

# What's the Big Deal About Internet Privacy?

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## Essential Question

*How do websites collect your personal information, and what can you do about it?*

## Lesson Overview

Students explore the concept of privacy in their everyday lives, and as it relates to using the Internet. Students examine a scenario in which a research company collects information about them. They reflect on concerns they might have, and they learn about the kinds of information websites collect. They learn that sites are required to post their privacy policies and that kids should check those policies on the sites they visit.

## Learning Objectives

*Students will be able to ...*

- explore the concept of privacy in both a real-world setting and online.
- understand how and why companies collect information about visitors to their websites.
- learn and use online privacy terms.
- learn that websites are required to post privacy policies.

## Materials and Preparation

- Paper and pens
- Copy the **What's Private? Student Handout**, one for each student.
- If students will not have access to computers with an Internet connection, print out privacy policies from two websites that students commonly use. Make copies for each pair of students.

## Family Resources

- Send home the **Online Security Family Tip Sheet (Middle & High School)**.

**Estimated time:** 45 minutes

## Standards Alignment –

### Common Core:

**grades 9-10:** RI.1, RI.4, RI.10, W.4, W.7, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.4, SL.6, L.4c, L.6

**grades 11-12:** RI.1, RI.4, RI.10, W.4, W.7, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.4, SL.6, L.4c, L.6

**ISTE:** 5a, 6a

## Key Vocabulary –

**anonymous:** someone who can't be identified based on the information at hand

**cookies:** small computer text files placed in your computer by the sites you visit that collect information about your computer system and the webpages you view

**third party:** a person or company other than you and the owner of the website you visit

**privacy options:** choices a website might give you about what it does with your information

## introduction

### Warm-up (5 minutes)

**TELL** your class the following story:

*Our principal has hired a research company to collect information that will help us make the school better for you. Several observers will watch students and record where each of you goes, how many times you go there, and how long you stay there, including to the water fountain, your locker, the bathroom, the cafeteria, and to visit another student. You will be identified only by a number. At the end of the day, the research company will put all the data together and write a report for the principal.*

**ENCOURAGE** students to think about what you just told them. Have them jot down any questions or concerns they have, or think other students might have. Then have them share their thoughts with the class.

**GUIDE** students to consider the following questions:

- Who else might see the information?
- Can people’s identification numbers be linked to their name by the principal?
- Do you think any of the information should remain private?
- Do you think you will be allowed to review the data collected about you?
- Are you satisfied with the explanation that the information is needed “to make the school better,” or do you want to know more about how the information will be used?

**EXPLAIN** that the story you told is not true; no one will be collecting information about them in the school. However, this is the kind of information that many websites collect whenever you visit them. Companies can learn all kinds of things about you, based on where you go and what you do when you’re online.

**DEFINE** the Key Vocabulary term **anonymous**. Explain to students that most people think no one knows who they are or what they do when they are online. Believing they are anonymous is why people sometimes do things online that they would not do face-to-face. However, it’s nearly impossible to be completely anonymous online.

## teach 1

### What’s Private? (20 minutes)

**ARRANGE** students in pairs.

**DISTRIBUTE** the **What’s Private? Student Handout**, one for each pair of students.

**REVIEW** the Key Vocabulary terms **cookies**, **third party**, and **privacy options**. These terms are discussed in more detail on the student handout.

**ASSIGN** each pair of students one of the following websites, or choose other sites that your class uses. If your class has access to a limited number of computers, you may assign two or more pairs to work at the same computer and look at the same sites; each pair should complete its own handout.

**How Stuff Works:** [www.howstuffworks.com](http://www.howstuffworks.com)

**Google:** [www.google.com](http://www.google.com)

**Wikipedia:** [www.wikipedia.org](http://www.wikipedia.org)

**Hulu:** [www.hulu.com](http://www.hulu.com)

**Facebook:** [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)

**EXPLAIN** to students that every website has a privacy policy. They can usually find this by looking at the small print at the bottom of the home page and finding the words “Privacy” or “Privacy Policy.”

**ASK** students to go to their assigned websites and find the privacy policy. On their handouts, have them check off the words that they find on the site and answer the questions about personal information and privacy options.

