common sense education™

GRADE	TIME	TOPICS & SUBJECTS

9–12   **45 mins.**

- Media Balance & Well-Being
- Digital Citizenship
- Health & Wellness

Design Tricks

How is tech designed to hold our attention, and how can it impact our well-being?

The tech we use every day is strategically designed to capture and hold our attention. And over time, companies have gotten "better" at knowing what pulls us in and keeps our eyes on the screen. This lesson is designed to help students learn about design tricks that companies use and consider how features like notifications, infinite scroll, and autoplay can impact their well-being. Learning about features can motivate us to take back control over our experience with tech and media, and pave the way for more agency.

This is one of four lessons in our <u>*digital well-being collection for high school*</u>. *If time permits, we recommend teaching all four lessons, in the suggested order, to maximize impact.*

Students will be able to:

- Understand how and why tech companies use certain design tricks to hold our attention.
- Consider the app features that hinder and promote well-being.
- Reflect on how the goal of an app informs the way it is designed.

What You'll Need

Some resources below are available in Spanish

IN CLASS

- Lesson Slides

- Video: Above the Noise: How Apps Use Design Tricks To Hook You

- App Design
  Handout
  Teacher Version

FOR FAMILIES

- Family Activity

Lesson Plan

Part 1: **App Designer**   15 mins.

1. **Say:** *Imagine that you are the lead designer at a tech company that is looking to create a new app. Your goal is to design the app features, content, and experiences to be as engaging and fun as possible.*

2. **Distribute** the **App Design** student handout and have students complete Part 1 in groups of three (**Slide 4**).

   Refer to the **Teacher Version** of the handout to help students brainstorm features based on the app scenario they select. Remind them that they can incorporate existing features or create new ones that don't already exist.

3. **Invite** each group to share the designs for their new app and some of the key features and content they would include (**Slide 5**).

4. **Ask:** *You were asked to design an app to be as engaging as possible. What does it mean to design something that is engaging and fun?* (**Slide 6**)

   Invite students to share out. Guide students to share the upsides of technology (e.g., ability to connect with friends, learn new things, entertainment, create and share ideas, etc.)

5. **Ask:** *There are clearly many upsides to tech, and the apps you designed sound really engaging and fun. But could there ever be downsides to creating something that is so engaging?* (**Slide 7**)

   Invite students to share out, and name some of the potential downsides of technology (e.g., addictive, loss of time, comparing yourself to others, feeling sad, anxious, or upset, etc.) if they aren't mentioned.

Part 2: **Design Tricks Video**   15 mins.

1. **Say:** *While there are plenty of upsides to tech, there can be downsides, too. Today we're going to explore why and how tech can be designed in ways that negatively impact our digital well-being. Digital well-being is experiencing media and technology in ways that support one's mental, physical, social, and emotional health* (**Slide 8**).

2. **Show** the video **Above the Noise: Mind Control: How Apps Use Design Tricks To Hook You** and have students complete **Part 2** of the **App Design student handout** as they watch (**Slide 9**).

3. **Review** student reflections on each of the four questions and refer to the Teacher Version of the handout as you guide the class discussion.

   Define **design tricks** as *features that technology companies use (like endless scrolling and autoplay) to capture user attention by playing on our psychology* (**Slide 10**).

4. **Ask:** *What is one thing we talked about today that you hadn't considered or known about before? How does it feel to learn about some of these design tricks and why they exist?* (**Slide 11**)

   Have students pair-share and then call on students to share out with the class as time permits.

5. **Say:** *Understanding how and why tech is designed the way it is can help us reexamine our own use and take back some control over our experience with it, so that it feels more in line with our values.*

Part 3: **Redesigning for Well-Being**   15 mins.

1. **Say:** *As the video explained, technology companies view us as "users." You might have heard the term UX, which is an acronym for user experience. User experience is how a user interacts with and experiences an app, website, system, or service. As we learned, tech companies spend a lot of money to make sure our "experience" on their platform/app continues for as long as possible.* (**Slide 12**)

2. **Say:** *But what if your job was to start redesigning a world where people had healthier relationships with technology? Where instead of designing for the best "user experience," you designed for the best human experience? What would that look like?*

   Invite students to share out.

3. **Direct** students to **Part 3** of the **App Design handout**. In their groups, have students redesign the same technology from Part 1, with the goal of helping people foster a healthier relationship with the app and with life (**Slide 13**).

   If students are stuck, encourage them to look at the specific features they included in Part 1 and consider how they might tweak those features in support of well-being. Refer to the Teacher Version of the handout as you guide the class discussion.

   Have groups share what they might change or redesign.

4. Say: *It's powerful to learn about how tech design can impact our well-being, because then we can start to take back some control over our experience with it.*

Lesson last updated: July 2023