



LESSON

Investigating Internet Addiction

OVERVIEW

In the past 15 years, digital media technologies have transformed the world and the ways that people across the globe interact. We've witnessed the introduction of the iPhone, iPad, MMOGs (massive multiplayer online games) and dozens of social networking sites, from Facebook and Instagram to Twitter and Vine. Along with these new communication opportunities come new concerns.

One of those concerns—Internet addiction—is examined in the documentary *Web Junkie*, which follows the treatment of three Chinese teenagers, obsessive gamers whose preference for the virtual world over the real one is summed up in one jarring statement: “Reality is too fake.” Israeli filmmakers Shosh Shlam and Hilla Medalia gained extraordinary access to a three-month military-style rehab program in Beijing, illuminating a process that, while stern, may help set a standard as the wider world comes to grips with the devastating consequences of excessive Internet use.

This lesson uses the documentary as a springboard for a project-based research exercise, assigning students to investigate whether Internet addiction is a problem in their community.

POV offers a lending library of DVDs that you can borrow anytime during the school year—FOR FREE! Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Examine claims of Internet addiction
- Conduct research about peer online time
- Reflect on the impact of their own online habits

GRADE LEVELS: 8-12

SUBJECT AREAS

Digital and Media Literacy
English/Language Arts

Journalism/Current Events/News Literacy
Social Science

MATERIALS

- Film clips from *Web Junkie* and equipment on which to show them

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

Two class periods, plus time for of out-of-class research and writing. There is also an optional third class period for presentations.

FILM CLIPS

Video clips provided with this lesson are from *Web Junkie*. The total clip time is about 12 minutes.

Clip 1: “Daxing Boot Camp” (Length: 2:48 min.)

The clip begins at 1:46 with a shot of teens playing games at an Internet cafe. It ends at 4:34 with teens marching and chanting at the Daxing Boot Camp at the Beijing Military Hospital.

Clip 2: “Electronic Heroin” (Length: 1:21 min.)

The clip begins at 12:15 with Tao Ran—a psychiatrist, addiction specialist and director of the Daxing Boot Camp—saying, “Internet addiction is a critical problem among Chinese teenagers.” It ends at 13:36 with Ran saying, “That’s why we call it ‘electronic heroin.’”

Clip 3: “Loneliness” (Length: 3:09 min.)

The clip begins at 39:49 with Nicky saying, “When I feel lonely...” It ends at 42:58 with Ran saying that Internet addiction can “evolve from a medical disorder into mental illness.”

Clip 4: “The Mothers” (Length: 1:00 min.)

The clip begins at 9:47 with a conversation among mothers of sons at the treatment center describing their sons’ problems. It ends at 10:57 with one mother saying, “He changed into a different person.”

Behavior described by the mothers includes playing online games for more than 40 days, not eating, sleeping or bathing, withdrawing from family and friends and mental problems.

Clip 5: “Hacker’s Father” (Length: 1:44 min.)

The clip begins at 23:08 with a therapist asking, “Are you Hacker’s father?” It ends at 24:52 with Hacker’s father saying, “That was the most violent I was with him.”

Clip 6: “Disease or Social Phenomenon?” (Length: 00:20 min.)

The clip begins at 49:57 with Nicky, one of the young men at the treatment center, saying, “Most of us don’t think we have Internet addiction. It’s not a real disease. It’s a social phenomenon.” It ends at 50:17, when Nicky says he was just getting good at the game when he “had to come to this camp.”

Clip 7: “Family Therapy” (Length: 1:08 min.)

The clip begins at 4:36 with Hope, one of the young men at the treatment center, saying “I want to talk to my dad.” It ends at 5:44 with Hope asking the therapist, “What is reality?”

Clip 8: “Parents” (Length: 1:01 min.)

The clip begins at 28:25 with a group of young men talking after lights out: “Parents are brainwashed by psychiatrists.” It ends at 29:26 with one of the young men saying, “At least that’s one thing I’m better at than others.”

ACTIVITY

1. Introduce the Activity

Begin by asking students if they've ever heard the term "Internet addiction." What do they think would qualify as being "addicted" to the Internet? Explain that China has been a world leader in developing treatment centers for Internet addiction. Tell students that they are going to view clips from the documentary *Web Junkie*, which follows the treatment of three Chinese young men who have been diagnosed with Internet addiction. They will then conduct a research project to investigate whether Internet addiction is real and, if it is real, whether it is an issue in their local area.

