

Internet: Indispensable or Evil?



Overview

In these four lessons, students use the episode *Adam Ruins the Internet* (Season 2, Episode 12) as a starting point to discuss the role of the Internet in modern culture and learn about media policies that shape people's online experiences. Students also consider their own role as active participants in navigating life online, considering two sides of the argument: is the Internet destroying our culture, or is it a natural extension of human communication processes that reflect human nature? Students gain knowledge about regulations governing Internet service providers and discuss the importance of competition in the media. Finally, students reflect on the way they themselves communicate online in ways that empower or hurt themselves and others. Drawing on what they have learned, participants create media texts to reflect and share insights with their communities.

About *Adam Ruins Everything*

Adam Ruins Everything is a comedy education TV show that runs on the US cable and satellite television channel truTV (formerly Court TV, owned by Turner Broadcasting division of Time Warner). In each episode, the show's talented and inquisitive host Adam Conover debunks popular misconceptions, false impressions, and ideas. The show uses a form of comedy that involves questioning. Similar to the practice of inquiry education, Conover takes ideas, pulls them apart, holds them up, and looks at them. The show advances media literacy by teaching its viewers to be critical thinkers and lifelong learners who ask questions about things that seem obvious and are not afraid to challenge their own preconceived opinions.

Teacher Preparation

View and download Season 2 Episode 12, *Adam Ruins the Internet*, which is available for a small fee on Amazon Video. Then read this curriculum guide carefully and identify the learning activities which meet your instructional goals and the needs of your students.

Synopsis

In Season 2, Episode 12 titled *Adam Ruins the Internet*, Adam challenges his friend (who is initially critical about the media) to think differently about the way the Internet functions. The episode has four short segments, perfect for in-class viewing, and this curriculum guide includes activities for each section.

LESSON 1: Blaming the Media

Adam explains to his friend why the fears about the Internet's negative impact are unfounded. He describes how every form of media (books, newspapers, telegraph, telephone) was initially considered harmful. Adam argues that new forms of communication do not make people worse, but provide new opportunities for connection and learning.

LESSON 2: Virtues of Competition

Adam explains to his friend (who has now become more optimistic about the Internet) how the lack of competition between US cable companies makes American Internet worse than in most other countries. Adam tells how policies that create the lack of competition were established, why they are so difficult to challenge, and how they hurt us in our everyday lives.

LESSON 3: Free Internet: Reality or Illusion?

Adam uncovers business models behind Facebook and Google that make free Internet a dangerous illusion. He explains how these companies collect data about their users and sell this information to advertisers, therefore turning each user into a product. By the end of this part, Adam's friend is in despair as he has realized that the truth about the Internet is even worse than his initial concerns.

LESSON 4: The Internet is Us

Adam cheers his friend up by explaining how we can use the power of the media technology to challenge things we do not like about the way the Internet functions.

Learning Objectives

After completing these activities, students will:

- Gain knowledge about Internet economics and telecommunication policy and regulations
- Access information and activate competencies of critical analysis
- Formulate an informed personal opinion on an issue of public concern
- Reflect on participating as a member of a media-saturated society
- Engage in creating media as a form of social action

Common Core State Standards

1) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
2) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11-12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
3) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.
4) CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.11-12.7 Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Vocabulary Words

- **Media** - plural form of “medium,” although increasingly used as a singular noun. This complex term refers to processes and products of communication mediated through technology, and might include specific messages, texts, representations, channels and tools of communication, companies, corporations, as well as virtual spaces where communication through technology takes place.
- **Net neutrality** - principle and policy that shapes our access to online information. Net neutrality dictates that Internet providers must treat equally all information available online, and all people who want to access this information. According to this principle, Internet companies cannot block or slow down access to certain content for certain users.
- **FCC** - Federal Communications Commission is an independent agency of the United States government that regulates all interstate communications by radio, television, wire, satellite, and cable in the country.
- **Stereotype** - Mental shortcut, generalized and simplified understanding of a particular type of person or thing.
- **Government regulation** - rules and laws created by the government and imposed on activities of individuals and companies.
- **Telecommunications Act of 1996** - major overhaul of media communication laws that enabled cable television companies to compete with telecommunication companies in local communities.

