NEWS BREAK

Article: **How to protect your mind and your family from your smartphone**

Section: **BUSINESS, C7**

Sunday's News Break selects an article from **Sunday, November 1, 2026,** of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

Feel free to adapt this lesson for your students. For instance, some educators may assign this as a homework task, while others might facilitate the reading and discussion of questions within small groups or larger class discussions.

Please take a moment to review all NIE content before classroom use to ensure it is suitable for your students.*

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Learning Objectives:

After reading the article, students will explain how smartphone use affects attention, mental health, and relationships. Students will examine how apps and notifications encourage excessive screen time and explore strategies for building healthier technology habits. Students will evaluate how individuals and families can balance the benefits of technology with face-to-face connections, physical activity, and other meaningful activities.

Pre-Reading Discussion:



- What do you think the article will be about, using this picture?
- Are there any clues? What can you infer?

Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted word means using context clues? A ***context clue*** is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the meaning of the word.

"Years of evidence suggest that excessive phone use ***alienates*** us from each other and the natural world."

Alienates Guess:

Alienates Definition:

Comprehension Questions:

1. Many of the apps and algorithms in your pocket are designed to steal you away from the rest of your life. The typical American spends ____ hours per day on their phone, according to a peer-reviewed study of 10,000 U.S. adults. That's roughly ____ years of continuous screen time over a lifetime.
2. Half of Americans with a smartphone worry that they use their device _____ _____. For those under 30, that figure rises to ____%.
3. The most powerful data centers in the world are pointed at your brain with a singular goal: capturing your _____.

4. Tech companies have learned how to activate the brain's _____ _____ with exquisite precision.
5. The average smartphone user checks their phone ____ to ____ times per day.
6. While two-thirds of smartphone users in the U.S. report that their device has made their life at least "a little" better, Gallup found in 2022, the share of Americans who say they use their phone too much, sometimes describing it as an "_____," keeps rising.
7. Putting _____ and _____ distance between you and your phone is the first step to reclaiming your attention — and the rest of your life.
8. But experiments show it has two hallmarks of one: habit formation, and people finding it hard to quit even as it takes over their lives. The reason, says Shreya Hessler, a psychologist who teaches digital wellness to patients, is the _____ _____ our devices deliver to our brain.
9. Another way to deal with the dings, pings and buzzes that punctuate our lives is to _____ them.
10. Research consistently shows that the more we're _____, the _____ our work gets
11. Hessler, who teaches a digital wellness class at Loyola University Maryland, often witnesses these struggles firsthand. In her course, she helps students reclaim their lives from their devices. For one semester, her class meets twice a week, device-free, to practice "_____ _____," a subject she hopes will be taught like sex education to protect our mental health and relationships at an early age.
12. What are a few things the students get to do in this class?
13. Noah Castelo felt his attention span getting worse and suspected phones had something to do with it. So, the associate professor at the University of Alberta School of Business designed an experiment, published in PNAS Nexus last year. He blocked subjects' internet access on their smartphones for two weeks. Only text messages and phone calls were allowed. The results, published in PNAS Nexus last year, were striking: _____% of people reported improvements in well-being, mental health or their ability to sustain attention.
14. In his study, participants spent more time _____ in person, _____ and being in _____, which helped explain their gains.

<u>Class Discussion Questions:</u>

- What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?
- At first, I thought _____, but now I think _____?

Deeper-Dive "Connect & Explain" Comprehension Questions for Small Groups, Entire Classes or Journal Entries and/or Essay Prompts for Extended Enrichment

1.The article explains that the average American spends approximately six hours a day on their phone and that excessive phone use can interfere with relationships, attention, and connections with the natural world. Why do you think smartphones have become such a large part of everyday life? How might excessive phone use affect students' friendships, schoolwork, sleep, and overall well-being? What signs might indicate that technology is taking up too much of someone's time?

2.The article describes how technology companies use apps, notifications, and algorithms designed to capture users' attention and encourage them to keep scrolling. Why might it be difficult for people to control their phone use when apps are designed to keep them engaged? To what extent should individuals be responsible for managing their screen time, and what responsibility should technology companies have for encouraging healthier digital habits?

3.The article explains that even having a smartphone nearby can reduce a person's ability to concentrate, even when the phone is turned off or put away in a bag. How might the presence of a phone affect students' ability to learn, complete assignments, or participate in conversations? What strategies could students use to reduce distractions and improve their focus at school and at home?

4.The article describes strategies for developing healthier phone habits, including silencing notifications, setting app limits, using grayscale settings, and keeping phones out of bedrooms. Why might changing your environment be more effective than simply relying on willpower to reduce screen time? Which of these strategies do you think would be most effective for students, and what other approaches could help people take greater control of their technology use?

5.The article discusses a study in which researchers blocked participants' smartphone internet access for two weeks while allowing calls and text messages. Most participants reported improvements in well-being, mental health, or their ability to sustain attention. Why might reducing smartphone use lead to these improvements? How could spending more time exercising, enjoying nature, or connecting with others in person affect a person's quality of life? What activities could students pursue to replace some of their screen time?

6.The article describes how the author establishes phone-free spaces and routines, including keeping phones away from the dinner table and bedroom. How might family rules about smartphone use strengthen relationships and encourage healthier habits? What challenges might families face when trying to establish these boundaries? If you could create three technology guidelines for

your household, what would they be, and how would you encourage everyone to follow them?

7. Imagine you have noticed that you spend more time on your phone than you intended, and it is beginning to affect your sleep, schoolwork, or relationships. Using strategies from the article, develop a realistic seven-day plan to improve your digital habits. Identify which behaviors you would change, what boundaries you would establish, and which activities you would use to replace screen time. Explain how you would measure your progress and adjust your plan if you struggled to maintain these changes.

Extended Essay Prompts

- **Smartphones and Student Well-Being**: The article examines how excessive smartphone use can affect attention, mental health, relationships, and everyday activities. In your essay, analyze how phone habits can influence students' academic performance and personal well-being. Use examples and research findings from the article to explain the challenges students face and evaluate strategies that could help them develop healthier technology habits.
- **Personal Responsibility and Technology Companies:** The article explains how technology companies design apps and algorithms to capture users' attention. In your essay, evaluate the responsibilities individuals and technology companies have in addressing excessive smartphone use. Consider how app design, notifications, screen-time limits, and personal choices influence behavior. Explain what changes could help people use technology more responsibly.
- **Technology and Human Connection:** The article suggests that excessive phone use can distance people from one another and the natural world. In your essay, examine how smartphones influence friendships, family relationships, and face-to-face communication. Consider both the benefits of digital connections and the potential consequences of relying too heavily on screens. Explain how individuals can balance technology use with meaningful relationships and real-world experiences.
- **Developing Healthier Digital Habits:** The article presents several strategies for reducing distractions, including silencing notifications, establishing phone-free spaces, setting app limits, and replacing screen time with other activities. In your essay, evaluate which strategies might be most effective for students and explain why relying on willpower alone may not be enough. Develop a practical plan for helping students build healthier technology habits while maintaining access to the benefits of smartphones.
- **Finding Balance in a Digital World:** The article argues that digital well-being is not simply about minimizing screen time but about ensuring that technology use matches personal intentions. In your essay, explore what it

means to use technology intentionally. Examine how students can recognize when phone use supports their goals and when it becomes a distraction. Propose realistic strategies for balancing smartphones with school, sleep, physical activity, family, friendships, and other meaningful experiences.

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