

LESSON PLAN

Finding Balance in Our Digital Lives

This lesson is part of *USE, UNDERSTAND & ENGAGE: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools*: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.



LEVEL: Grade X to Y

DURATION: 30-60 minutes

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: This lesson was written for MediaSmarts by Ethan Anderson

Overview

In this lesson, students look at the different ways in which we spend our free time and learn to find balance between active, learning and media activities. They begin by considering how media activities can take up time they'd rather use for other things, then explore reasons why we sometimes spend more time using media than we mean to. Finally, students imagine how media tools could be changed to make balancing your time easier and brainstorm ways to use media as though those changes had been made.

Learning Outcomes

Big ideas/key concepts: Students will understand that...

- Digital media experiences are shaped by the tools we use
- How media tools are made can affect how we use them

Key questions:

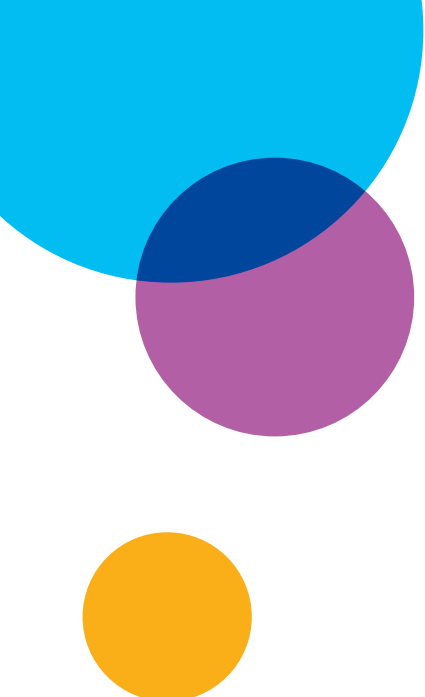
- How can we make each day feel good for our bodies and brains?"
- How can we balance the different kinds of activities in our lives?

Essential knowledge: Students will know...

- Media health: The importance of balancing screen time with other activities; how features like autoplay can make us use devices longer than we mean to; strategies for balancing our screen use

Performance tasks: Students will be able to...

- Use: Develop strategies for healthy and mindful media use
- Understand: Analyze how features of digital tools influence how they are used
- Engage: Reflect on how their media habits affect their mental and physical health



Preparation and Materials

Prepare to distribute the handout / *Wish...*

Bring a glass, measuring cup or other transparent vessel and a few dozen marbles, Lego blocks or other small items.

Procedure

FILLING OUR TIME

Begin by asking students, “How can we make each day feel good for our bodies and brains?”

After students have made a few suggestions, ask them to think about all of the things that they do before and after school. This would include focused activities (piano lessons, hockey practice, homework) as well as more casual ones (watching TV, playing toys with friends, riding bikes around the neighbourhood).

Add a marble or block to the glass for each thing that is named. When you fill the glass or students finish listing activities, whichever is first, hold up the glass and tell them that it represents the time in a day: if they fill it up with one thing, there isn’t room for other things.

Now lead a discussion about the impact of different activities on a person’s life.

Make sure students consider the following questions:

- Why might we sometimes not feel like doing some things that were named, like going outside or playing with friends? Why might we sometimes not be able to do those things?
 - Too tired, bad weather, etc.
- Are there things about screens (tablets, games, phones, and so on) that might make us spend more time using them than other activities?
 - They can be “easier” because in many cases all we have to do is watch; they often have a story that we’re being told or that we’re part of; a lot of times the things we watch lead to other things to watch – TV shows are on one after the other, online videos link to similar videos.

- Are any of these activities better than the others?
 - No – each one can give us different things: for example, playing basketball builds our strength and coordination, while playing an online game can build our reflexes or our thinking skills. However, it's important that screen time be balanced by other activities.

SCREEN TIME

Now ask students how many of them watch videos on YouTube Kids, Netflix, or a similar app.

Ask those students: What happens when you get to the end of a video?
(*Another video starts playing.*)

Tell students that this is called *autoplay*.

