

What is AI?

40 minutes

Digital Media Literacy

WHAT THIS LESSON DOES

In this lesson, you'll explore the fascinating world of Artificial Intelligence. Learn what AI is, see how it's used in everyday tools like voice assistants, and understand its strengths and limits through engaging activities and reflections.

WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO

- Understand the fundamental definition and concept of Artificial Intelligence as a branch of computer science.
- Identify examples of AI in everyday life and its practical applications across various domains.
- Explain the basic process of how AI systems function, including data collection, pattern recognition, and prediction.
- Recognise the capabilities and limitations of AI, distinguishing between human and machine intelligence.
- Develop critical thinking skills to evaluate AI-generated content and its implications in digital contexts.

BEFORE THE LESSON

- Open and test the lesson on a large screen: step 5's image quiz loads photos from an external site, so confirm your school filter is not blocking codingireland image links.
- One device per pupil or per pair for the quiz in step 5.
- Decide beforehand how you will handle the reflection in step 8: this lesson works well as a whole-class discussion.
- Have a familiar example ready to name, such as how Siri answers a question or how a video app suggests the next clip.

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HOW THE LESSON RUNS

Introduction
Understanding What AI Is
AI in Your Everyday World
How AI Works
Activity: Is It AI or Not?
AI Generated Images
Thinking about AI's Limits
Your Thoughts on AI
Wrapping It Up

TEACHING MOVES

1. Introduction. Open by asking pupils to name a 'smart' device they use. Collect three or four answers aloud so the lesson starts from what they already know.
2. Understanding What AI Is. Draw out the key contrast: ordinary software always follows the same fixed rules, while AI learns from data and changes over time. Ask pupils for that difference in their own words.
3. AI in Your Everyday World. Turn the examples into a quick hands-up survey: who uses a voice assistant, who has seen suggested videos. Link each back to the definition from the previous step.
4. How AI Works. Stress there is no magic here, only collecting information and spotting patterns. Use the 'learning a new game by watching' comparison to keep it concrete.
5. Activity: Is It AI or Not? Let pupils guess before revealing each answer. Pause after a few to ask what clues they used, so the quiz becomes a discussion about how they can tell, not just a score.
6. AI Generated Images. Name the real risk plainly: AI images can show events that never happened. Ask pupils why that matters for what they see and share online.
7. Thinking about AI's Limits. Balance the earlier excitement here. Ask pupils to name one thing AI does well and one thing it cannot do, such as having real feelings or genuinely new ideas.
8. Your Thoughts on AI. Run the three prompts as a spoken discussion: what surprised you, what still confuses you, how might AI change your life. Take answers aloud rather than written.
9. Wrapping It Up. Close by asking the class to give the definition of AI back to you in one sentence, then name both a strength and a limit.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Pupils think AI 'knows' or 'understands' things the way a person does, and that it has feelings or opinions. Return to step 4: AI spots patterns in data and makes guesses. Contrast this with step 7's point that it has no emotions or genuinely new ideas of its own.
- Pupils assume a photo must be real because it looks convincing. Use the quiz results in step 5 to show how many they got wrong. Reinforce that a believable image is not proof of a real event.
- Pupils believe AI is separate and futuristic, not something they already use. Point back to the hands-up survey in step 3. Every suggested video or voice answer is AI already in their day.

DIFFERENTIATION

- Emerging: Pair them with a partner for the image quiz so they can talk each guess through before answering. Give them one clear example to hold onto, such as a voice assistant, and build every idea back to that.
- Developing: Ask them to explain to a partner how AI decides which video to suggest, using the collect, find patterns, guess steps from step 4.
- Proficient: Challenge them to list clues that gave away the AI images in the quiz and share them with the class. Ask them to think of an everyday task AI could not do and say why, drawing on the limits in step 7.