LESSON 1: Blaming the Media (75 minutes)

Overview:

In this lesson, students will discuss people's tendency to be concerned about the role that the media plays in their lives. They will critically analyze the content and the form of the first part of the episode, where Adam claims that people's fears and concerns about the media have a long history, but are largely unfounded. Students will discuss whether the sources Adam uses make his claims more or less credible.

Read Prior to the Lesson:

- Madrigal, Alexis C. [“The Next Time Someone Says the Internet Killed Reading Books, Show Them This Chart.”](#) The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, 6 Apr. 2012. Web.
- Nowak, Peter. [“Boo! A brief history of technology scares.”](#) Maclean's. Rogers Media, 1 Nov. 2011. Web.



Engage (10 minutes)

Students watch the first part of *Adam Ruins the Internet* (00:00 - 06:00) Elicit from several students their initial reactions to this segment.

- What key ideas grabbed your attention?
- What were your emotions and feelings as you watched?

Analyze (20 minutes)

Students work in small groups. Each group answers the following questions (one question per group). Students may choose to re-view the excerpt again to take notes and capture key ideas.

- 1) Adam makes a number of claims about the media in general and the Internet in particular. How does he support his claims? What sources does he use?
- 2) What film-making techniques does this part of the episode use to make its point and to keep our attention?
- 3) Describe the characters (both central and background) introduced in this part of the episode. How do different characters (including minor ones) help the authors of the episode to make their point?
- 4) What are the different kinds of the media that Adam names? Why were these media criticized when they were created?
- 5) What arguments does Adam use to persuade us that we should not be scared of the media?

One participant from each group shares their insights. Provide warm feedback.

Read and Discuss (10 minutes)

Discuss the readings with students. Explain that these are two readings from the episode's [list of sources](#). What kind of evidence is used in each article to argue the following two main ideas?

1. People are reading more since the Internet was created.
2. People have always feared the unintended consequences of a new communications medium.



Extend (15 minutes)

In a free write activity, ask students to review the choices below and select one to explore through informal writing:

- A situation when you have seen or heard other people being concerned about the media
- An situation when you have seen/heard other people blame the media for things that are wrong with society (e.g., violence, sexism, racism, unachievable beauty standards, etc.).
- A situation when you have been worried about the influence of the media (e.g., the Internet) on yourself or others

After 8 minutes of free-writing, ask students to share excerpts of their writing by reading aloud.

Focus (15 minutes)

Adam says: “We are all communicating more now than we ever were before. We weren’t better people back before we had smartphones or the Internet. We were the same lazy, curious, social people we’ve always been. The only difference is, now we have instantaneous access to all knowledge and communication. I mean, how is that anything other than a tremendous social good?”

Discuss: What do you think about the point that Adam is trying to make here?

Wrap up (5 minutes)

Ask the class: How has your perception of the media’s role in our lives has changed after watching the first part of the episode?

LESSON 2: Virtues of Competition (75 minutes)

Overview:

In this lesson, students discuss how hidden policies impact their experiences of using the Internet. They reflect on virtues of competition in the media industry, and learn to articulate their opinion about net neutrality. Participants discuss why government regulation of the Internet is important, and what are the main obstacles for implementing such regulation.

Read Prior to the Lesson:

- Irwin, Neil. [“A Super-Simple Way to Understand the Net Neutrality Debate.”](#) *New York Times*. The Upshot. 10 Nov. 2014. Web.
- Moore, Heidi. [“Price-gouging cable companies are our latter-day robber barons.”](#) *The Guardian*. Guardian Media Group, 4 Jun. 2013. Web.

Engage (10 minutes)

Students watch the second part of *Adam Ruins the Internet* (06:00 - 12:50) Elicit from several students their initial reactions to this segment.

