common sense education

GRADE 8

Digital Media and Your Brain

How does digital media try to hook you, and what can you do about it?

MEDIA BALANCE & WELL-BEING

We find balance
in our digital lives.

OVERVIEW

Sometimes when you're using media, it's hard to stop. Lots of people even say they feel "addicted" to their phones or the apps and games they use. But is digital media actually designed to get you hooked? Have students think about the ways different digital media does -- and does not -- help us find healthy media balance.

Students will be able to:

- Explore ways that different digital media are, and aren't, designed to help them make good media choices.
- Reflect on how digital media is designed to either help or hinder the addition of meaning and value to their lives.
- Think about how to develop good, healthy habits when using digital media.

Lesson Snapshot   **Estimated time: 45 mins.**

Warm Up:	Attention Getter	10 mins.
Watch and Analyze:	Why Do We Get Hooked?	15 mins.
Compare and Contrast:	Addictive Design Vs. Humane Design	10 mins.
Wrap Up:	Making Healthy Media Choices	10 mins.

Key Standards Supported

Common Core ELA

L.8.6, RI.8.1, RI.8.4, RI.8.10, SL.8.1, SL.8.1b, SL.8.1c, SL.8.1d, SL.8.2, SL.8.6, W.8.1, W.8.4, W.8.10

CASEL

1a, 1b, 2a, 2b, 2c, 2d, 2e, 2f, 3a, 3d, 4a, 4b, 4c, 4d, 5a, 5b, 5c, 5d, 5e, 5f

AASL

I.A.1, I.A.2, I.B.1, I.B.3, I.C.1, I.C.4, I.D.1, I.D.2, I.D.3, I.D.4, II.A.2, II.A.3, II.B.1, II.B.2, II.C.1, II.C.2, II.D.1, II.D.2, II.D.3, III.A.1, III.A.2, III.B.1, III.B.2, III.C.1, III.C.2, III.D.1, III.D.2, V.A.1, V.A.2, V.A.3

ISTE

1a, 1b, 1c, 1d, 2a, 2b, 3d, 6a, 7b, 7c, 7d

What You'll Need

Spanish-language student and family resources available soon!

- **Lesson Slides**
- Video: Teen Voices: The Pressure to Stay Connected **Watch**
- Student Handout: Humane or a Brain Drain? **Student Version Teacher Version**
- Lesson Quiz **Editable Google form Answer Key**

Take-home resources

- **Family Tips**
- **Family Activity**
- **Family Engagement Resources**

LESSON PLAN

Key Vocabulary:

addictive design
features or aspects of a device or app that are intended to hook the user into frequent use

feedback loop

when you get a response to something you do or post online, causing you brain to experience a temporary moment of pleasure

habit

something we do automatically without thinking

humane design

features or aspects of a device or app that prioritizes what's good for people's lives

---

Warm Up: **Attention Getter**   10 mins.

1. **Project Slide 4**. Have students reflect on the image and then discuss the questions with a partner. Call on pairs to share out responses. Invite volunteers to explain their captions.

2. **Ask**: *What are some things you like to do on your phone or other devices?* As students respond, highlight any of the following actions they mention:

   - Text and read texts.
   - Post and check on social media.
   - Watch videos.
   - Play games.
   - Listen to music.
   - Read news articles and blog posts.

3. **Ask**: *Why do you enjoy doing these different activities?* Call on students to share out their thoughts. Encourage students to pinpoint specific reasons for their device use, including getting positive feelings, being entertained, engaging in their interests, and maintaining relationships.

4. **Explain** to students that when we use media and devices, sometimes we have specific reasons for doing so, but sometimes we don't have a reason or goal. We do them out of **habit**, which means *something we do automatically without thinking*. (**Slide 5**) If necessary, provide some examples of habits, including blinking, running your fingers through your hair, cracking your knuckles, biting fingernails, and giggling.

5. **Ask**: *Going back to your list of the things you like to do on your phone or device, do you think you ever do those things out of habit? If so, do you think that's a good or bad thing?* Call on students to respond, helping them surface which digital media habits they have and whether they think these habits are positive or negative.

6. **Say**: *Using digital media can be fun and interesting. In fact, it's built to be that way. The features of your devices and the apps and the games and websites you interact with all have been designed by people who want to get your attention. Today we are going to talk about how they do that and how it affects you.*

Watch and Analyze: **Why Do We Get Hooked?**   15 mins.

1. **Show** the **Teen Voices: The Pressure to Stay Connected** video and have students discuss the questions on **Slide 6** with a partner.

   Guide students to understand that features like autoplay on Netflix and YouTube, likes and comments on social media apps, and goals and levels in online gaming increase people's use of these tools. These design features can sometimes lead us to form unhealthy habits like checking our phones obsessively and spending more time online than we'd like.

2. **Say**: *Our brains are wired to build habits. We have habits for our daily routines, like the way we brush our teeth or the things we do to get ready for school. Tech designers understand the power of habits. Their job is to get you to use their devices or tools as a habit, without even thinking about it. This makes them successful and makes them more money. This is called* **addictive design**, *which refers to features or aspects of a device or app that are intended to hook the user into frequent use.* (**Slide 7**)

   Point out that addictive design works because it uses **feedback loops**, *which is when you get a response to something you do or post online causing your brain to experience a temporary moment of pleasure* (**Slide 7**) Feedback loops create a kind of reward that makes a habit stick. You do something, you get a response that makes you feel good, and then you want to do it again.

3. **Ask**: *How does social media use addictive design like feedback loops to get and keep your attention?*

   Students may note the following features:

   - Likes, dislikes, or other ratings
   - Comments
   - The ability to share pictures and see other peoples' pictures
   - Streaks
   - Videos with autoplay features
   - Livestreaming

Compare and Contrast: **Addictive Design Vs. Humane Design**   10 mins.

1. **Say**: *Thinking about our media choices and the habits we form while using them is important. Good habits help us build healthy and happy lives. Bad habits can make our lives more difficult.*

2. **Project Slide 8**. Point out that while addictive design is used to create many kinds of media, there is a movement to develop media using **humane design**. Say: *Humane design prioritizes what is good for us. It includes technology that is designed to be useful and really add value to our lives.*

3. **Distribute** the **Humane or a Brain Drain? Student Handout**. Read the directions for Part 1 on the handout and allow students time to complete the activity in small groups. (**Slide 9**) Invite students to share out some of the humane-design features they noted. Sample answers include:

   - The ability to control when and if you receive alerts/notifications
   - Alerts, rewards, and activities that don't necessarily involve using the app
   - The ability to disconnect for selected amounts of time
   - A way to monitor use

4. **Say**: *Humane design encourages tech designers to design tools that really add value to our lives, not just get us to use the app more.* Note that some apps and games can have elements of both humane design and addictive design: Some features might be helpful, and others might be a hindrance.

Wrap Up: **Making Healthy Media Choices**   10 mins.

1. **Say**: *Much of the digital media we use incorporates addictive design, which gets us to use it more but doesn't really benefit our lives. We can make choices to use media that incorporates humane design to get the best out of media in our lives.*

2. **Direct** students to Part 2 of the **Humane or a Brain Drain? Student Handout**. Have students complete the activity with their small group. (**Slide 10**) Then invite groups to share out their responses.

   If time allows, invite volunteers to share the three rules they will use when they decide to spend time using digital media with addictive features. Encourage students to borrow tips and strategies from one another to give themselves a greater variety of ideas.

3. **Have** students complete the **Lesson Quiz**. Send home the **Family Activity** and **Family Tips**.