

Pirates in the Classroom  
by Melanie G. Snyder

Do you have pirates in your classroom? No, not one-eyed swashbucklers stealing gold and jewels, but students who illegally copy or download copyrighted materials, including software and Internet content.

“Possibly the most pervasive form of cheating, electronic piracy has lost its taboo,” says David Callahan in *The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans Are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead* (Harcourt, 2004).

Part of the problem is an “everybody does it” mentality. A new poll from Harris Interactive found that a majority of youth are aware that digital media files are copyrighted, yet many of them admit to downloading files anyway. More than half of the 8 to 18 year olds surveyed have engaged in some form of illegal downloading from the Internet. Three quarters of the surveyed youth say they know other people who have downloaded illegally and one third responded that they think it’s okay because “lots of people do it.”

### **A cheating culture**

“When ‘everybody does it,’ or imagines that everybody does it, a cheating culture has emerged,” says Callahan. The challenge for educators is to convey clear messages to students to prevent a cheating culture from becoming pervasive in school.

First and foremost, students must understand that copying or downloading copyrighted digital works without paying for them or without explicit permission from the creator is stealing – no different than going into a store and shoplifting a software program, book or magazine from the shelf.

### **Educate students**

Though virtually every student in grades K-12 utilizes computers at school, only 18 percent of students surveyed by Harris Interactive were taught the do's and don't's of downloading copyrighted works by their teachers.

You can help your students understand that it's not okay to take someone else's creative work product without paying for it or having their permission says Bob Kruger, who leads anti-piracy programs for the Business Software Alliance (BSA), the foremost organization dedicated to promoting a safe and legal digital world.

While you may have discussed plagiarism and copyright with students in the context of books and materials from the library, the Internet affords numerous new opportunities for students to copy protected works quickly and easily. You can start by explaining key terms to your students and making sure they know these terms apply to creative works online as well. (see sidebar: **Terminology**)

### **Connect with students' own creativity**

"Teachers have numerous opportunities throughout the day to include discussions of cyber-ethics in the standard curriculum," says Dr. Diane DeMott Painter, a Centreville, Va., technology resource teacher and recipient of BSA's first *Cyber Education Champion Award* for her commitment to teaching students about cyber ethics. (see sidebar: **Seven simple ways**)

Though terms like "copyright" and "intellectual property" may be difficult to convey to students, the most powerful way to connect with them may be to tie cyber-ethics to their own inherent creativity. Students create things all the time, from artwork and music to essays, stories and poems. "Show students how copyright and intellectual property laws relate to them by explaining that, just as they wouldn't want someone taking or using their creative work without their permission, neither do software programmers or others who have created such works," Kruger suggests.

### **Address the economics of piracy**

Students can also benefit from an explanation of the economics involved in creating and selling creative works and how piracy impacts those economics, says Painter.

“Most students understand that in the work world, people get paid for their hard work and creative ideas,” says Painter. “Explain that the money we pay for a video game or software package goes to all of the people who helped to create and distribute it – the graphic artist or computer programmer, the manufacturer, the retailer. Then explain that when someone copies these things without paying for them, all of those people who helped to create them don’t get the money they have earned.”

This approach can also help to overcome the misconception that piracy doesn’t hurt anyone – a belief expressed by more than 25 percent of the youth surveyed by Harris Interactive. Ironically, piracy may hurt the pirates. When piracy prevents software developers and video game creators from getting back the investment they’ve made on the works they’ve already created, they may scale back on creating anything new, thereby reducing the number of available software packages and games – “a bleak prospect for most 21<sup>st</sup> century kids,” says Kruger.

### **Discuss legal and practical consequences**

Students also need to understand the very real consequences of violating copyright laws, including potential legal action against pirates by the creators or organizations that represent them (witness the recent lawsuits by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) against people who illegally uploaded and shared music files over the Internet). Piracy can also have practical consequences, including infecting your school’s computers with viruses or inadvertently downloading spyware onto your computers from a file-sharing network.

### **The right thing to do**

By educating your students, you can protect your school's computers from these consequences, help your students become responsible cyber-citizens and make a significant positive impact in curbing the growth of electronic piracy, the most pervasive form of cheating.

Says Kruger, "Ultimately, we need to instill in children a respect for others' creative work for the best reason of all: simply because it's the right thing to do."

**Sidebar 1: Terminology - in language students can understand**

(Approx 80 words)

**Intellectual property** – work that is the result of your own creativity; your intellectual property can be protected by copyright

**Copyright** – the law that says that someone who created something owns his or her creative work; the symbol for copyright looks like this: ©

**Licensing agreement** – the agreement that comes with a software program that permits you to install that program on your own computer

**Piracy** – copying or downloading software, music or games that are protected by copyright; piracy is stealing

**Sidebar 2: Seven simple ways to incorporate cyber-ethics into daily classroom curriculum**  
(approx 250 words)

For a comprehensive, free curriculum to educate students about cyber-ethics (developed by Weekly Reader in partnership with BSA), see <http://www.playitcybersafe.com/>.

1. Social Studies: include news stories about various forms of electronic piracy in current events discussions (see <http://www.cheatingculture.com/electronicpiracy.htm> for recent news stories)
2. English/Language Arts:
  - a. when students write original essays, stories and poems, discuss copyright of creative works
  - b. when students write research papers, discuss plagiarism, including Internet content
  - c. have students write letters to friends, essays or other written pieces about cyber-ethics
3. Math: discuss the economics related to creation of a software package; how computer programmers, graphic artists, manufacturers and retailers get paid for those products, and how piracy interrupts that economic chain
  - a. “Software piracy cost the US economy nearly \$2 billion in software revenue, more than 105,000 jobs and \$5.3 billion in wages in 2002,” according to “2002 Global Software Piracy Report” and “2002 State Piracy Study”, International Planning and Research Corp, August, 2003.
4. Technology/Computer Lab: discuss the computer programmers, graphic artists and others who created software used in the lab and their right to be paid for their work
5. Art:
  - a. when students create original artwork, discuss copyright issues related to artistic works
  - b. have students create cartoons where characters discuss cyber-ethics issues
6. Music: when students create or listen to music, discuss music copyright issues and the recent RIAA lawsuits
7. Character education: when discussing trustworthiness, respect, honesty, accountability and fairness, include cyber-ethics among the other forms of ethical behavior expected of students

**Author bio:** Melanie G. Snyder’s articles have been published by Harcourt Educational Publishers, SIRS Mandarin, LexisNexis, AlbemarleFamily, Welcome Home, [www.SheKnows.com](http://www.SheKnows.com), children’s magazines Cricket and Guideposts for Kids, and a wide range of other national, regional and special interest magazines, websites and newspapers.

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