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Level: Grades 8-10

About the Author

Adapted, with permission,
from *Who Knows? Your
Privacy in the Information
Age*, the American Express
Company, 1993

Lesson Plan

**Who Knows? Your Privacy in the
Information Age**

Overview

In this lesson, students explore issues relating to privacy through a series of activities, surveys and quizzes. The unit begins with a quiz about access to personal information. Students then complete an opinion survey about privacy and compare their answers to classmates and Canadians in general. In "Who Knows What About Me?" students assess how much personal information has been collected about them, and in small groups, they assume the roles of various organizations in order to determine what information is necessary to collect, and where collection of personal information becomes invasive. In a privacy roundtable, students invite experts from the community to participate in a discussion about privacy issues, and in "It Could Happen to You" students write endings to stories that feature privacy related scenarios.

Learning Outcomes

Students:

- develop an awareness of their rights to privacy as citizens and consumers
- research and analyse information concerning a number of privacy issues
- develop critical thinking skills in determining personal ideas on privacy issues

Preparation and Materials

Photocopy the following reference sheets and student handouts:

- *A Privacy Quiz* (educational handout)
- *Answers to A Privacy Quiz* (educational handout)
- *A Privacy Opinion Survey* (educational handout)
- *Public Responses to A Privacy Opinion Survey* (educational handout)
- *Who Knows What About Me?* (educational handout)
- *It Could Happen to You* (educational handout)
- *It Could Happen to You - Instructions* (educational handout)
- *It Could Happen to You - Some Possible Endings* (educational handout)

Procedure

Day One

- Distribute *A Privacy Quiz* to students.
- Once students have completed the quiz, take up the answers and discuss their responses. Were students surprised by any of this?

In 1995, the Public Interest Advocacy Centre and Fédération nationale des associations de consommateurs du Québec produced the report *Surveying Boundaries: Canadians and their Personal Information*.

Distribute the *A Privacy Opinion Survey* to students. When they are done, tally the class results and then compare this to the responses of the Canadians who were originally surveyed.

This report was the first opinion poll ever conducted by consumer groups on the protection of personal information in Canada. It's results provided a much clearer and deeper understanding of actual experiences and concerns of Canadians about the use by others of their personal information. In its executive summary, the report concluded that:

Control over personal information is at the core of the social and legal issue called informational privacy, which can be summarized by the question: Who controls what personal information to what end? It refers to a fundamental conflict between the interests of many different stakeholders, who are usually divided into two groups: "data subjects" and "data users," but who are not always so easily categorized. The vision of an "information highway" anticipates individuals becoming both consumers and producers of information and transactional services. Consequently, the traditional concepts of "data subjects", "data users" and personal information protection must be replaced by more sophisticated models that better resemble the complicated web of social relations within which personal information flows.

Ask students:

- What do they mean when they say that the information highway (Internet) is going to change the way we traditionally think about "data subjects" and "data users?" (This report was conducted in 1995, just as the Internet was becoming mainstream.)
- With more and more information is being collected and stored electronically, what other privacy issues are emerging that might not have been considered in 1995?

Day Two

Do students feel that organizations know very much about them?

- Distribute *Who Knows What About Me?* and have students record what information others have collected about them. (*Encourage them to think carefully about a wide variety of organizations, for example, their doctor's office would have much of this information; if they have a shoppers' card at their local pharmacy, their personal information is being combined with information about what they purchase and even what prescriptions they need.*)
- As students complete this sheet, ask them to also consider whether or not this information is stored electronically. If so, would it be on a personal computer, or in an online data-base?
- Do students feel confident that information that has been stored electronically is secure?
- Do students know whether their personal information is shared with third parties?
- If so, who might these third parties be?

Day Three

Now students are going to look at information collection from the perspectives of different organizations.

- Working in a small group, choose the type of business or organization (a bank, an apartment building, a store, a hospital, a social service agency) you can imagine you might own or manage.
- List the information you would need to collect from your customers or clients.
- Beside each item, write the reason you think the information would be necessary.

Your chart might look like this:

Information Needed	Reason

Once this is done, exchange lists with another group. Do you agree with the other group's "information needed" list? Does it ask enough? Too much? Why?

Get one or more questionnaires or applications from a real organization like the one chosen by your group. Call the organization, describe your class project, and ask for an application. Once you receive the application, compare it with your invented "information needed" list. What are the differences between its questions and yours? Why does the organization want the information requested?

