

UNIT 3: SOCIAL LIVES

Grade Level 6 - 8



INTRODUCTION

Themes & Ideas

- *Digital Ethics*
- *Synthetic Relationships*
- *Deepfakes*
- *Media Integrity*
- *Human Connections*
- *Artificial Intelligence*

What Students Will Uncover

Through active roleplay, facial mimicry experiments, and policy workshops, students will examine how AI companions, algorithmic sycophancy, and deepfake technology impact authentic human relationships and digital trust. They will explore the biological importance of face-to-face empathy and develop concrete strategies for navigating digital media, non-consensual deepfakes, and peer connections.

Lesson Overview

This guide addresses the impact of generative AI on youth social dynamics. It focuses on image abuse, deepfake regulations, AI companion attachment, and the biological necessity of real-world empathy. 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:

- *Evaluate the social, legal, and emotional risks associated with AI deepfakes, image manipulation, and digital misinformation.*
- *Analyze how AI companions and sycophantic algorithms alter human expectations for friendship, friction, and emotional vulnerability.*
- *Examine the role of non-verbal cues, facial mimicry, and physical presence in building real-world empathy and trust.*

- Formulate student-led standards and policy recommendations to protect digital safety and support authentic peer connections.

Lesson Materials

- The lesson plan below
- Activity 1: [Facial Mimicry Experiment Instructions](#)
- Activity 2: [Student Instructions & Scorecard](#) | [Scenario & Response Cards](#)
- Activity 3: [Spotting Fakes Worksheet](#)

LESSON ACTIVITIES

Discussion Prompts & Video Reflections

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

 [View/Show: Expert Reflection Anna Lembke \(20 seconds\)](#)

1. Expert Reflection (Dr. Anna Lembke): Lembke states that relying on AI for communication can lead to teens "no longer trusting their own judgment and inner voice." How might using AI to script your messages change your confidence in real life?

Suggested Discussion Formats:

- [Talk-Listen Partner Sharing](#)
- [Four Corners](#)

 [View/Show: Expert Reflection Zak Stein \(30 seconds\)](#)

2. Expert Reflection (Zak Stein): "Social media got our attention, AI gets our attachment." What is the difference between an app taking your time versus taking your emotional attachment?

Suggested Discussion Formats:

- [Fishbowl](#)
- [Poster Board Discussion \(Chalk Talk\)](#)

 [View/Show: AI Generated Imagery \(10 seconds\)](#)

3. Almost a fifth of high school students know a classmate who has had AI-generated intimate images created/distributed. What are the short- and long-term damages of this kind of "prank" or image abuse?

Suggested Discussion Formats:

- [Anonymous Comments](#)
- [Talk-Listen Partner Sharing](#)

 [View/Show: Using AI Chatbots for Connection \(30 seconds\)](#)

4. Why is an honest friend who occasionally disagrees with you better for your growth than a chatbot that constantly flatters you?

Suggested Discussion Formats:

- [Musical Chairs \(Concentric Circles\)](#)
- [Turn-and-Talk \(Elbow Partners\)](#)

 [View/Show: Discussing AI Safety \(20 seconds\)](#)

5. Have you ever talked to your parents or a trusted adult about fake images online? What makes that conversation hard?

Suggested Discussion Formats:

- [Anonymous Comments](#)
- [Post-It Notes \(Silent Gallery Walk\)](#)

Activities

ACTIVITY 1: Chopstick Facial Mimicry Experiment

Overview: Students recreate scientific research on facial mimicry by attempting to identify partner emotions with and without a horizontal chopstick held in their teeth to block facial muscle movements.

Approximate Time: 20 minutes

Supplies:

- Clean wooden chopsticks (1 per student)
- Printed [Facial Mimicry Experiment Instructions](#) (1 per group)

Teacher Instructions:

- **Preliminary Framing (3 mins):** Explain that human brains use microscopic facial muscle movements (mimicry) to trigger oxytocin and understand how others feel.
- **Test 1: Unrestricted Mimicry (5 mins):** Partners take turns acting out three subtle emotions using only their face (no sounds or body language allowed!). The non-acting partner tries to guess the emotion.
- **Test 2: Blocked Mimicry (5 mins):** Partner B holds a chopstick horizontally between their teeth (preventing smile/frown muscles from moving) while Partner A displays 3 new emotions. Partner B tries

to guess the emotion. Partners then switch roles. *Important: students should not share chopsticks!*

- **Follow-up Debrief (7 mins):** Ask:
 - *Did the chopstick affect your ability to guess your partner's emotions? Give some examples. Why do you think this happened?*
 - *If blocking physical facial movements harms our ability to feel empathy, what happens when most of our communication occurs behind screens or with AI avatars?*

ACTIVITY 2: The Feedback Script Lab

Overview Pairs test the difference between empathetic human honesty and automated sycophancy by drawing scenario cards and physically executing responses using structured script templates. Students track which response style solves long-term problems versus offering short-term validation.

