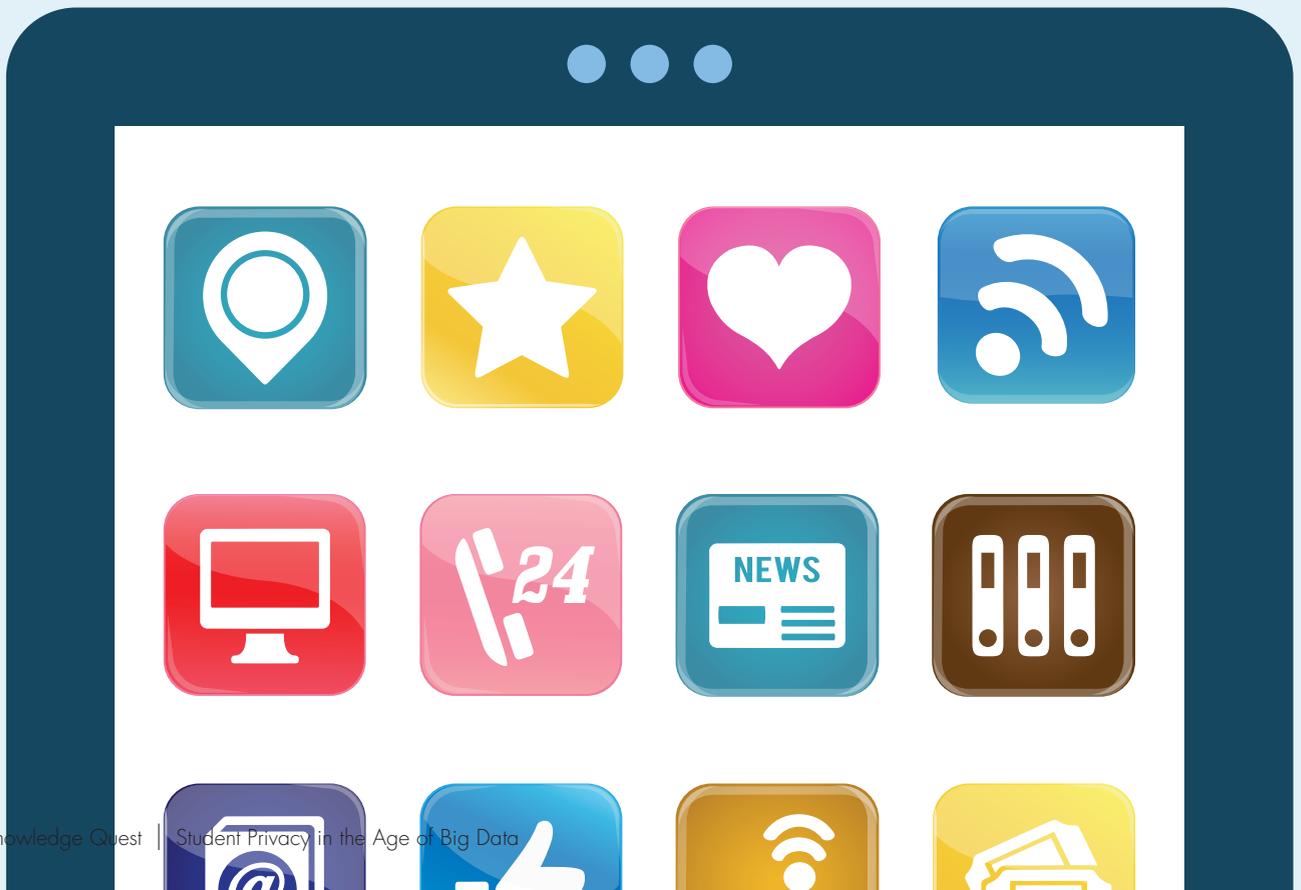


Can I Use This App or Website for My Class?





What to Know about Instructing Teachers and Students on Digital Citizenship, Digital Footprints, and Cybersafety

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“Can I use this app (or website) for my class?” is a question school librarians may soon hear on a regular basis. As more school systems allow devices in schools (whether as a BYOD or a 1:1 program), we are being asked questions about appropriate applications for our teachers and students to use. This is *not* an easy question to answer, and it’s answered slightly differently depending on grade levels, student ages, and website/app restrictions. At times we feel like Sherlock Holmes trying to peel back the mystery of the Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA) and to understand the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) while helping teachers decide what learning tools are appropriate for their lessons.

