

Upper primary unit

Online symbols



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Online symbols

Before you start

This unit is designed for students aged 10–11 years.

Before you start this unit it is important that you are aware of what your students, and others in this age group, are doing online and how they use online technologies. For some general information visit the 'What are students doing online?' section at www.cybersmart.gov.au/schools.aspx.

This section provides information on children and technology, including cybercitizen profiles, videos of students discussing their online activities and links to ACMA research regarding online behaviour.

Teacher background information

Every day we encounter symbols that communicate ideas or give us information. Symbols are widely used online to tell us which button to press to print our documents, to refresh a page, to take us to the games page of a site and much more.

Symbols can also be used to represent someone's identity. Avatars (a graphical representation of someone's identity) are a good example of how symbols can be used to protect someone's true identity online. Using an avatar is an excellent way for children to conceal their identity when engaging in online activities, such as chat or social networking.

Unit overview and objectives

This unit aims to help students to:

- understand that symbols are used to communicate or represent ideas
- become familiar with symbols commonly used online
- recognise avatars as online constructs that can help protect their identity.

By the end of this unit, students will be able to:

- explain how symbols can be used to represent ideas
- identify symbols commonly used online
- create an avatar that provides them with a safe online identity.

Unit duration

The time allocated to this unit will depend upon the prior knowledge and skill levels of your students. It comprises five activities, each designed to take approximately one or two 45 minute lessons.

Required resources

- Worksheets 1–4
- Pictures of flags from various countries (including Australia)
- Interactive whiteboard with Internet access
- Several computers with Internet access
- www.abc.net.au/abc3
- www.abc.net.au/dustechoes
- Copies of, or excerpts from, superhero films or animations
- Poster paper
- Sticky notes
- Graphics or drawing programs, such as KidPix (optional)

Further information

For more information, contact:

Australian Communications and Media Authority
Cybersafety Contact Centre

Tel: 1800 880 176

Email: cybersafety@acma.gov.au

www.cybersmart.gov.au

Activity 1: What are symbols?

What you will need:

- Worksheet 1: Symbols, symbols, everywhere!
- Worksheet 1: Solutions

Provide students with worksheet 1 and ask them to identify as many of the symbols as they can.

Ask students why they think symbols are used. Where do they see symbols? What other symbols do they know?

Walk around the school (or the local area) and record (photographs are ideal) any symbols you encounter.

Explain that symbols are used to represent an idea, or to communicate something. If required, revisit worksheet 1 and ask students to explain what they think the symbols represent, or what they are trying to communicate.

Homework task

Ask students to keep a symbol diary for a day and record all the symbols they see.

Activity 2: Why are symbols used?

What you will need:

- A picture of the Australian flag and flags of various other countries

Display pictures of the various countries' flags. Select one, and ask students to share their ideas about what they think the symbols used on the flag indicate about the country, its people and their way of life.

Provide pairs, or small groups, with a flag and ask them to discuss the following and then present their ideas to the class:

- What symbols are used on the flag?
- What do you think the symbols represent?
- Overall, what do you think the flag tells us about the country?

Now that students have had some experience with looking at, discussing and interpreting symbols, they can work in pairs to decide on a definition for 'symbol'; for example, objects, pictures, words, sounds or marks that represent something by association.

Share the pairs' definitions with the class.

Activity 3: Symbols online

What you will need:

- Interactive whiteboard and several computers with Internet access
- Worksheet 2: Online symbols
- www.abc.net.au/abc3

In this lesson common online symbols will be explored. This can be done using word processing software, websites, email accounts, social networking sites etc. Select the forum that is best suited to the students involved.

Open one of the suggested forums (e.g. a website) on an interactive whiteboard.

Ask students to spend 10 minutes drawing different symbols they can see (such as Home, Refresh, Bold, Print, Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Safari etc.). Allow students time to show their drawings and share what they think the symbols represent.

As a class, use an interactive whiteboard, digital projector or large screen computer to visit the ABC3 website at www.abc.net.au/abc3

Point out the symbols used to represent the ABC3 website menu. As a class, discuss why each symbol (Home, Studio3, Watch Now, Games TV Shows etc.) might have been selected.

Students to complete worksheet 2.

Important

Review what it means to 'visit' websites. Remind students that, when visiting a website for the first time, they should do so with a trusted adult.

Activity 4: An unconventional website

What you will need:

- Several computers with Internet access
- www.abc.net.au/dustechoes
- Worksheet 3: 'Dust Echoes' site

Students to visit the ABC Dust Echoes site at www.abc.net.au/dustechoes. The site features twelve animated dreamtime stories of love, loyalty, duty and Aboriginal custom and law.