As a class, review all the real applications you collected. Do any of them allow you to opt out of direct-mailing lists? Do any explain how your information will be used?

Activities

Activity One: Privacy Roundtable

In a roundtable, people sit down together to discuss questions and answers about an issue. A Privacy Roundtable would include you and invited experts from your community. It would probably last for one period. Here's how to create an exciting roundtable event:

Before the Day

1. As a class, think of businesses and organizations in your community you would like to invite. Then think of whom you should call within that business. For example, it could be a school administrator or guidance counselor, a retail store credit manager or a personnel manager from a business, a lawyer, a hospital records manager, a journalist who writes about privacy, or a consumer advocate.
2. One group of students should be assigned to invite your roundtable guests; another should create questions and discussion points for the roundtable discussions. (For example, what's the business' perspective? Or the consumer advocate's perspective? Who takes what steps to protect individual privacy?)
3. Before your roundtable, distribute your list of questions and discussion points in your class. Send copies to your guests, as well.

On the Day

4. Divide your class into small groups. Arrange tables and chairs for discussions. Place one or more guests at each table. Choose one student as moderator and one as secretary for each group.
5. Within each group, begin the discussion by having each person complete the statement: "In today's world, the privacy of personal information is..." Use the answers as a discussion starter.
6. Talk about each of the points on the discussion outline. The moderator should make sure that everyone gets a chance to talk. The secretary should record the points people make: concerns, business and advocate perspectives, and answers to questions.
7. Reconvene the entire class. Each secretary or moderator reports on his or her table's discussion. Together, the class summarizes the overall findings.

Activity Two: It Could Happen to You

Distribute the student worksheet *It Could Happen to You* to students.

1. Choose one story to focus on. Briefly jot down an ending for the story, and then answer the questions below. Use your answers to discuss the stories in class.
2. What is the privacy issue in the story?
3. In your story ending, how was the customer's privacy protected?
4. In your story ending, did the business get all the information it really needed? Did it get all the information it wanted? Why or why not? What should the business do in the future to protect privacy of information for its customers?

Using the *It Could Happen to You - Some Possible Endings* sheet as a guide, discuss answers as a class.

Evaluation

Completed worksheets

A Privacy Quiz

A Privacy Quiz

True or False? Circle the right answer.



- 1 Anyone who works in a department store or credit card company can look up your credit records. **T F**
- 2 If a mistake gets into your credit file, it's almost impossible to correct. **T F**
- 3 When you owe money, people can call you at home or at work anytime to try to collect it. **T F**
- 4 There are many different computer files about everybody in this country. **T F**
- 5 Many companies have policies that protect the privacy of their customers. **T F**
- 6 You always have the legal right to ask people why they need the information before you answer a question. **T F**
- 7 The government protects your right to privacy. **T F**
- 8 The information you give one company can be used to make a mailing list for other companies. **T F**
- 9 People can check your credit file if you are applying for a job, insurance, credit or if you are renting an apartment. **T F**
- 10 If you want to get a copy of your credit file, all you have to do is ask for it. **T F**

Answers: A Privacy Quiz

Answers to A Privacy Quiz

- 1 False.** Some companies have policies that limit the number of people who can look at your files. In general, it has to be a person who has a specific and important reason. **TF**
- 2 False.** The Canadian Privacy Act (1993) allows you to correct a mistake on your credit file by writing to the credit reporting agency to explain the mistake and by providing proof that an error was made. **TF**
- 3 False.** In most provinces you are protected from receiving phone calls from creditors at unreasonable times or places, such as before 7 a.m. and after 9 p.m. and on Sundays and Statutory holidays. For details, check with whichever ministry deals with consumer affairs in your own province. **TF**
- 4 True.** A computer file on you can be made by every company you do business with, or any company that wants to do business with you. **TF**
- 5 True.** Reliable companies use either the Canadian Standards Association (CSA) Model Code for the Protection of Personal Privacy or the Canadian Direct Marketing Association (CDMA) Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice. **TF**
- 6 True.** Never give anyone information unless you know why they want it and what they plan to do with it. **TF**
- 7 True and False.** There are several federal and provincial laws that help protect your privacy, but they protect different aspects of privacy, not every one. For details, check with whichever ministry deals with consumer affairs in your own province. **TF**
- 8 True.** Companies can share your files with other businesses that may want to contact you. In Canada, there is a high level of protection for personal information held by the government but there is practically no security for information held by the private industry (except in Quebec.) **TF**
- 9 True.** Anyone who has a need to know about your credit history can check your credit file. That's why it's so important to be sure it is accurate and up to date. **TF**
- 10 True.** If you have been turned down for credit, you can get a free copy of your credit report by writing Equifax Canada (The Credit Bureau of Canada). If you send them a request with proper identification, you should receive a copy of your credit report within ten days. **TF**

