



Essential Question: How can you protect yourself from online identity theft?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: As students visit sites that request information about their identity, they learn to adopt a critical inquiry process that empowers them to protect themselves and their families from identity theft. In this lesson, students learn to think critically about the user information that some websites request or require. They learn the difference between private information and personal information, distinguishing what is safe and unsafe to share online.

objectives

Students will:

- Learn about the benefits of sharing information online, but also about the safety and security risks of sharing certain types of information
- Understand what type of information can put them at risk for identity theft and other scams
- Distinguish between personal information, which is safe to share online, and private information, which is unsafe to share

Materials and Preparation

Materials

- **Protect Yourself Student Handout**
- **All About Me Student Handout**
- Chalkboard or white board
- Digital projector for viewing website pages (optional)

Preparation

- Copy the **Protect Yourself Student Handout**, one for every student
- Copy the **All About Me Student Handout**, one for every student
- Preview the suggested websites in **Teach 1** to make sure that the links are working

Parent Resources

- Send parents the **Security Parent Tip Sheet**
- Send parents the **Protecting and Respecting Privacy Parent Tip Sheet**

Key Vocabulary

- **Register (online):** To enter your information in order to sign up and get access to a website
- **Personal Information:** Information that can't be used to identify you, such as your age, gender, how many brothers and sisters you have, your favorite food, etc.
- **Private Information:** Information that can be used to identify you, such as your Social Security number, postal address, email address, phone number, etc.
- **Identity Theft:** When a thief steals someone's **private information** in order to pretend to be that person.



Private and Personal Information

teaching plans

Introduce

ASK *What types of information do you think are okay to share publicly online, on a profile that others will see, for instance?*

Sample responses:

- *Interests and favorite activities*
- *Opinions about a movie*
- *First name*

INVITE students to share the names of websites they visit that require or request user information before allowing people to participate in online activities.

ASK *What are some examples of websites where you must register in order to participate?* (Review the Key Vocabulary word **register**.)

Sample responses:

- *Social networking sites*
- *Video-sharing sites*
- *Youth discussion sites*
- *Ask-an-expert sites*
- *Game sites*

WRITE the names of the websites on the board. Explain that it's important to know that sharing some kinds of user information can put you and your family's privacy at risk.

Teach 1 (online): Log In

PROJECT for the class, or have students go online, to www.neopets.com, <http://www.nick.com>, <http://www.bookadventure.org>, or one of the websites that your students suggested. Note: As an offline alternative, print out and copy two of the website pages that ask for registration and log-in information. Distribute copies of the pages to each student.

DISCUSS with students the kinds of information that each website requires or requests before users can participate.

ASK *What information is required and why do you think it is required?* (This may include first name, user name, password, password hint, birth date, gender, the state you live in, parent's permission, etc. Let them know that the information may be required because it helps distinguish one person from another. Or perhaps the website is keeping a record of who uses it.)

ASK *What information is optional, and why do you think it is optional?* (This may include parent's email, birthday, state, country, gender, etc. Maybe this information is optional because the website does not require it for payment, to distinguish people from one another, or so the website can keep track of this kind of information.)



Private and Personal Information

ASK *Why do you think websites ask for this kind of information?* (Answers may include: They want to get people to pay in order to use the site, they want to send messages to people who are signing up, or they want to try to sell things to those people.)

POINT OUT that you do not have to fill out fields on websites if they are not required. Required fields are usually marked by an asterisk (*) or are highlighted in red.

Teach 2 (offline): Private and Personal

EXPLAIN to students that some kinds of information are generally safe to share on the Internet and some are not. However, the information that's considered safe should not be shared one on one with people they don't already know offline.

REVIEW the Key Vocabulary words **personal information** and **private information**. Emphasize that personal information is usually safe to share online. Private information is usually unsafe to share online (students should get permission from a parent or guardian).

Provide the following examples of information that is safe or unsafe to share:

| SAFE – Personal Information | UNSAFE – Private Information |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Your favorite food • Your opinion (though it should be done respectfully) • First name | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mother's maiden name • Social Security number • Your date of birth • Parents' credit card number • Phone number |

ASK *Why would someone want to steal someone else's identity on the Internet?* (Sample answers: to steal money, to do something bad or mean, to hide their real identity)

REVIEW Key Vocabulary word **identity theft**.

