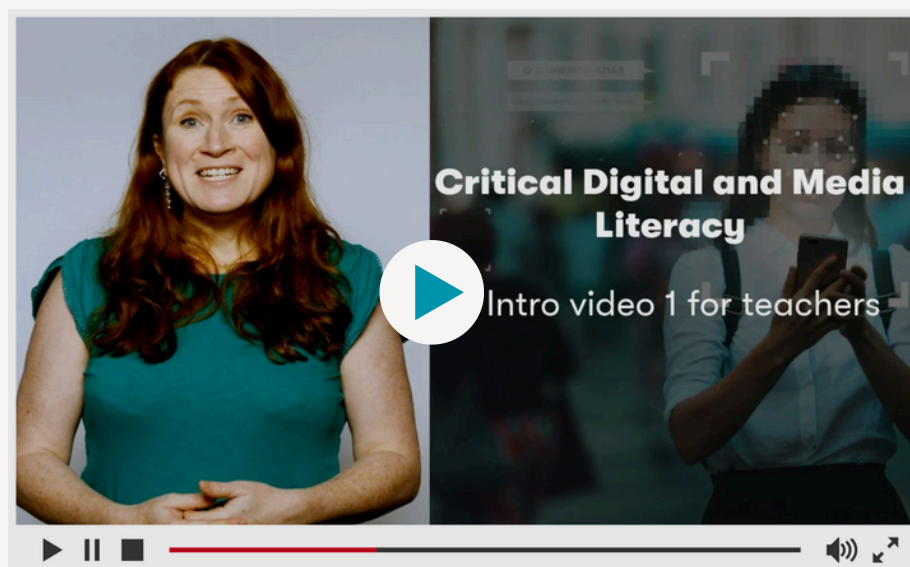# ⌐LYFTA┘

CRITICAL DIGITAL AND MEDIA LITERACY

Introduction

In an era of misinformation, AI bias, and digital manipulation, we need to go beyond traditional media literacy approaches focused solely on fact-checking.

Critical thinking skills, ethical awareness, and global perspectives help students navigate the complex digital landscape.

This Critical Digital and Media Literacy Toolkit supports teachers in delivering engaging, human-centred digital literacy lessons.

It is built on a human connection method, which fosters empathy, relational thinking, and resilience through real-world human narratives and immersive 360° storytelling.

Click the play button to access the video, or this link:
https://vimeo.com/1078630780?ts=0&share=copy.

What is Critical Digital and Media Literacy?

Critical Digital & Media Literacy (CDML) is the ability to:

- Assess the credibility of online information and digital media content.

- Recognise and understand bias in media, algorithms, echo chambers and misinformation.

- Understand the ethics and responsibility of content creation.

- Appreciate diverse perspectives and how media shapes understanding of the world.

This course empowers students to move beyond passive media consumption toward critical, thoughtful, relational, and responsible digital engagement.

One of the main aims of this course is to help students to discover for themselves the importance of critical digital and media literacy.

The course helps students develop their own toolkit for critically analysing and engaging with content, empowering them to navigate the digital world with a critical lens.

Course structure and key themes

This 12-session course provides students with a foundational comprehension of digital literacy, with content adapted for primary (collection here) and secondary levels (collection here). A link to each lesson plan is hyperlinked below.

Key themes include:
- Documentary Literacy & Critical Thinking
- Social Media, Truth and Echo Chambers
- Stereotypes & Representation
- AI & Algorithmic Bias
- Deepfakes & Mis/Disinformation
- Digital Kindness & Belonging

	Primary	Secondary
1	Course introduction and baseline survey	Course introduction and baseline survey
2	An introduction to digital and media literacy	An introduction to digital and media literacy
3	Documentary literacy and critical thinking	Documentary literacy and critical thinking
4	Social media and truth	Developing media literacy
5	Stereotypes and belonging	AI: algorithms, bias and stereotypes
6	Representation and the media	Deepfakes, misinformation and disinformation
7	An introduction to AI	AI and echo chambers
8	Exploring AI and staying safe online	Social media and image manipulation
9	Deepfakes and misinformation	Representation and the media
10	Critical visual literacy	Collective responsibility and belonging
11	Digital kindness and belonging	Humanity and truth
12	Course reflections and final survey	Course reflections and final survey