- What key ideas grabbed your attention?
- What were your emotions and feelings as you watched?

Analyze (20 minutes)

Students work in small groups of two or three to address these questions (one question per group). Students may choose to re-view the excerpt again to take notes and capture key ideas.

- 1) What stereotypes does this part of the episode use to make its point? Why do you think it uses all these stereotypes?
- 2) What jokes does this part use? Why do you think its authors chose to use these jokes?
- 3) What do you notice about the way this part of the episode represents race, gender, sexuality, and physical ability?
- 4) What feelings do you experience as you are learning about the way the Internet works in the US? What techniques does the episode use to make you feel this way?
- 5) How does this episode portray people working in/for US cable companies?

One participant from each group shares their insights. Provide warm feedback.



Extend and Discuss (15 minutes)

In a free write activity, ask students to review the choices below and select one to explore through informal writing:

- Why is competition among Internet providers important?
- Why is there currently little competition among U.S. Internet providers?
- How do you understand the notion of net neutrality?

Ask several students to read out loud what they wrote. Provide warm feedback.

Focus (15 minutes)

Adam says: “Uncle Sam needs to do his job and force the cable companies to compete. Until he does, we are gonna keep getting screwed.” Discuss:

- What are some pros and cons of forcing cable companies to compete?
- What are some obstacles to doing that?

Research (10 minutes)

Have students do quick research online about the show’s authors. How do we make sense of the fact that the show relies on business models and techniques of the media industry that Adam is criticizing?

Wrap up (5 minutes)

Ask the class: How did watching this segment change your understanding of the US Internet industry?

LESSON 3: Free Internet: Reality or Illusion? (75 minutes)

Overview:

In this lesson, students discuss why some people believe that the Internet is free, and why others claim that this freedom is an illusion. Students learn about business models that shape our experiences online, their advantages and deficiencies. Students discuss whose responsibility it is to change these business models. Participants reflect on the need to reconcile different opinions about the media, and on the challenges of debating about the media.

Read Prior to the Lesson:

- Manjoo, Farhad. [“Facebook Followed You to the Supermarket.”](#) Slate. 20 Mar. 2013. Web.

Engage (10 minutes)

Students watch the third part of *Adam Ruins the Internet* (12:50 - 18:58). Elicit from several students their initial reactions to this segment. Discuss:

- What key ideas grabbed your attention?
- What were their emotions and feelings as you watched this part?



Analyze (20 minutes)

Students work in small groups. Each group answers the following questions (one question per group). Students may choose to re-view the excerpt again to take notes and capture key ideas.

- 1) What have you learned about business models of Facebook and Google?
- 2) What techniques does this part use to illustrate problematic practices of Facebook and Google?
- 3) How is the *Matrix* parody used to teach us about the illusion of free Internet?
- 4) How does the third part explain the following claim: “When we use these sites, we are not the customer, we are the product.”
- 5) In the third part Adam makes a shocking claim: “Your interests, your personality, your relationships, your privacy - those things are priceless. But you gave them all away just to avoid paying 12 dollars.” Where does this very specific claim come from?

One participant from each group shares their insights. Provide warm feedback.

Extend and Discuss (15 minutes)

Ask students to answer in writing:

- Briefly summarize the main argument of each of the three parts you have watched so far. Why is the episode’s argument structured this way?
- Is the argument neutral, providing an objective description of how mediated communication impacts our lives? Is it biased? If so, how?

- Depending on how you answered the previous question, explain how the episode's structure makes its argument neutral and objective or biased and subjective.

Ask several students to read out loud what they wrote. Provide warm feedback.

Focus (15 minutes)

Have students engage in the “Crossing the Line” activity in order to discuss the following question: *The way the Internet functions is far from perfect. Who is responsible for improving it?*

Ask students to stand up and gather along a line at front of the room. Tell them that you will give four different answers to the question. Ask students to step forward if they agree with an answer. They will be able to step back (and re-join the group) after several seconds. Students cross the line in response to these statements:

- Improving the Internet is the government’s responsibility.
- Improving the Internet is the media industry’s responsibility.
- Improving the Internet is the responsibility of Internet consumers.
- The Internet cannot be improved.

