

UNIT 1: LEARNING

Grade Level 6 - 8



INTRODUCTION

Themes & Ideas

- *Interpersonal Dynamics*
- *Academic Environments*
- *Mobile Device Usage*
- *Digital Advancements*
- *Artificial Intelligence*
- *Human Connections*

What Students Will Uncover

Through a variety of discussions and activities, students will learn about the potential impact of Artificial Intelligence on their learning habits, academic integrity, and cognitive development. They will examine how reliance on generative tools influences independent thinking. They will also learn about the importance of critically evaluating AI-generated content.

Lesson Overview

This guide addresses the integration of generative AI tools into academic environments, exploring both the benefits for learning and the risks to critical thinking, memory retention, and academic stamina. It works well for educators to run:

As a follow-up to the Screening and Class Discussion Lesson Plan

OR

Independently, if you already know this is a subject you want to explore in particular.

We recommend that students watch Screenagers: Generation AI prior to (or as part of) this lesson, but relevant clips are embedded throughout the guide if students do not have time to watch the whole film or need a refresher.

The lesson is organized around activities that can be completed during a class period. Educators can select and arrange the activities to fit their class timing, including running activities over multiple periods or assigning them as homework.

Lesson Objectives

Students will be able to:

- *Examine how generative AI tools and automation impact independent problem-solving, cognitive stamina, and deep learning habits*
- *Evaluate the accuracy, bias, and reliability of AI-generated content.*
- *Identify healthy strategies for utilizing technology as a learning aid without replacing original thought and academic effort.*
- *Analyze the ethical considerations and academic integrity questions surrounding AI usage in school settings.*

Lesson Materials

- The lesson plan below
 - Activity 1: [Puzzle Worksheet](#)
 - Activity 2: [Flawed Article Worksheet](#) | [AI Proofreading Output Sheets](#)
 - Activity 3: [Assignment Cards](#)
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LESSON ACTIVITIES

Discussion Prompts & Video Reflections

- Please see the Discussion Format guidance at the end of this document -

  [View/Show: Expert Reflection - Dr. Jared Cooney Horvath \(30 seconds\)](#)

1. Expert Reflection (Dr. Jared Cooney Horvath): "Your brain does not like to work." What does this mean? Why does your brain naturally try to avoid hard mental effort?

Suggested Discussion Formats:

- Turn-and-Talk (Elbow Partners)
- Poster Board Discussion (Chalk Talk)

  [View/Show: Expert Reflection - Dr. Rebecca Winthrop \(20 seconds\)](#)

2. Expert Reflection (Dr. Rebecca Winthrop): Winthrop notes adults use AI for productivity, but students need "productive struggle" to grow. What does this mean? How do adults and students view AI differently?

Suggested Discussion Formats:

- Talk-Listen Partner Sharing
- Fishbowl

  [View/Show: "Struggle is learning" \(20 seconds\)](#)

3. "Don't think struggle is antithetical to learning. Struggle is learning." Can you share a time you worked very hard to learn a skill? How did it feel while you were learning the skill? How did it feel after you mastered it? How would this experience have been different if the "hard work" part had been removed?

Suggested Discussion Formats:

- Musical Chairs (Concentric Circles)
- Anonymous Comments

 [View/Show: Fake AI Research Paper \(1 minute, 10 seconds\)](#)

4. How was the fake scientific paper about an eye disease able to spread so quickly into multiple AI products? Why do AI systems fail to catch fake information?

Suggested Discussion Formats:

- Jigsaw Puzzle
- Fishbowl

 [View/Show: The Importance of Writing \(1 minute, 10 seconds\)](#)

5. What happens to your brain's "learning muscle" if an AI tool always does the heavy lifting for you?

Suggested Discussion Formats:

- Four Corners
- Turn-and-Talk (Elbow Partners)

6. Have you ever felt encouraged or pressured by parents or teachers to use AI when you didn't want to? Why did you prefer not to use it? What was the outcome?