A Privacy Opinion Survey

This opinion survey contains questions and statements about the protection of Canadians' personal information. Read each of the statements below and check the box which expresses how you feel, or how you think Canadians feel about the issue described. You can compare your answers to some of the national findings outlined in the 1995 report *Surveying Boundaries: Canadians and their Personal Information*.

1 Members of your family have as much control over their personal information as they did ten years ago.

Agree Disagree Not sure

2 We should be just as concerned about private businesses and corporations sharing their personal information as we are about government departments sharing their information.

Agree Disagree Not sure

3 It is important that consumers be informed about collection processes and the uses to which their personal information may be put.

Very Important Somewhat Important Not very Important

4 Technological change should not place a greater burden (financial or otherwise) on individuals to protect their personal information.

Agree Disagree Not sure

5 Have you ever experienced a violation of a widely-accepted principle of personal information protection?

Yes No

6 Are you aware of any Canadian legislation or programs which protect the privacy of your personal information?

Yes No

7 Have you, or anyone in your family, ever requested to see personal information (i.e. landlord's information or medical records?)

Yes No

8 (a) Do you think the telephone *Call Display* function invades your personal privacy?

Yes No

8 (b) Do you think Canadians should have access to *Call Display Blocking*?

Yes No

9 The protection of personal information should be regulated through:

Private sector self-regulation Government legislation

10 The Canadian government should treat protection of personal information as a priority.

Agree Disagree

Public Responses to A Privacy Opinion Survey

In 1995 two non-profit consumer advocacy groups, the Federation of Quebec Consumer Groups (FNACQ) and the Public Interest Advocacy Center (PIAC), conducted a public opinion poll on how Canadians feel about the collection, communication, and use of their personal information. Below are some of their findings, reported in *Surveying Boundaries: Canadians and their Personal Information*, (September 1995).

- 1 In the report, *Surveying Boundaries* (1995), 76% of Canadians felt that they had less control over their personal information than they did ten years ago. This is up from 60% of Canadians who felt this way in the 1992 Ekos survey.
- 2 In the 1995 survey, 70% of Canadians said they would be at least moderately concerned about the sharing of personal information between government bodies, while 90% said they would be at least moderately concerned about such information sharing among private firms, or between government and private firms.
- 3 *Surveying Boundaries* reported that 95% of Canadians wanted to be informed about the uses to which their personal information is put. Ninety-four percent insisted that their permission be sought and given before any such information was passed on to another organization.
- 4 Eighty-two percent of Canadians surveyed in 1995 felt strongly that technological change should not place a greater burden (financial or otherwise) on them, as individuals, to protect their personal information.
- 5 Ninety-five percent of Canadians surveyed in 1995 had experienced unsolicited calls from telemarketers and 85% from charities. The *Surveying Boundaries* report states "there can be little doubt that personal information is being widely collected and traded without the knowledge or consent of data subjects, contrary to principles of information privacy."
- 6 The *Surveying Boundaries* report states that "Canadians are largely unaware of legislation and programs protecting the privacy of their personal information". Three quarters (73%) of the Canadians surveyed were unaware of any law or government program protecting their personal information and only 17% could cite an example.
- 7 The 1995 survey showed that few Canadians request to see personal information which is in the possession of businesses or institution. (Answers ranged from 1% for records held by landlords to 18% for medical records). Approximately one-fifth of respondents who obtained access to their personal file detected errors in it.
- 8 a) In the 1995 survey, 83% of Canadians considered *Call Display* to be a desirable service while 40% thought that it invaded privacy. (b) Seventy-four percent thought that they should have access to *Call Display Blocking* while 47% thought it was not a

good idea.

"Attitudes of Canadians about *Call Display* and the blocking function appear to be driven by a desire to maximize the benefits of the technology in respect of both control of incoming calls and control of outgoing information," the *Surveying Boundaries* report noted.

