

Dr Niraj Lal: Behind the Screens

In this fast, fun, eye-opening session, the author of *Behind the Screens* lifts the lid on what's really going on behind our favourite apps, games and videos – and how young people can stay safe and smart in a digital world that's constantly trying to influence what we click, think, buy and believe.

Dr Niraj Lal will unpack the big questions kids are asking: How does the internet actually work?

Why is it so hard to stop scrolling? Who's watching us online? What happens to all the data we leave behind? How can we tell what's true? And what will our digital future look like? From gaming and social media to algorithms, advertising tricks, online privacy, misinformation and more, this session gives young people the tools to understand the digital world before it starts shaping them.

WHY IS IT SO HARD TO STOP SCROLLING?

Apps, games and platforms are designed to keep our attention. What makes some apps “sticky” or addictive? Why do endless feeds and notifications make us want to keep checking? Who benefits when we scroll longer?

Teachers read out different features: cliff-hanger endings, streaks, “likes”, bright colours, loot boxes. Students vote with thumbs up/down: Does this make people want to keep using the app? Then discuss why.

WHO IS COLLECTING OUR DATA?

Every click leaves a trace. What is a digital footprint? Why would companies want our data? What are privacy settings and why do they matter?

In groups, students should draw a simple outline of a foot and label examples of data footprints such as: searches, photos, comments, location, purchases, likes. Groups can share one privacy tip each.

CAN WE TELL WHAT'S TRUE ONLINE?

Not everything online is accurate or fair. What is misinformation? Why do false stories spread so quickly? How can we check whether something is reliable?

Teachers should present several short claims (i.e. miracle cures, celebrity rumours, wild headlines). Students work in pairs or groups to list three questions they would ask before believing or sharing the claim.

SOCIAL MEDIA AGE LIMITS AND RULES

In Australia there has been major discussion about banning or restricting social media for under-16s. Why do governments consider age limits for platforms? What problems are they worried about (e.g. wellbeing, bullying, data collection)? What might be the positives and negatives of such a ban for young people?

Line up across the room for a class debate:

- One end = “support the ban”
- Middle = “unsure”
- Other end = “do not support”

Take turns stating one opinion each. Students may move positions as they hear new arguments.

A HEALTHY DIGITAL LIFE

Instead of quitting technology completely, we can learn to use it wisely. What are signs that screen time is becoming unhealthy? How can we balance online and offline activities?

Students complete a personal reflection card:

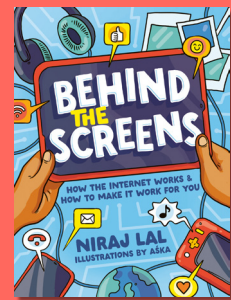
- One thing I like about technology
- One boundary that helps me
- One adult I can go to if I'm worried

PUBLISHER TEACHING NOTES

Access UQP teaching notes for *Behind the Screens* [here](#).



Dr Niraj Lal



Behind the Screens is available at Readings.

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS (YEAR 3-6)

Learning areas: English, Technologies/Digital Technologies, Health and Physical Education, Humanities/Civics and Citizenship, The Arts/Media Arts

Capabilities: Critical and Creative Thinking, Personal and Social Capability, Ethical Capability

Foundational Skills: Digital Literacy