Ask students if they have ever watched a video because of autoplay. Then ask if they have ever watched a video just because it was the next one the app suggested.

Show students the glass full of marbles or blocks and ask: What happens to this each time you watch another video? (It fills up more.)

Now ask: Why do the people who make these apps include autoplay? (So that you will watch them for longer.)

Have students think of different ways that apps, games and devices make you use them longer.

Prompting questions:

- Are there ways besides Autoplay that apps, games or devices make it hard to turn them off?
- Do characters in games or apps sometimes get sad if you want to quit?
- Do you sometimes get reminders from apps or games if you haven't played or watched in a while?
- Do some apps or games promise you something new, or something special, if you come back soon or play a little longer?
- Do some apps or games make you feel bad if you haven't played them in a while?

MAGIC TIME

Now distribute the student handout / *Wish...* and ask: If you had a magic wand that could change how apps or devices work, what would you do with it?

Then ask: What could you do to act **as if** you had used that magic wand?

Have students pick one of the ways identified in the class discussion that devices, apps or games make it hard to balance your time.

- Under “I wish,” have them write (or draw) how they would change that if they had a magic wand.
- Under “I will,” have them write (or draw) what they could do to act as if it had been changed like that.

Model the activity with a sample think-aloud, such as: “I wish that another video didn’t play as soon as the last one was finished. If I had a magic wand, I would change the app so that didn’t happen. Since I don’t have a magic wand, I will find a way to turn off autoplay. If I can’t do that, I’ll remind myself not to let it keep playing.”

With very young students, you may wish to project the handout and do this as a whole-class activity.

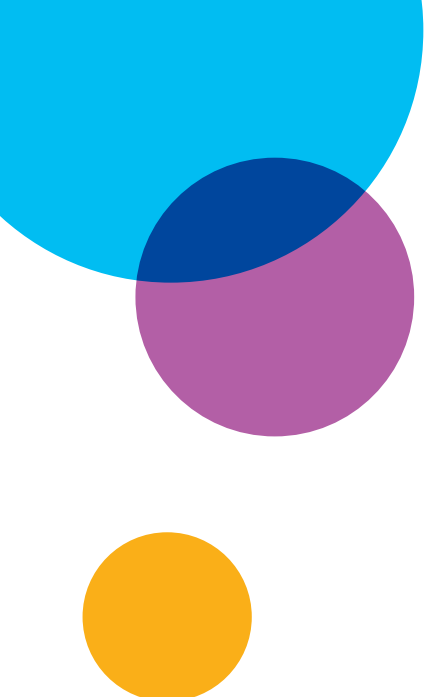
EXTENSION: WACKY MEDIA SONGS

You may consider supplementing this lesson with the TVOntario Original Series *Wacky Media Songs*. These short videos explore a variety of digital media literacy topics. Here are a few suggested videos and discussion topics:

[Think Twice With That Device](#). During her song, Ava keeps getting distracted by her phone. Before she knows it, her whole day is off track! It’s important to be mindful about how we use media. Think twice before using a device!

Before the video, ask: Do you ever find yourself using a phone, the TV or something else like a video game console just because you don’t have anything else to do?

After the video, ask: Think about your favourite website or app. What is it about the design that makes you come back to it? Have you ever seen a game character look sad or say “Don’t give up” when you try to stop playing?



What are some things you do with screen devices that you feel good about? What can we do to keep doing those, but stop doing things that just distract us?

Extension Activity: Come up with a list of times and places when it is and isn't okay to use devices during the day. Brainstorm a "sleepy spot" for devices (like a drawer or another room) so it's out of sight when they want to do other things.

[Game On!](#) Want to play online games with friends? It can be super fun. Ava shares some tips on how to make sure we stay safe and don't fall prey more than we wanted to!

Before the video, ask: When you're playing a video game online, what makes you feel happy and energized? What makes you angry and frustrated?

After the video, ask: What do you like about video games? How can we get the fun parts of games without spending too much time playing them? (Set a time limit before you start, and make sure to plan other things to do.)

FINDING BALANCE IN OUR DIGITAL LIVES

I wish...

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I WISH...

I WILL...