9 In the 1995 survey, only 7% of Canadians chose industry self-regulation over government regulation or public involvement. A large majority, (69%) chose an option, involving public involvement in rule-making and enforcement, which did not rely entirely on either government or private business.

10 In the 1995 survey, 87% of Canadians thought that the government should treat protection of personal information as a priority (but should not collect more taxes for this purpose!).

It Could Happen to You

Read the following stories. Then see the *Instructions Page*.



Paul Scott - Paul is in his last year at Grandview High School. He has a part-time job at a local grocery store. He has been saving his money for a new stereo and finally has enough. He takes his cash and goes to Jim's Stereo Xpress and picks out the model he wants. The sales rep fills out the sales slip and asks for Paul's name, address, telephone number, and place of employment. Paul...

Trisha Jones - Trisha is a Grade 10 student at South Central High School. She works two evenings a week and Saturdays at a fast-food restaurant. She has saved enough money to buy a food processor for her mother's birthday. When her mother opens the gift, they find the warranty card and start to fill it out. It asks for their name and address, the name of the store where the product was purchased, the product's price, the family's income level, and what other appliances they own that were made by the same company. Trisha tells her mother to...



Anthony Ortiz - Anthony is the bookkeeper for a small chain of clothing stores. The company has its own charge card and one of Anthony's jobs is to enter in all the new charges into the computer. One day Liz, a co-worker, comes up and asks him to look up the record of her boyfriend, who, she says, asked her to check something. They have the record on the screen and are talking about it when Mr. Ross, the manager, comes in. Mr. Ross...

Sara Chen - Sara is the marketing manager for Fashion, Inc., a large catalogue company. She has just received a phone call from an irate customer who recently received catalogues from eight other companies when the only catalogue she ordered was from Fashion. She accused Sara's company of selling her name and address to other companies without her consent. She wants to keep getting Fashion's catalogue, but she doesn't want her name rented to anyone else. Sara...



Rick Soloman - Rick graduated from high school in June. He has a full-time job as a management trainee at Bobby's, a local fast-food restaurant. He is taking courses at night at the local community college. He has decided it's time to start building a credit history for himself, so he is completing applications for a gasoline charge card and a local department store charge card. He's puzzled about some of the questions on the forms. "Why do they need my Social Insurance number?" And the name of my nearest relative...?" he wonders.

Instructions for It Could Happen to You

Choose one story to focus on. Briefly jot down an ending for the story, and then answer the questions below. Use your answers to discuss the stories in class.

1 What is the privacy issue in the story?

2 In your story ending, how was the customer's privacy protected?

3 In your story ending, did the business get all the information it really needed? Did it get all the information it wanted? Why or why not?

4 What should the business do in the future to protect privacy of information for its customers?

It Could Happen to You— Some Possible Endings

Paul Scott asks the sales rep why he needs that information. As he is paying cash, no information should be required. At most a name and address may be needed for warranty information, but this usually goes directly to the manufacturer. The sales rep may say the store wants to put Paul on its mailing list so Paul can be told about sales. Then Paul can decide whether or not he wants to be on the list. Under no circumstances is employment information required.

Trisha Jones tells her mother to complete the form with Mrs. Jones's name and address so she can be notified if the product is ever recalled. The rest of the information is optional. If Trisha's mother does not want her name on a marketing list, she can write a letter to send along with the warranty card, explaining that she does not wish to participate in any marketing programs and asking that her name not be placed on such lists.

Anthony Ortiz should not have looked up the record of Liz's boyfriend. The record is personal information that only Anthony and his manager should have access to. Mr. Ross should explain the confidentiality of these records to Anthony and Liz and tell them firmly that they should not have looked up the file. Mr. Ross might also call a staff meeting and explain the issues to his employees.

Sara Chen acknowledges that Fashion's mailing list is rented to other companies, and apologizes for any inconvenience it may have caused. She says that Fashion, Inc. offers consumers a chance to "opt out" of these lists and offers to send a form. Sara sends a memo to the catalogue department and suggests that they put an opt out insert into their next catalogue.

Rick Soloman takes the form to his dad (mother, boss, older sister) and asks why the information is needed. (Or he could call the company itself.) When he learns about the records kept by credit bureaus, he decides to send away for his credit record to see what information is already in it. He may find that there are several Rick Solomons and some of the information requested (such as Social Insurance number) is to make sure the correct record is checked. He understands the need for the names of his bank and his employer.