As students move, ask some to comment on their reasons for where they are standing by asking: Why did you step forward on a particular answer?

Reflect (10 minutes)

Explain: People debate a lot about what they perceive as problems associated with the media, as well about the ways of fixing them. Some think there is no problem. Others argue that that the media impacts us in negative ways, and that it is up to people working in the media industry to fix the problem. Yet others claim that all of us are responsible for making things better.

Discuss:

- What have you learned from having a dialogue with your peers? What is the value of debating and discussing these issues?

Wrap up (5 minutes)

Ask students to name their main “aha” moment for this class meeting.

Notes:

Discussing whether the Internet is “evil” or “good” students might disagree with each other, become angry and defensive. Navigating emotional classroom discussions is always a challenge. It is essential to show students that you value different opinions, and that the goal of the class is not for you to make everybody agree with your point of view. Use the debates between students to show the complexity of the issue. Instead of taking sides, play the devil’s advocate and challenge students with different opinions to explain their positions. Use the debates to show to your students the importance of empathic and respectful dialogue.

LESSON 4: The Internet is Us (75 minutes)

Overview

In this lesson, students create their own media products in order to share what they have learned about the media over the previous three classes. After discussing several key questions in small groups, students work individually on their projects. They can choose from a variety of media forms and themes as they create their media products. After completing their work, students share them with peers.

Engage (15 minutes)

Students watch the fourth part of *Adam Ruins the Internet* (18:58 - 20:59) Explain that in this class students will explore their own power as members of a media-saturated society to challenge flaws and improve the media.

Discuss (10 minutes)

Explain that students will be creating media in order to share with friends and families what they learned about the Internet. Students work in groups of three to discuss the following questions:

- 1) How productive is it to think about the Internet (or the media in general) in terms of binaries like “good” or “evil”?
- 2) How productive is it to divide people into media producers and media consumers?
- 3) What are some challenges of mediated communication, and ways to overcome them?



Create (30 minutes)

Students work individually on a media project of their choice, selecting from the following activities and completing one, working under deadline pressure.

1. *Poem, Rap or Song Lyric.* Write a poem or song lyrics.
2. *Meme.* Create 3 using [online meme generator](#).
3. *Blog post.* Write a post that you could share in your social network.
4. *Comic.* Create a short story involving two or more characters using an [online comic maker](#).

Have students consider these topics as they are creating their media texts:

- How much competition exists between Internet providers in a local community
- Different approaches to government regulation of the media
- Similarities and differences in the way Internet works around the world
- People's tendency to blame the media
- Strategies for becoming responsible members of a media-saturated society

Share and Reflect (10 minutes)

Invite students to share a sample of their creative work and offer warm feedback to acknowledge their reflective thinking. If you are using a website/blog for your class, post students' media projects online. Encourage students to provide comments for each other's work using constructive ("sandwich") feedback: start with a positive note ("What I love about your work..."), continue with constructive criticism ("If I were you, I would..."), and finish on a positive note ("Another thing I loved...").

Wrap up (10 minutes)

Summarize a couple of ideas that emerged from student work. Offer your own thoughts about the debate about the media (and the Internet in particular). Encourage students to share what they learned with their family and friends outside of the class.

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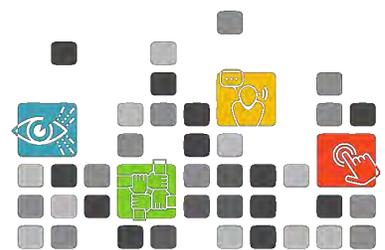
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About the Media Education Lab

The mission of the Media Education Lab is to advance digital and media literacy education through scholarship and community service. Learn more: www.mediaeducationlab.com



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