Curriculum links

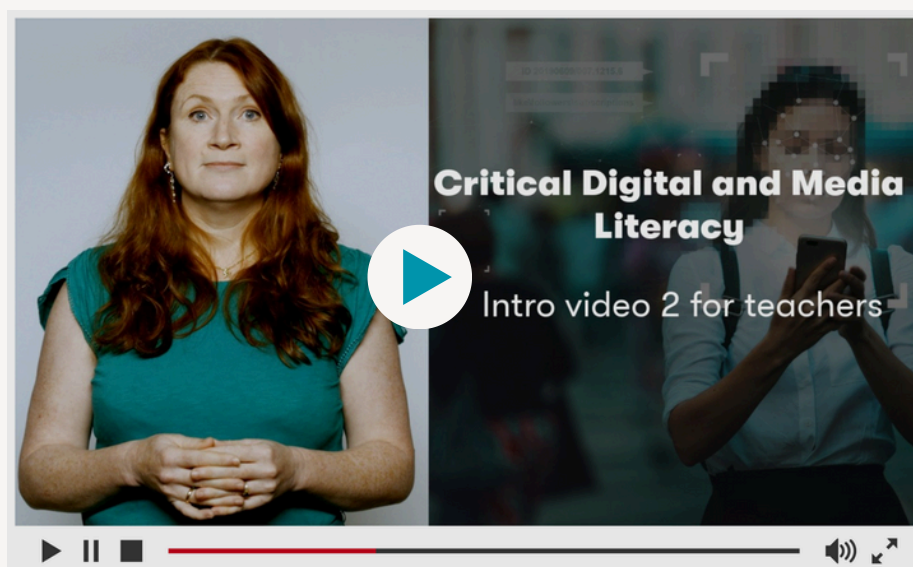| Curriculum	KS2 (7-11)	KS3 (11-14)	KS4 (14-16)
PSHE: Health & Wellbeing	Building online wellbeing, understanding screen time balance, and recognising misinformation	Critically evaluating online pressures, digital wellbeing, and ethical AI impacts	Advanced critical thinking on digital privacy, media bias, AI manipulation, and mental health
PSHE: Relationships (RSE)	Developing online kindness, recognising stereotypes, and respectful digital communication	Exploring digital relationships, peer influence, echo chambers, and identity shaping	Critically examining media narratives around relationships, consent, and equality
PSHE: Living in the Wider World	Understanding media's impact on communities and global citizenship	Exploring how digital platforms influence democracy, representation, and activism	Investigating digital activism, AI ethics, and the role of the media in civic engagement
Citizenship	Recognising online rights, democratic participation, and responsibilities	Developing critical digital citizenship and understanding media influence in political discourse	Analysing media regulation, free speech, digital rights, and global civic responsibilities
Computing	Safe internet use, digital footprint awareness, recognising misinformation & understanding basic algorithms	Understanding AI, algorithms, data use, personal privacy, and digital safety risks	Critically analysing AI ethics, algorithmic bias, and misinformation detection

Lyfta's method of Human Connection

This course is not just about identifying misinformation or an echo chamber, it's about understanding why it matters.

The approach is built on three defining pillars:

Human Connection as a Pedagogical Foundation

Students engage with real human experiences through Lyfta's interactive storyworlds.

Click the play button to access the video, or this link:
https://vimeo.com/1078630780?ts=0&share=copy

This method builds connection, curiosity, empathy, and real-world contextual understanding.

It connects global issues to personal experiences, helping students see why digital literacy is essential in their own lives.

Self-Discovery of the Need for Digital Literacy

Instead of being told why media literacy matters, students uncover it themselves through interactive experiences and reflection.

This approach fosters intrinsic motivation to engage critically with digital content.

Question-Driven Learning
Students develop their own framework of critical questions.
They learn to interrogate content independently, moving beyond "Is this true?" to deeper questions, such as:

- Who created this media, and what were their intentions?
- What perspectives are missing?
- How do algorithms shape what I see?

This approach equips students with life-long critical skills, ensuring that digital literacy becomes an active and ongoing process, not a passive one-off lesson.

Capturing learning and impact: Surveys and journals

This course suggests two methods for teachers and students to track learning progress and impact:

- Baseline and final surveys, helping to measure students' knowledge and confidence before and after the course.
- Reflective learning journals, encouraging personal reflection and the development of life-long critical thinking habits.

Baseline and final surveys: measuring growth

Students are encouraged to complete a survey (we offer this as a Lyfta lesson*) at the start and end of the course to assess their ability to:

- Evaluate online information and spot misinformation
- Recognise representation and stereotypes in media
- Understand AI and social media influence
- Practice digital kindness and responsible online behavior

The baseline survey captures their starting points, while the final survey tracks progress and learning - this also helps students see how their thinking has (and has not) shifted in any way. You can find hyperlinks to the survey lessons in the course structure table above.

*Surveys can also be downloaded and printed as a PDF by clicking on the print icon within the lesson plans.