Allow students time to explore the site by clicking on symbols and viewing animations.

After exploring the site, students answer the questions on worksheet 3.

Lesson extension

Symbols and symbolism are used extensively in Aboriginal dreamtime stories. View various animations on the Dust Echoes site and discuss the symbols or symbolism presented in the stories.

Activity 5: How can symbols protect students online?

What you will need:

- Several computers with Internet access
- Copies of, or excerpts from, superhero pictures, films or animations (follow your school's viewing policy)
- Worksheet 4: Planning an avatar
- Poster paper
- Sticky notes
- Graphics or drawing programs, such as KidPix (optional)

Students to conduct an Internet search on superheroes such as Peter Parker/Spider-Man, Bruce Wayne/Batman and Clark Kent/Superman. Students write down any symbols they see used in conjunction with the superheroes (e.g. the Superman 'S' or the spider image on Spider-Man's costume).

Now view excerpts from superhero films or animations and ask students to add anymore symbols they see.

Compile a class list of all the symbols the students found. Ask students why they think the superheroes use symbols, masks, costumes or aliases. Talk about how the superheroes use them to create a persona or an identity (often a secret identity) to hide who they really are.

Ask students 'When might you need to protect your identity?'

Write the word 'avatar' on the board and ask the students if they can tell you what it means, where they have seen them, or if they have one.

An avatar (in computing terms) is an online graphical representation of someone. It is a construct that is used on many chat or social networking sites to keep identities protected.

Explain to students that an avatar does for them what the symbols, masks, costumes and aliases do for the superheroes: it protects their true identity. Ask students to provide reasons why it is important to protect their identity when online. With a partner, students have a five to ten minute brainstorm about why they might need to protect their identity when online. Students write the ideas on sticky notes and add them to a class poster.

Students then create and name their own avatar. It will be a symbolic, graphical representation of them, but should not be so specific that it can be used to identify them easily.

Students can use worksheet 4 to plan their avatar. The final copy can be drawn by hand, or using a graphics or drawing program (such as KidPix).

When completed, share the avatars with the class and see if students can match them to their owners. Display the avatars around the classroom (e.g. on desks, lockers, book trays etc.).

Worksheet 1: Symbols, symbols, everywhere!

Name: _____

Look at each of the symbols below. How many can you identify? Can you explain what they mean? Where have you seen them?











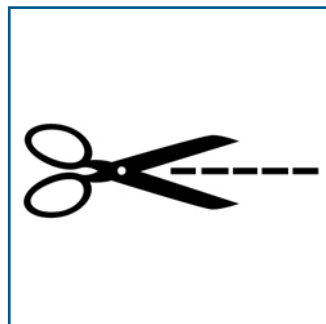














Worksheet 1: Symbols, symbols, everywhere!

Solutions



Disability access



Traffic lights ahead



Recycling



Information



at sign



Female/male toilet



Pedestrian crossing



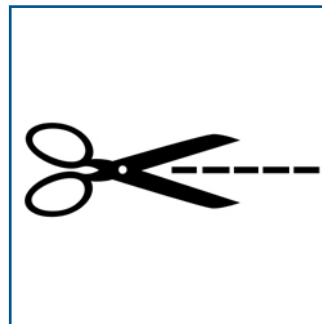
First aid



Peace



Exit



Cut along here



Poison/danger/toxic

Worksheet 2: Online symbols

Name: _____

Draw the symbol used to represent each of the following actions or items on the home page of the ABC3 website www.abc.net.au/abc3, and then create your own symbol for each one. At the bottom of the page there is a box for you to choose one more symbol from the site.

	ABC3 symbol	My symbol
Home		
Studio3		
Watch Now!		
Games		
TV Guide		
_____ (your choice)		



Worksheet 3: 'Dust Echoes' site

Name: _____

Spend some time exploring the 'Dust Echoes' site at www.abc.net.au/dustechoes, and then answer the following questions:

1. What were your first thoughts about this site?

2. How is the site presented?

3. Is the site easy to navigate?

Yes No

Why or why not?

4. How is this site the same as other websites you have visited?



Worksheet 3: 'Dust Echoes' site

5. How is this site different from other sites you have visited?

6. Why do you think the creators of this site chose to use a flickering campfire as a symbol for the 'Enter Here' button?

7. If you could redesign this website what changes would you make and why?



Worksheet 4: Planning an avatar

Name: _____

Draw symbols to represent your personality and favourite things (sports, music, books, movies etc.).

List nicknames you could use to keep your real identity secret. An online identity is often called a 'handle'.

Draw your avatar.