**INVITE** pairs of students to share what they found out about the kinds of information their sites collect, and how the sites use the information. Does their site collect personal information? Does it use cookies, or does it give out data to third parties? Does it give them a choice of privacy options? This information is generally included in the privacy policy, though not always.

Then ask students what they think about their site’s privacy policy. Remind them to think back to the real world and how this topic relates to their school.

**ASK:**

*Do you mind that the site collects information about you? Why or why not?*

Students may say that they don’t mind but they want to know the site is doing it, or that they don’t like strangers having personal information about them.

*Does it make a difference what kind of information your site collects about you?*

Make sure students understand the difference between sites that collect personal information such as names, addresses, and email, and sites that collect other information about things they do on the Internet but keep the identities of their visitors anonymous.

*What do you get in return for the information? Is the exchange worth it to you?*

Students should understand that what they receive is free access to the website. In some cases, sites sell the data to make money, which supports the site. However, not every site does this, and some sites find other ways to support themselves.

## teach 2

### Design a Privacy Policy (15 minutes)

**HAVE** students write their own privacy policies, using all of the terms on the **What’s Private? Student Handout**. In designing their privacy policies, students will need to consider the following questions:

- *What kinds of information do you want to collect about visitors to your site? How will you use the information?*
- *Will you use cookies?*
- *Will you share the information you collect with third parties?*
- *Do you want to give your visitors privacy options, so that they have choices about how the information will be used?*

For students who need extra support, suggest that they structure their privacy policies by including the following headings:

| Name of Site | What Information Is Collected | How This Information Is Used |
|--------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
|--------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------|

**ENCOURAGE** volunteers to read their privacy policies aloud, and invite other students to respond to them.

**DISCUSS** strategies for dealing with a site that asks for more information than students feel comfortable sharing, or that does not post a clear policy. Remind students that they can leave a site if they don't like the policy. Adults may have access to privacy settings, so students can ask an adult family member or teacher to check out the site or contact the site for more information. (Adults should also know that the Federal Trade Commission provides an online Consumer Complaint Form at [www.ftc.gov](http://www.ftc.gov).)

## closing

### Wrap-up (5 minutes)

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives. You may want to ask students to reflect in writing on one of the questions, using a journal or an online blog/wiki.

#### ASK:

*What is a cookie? A third party? A privacy policy? Privacy options?*

Students should recall the Key Vocabulary definitions.

*Why do website owners want information about their visitors?*

They use the information to decide how to change the site, to decide how much to charge advertisers, and to customize a site for each visitor to encourage them to use the site more or, for commercial sites, to buy more. Without your knowledge, some sites may also share your information with others in exchange for more information about you or in exchange for money.

*Why is anonymity an important feature of the Internet?*

If websites know students' personal information, like their names and addresses, they can use the data or sell the information to third parties.

**REMINDE** students that they can always check a website's privacy policy to find out what that site might do with their personal information. If they don't feel comfortable with the policy, they can leave the site.

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## Directions

It's a good idea to check a website's privacy policy before using the site. Look for the words "Privacy" or "Privacy Policy" at the bottom of the home page. Here are some terms you're likely to find in privacy policy notices. Check off the terms you find on your site, and answer the following questions.

- Personally Identifiable Information:** This includes information that reveals who you are in the offline world, including your real name, address, email address, phone number, age, or school.

**Does your site collect personally identifiable information?** Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If so, what kinds?

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- Cookies:** Cookies are small computer text files placed in your computer by the sites you visit. These files contain numbers to identify your computer. Cookies can also identify you by any personally identifiable information you may have given to the site.

A cookie records the date and time you visited the site and how long you stayed. It also records which webpages and ads you viewed. The next time you return, the site can present content and ads designed just for you. Many privacy policies include information about the sites' cookies.

**Does your site use cookies?** Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ It doesn't say \_\_\_\_\_

- Third Party:** The word "party" is a legal term for an individual or a company. You (the visitor) are the first party. The site owner is the second party. Any other person or company is the third party.

Most people don't mind sharing information about themselves with site owners to get better service. However, many people DO NOT want their information passed to a third party without their knowledge. A site's privacy policy should tell you if the owner shares your information with third parties.

