Design Tricks: A scavenger hunt for persuasive design

ENG4U, Unit 6: The Machine Stops, Lesson 7. 75 minutes. Teacher lesson plan.

Lesson at a glance

Apps are media texts with conventions of their own: the red badge, the endless scroll, the streak, the autoplay countdown. Some of these techniques help us; some are designed to keep us longer than we meant to stay. Naming them gives us power over them.

What students do: Students learn the conventions of app design and persuasive design techniques, analyse an original mock feed, go on a design-trick scavenger hunt in real apps or screenshots (as their teacher directs), and evaluate which techniques serve users and which work against them.

Curriculum expectations

Code	Students will…
M 2.2	identify conventions and/or techniques used in a variety of media forms and demonstrate insight into the way they convey meaning and influence their audience
M 2.1	identify general and specific characteristics of a variety of media forms and demonstrate insight into the way they shape content and create meaning
M 1.1	explain how media texts, including complex and challenging texts, are created to suit particular purposes and audiences

From The Ontario Curriculum, Grades 11 and 12: English (2007, revised), ENG4U. OC = Oral Communication, R = Reading and Literature Studies, W = Writing, M = Media Studies.

Learning goals and success criteria

Learning goals	Success criteria
• We are learning the conventions and techniques of app design. • We are learning how design techniques influence an audience.	• I can name and explain five persuasive design techniques. • I can identify techniques in a real or mock app. • I can explain how each technique influences users. • I can judge whether a technique serves or works against users.

Materials and preparation

- **Slides:** Design Tricks deck.
- **Handouts:** Scavenger Hunt (page 1), Serve or Steer? (page 2).
- **Devices:** Only as directed by the teacher, following Ontario's classroom cellphone policy; otherwise use screenshots or the mock feed.

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- **Reader:** Original media texts: the Glimmer feed.

Lesson sequence

Time (min)	Part	Teacher	Students	Look for
0–8	**Hook**	The red dot.	Discuss.	
8–25	**Techniques**	Name them.	Note.	
25–35	**Mock feed**	Glimmer.	Analyse.	
35–60	**Scavenger hunt**	Real apps.	Hunt.	Techniques identified.
60–75	**Serve or steer?**	Evaluate.	Judge.	

Differentiation

- **Support:** Picture cards of each technique.
- **ELL:** Technique glossary with screenshots.
- **Challenge:** Find a technique not on the list and name it.

Assessment

Type	Tool	Purpose
Assessment for learning	Scavenger Hunt and Serve or Steer?	Conventions and techniques (M 2.2), form (M 2.1) and purpose (M 1.1)

Design tricks: key points

- **Infinite scroll and autoplay:** Remove natural stopping points.
- **Variable rewards:** Pull-to-refresh and unpredictable likes work like a slot machine.
- **Streaks and badges:** Turn habits into obligations; fear of losing a streak.
- **Notifications:** Red badges and urgent wording pull you back.
- **Defaults and friction:** Settings that benefit the company are on by default; leaving is made harder than joining.
- **Serve or steer:** The same technique can help (a reminder to take medicine) or steer (a reminder to scroll).

Teacher notes

- Ontario policy bans cellphones during class time for Grades 7 to 12 unless an educator directs their use; if you use devices, direct it explicitly for this activity, or use teacher-prepared screenshots.
- Students should not share personal accounts or messages; look at interfaces only.
- Glimmer is an invented app created for this unit. It is not a real product.

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- Some students find it hard to manage their phone or social media use, and for some, online spaces are where they find community and support. We discuss design and business, not anyone's personal habits. If screen use, online pressure or anything else is weighing on you: Kids Help Phone, 1-800-668-6868 or text 686868; Suicide Crisis Helpline, call or text 9-8-8.

Coming up

Lesson 8, The Algorithm Game.

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