Approximate Time: 20 minutes

Supplies:

- [Student Instructions & Scorecard](#) (1 per student)
- [Scenario & Response Cards](#) (1 per group)

Teacher Instructions:

- **Preliminary Framing (3 mins):** Ask:
 - *Would you rather have a friend who always tells you you're right no matter what, or a friend who tells you the truth even when it's hard to hear?*
- **Roleplay & Evaluation (12 mins):**
 - Divide students into groups of 2-3
 - Distribute *Student Instructions & Scorecard* and *Scenario Cards & Response Cards* to each group.
 - One partner draws a *Scenario Card* and reads it aloud. A second partner draws a *Response Card* and reads the response.
 - After each interaction, all partners fill out their scorecard rating the response on two metrics: 1) *Immediate Comfort* and 2) *Long-Term Problem Solving*.
 - Switch roles and continue the activity until time is up.
- **Follow-up Debrief (3 mins):** Ask:
 - *What did you notice during this activity?*
 - *What does it mean to act sycophantically?*
 - *Why might an AI companion be programmed to act sycophantically?*
 - *What happens to human relationships if we start expecting real people to treat us like agreeable chatbots?*

ACTIVITY 3: Spotting Fakes & Deepfake Red Flags

Overview: Students act as digital forensic investigators. In Part 1, they audit four AI-generated images using highlighters to pinpoint specific AI glitches. In Part 2, students analyze photo pairs side-by-side to identify which picture is synthetic based on target prompt descriptions.

Approximate Time: 20 - 35 minutes

Supplies:

- [Spotting Fakes Worksheet](#) (1 per group)

Teacher Instructions:

- **Preliminary Framing (2 mins):** Ask students:
 - *When an AI creates an image, it doesn't understand physics or spelling. It just guesses which pixels look right. What mistakes might an AI make when trying to create a believable photo?*
- **Part 1: Forensic Audit (10 mins):**
 - Hand out the [Spotting Fakes Worksheet](#) (1 per group).
 - Instruct students to review the checklist of AI Glitches & Mistakes.
 - In small groups or pairs, have students inspect Red Flag Images 1–4, check off errors on their Red Flag Checklist, highlight the glitches on the printed photos, and fill out their audit record.
- **Part 2: Photo Pair Matching (10 mins):**
 - Direct students to “Spot the Fake Photo” images A - H
 - In pairs or small groups, students read the Gemini prompts under each pair of photos.
 - Using their Forensic Audit skills, students determine which photo in each pair was genuinely taken by a human and which photo is generated by AI.
- **Follow-up Debrief (5 mins):**
 - Reveal the answers (See below).
 - Ask students:
 - *Which visual flaws were easiest to spot? Which were hardest to spot?*
 - *Why is it dangerous to share an unverified image even if it seems harmless or funny?*

ANSWERS:

PART 1: FORENSIC AUDIT

- **Image #1 (Man on Subway):** Metal wristwatch melting into coat sleeve; garbled transit map; missing reflection of passengers in windows.
- **Image #2 (Woman at Cafe):** Mismatched eyeglass lenses (one round, one square); chair legs fused into brickwork; stairs leading into a blank wall.

- **Image #3 (Speaker at Rally):** Microphone handle melts into hand; alien text on background banners; opposite shadow directions.
- **Image #4 (Deer in Stream):** Deer legs melting into river stones; extra deer in water reflection; pine needles growing out of solid rock.

PART 2: SPOT THE FAKE PHOTO

- Image B is AI Generated
- Image C is AI Generated
- Image E is AI Generated
- Image H is AI Generated

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.
- **Social-awareness:** Demonstrating empathy and compassion. Taking others' perspectives. Identifying diverse social norms, including unjust ones.
- **Relationship Skills:** Developing positive relationships. Resisting negative social pressure. Showing leadership in groups.
- **Responsible Decision-making:** Anticipating and evaluating the consequences of one's actions. Reflecting on one's role to promote personal, family, and community well-being.

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

B. CREATE — Generating products that illustrate learning.

Include

B. CREATE — Evaluating a variety of perspectives during learning activities. Representing diverse perspectives during learning activities.

Collaborate

C. SHARE — Expressing ethical behavior when using information and technology.

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.

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.