A read-aloud for kids, parents and teachers

Read It Together

The Helper with the Notebook

What a program writes down while you use it, and why

You have used programs all your life. Did you ever agree to what they keep? A grown-up did, or nobody did.

Today we make the writing-down visible, without making it scary. Thirty-five minutes, and no device needed. The point of this plate is not to use the tool.

Step 1 · The starter · 5 min

Imagine a helper

Imagine a helper who follows you around all day with a notebook. They write down everything you say, when you said it, and where you were.

How would that feel? And what might the helper do with the notebook?

Here is the point. Most programs on a phone or tablet are that helper. The notebook is called data. The writing down is called collecting.

Step 2 · The list · 8 min

What might a program write down?

Build the list together, where everyone can see it. You will get most of it.

What you type. When. How long for. Where you are. What device you used. What you liked.

Now the one people miss: things you mention without meaning to. A friend's name. Your school. Your street.

Step 3 · Three real sentences · 7 min

Read the policy

The grown-up reads three sentences from a real privacy policy, from a program you know. One about what it collects. One about why. One about children.

After each one, say it in your own words.

The "why" sentence usually turns out to mean advertising, or "improving our services". Say both plainly. Free things are paid for somehow.

Step 4 · In pairs · 5 min

Three things, three reasons

Write three things a program might collect, and for each one, one reason it would want it.

This should be quick. The board has done the work. This is the outcome of the whole plate.

Never type these

The never list, and why

Put these where everyone can see them, and ask why each one is there. You can usually supply the reasons yourselves.

> Never type: Your full name with your birthday.
>
> **Together they can be used to pretend to be you.**

> Never type: Your home address.
>
> **It says where you are when nobody is with you.**

> Never type: Passwords, and photos of yourself.
>
> **A password opens everything. A photo cannot be taken back.**

> Never type: Anything about someone else.
>
> **It is not your secret to give.**

The plenary · 10 min

Three questions before you type

What does it collect? Why would it want that? Who agreed to it?

Write them where they can be copied. Say the last one twice.

For children under thirteen, the law says a grown-up has to agree first. This is why.

Next time · Plate 6

Using it fairly

You know what it does, when it is wrong, what a source is, whose work is whose, and what it keeps. Last of all: how to use it fairly, and how to say so.

For the grown-up

Why this plate matters

The failure to guard against is "nothing to hide": the idea that collection only matters if you have done something wrong. The friend's-name example does the work for younger children. It is not your secret to give.

The opposite failure is alarm. Keep it matter-of-fact. Programs collect data the way shops have cameras. Knowing it is there is the point, not avoiding every shop.

Do not ask children which services they use or what they have typed into them. The lesson works entirely on the imaginary helper and the published policy.

Choose the three policy sentences in advance. One about what is collected, one about why, one about children.