2. Show the Film Clips

Show the clips and invite initial reactions. (It might be helpful to have students view the clips in small blocks (i.e., four clips at a time), followed by discussion. Solicit initial impressions of the boot camp and whether students think Internet addiction is real or, as one of the young men in the film puts it, "just a social phenomenon." A few guiding questions that might be helpful after viewing the clips:

- Based on the clips, what is Internet addiction? Describe the various "symptoms" and behaviors that are associated with this "addiction."
- Do you think these symptoms and behaviors are a result of only the young men's engagement with the Internet? Discuss.
- Do you agree that what the young men have is an addiction to the Internet? Explain.
- What family issues seem to influence these teens' use of the Internet?
- Given these circumstances, why might the teens be driven to a virtual/digital world?
- In your eyes, do the young men have an Internet addiction, or are they simply participating in the "social phenomenon" of digital engagement? Explain.
- Do you think the young men need a boot camp to treat their Internet usage? Why or why not?
- Could the young men benefit from other types of services? Discuss.

3. Design the Research Process

Pose this question: *How can we find out if Internet addiction is a problem among teens in our school or community?* Tell students they will tackle this question as a research project.

Divide students into teams of five or six. Have them plan their research. During that process, they should consider:

- What background information do they need? (For example, what is the definition of addiction? Who counts as a "teen"?)
- Who might have answers? (Possible responses include parents, teens, psychologists specializing in treating addiction, teachers.)
- What do you need to ask each source?
- How and when will you do the asking?
- How will you present your findings?

4. Refine the Research Process

Ask the members of each team to present their plan to their classmates, taking comments and questions. The goal is for each team to improve its own research process and the other teams' research processes as well. Eventually they may incorporate each other's findings into their own reports, so everyone has a stake in every team doing well.

Depending on the level and experience of the students, this step should also include discussions of:

- Preserving the privacy of people they survey or interview (including any human subjects research protocols that exist in your school)
- Obtaining necessary permissions (e.g., if they want to conduct surveys of people at the mall, they need to get permission from mall management)
- What constitutes scientifically valid sampling (e.g., the difference between random sampling and just talking to their friends)
- The difference between investigative journalism that gathers information from secondary sources (e.g., psychologists or addiction specialists) and investigation that asks teens directly about their own experiences
- What to do if they encounter someone who is “addicted” or struggling with a problem

Set a deadline for students to turn in their research findings, either as written homework assignments or, if time permits, as presentations to the class. Teams may want to cooperate (e.g., everyone using the same survey questions so they can easily combine results at the end). Then let the research begin.

5. Presenting Findings (OPTIONAL)

Once research is completed, devote a class period to team presentations. Encourage students to take notes during each presentation (these will be useful for the final reflection, as well as the optional extension to create a news feature, which will need to include material from research conducted by the entire class).

After all teams have presented, discuss the findings and aggregate common results (e.g., if four teams each surveyed 25 students, combine results to give percentages based on 100 responses). If there are discrepancies, see if the class can come up with a logical explanation as to why those discrepancies exist.

Invite students to reflect on their research process. If they could do things over, is there anything they would change in order to strengthen their results?

6. Final Reflection

To wrap up the project, invite students to share what they learned about Internet addiction. Help them reflect on their own habits and whether or not they are making healthy choices.

EXTENSIONS

1. Have students compare their conclusions with claims made by researchers and cultural critics who deal with teens and media. They might read works by Danah Boyd, Douglas Rushkoff, Howard Gardner or Katie Davis.
2. Have students review school policies related to Internet use with their new expertise and recommend any revisions that they deem warranted.
3. Using a media format of their choosing, have each team prepare a news feature with the class research findings. For teams using video, the story should be no longer than five minutes. For teams using a print-based format, the story must also include pictures or embedded video clips. Each team should incorporate a reference to the clips from **Web Junkie** that they saw. Final features should be posted to a classroom website or wiki.

Encourage teams to submit their features to the school newscast or newspaper, or even offer them to a local news outlet (e.g., check your local PBS station to see if they might post it on their website).