Suggested Discussion Formats:

- Anonymous Comments
- Talk-Listen Partner Sharing

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: The Cognitive Muscle Challenge

Overview: Students complete an analog, device-free problem-solving task while tracking their internal "frustration score" on a shared classroom wall. This exercise demonstrates how mental struggle builds cognitive stamina.

Approximate Time: 15 - 20 minutes

Supplies:

- Printed [puzzle worksheet](#) (1 per student)
- Sticky notes (3 per student)
- Poster or whiteboard space labeled "*The Class Stamina Board*"

Teacher Instructions:

- **Preliminary Framing (2 mins):** Introduce Dr. Cooney Horvath's concept: "*Your brain naturally wants to save energy, but struggle is how learning actually happens.*"
- **Device-Free Work Block (12 mins):** Instruct students to work on the paper challenge independently

without digital tools. Every 3 minutes, ring a bell and have students write a "Frustration Score" (1 = Easy/Bored, 5 = High Frustration) on a sticky note and stick it on the *Stamina Board*.

- **Data Analysis & Debrief (5 mins):** Examine the board's trendline together. Ask students:
 - *At what point did you feel tempted to give up or ask an AI tool for the answer?*
 - *How did pushing through that frustration change how well you understood the problem?*

ACTIVITY 2: The Manual vs. Machine Proofing Lab

Overview: Students act as human quality-control editors by manually auditing a flawed document using red pens to calculate their "Human Detection Rate" before comparing their results to an automated AI output. This exercise demonstrates the specific logic and factual errors AI tools frequently miss.

Approximate Time: 15 - 20 minutes

Supplies:

- Printed [Flawed Article Worksheets](#) (containing subtle factual errors, logical inconsistencies, and tone slips)
- Highlighters or colored pencils/pens
- Printed [AI Proofreading Output Sheets](#) (showing what a basic AI check flagged vs. missed)

Teacher Instructions:

- **Preliminary Framing (2 mins):** Ask students: *"If a spellcheck or AI tool marks a paper as clean, does that mean the paper is actually accurate and logical?"*
- **Manual Human Audit (8 mins):** Hand out the [paper worksheet](#) and highlighters or colored pens/pencils. Give students 5 minutes to read through the text independently, circle errors, write corrections in the margins, and count the number of errors they detected.
- **AI Output Comparison (5 mins):** Hand out the pre-run [AI proofreading sheet](#). Have students compare what they caught manually versus what the software missed or incorrectly changed.
- **Follow-up Debrief (5 mins):** Ask students:
 - *What types of errors did the machine catch easily, and what types of errors required human judgment to spot?*
 - *How does relying 100% on automated tools weaken your own critical auditing skills?*
- **Key Takeaway:** *Automated proofreaders search for syntax, spelling, and basic grammar mechanics. They do NOT check historical facts, internal logic, extreme bias, or tone consistency. Relying 100% on automated software leaves critical errors behind!*

ACTIVITY 3: Assignment Scenario Sorting

Overview: In small groups, students categorize real classroom assignments using scenario cards into three clear buckets: *AI Helps Learning*, *AI Hurts Learning*, or *Gray Area*.

Approximate Time: 15 - 20 minutes

Supplies:

- Sets of printed [Assignment Cards](#) (Contains some blanks if you want to write some more of your own)

- 3 sorting areas or labeled butcher paper per group (*Helps Learning / Hurts Learning / Gray Area*)

Teacher Instructions:

- **Preliminary Framing (2 mins):** Ask students: *"Is using AI for school always cheating, or does it depend on which part of the learning process you hand over to the machine?"*
- **Group Sorting (10 mins):** Divide students into small groups. Have them take turns selecting an [Assignment Card](#), reading it aloud, justifying where it belongs, and placing it on a sorting mat.
- **Defending Gray Areas (5 mins):** Call on groups to share one assignment they placed in the *"Gray Area."*
- **Follow-up Debrief (3 mins):** Ask:
 - *What rule can we make to decide if an AI tool is helping you learn or just doing the work for you?*

Frameworks

CASEL® SEL Competencies

Our Curriculum & Lesson Plans are independently aligned by the Screenagers Team to the CASEL® SEL Competencies Framework.

