thinkalong™
Current events for the curious classroom

IS HACKING ALWAYS WRONG?

THIS ACTIVITY SHOULD TAKE ABOUT 90 MINUTES. IF LEARNERS ARE ABLE TO REVIEW MEDIA PRIOR TO THE LESSON, ACTIVITY TIME SHOULD BE 45 TO 60 MINUTES.

INVESTIGATE

Read, watch, and listen to the three media resources on the Thinkalong module. Learners can use the Investigate graphic organizer to summarize each piece of media and record new information. Below are summaries of the three pieces of media curated in the Thinkalong module.

THE SECRET LIVES OF HACKERS
NOVA Labs | August 27, 2014 | Video
3:01 minutes

This video from NOVA Labs investigates the different roles a hacker can take, from burglars and vandals to inventors and spies.
- Hacking is "creative problem-solving that takes advantage of the properties of things in unexpected ways"; computer hacking takes advantage of the properties of computers and networks.
- Computer hackers may be driven by curiosity about how systems work, an interest in providing network security, or the desire to make money or cause harm.
- Some hackers are willing to break the law in order to expose something they see as morally wrong, while others may be seen as "brilliant minds gone astray."

HOW HACKERS ARE MAKING THE WORLD SAFER
The Good Stuff | September 15, 2016 | Video
10:18 minutes

Headlines and Hollywood can skew peoples' perceptions of hacking, but many hackers are working for the greater good.
- Some hackers prefer the term "researcher," because they are usually more interested in ethical hacking - researching systems and understanding how their controls can be circumvented.
- Criminal hackers are often connected to well-funded syndicates trying to infiltrate networks, so organizations such as banks and manufacturers will often hire ethical hackers to help them protect their systems from criminal hackers.
- Any products connected to the internet, including phones, TVs, appliances, cameras, and cars, are susceptible to hacking and make personal information vulnerable. Security researchers can expose security flaws before they become a problem.
- Hackers can investigate both software and hardware that can be compromised and are sometimes rewarded by companies for exposing flaws. Still, unless they have actually been assigned the task, they are technically breaking the law.

Using public media — video, audio and digital reports — about newsworthy topics, these classroom-based exercises help learners to think critically about media messages, develop informed opinions, and practice how to take a stand.

U.S. RECOVERS SOME OF THE RANSOM PAID TO COLONIAL PIPELINE HACKERS
NPR | June 8, 2021 | Audio
3:27 minutes

The Colonial Pipeline fell victim to a ransomware attack by a group of hackers and worked quickly with the FBI to recover some of the ransom money they were forced to pay.

- The Colonial Pipeline, which transports millions of barrels of gasoline, heating oil, and fuel in the U.S. every day, was forced to go offline for a period of time in May 2021 when a group of hackers attacked their network.
- After paying a $4.4 million ransom to the criminal hacker group called Darkside, the company contacted the FBI, who tracked the payment to a virtual wallet and managed to retrieve some of the money.
- Because of the increased frequency and sophistication in this type of ransomware attack on infrastructure, businesses, cities, and law enforcement, the U.S. Justice Department established a task force to investigate and prosecute cyber criminals.

KEY WORDS

Look out for these important keywords in the news stories. Discuss the definitions with your learners and see how they affect the understanding of the story.

- Breach
- Ransom
- Bitcoin

CONTEMPLATE

Learners will use media literacy questions to critically engage with news by thinking about its purpose, searching for bias and discussing missing perspectives. They will answer the 5 Key Questions of Media Literacy created by the Center for Media Literacy, which are:

1. Who created this message?
2. What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
3. How might different people understand this message differently than me?
4. What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
5. Why is this message being sent?

A graphic organizer is included in this guide and the Thinkalong website to help learners answer these five questions about each piece of media.

DEBATE

Use the debate tool on the module webpage to help form evidence-based responses to the debate question.

Thinkalong is designed to help learners engage with real issues that are relevant to their lives. Structured discussions allow learners to practice their critical thinking skills through evidence-based debate with their peers. Discussions are designed to take about 30 minutes. Educators are encouraged to modify aspects that work best for their learners.

To encourage civil discourse, please review the Code of Conduct with your learners.

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