4. Learn more about teen life in China and compare experiences there with typical teen culture where you live.

RESOURCES

Web Junkie

You can find links to additional resources at the film's websites: www.webjunkiemovie.com and www.pbs.org/pov/webjunkie/ – The POV site includes a general discussion guide with additional activity ideas.

POV: Media Literacy Questions for Analyzing POV Films

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/educators/media-literacy.php>

This list of questions provides a useful starting point for leading rich discussions that challenge students to think critically about documentaries.

American Psychological Association: “Is Internet Addiction Real?”

www.apa.org/monitor/apr00/addiction.aspx - This article summarizes current psychologists' thinking about Internet addiction.

The App Generation

<http://theappgenerationbook.com> – On the website for the book *The App Generation*, authors Howard Gardner and Katie Davis investigate the ways young people navigate identity, intimacy and imagination in a digital world.

Danah Boyd

<http://www.danah.org> – Danah Boyd researches teen online life and her website explores the intersection between technology and society.

The New York Times: “Screen Addiction Is Taking a Toll on Children”

http://well.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/07/06/screen-addiction-is-taking-a-toll-on-children/?_r=0 – In this 2015 article, Jane E. Brody examines the potential effects of screen time and Internet use on adolescents.

Douglas Rushkoff

www.douglasrushkoff.com – Search the term “addiction” to find relevant articles and interviews on the website of this futurist who specializes in media effects.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects

(http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf)

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4](#)

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.5](#)

Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting or trying a new approach.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.6](#)

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.7](#)

Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects based on focused questions, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.8](#)

Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources, assess the credibility and accuracy of each source and integrate the information while avoiding plagiarism.

[W.9-10.1](#) & [11-12.1](#) Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

[W.9-10.2d](#), [11-12.2d](#) Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1](#)

Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.2](#)

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally. [SL.11-12.2](#) adds: in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.5](#)

Make strategic use of digital media and visual displays of data to express information and enhance understanding of presentations.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.6](#)

Adapt speech to a variety of contexts and communicative tasks, demonstrating command of formal English when indicated or appropriate.

[SL.11-12.4](#) Present information, findings and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective, such that listeners can follow the line of reasoning, alternative or opposing perspectives are addressed and the organization, development, substance and style are appropriate to purpose, audience and a range of formal and informal tasks.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1](#)

Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2](#)

Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7](#)

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.8](#)

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.10](#)

Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently.

[McREL \(Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning\) K-12 Content Standards and Benchmarks](#)

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 2: Uses the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing.

Language Arts, Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

[NCSS C3 Social Studies Standards](#)

Dimension 1: Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries

D1.2.9-12. Explain points of agreement and disagreement experts have about interpretations and applications of disciplinary concepts and ideas associated with a compelling question.

D1.4.9-12. Explain how supporting questions contribute to an inquiry and how, through engaging source work, new compelling and supporting questions emerge.

D1.5.9-12. Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available and the potential uses of the sources.

Dimension 2: Applying Disciplinary Concepts and Tools

Civics

D2.Civ.9.9-12. Use appropriate deliberative processes in multiple settings.

D2.Civ.10.9-12. Analyze the impact and the appropriate roles of personal interests and perspectives on the application of civic virtues, democratic principles, constitutional rights and human rights.

D2.Civ.13.9-12. Evaluate public policies in terms of intended and unintended outcomes, and related consequences.

D2.Civ.14.9-12. Analyze historical, contemporary and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good and protecting rights.

Dimension 3: Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence

D3.3.9-12. Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims.

D3.4.9-12. Refine claims and counterclaims attending to precision, significance and knowledge conveyed through the claim while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both.

Dimension 4: Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Actions

D4.1.9-12. Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.

D4.2.9-12. Construct explanations using sound reasoning, correct sequence (linear or non-linear), examples and details with significant and pertinent information and data, while acknowledging the strengths and weaknesses of the explanation given its purpose (e.g., cause and effect, chronological, procedural, technical).

D4.4.9-12. Critique the use of claims and evidence in arguments for credibility.

D4.5.9-12. Critique the use of the reasoning, sequencing and supporting details of explanations.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Faith Rogow, Ph.D., is the co-author of *The Teacher's Guide to Media Literacy: Critical Thinking in a Multimedia World* (Corwin, 2012) and past president of the National Association for Media Literacy Education. She has written discussion guides and lesson plans for more than 250 independent films.