Reflective learning journals: building critical awareness

Each lesson includes reflection prompts for students to answer, which we recommend completing in a journal of some sort.

These journals help them:

- process new ideas and perspectives;

- track how their thinking changes over time;
- build a personal toolkit of critical digital literacy questions.

In addition to questions posed in structured lessons, here are some suggested reflection questions that could be used anytime:

- Did this lesson change the way I think about anything?

- What surprised me or made me think differently?

- What question will I add to my digital literacy toolkit today?

- How can I apply today's learning to my online life?

- What responsibility do media/digital content creators have in shaping how people think?

A "Back pocket" toolkit for life

By the end of the course, students will have developed a set of critical questions they can use beyond the classroom, such as:

- How do I know if this information is true?
- Who created this content, and why?
- What voices are missing from this story?
- Am I being influenced without realising it?

These questions will evolve as students grow, helping them navigate an ever-changing digital world with curiosity, confidence, compassion, connection and critical thinking.

APPENDIX

Research and policy

- Ofcom (2021). Online Media Literacy Strategy. This highlights the need for critical inquiry-based digital literacy programs.

- Picton et al. (2022), National Literacy Trust. This shows that students with high critical digital literacy skills experience improved mental wellbeing.

- Livingstone, S., Stoilova, M., & Nandagiri, R. (2023). This advocates for AI and data literacy to be embedded in school curricula.

- Education Endowment Foundation (2022). This study found that enquiry-led, experiential learning is the most effective approach to media literacy education.

Case study, *The Age of AI*

As AI becomes a more integral part of everyday life, educators face the challenge of helping students to think critically about its benefits, risks, and ethical implications.

Lyfta's 'Age of AI' storyworld in San Francisco, provides an opportunity for students to engage with these complex topics in a dynamic and interactive way.

How is the "Age of AI" storyworld designed to enhance learning?

This storyworld, accompanying films, 360s and lesson plans are designed to:

- Develop critical thinking skills: students question content, recognise deepfakes, and evaluate digital sources.
- Explore ethical dilemmas: a space to debate AI's role in society, from job automation to misinformation and online safety.
- Foster curiosity and engagement: immersion in AI-related environments, from high-tech server rooms to city streets where AI is shaping everyday life.
- Encourage real-world connection: linking AI's rapid development to impact on careers, global challenges, and personal security.

IMPACT AND STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

One of the most impactful uses of this storyworld to date took place during a series of live lessons delivered to thousands of students (mostly Primary-aged) across the UK in 2024.

These sessions combined 360° environments, discussions, and thought-provoking films to spark student reflections on AI's role in the world.

KEY LEARNING MOMENTS FROM LIVE LESSONS

AI as both exciting and concerning Students were fascinated by AI's power and speed, but also voiced concerns about its long-term implications.

The idea that AI could complete three years' worth of work in a single day sparked both enthusiasm and fear.

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AI will be very useful; however, it will be more powerful than humans. Student, 5G

Imagine them taking over the world like in the movies. Class R

> "
> *We are worried about what jobs we will be able to do in the future. Computers will take over all of the jobs?*
> Greece class
>
> *Jobs will be taken, waiters won't exist - teachers won't be needed.*
> VR School

Concerns about job security and human skills
Many students raised questions about the future of work, wondering how AI might replace jobs and impact human skills development.

> "
> *You could get scammed or tricked into clicking on something that can hack you.*
> Year 6 student
>
> *Someone could send you pictures of AI-generated places and ask us to meet in fictional places.*
> Year 5 student

Digital safety and misinformation awareness
Younger students focused on personal safety and the risks of deepfakes, scams, and AI-generated deception.

AI's potential for good – Science and climate change
Despite concerns, students also saw AI's potential to contribute to global challenges.

Reality vs. AI: questioning what we see

The 360° immersive experiences encouraged students to think critically about what is real and what might be AI-generated manipulation.

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Is the café a fake image?
Mrs Parr's Class

CONCLUSION

The value of "The Age of AI" Lyfta storyworld
This live lesson experience showcased the power and potential of using an immersive AI storyworld to drive discussions on digital literacy, ethics, and the future of technology.

By engaging with AI in a meaningful way, students:

- asked critical questions about AI's role in shaping society;
- expressed excitement and concern about AI's potential;
- practiced media literacy skills, analysing deepfakes and misinformation;
- created connections between AI and real-world challenges, from job automation to climate change.

Students cultivate essential critical thinking and ethical reasoning skills, vital in our increasingly tech-driven society, through the use of these tools in live lessons, classroom discussions, and self-directed/independent study.