- **Self-awareness:** Examining prejudices and biases.
- **Self-management:** Exhibiting self-discipline and self-motivation.
- **Social-awareness:** Taking others' perspectives.
- **Responsible Decision-making:** Demonstrating curiosity and open-mindedness. Learning to make a reasoned judgment after analyzing information, data, and facts.

AASL Standards Framework for Learners

Our Curriculum & Lesson Plans are also informed by the American Association of School Librarians (AASL) Standards Framework for Learners. For additional information and resources, including a downloadable format for the Learners Standards Framework, for AASL's National Standards visit standards.aasl.org.

Inquire

- A. THINK** — Formulating questions about a personal interest or a need for information.
- B. CREATE** — Generating products that illustrate learning.

Include

- B. CREATE** — Evaluating a variety of perspectives during learning activities.

Collaborate

- D. GROW** — Recognizing learning as a social responsibility.

Engage

- C. SHARE** — Disseminating new knowledge through means appropriate for the intended audience.

Explore

- A. THINK** — Reflecting and questioning assumptions and possible misconceptions. Developing personal habits that reflect a critical stance toward information.

DISCUSSION FORMATS

Turn-and-Talk (Elbow Partners)

Students discuss the question with the closest student to their right, then turn and talk with the closest student to their left. Afterward, students are invited to share their opinions with the entire class.

Supplies Needed: *None*

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Present the discussion prompt on the board or read it aloud.
2. Direct students to turn to their right and discuss the prompt with their elbow partner for 60 seconds.
3. Signal a transition and instruct students to turn to their left to discuss the prompt with a new partner for 60 seconds.
4. Bring the class together and invite 2 - 3 volunteers to share insights from their conversations.

Fishbowl

A small group of students sits in a center circle and actively discusses the prompt while the remaining students sit outside taking notes. Periodically, outer circle observers rotate into the inner circle to join the conversation.

Supplies Needed: *Chairs arranged in two concentric circles, paper, and pens.*

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Arrange 4 - 5 chairs in an inner circle (the Fishbowl) surrounded by the rest of the class in an outer circle.
2. Assign the inner circle to begin actively discussing the prompt while the outer circle actively listens and takes notes.
3. Every 3 - 5 minutes, pause the discussion to rotate students from the outer circle into the inner circle.
4. Conclude with a full-class debrief summarizing key arguments brought up by the inner circle.

Musical Chairs (Concentric Circles)

Students form two facing concentric circles and discuss a prompt in pairs for two minutes. After two minutes, the inner circle rotates clockwise to a new partner to repeat the discussion.

Supplies Needed: *Open floor space or desks arranged in two facing rows.*

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Divide the class into two equal groups, forming an inner circle facing outward and an outer circle facing inward.
2. Post a prompt and give pairs 2 minutes to share their perspectives.
3. Call "Time!" and instruct only the inner circle to rotate one spot clockwise to meet a new partner.
4. Repeat for 3 - 4 rotations using the same prompt or introducing new reflection questions.

Jigsaw Puzzle

Small groups discuss one portion of a prompt before splitting up to join a new group. In their new groups, students share what their original group discussed before tackling the next prompt.

Supplies Needed: *Playing cards or grouping tokens, chart paper, markers.*

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Split the class into "home groups" of 3 - 4 students using playing cards or random selection, assigning each group a distinct portion of a prompt.
2. Give home groups 5 minutes to discuss and record key takeaways on chart paper.
3. Re-sort students into "expert groups" containing one representative from each original home group.
4. Give each student 2 minutes to present their home group's findings to their new group.

Post-It Notes (Silent Gallery Walk)

Teachers post questions on boards around the room, and students walk around writing their responses on sticky notes. Classmates then walk through to read the notes and add check marks next to comments they agree with.