Children’s Internet Protection Act (CIPA)

School systems receiving discounts through the U.S. government Internet E-rate program must follow CIPA regulations to continue to receive the discounts. According to the Federal Communications Commission:

Schools and libraries subject to CIPA may not receive the discounts offered by the E-rate program unless they certify that they have an Internet safety policy that includes technology protection measures. The protection measures must block or filter Internet access to pictures that are: (a) obscene; (b) child pornography; or (c) harmful to minors (for computers that are accessed by minors). (FCC 2015)

Most school districts have software that filters inappropriate words and blocks websites that fall under these three categories so students are not

able to access the sites. Since CIPA was enacted by Congress in 2000, Internet filtering by school districts has become standard; this filtering is typically managed by information technology (IT) departments. The next section of CIPA outlines the requirements specific to the use of the Internet and how our schools and libraries monitor student use:

Schools and libraries subject to CIPA are required to adopt and implement an Internet safety policy addressing:

- Access by minors to inappropriate matter on the Internet;
- The safety and security of minors when using electronic mail, chat rooms and other forms of direct electronic communications;
- Unauthorized access, including so-called “hacking,” and other unlawful activities by minors online;
- Unauthorized disclosure, use, and dissemination of personal information regarding minors; and
- Measures restricting minors’ access to materials harmful to them. (FCC 2015)

Although many of these safety policies are implemented by means of software and district firewalls, the safety of minors using e-mail, chat rooms, and other direct electronic communications is still an area of concern. School librarians have been and continue to be the primary instructors to teach students and teachers appropriate research skills and methods of accessing information through the Internet. Now, in the age of mobile devices and 1:1 programs, school librarians are increasingly responsible for teaching students about digital citizenship, digital footprints,

cyberbullying, cybersafety, and general caution while using the Internet. In the school library, computers with filtering software and purchased applications installed by the IT department have in some cases been replaced by mobile devices that students can use to instantly download apps. An app, as defined by Dictionary.com, is “an application, typically a small, specialized program downloaded onto mobile devices.” School librarians are being asked to help guide teachers’ understanding on which apps and websites are appropriate for student use to support instruction and learning. A few key concepts must be understood by the teaching community as these new technologies are adopted more broadly.

Digital Footprints

When we rolled out iPads as 1:1 devices to our eighth-grade students two years ago, one of the initial lessons required students to enter their names in Google and review their digital footprints. It was revealing to hear many exclaim “Oh no, there’s a lot of information about ME!” as students became aware of the pictures, news articles, Facebook posts, and other online information that make up their digital footprint. Parents (and students) are concerned about children’s personal information being exposed to anyone on the Internet. Likewise, the CIPA rules are intended to lessen the amount of personal information being exposed while students are using the Internet in our schools. This circumstance provides an opportunity for school librarians to expand their lessons on research and online resources and teach students the value of appropriate Internet behavior through digital-citizenship lessons. Common Sense

Media <commonsensemedia.org> has free age-appropriate lessons on digital citizenship, videos, and NearPod lessons (for a fee) available to anyone through their website. These digital-citizenship lessons teach awareness and strategies to help students combat some of the common Internet issues such as cyberbullying, cyberpredators, appropriate social interactions through websites, copyright, and Web source validation. The Common Sense Media site also has a parent section that recently added ratings and reviews on some of the more commonly used educational apps.

Aside from teaching Internet awareness to our students of all ages—many elementary school students have access to the Internet through smartphones and other mobile devices—we also should be teaching parents and teachers as well. I've often responded to the question from parents "Is the device secured or filtered?" with "Yes, while your student is at school." When at school, students' Internet access is filtered based on CIPA stipulations, but once students leave a school's network their Internet access is limited only by the filters—if any—on the next available Internet connection. These connections (in coffeehouses, restaurants, stores, homes, etc.) may have very different filtering capabilities than the school network, and often have few or no restrictions. As schools deploy mobile platforms, school librarians have an opportunity to expand their audience by also teaching parents and classroom teachers lessons on digital safety and citizenship. This instruction can be accomplished online through ongoing communication via e-mails, e-newsletters, and posts on personal and school webpages and blogs and delivered face-to-face at meetings

attended by parents and by teachers and administrators.