**Does your site share information with third parties?**

Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_ It doesn't say \_\_\_\_\_

**Privacy Options:** Many sites give you choices about what they do with the information they collect about you. For example, you can tell the site they are not allowed to share their information with a third party.

**Does your site offer privacy options?** Yes \_\_\_\_\_ No \_\_\_\_\_

If yes, what are they?

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# What's the Big Deal About Internet Privacy?

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1. Tavian visits a new website. Before Tavian can explore the site, he is asked to fill in his date of birth and the name of his school. Tavian doesn't feel comfortable giving that information. Tavian could:

- a) Leave the site
- b) Ask an adult to look at the site and read its privacy policy with him
- c) Both a and b

2. \_\_\_\_\_ means someone who can't be identified based on the information you have.

- a) Well known
- b) Anonymous
- c) Guilty

3. True or false: Websites that are targeted at kids are required to post privacy policies.

- a) True
- b) False

# What's the Big Deal About Internet Privacy?

ASSESSMENT  
TEACHER VERSION

1. Tavian visits a new website. Before Tavian can explore the site, he is asked to fill in his date of birth and the name of his school. Tavian doesn't feel comfortable giving that information. Tavian could:

- a) Leave the site
- b) Ask an adult to look at the site and read its privacy policy with him
- c) Both a and b**

*Answer feedback*

The correct answer is **c**. Tavian should not give information online that he is not comfortable sharing. He could leave the site or ask an adult for help.

2. \_\_\_\_\_ means someone who can't be identified based on the information you have.

- a) Well known
- b) Anonymous**
- c) Guilty

*Answer feedback*

The correct answer is **b**. *Anonymous* means someone who is unknown.

3. True or false: Websites that are targeted at kids are required to post privacy policies.

- a) True**
- b) False

*Answer feedback*

The correct answer is **a**, True. Websites that expect to have users under the age of 13 are required to post privacy policies. The privacy policy tells you how the site may use the information you give it.

# What's the Big Deal about Internet Privacy?



## \* DID YOU KNOW ...

If a combination lock has three columns of numbers each with the digits 0-9, there are 1,000 possible combinations!

## Match the words to their definition

- |              |  |
|--------------|--|
| fair use     | a set of rules and expectations that govern how both men and women, as well as boys and girls, are supposed to look and act                            |
| cookies      | a person or company other than you and the owner of the website you visit  |
| third party  | the ability to use a small amount of copyrighted work without permission, but only in certain ways   |
| gender roles | small computer text files placed in your computer by the sites you visit that collect information about your computer system and the webpages you view |

## \* WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Why do website owners want information about their visitors?

## 1. Family Activity

At lunch, Emani's friend told him that a junior was suspended because of a joking tweet asking why someone couldn't just make a bomb threat so school could be cancelled for the day. He had tagged the school using a hashtag, and the vice principal saw the tweet. Later that week, he heard another rumor that a girl was called to the guidance counselor's office because she'd posted some song lyrics as her Facebook status and someone thought she was depressed.

**\* DO YOU REMEMBER ...**  
How websites collect your personal information and what you can do about it?

## 2. Think Out Loud!

- ~ What is your immediate reaction to this situation? What seems realistic or unrealistic?
- ~ When do you think it's good (or bad) for schools to get involved with what happens on social media?
- ~ Do you know of any cases of schools punishing students for something they did or said online or over text message? What do you think about how the situation was handled?
- ~ When is it reasonable for kids to assume that what they say online is private?

## 3. Common Sense Says ...

Social login is a way to sign on to websites that uses existing login information from a social-networking service such as Facebook, Twitter, or Google+ to sign on to another (third-party) website. If you use social login, make sure you understand what you're giving the site access to. By using social login, you might be giving that site the right to post on your newsfeed, to access or contact friends on your friends list, or to collect information such as your email address. Check out the privacy policy and terms and conditions to make sure you know what information you're authorizing the site to access and use.



# Common Sense on Online Security

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## What's the Issue?