EXPLAIN that an identity thief uses private information to pretend to be the person whose identity he or she has stolen. Once the thief has taken someone's identity, he or she can use that person's name to get a driver's license or buy things, even if the person whose identity they stole isn't old enough to do these things! It's often not until much later that people realize that their identity has been stolen. Identity thieves may also apply for credit cards in other people's names and run up big bills that they don't pay off. Let students know that identity thieves often target children and teens because they have a clean credit history and their parents are unlikely to be aware that someone is taking on their child's identity.

EMPHASIZE the difference between private information (which can be used to steal your identity) and personal information (which cannot be used to steal your identity). Invite students to answer the following questions (write their answers on the board):

ASK *What kinds of private information could an identity thief use to find out and steal your identity?* (Examples include: first and last name, postal address, email address, phone numbers, passwords, calling card numbers, credit card numbers, Social Security number, mother's maiden name.)



Private and Personal Information

ASK *What kinds of personal information could you share about yourself without showing your identity?* (Examples include: your age, gender, how many brothers and sisters you have, your favorite band, your favorite food, what pets you have, the name of your pet, your opinion about an important issue.)

EXPLAIN to students that on the Internet people you interact with could be your friends next door or strangers who live on the other side of the world. Because it's hard to know the intentions of people who you've never met before, it is best to remain cautious when sharing your information. You wouldn't give strangers your private information in the real world, and you need to be just as careful when you're online.

REMIND students how important it is each time they share information online to stop and think: "Am I giving out information that I should keep private?" Point out that it can sometimes be safe to give out some private information. For example, a website might ask for your birth date or email address. But students should always ask their parent or guardian before giving out private information.

DISTRIBUTE the **Protect Yourself Student Handout** and have students complete the activity. Review the correct answers (listed below):

- **Personal Information:** Your age, gender, how many brothers and sisters you have, your favorite band, your favorite food, the name of your pet.
- **Private Information:** Full name, email address, your date of birth, phone numbers, credit card numbers, calling card numbers, mother's maiden name, Social Security number.

Teach 3 (offline): What's Safe to Share Online?

DISTRIBUTE the **All About Me Student Handout**. Have students write down all the personal information they would like to share about themselves on a public profile in an online community. Emphasize that even though personal information is safe to share online, it is okay to choose not to share it. Remind students that everything on the list should be safe to share; none of it should be private information that can put their identity at risk.

ENCOURAGE students to share their lists with the class.

ASK *Is there anything on the lists that could be used by an identity thief? Why?* (Guide students to explain their answers and encourage them to use the Key Vocabulary words.)

Wrap Up and Assess

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives.

ASK

- *What is identity theft?* (Using someone else's private information to pretend to be that person.)
- *How does personal information and private information differ?* (Private information, such as a Social Security number, is unsafe to share. It should be kept private so that identity thieves cannot use it. Personal information, such as your favorite food, cannot be used by identity thieves and is safe to share. Even though personal information is usually safe to share online, you might choose not to share this information, and that's fine.)



Private and Personal Information

- *When is it okay to give out personal information such as your pet's name or your favorite band? (When it does not reveal your identity.)*
- *What would be a good rule for kids about giving out private information online? (They should not share it online without the permission of a teacher, parent, or guardian.)*

REVIEW with students that they should stop and think before providing information that websites request or require. Remind them that they should never share private identity information without first asking a parent or guardian.



Extension Activity

Direct students to find examples of additional websites for kids their age that require identity information to register. Have students classify the information requested as personal information or private information. Students may report their site findings and classifications to the class.



Homework

Encourage students to share the tips they've learned about sharing information online with their parents or family members. Have students explain the difference between personal information and private information. Then, ask family members if they visit websites that ask for private information. What do family members do to keep their private information secure?

Alignment with Standards – National Educational Technology Standards for Students® 2007

(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

1. Creativity and Innovation

- b. create original works as a means of personal or group expression

5. Digital Citizenship

- a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology
- b. exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity

Common Sense Media is an independent, nonprofit resource that helps families and educators teach kids how to be safe and smart in today's 24/7 media world. Go to www.commonsensemedia.org for thousands of reviews and expert advice.