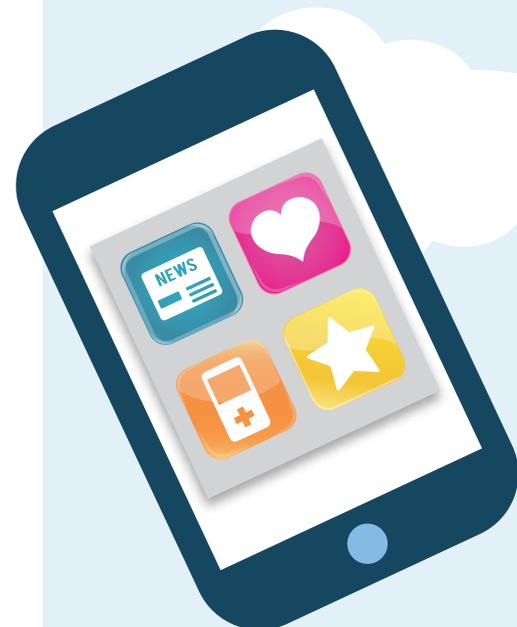
Each year teachers hear about many new apps and websites and are eager to use the new resources they've seen at conferences, read about on educational blogs, discussed with fellow teachers, and seen in magazines and journals. Although we don't want to stand in the way of innovation and creativity in teaching, school librarians may often be the people responsible for reviewing app and website privacy information and for educating teachers on best practices for complying with the policies. The one policy that has become particularly relevant in the BYOD or I:1 environment is making sure that minors' personal information is not collected and disseminated without their (and their parent/guardian's) consent.

What Information Do Websites Collect?

Not only do school districts need to be concerned about protecting minors using district Internet connections, but they also need to be concerned about teachers and students using apps and websites beyond district firewalls but while using school-designated mobile devices. How websites collect information and how they make the general public aware of what is collected is part of the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA). COPPA was enacted in 2000 and amended July 1, 2013 and states:

The primary goal of COPPA is to place parents in control over what information is collected from their young children online. The Rule was designed to protect children under age 13 while accounting for the dynamic nature of the Internet.

Aside from teaching Internet awareness to our students of all ages—many elementary school students have access to the Internet through smartphones and other mobile devices—we also should be teaching parents and teachers as well.



A general rule to follow for websites and apps is to suggest that students (especially those under age thirteen) should not be asked to create accounts for websites. If students must create an account to use the website, collect written consent from their parents or have students create the accounts at home under parents' supervision.

The Rule applies to operators of commercial websites and online services (including mobile apps) directed to children under 13 that collect, use, or disclose personal information from children, and operators of general audience websites or online services with actual knowledge that they are collecting, using, or disclosing personal information from children under 13. The Rule also applies to websites or online services that have actual knowledge that they are collecting personal information directly from users of another website or online service directed to children. (FCC 2015; FTC 2015)

Although identity theft is a valid fear, many websites that comply with COPPA do not ask for specific personal information (address, birthdate, Social Security number, etc.) when students sign up for a website. Even though these websites do not ask for personal information, many do request an e-mail address and the child's first and last names. Websites can use this information to market to the e-mail address and,

in the event that these sites sell their user lists, marketers or other third parties may also send unsolicited e-mails to students' addresses. Parents have a valid fear that their children will receive e-mails about ideas, items, and people that the parents would consider in opposition to their beliefs or preferences. We, as educators, can help guide teachers so that they understand the privacy information on websites and can choose and manage use of websites that are appropriate for their students' use.

Are Your Students Over or Under Age 13?

Based on COPPA, every website must provide information about age restrictions, as well as about what personal information is collected from users and how the website's owner may use or sell that information (FTC 2015). This information is usually found at the very bottom of the website through a link called "privacy." The privacy section defines who can access the website and what age the website is appropriate for based on the information the website can collect about users. This is where the

question of students' ages becomes relevant to the discussion. Most websites have a cutoff age of thirteen, meaning that users over the age of thirteen can use the site freely and may need to create an account to do so. When stipulated by the website, children under the age of thirteen may either be barred altogether from using the website or be required to get consent from a parent, guardian, or teacher. The specific wording about who can give consent is different for every website, making decisions about who can use websites—and how—very confusing. Although educators and students are using these websites and apps for educational purposes, there currently isn't a "fair use" equivalent for websites; each website and app has its own specific written policies that must be followed when the site or app is used. A general rule to follow for websites and apps is to suggest that students (especially those under age thirteen) should not be asked to create accounts for websites. If students must create an account to use the website, collect written consent from their parents or have students create the accounts at home under parents' supervision.