Just as in real life, it is important that teens know who they can trust with their information on the internet. Entering information such as their name, age, and address into forms and profiles online is common, but teens can be tracked by companies or tricked into scams that put themselves at risk for identity theft. Maybe they are tricked into filling out a form for a fake sweepstakes. Maybe they click on an attachment that installs spyware on their computer. Or maybe they click on ads and enter their email address, which the advertiser can then sell to other companies.

Digital security refers to keeping us, our information, and our digital devices secure from outside threats. These issues affect everyone – teens, families, and even whole online communities. Online security issues can be divided into three categories:

**Scams and identity theft.** Criminals may try to trick teens into giving out private information. They use this information to attempt identity theft, which can ruin a teen's financial future and make it difficult to make purchases and get loans. Criminals target young people and children because they have cleaner financial records than adults. Risks include:

- *Phishing:* Phony emails, messages, texts, or links to fake websites that scam artists use to trick people into giving out personal and financial information.
- *Clickjacking:* Scam artists tricking users to click on a seemingly harmless webpage, usually on a social network site, in an attempt to steal information or spread scams to others.

**Viruses and spyware.** Many teens download and share music, movies, or games. However, teens should only download from secure sites, and avoid clicking on links and attachments that can put themselves at risk. Viruses and spyware can be blocked with security tools. Risks include:

- *Computer Virus:* A program that can replicate itself and spread from one computer to another through the internet, CD, DVD, or USB drive. A virus attaches itself to a program so that each time it runs, the virus does too, causing problems on the computer.
- *Spyware:* Programs that secretly collect small pieces of information about a computer user without him or her knowing.

**Companies tracking users.** One of the fastest-growing business strategies is to monitor the information, behavior, and even location of internet users. Companies do this so they can personalize visitors' experiences and sell their information to advertisers. On the downside, most teens don't know that their online activity is being tracked. Companies aren't legally required to share how they track consumers' behaviors, which is often buried in the fine print of their privacy policies. On the upside, it can be nice for teens to have websites tailored to their interests. Issues include:

- *Cookies:* Data files stored on computers when people visit certain sites, which companies can use to identify repeat customers and personalize visitors' experiences.
- *Targeted Advertising:* Ads that are tailored to internet users based on the information companies have collected about them.

## Why Does It Matter?

Teens should understand that when they're online, companies are watching and tracking their behavior, and scam artists might be trying to trick them into giving out information. If teens don't understand digital security risks, their devices can be damaged, they can fall prey to scams, or they can increase their risk of identity theft. It's up to teens to protect themselves so they don't become targets.

## What Families Can Do

*What are the benefits and drawbacks of companies tracking your online information, behavior, and location?*

*When you download from the internet, how do you make sure it's from a secure site?*

*Have you ever encountered a phishing mess?*

## common sense says

**Create strong passwords.** A powerful password does wonders to protect accounts. Teens should never share passwords with friends, and they should update their passwords often. A great site for creating strong passwords is [www.strongpasswordgenerator.com](http://www.strongpasswordgenerator.com).

**Think twice before downloading.** Content that teens download from nonsecure sources can plague a computer with spyware and viruses. Encourage teens to download only from secure sites.

**Be careful when sharing information.** Teens should be careful when sharing information such as full name, address, and account numbers. Messages that ask teens to share private information are red flags for scams. If teens suspect a scam, they should not reply to it and not click on links in the message. Encourage them to report such phishing to the service provider.

**See what phishing and clickjacking looks like.** It's a great way to understand how to avoid being tricked. Check out the examples at: [www.consumerfraudreporting.org](http://www.consumerfraudreporting.org).

**Install the latest security updates.** Your computer can be protected from viruses, spyware, and other security problems by using up-to-date security tools.

**Consider limiting data collection.** Help teens take control over their own information by: 1. disabling internet "cookies" so companies cannot track online behavior, 2. limiting clicking on ads, and 3. examining a website's privacy policy before revealing any information on it.

## Sources

Common Sense Media. "Protecting Our Kids' Privacy in a Digital World." December 2010. <<http://www.common-sensemedia.org/privacy>.>

Stecklow, S. "On the Web, Children Face Intensive Tracking." *The Wall Street Journal*. September 17, 2010.