Supplies Needed: *Post-it notes, pens, chart paper hung around the room.*

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Hang poster boards with different prompts around the room.
2. Hand each student sticky notes and give them 5 - 7 minutes to walk silently around the room, posting written answers under each question.
3. Direct students to do a second lap with a pen, drawing a check mark (✓) next to comments they agree with and a question mark (?) next to points they want to clarify.
4. Gather as a class to review the posters with the highest concentration of checks or questions.

Poster Board Discussion (Chalk Talk)

Questions are written on poster boards around the room, and students walk around for 10 minutes writing their thoughts directly on the paper. Students mark a check next to points they agree with, and an X next to points of disagreement for a final class debrief.

Supplies Needed: *Large poster paper/whiteboards, markers.*

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Write central discussion prompts in the middle of large poster sheets placed on tables or taped to walls.
2. Give students 10 minutes to walk silently between posters, writing their responses directly on the paper.
3. Instruct students to read their peers' comments and draw a check mark (✓) next to statements they agree with and an "X" next to points of disagreement, adding brief written explanations.
4. Lead a debrief focusing explicitly on the clusters of agreement and disagreement across the boards.

Anonymous Comments

Students write their honest responses to a prompt on paper and submit them to the teacher anonymously. The teacher reads the responses aloud so the class can discuss which parts they agree or disagree with.

Supplies Needed: *Index cards or uniform slips of paper, collection box/basket, whiteboard & markers.*

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Distribute identical slips of paper or index cards, reading the prompt aloud or writing it on the board.
2. Provide 2 - 3 minutes for students to write an anonymous, honest response, then collect all cards in a box and shuffle them.
3. Read selected responses aloud to the class without identifying handwriting.

4. Transcribe main themes onto the board and facilitate a class discussion around common patterns or surprising perspectives.

Talk-Listen Partner Sharing

Partner A has one uninterrupted minute to respond to a question while Partner B listens quietly. Students then switch roles, followed by a final minute where both partners respond to each other's ideas.

Supplies Needed: *Visual timer or stopwatch.*

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Pair students up as Partner A and Partner B.
2. Partner A speaks for 60 seconds straight responding to the prompt, while Partner B listens completely uninterrupted.
3. Switch roles immediately: Partner B speaks for 60 seconds while Partner A listens.
4. Open a final 60-second block for open, two-way dialogue where partners react to what they heard from each other.

Four Corners

The teacher reads a statement, and students physically walk to a corner of the room labeled with their stance (Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, or Strongly Disagree). Each corner group briefly discusses their reasoning before choosing a spokesperson to share with the class.

Supplies Needed: *Four corner signs labeled Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree.*

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Post one sign in each of the four corners of the classroom.
2. Read a statement aloud to the class.
3. Instruct students to walk to the corner that best reflects their opinion.
4. Give each corner group 3 minutes to discuss their reasoning, then have a spokesperson from each corner present their argument to the class.

Socratic Seminar

Students sit in a single large circle and engage in a continuous, open discussion driven entirely by peer-to-peer questioning. Students build on each other's ideas and cite examples from the film without direct teacher intervention.

Supplies Needed: *Circle seating arrangement, printed text excerpts or discussion questions.*

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Arrange all chairs in a single large circle.
2. Provide a central question based on the film clip or reading.
3. Students lead the conversation entirely independently, raising hands to speak, building on peers' ideas, and citing evidence from the film without teacher intervention.
4. The teacher acts strictly as a timekeeper and recorder of participation.

Line Communication (The Consensus Continuum)

Students physically stand along a tape line on the classroom floor to show where their opinion falls between "100% Agree" and "100% Disagree." The teacher then prompts students standing at different points along the line to explain their stances.

Supplies Needed: *Masking tape line on the classroom floor labeled "100% Agree" on one end and "100% Disagree" on the other.*

Step-by-Step Guide:

1. Lay down a tape line across the room.
2. Read a policy or scenario prompt.
3. Ask students to physically stand along the continuum based on where their stance falls between the two extremes.
4. Ask students standing next to each other why they picked their specific spots, and invite students at opposite ends to debate their stances.