Some websites allow teachers to create a class account and give students either a link or a passcode to access the teacher's information. When using these websites, many require that a first name or last name be entered and, possibly, an e-mail address before a student can participate. In this case, it would be advisable to use unidentifiable names for students (e.g., animal names, superheroes, numbers, etc.) rather than having students enter their personal information. Elementary and middle school teachers may need to be educated on which websites have age requirements for their students, while high school teachers (with students over the age of thirteen) should be generally aware of the privacy policies. After reviewing the privacy policies, teachers may opt to avoid websites that require providing e-mail addresses along with other personal information to access a class account.

Ratings for Apps?

Many websites teachers use also have apps that can be downloaded from iTunes or Google Play. Apps have ratings: age ratings at iTunes and a four-tiered rating system at Google Play. These ratings may be confusing and, at times, misleading when using them with students. The app ratings seem to be based on content rather than the age stipulation in the website privacy policy. Although an app may have a rating of 4+ or E (because generally the content in the app is open for all ages), the policy of the website accessed via the app may still stipulate that students under the age of thirteen need parental consent before using the application. Both Apple and Google provide a link to the website for which the app provides access; before using the app for education the reviewer should read and be willing to comply with the policy that is stipulated in the website privacy section.

App / Website Vetting Checklist

* Required

Teacher Name *

Name of the App / Website *

Grade(s) to use the App / Website

- 6th
- 7th
- 8th
- All grades

Privacy Link review (for specific age limits) *

Many sites have terms of service that prevent a child under the age of 13 from using it without parental permission. You can find these age limits by going to the very bottom of a website and opening the Privacy link.

- Students under age 13 must have a parent set up an account
- Teachers can set up an account for their class to use
- This is NOT appropriate for middle school students (age limit to restrictive)
- Everyone can use this App/website
- Other:

If there is an App for the website, what is the Apple rating (from the App store):

Please check what you've reviewed while looking at the App or website:

- The Content is Appropriate for Students
- Information is Error-Free, Factual, and Reliable
- Design of the Tool / Website is functional and visually stimulating
- Tool / Website is Free of Charge, if not please proceed to the next question
- No In-App / Website Purchases are Necessary to Use the Tool / Site
- Tool or Site Loads quickly and does not crash
- Reviewed Advertising and Hype Links for Age Appropriateness

If the App has a cost, how much does it cost?

What Curriculum Standards and or Content Will be addressed with this App/Website?

What is the age limit for the app/website?

Figure 1. Sample website review checklist.

The advent of more mobile devices that allow students to download apps and access websites and the devices' use in schools has made parents and school districts more aware of the importance of keeping our children safe while they are online. The Web was initially used by companies to market their services and merchandise, but it has grown to be our main source of all information. As school librarians we are cognizant of copyright and fair use laws and teach students how to appropriately reference other's materials. But this is a new age of responsibility, and school districts are looking for someone to teach digital citizenship and social responsibility when using the Internet. It isn't an easy position to be in; teachers want to use apps for

student choice and creativity and to collect data, but they may forget to review privacy notifications. School librarians may suggest guidelines on how teachers should review and use apps, but like copyright suggestions, the final decision on whether these suggestions are acted upon is left in the hands of principals and individual teachers. School librarians in elementary and middle schools should be aware of both CIPA and COPPA rules and know where to find the age limitations for any website and the associated app. Two suggestions to assist teachers (and students) when they request help with websites and apps would be to provide an online form with guidelines about what to review to avoid compromising students' privacy; see figure 1 for a sample.

Also, a school librarian can curate and provide a list of commonly used websites and provide links to the privacy sections.

School librarians must be ready to answer the question "Can I use this app (or website) for my class?" Librarians must stay current as new websites and apps emerge so we can assist teachers in their decisions on whether to use the new resources. Helping to keep our students safe in the online realm is becoming a paramount responsibility, and by understanding the rules of CIPA and COPPA librarians can help lead our schools and parents as they confront this sometimes overwhelming task.





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