

This special bonus assembly is based on the FYI Investigates documentary *Who's Controlling Your Mind?*, and the accompanying special report in Issue 984 of First News, and is designed to be used with students in KS3/4.



News Assembly – Who's Controlling Your Mind?

● **Resources:** script/prompts; documentary excerpt from *FYI Investigates: Who's Controlling Your Mind* from 4 minutes, 42 seconds to 8 minutes, 5 seconds; dictionary with numbered pages; calculator and a whiteboard and pen; slip of paper showing the ninth word on the 108th page of the dictionary, sealed in an envelope

● **Preparation:** Read the script/prompts. Practise the mind trick. Prepare an envelope with the answer to the mind trick inside. Prepare the documentary to be projected, cued to the times shown above.

● **Duration:** approximately 25 minutes

● **Music suggestions:**

Always On My Mind – Pet Shop Boys or *Can't Get You Out Of My Head* – Kylie Minogue

This Is Me – Keala Settle from *The Greatest Showman*

Music suggestion

Children enter to *Always On My Mind* by Pet Shop Boys or *Can't Get You Out Of My Head* by Kylie Minogue

1. Introduction

2. Welcome and greeting

Prompt: perform the 'mind-reading' trick scripted below. Once finished, explain that it was only a trick and that you couldn't really read their minds. Consider how it would feel if people could read your mind then use that knowledge to control what you think and do. Then explain that, for those of us who use social media, this is precisely what we are inviting others to do. Use this to introduce the FYI video clip.

I wanted to start today with an amazing feat of mind-reading. [Select two volunteers, including at least one who's confident with maths. Give the mathematician a whiteboard and pen (plus a calculator if necessary). Give the other student a dictionary with numbered pages. Speak to the mathematician first...] I want you to think of any three-digit number as long as it doesn't have any repeated digits. For example, you could have 345 but you couldn't have 343. Write it on the board for all to see. Ok, now, reverse the order of the digits so you have a different three-digit number. In my example, 345 would become 543. Next, subtract the smaller number from the larger one. [e.g. $543 - 345 = 198$] What's the answer? [Get them to write it down.] Now, reverse that number's digits and add the answer to its reverse number. [e.g. $198 + 891$. *Whichever numbers they have chosen, the answer will always be 1,089.* Now, talk to the dictionary holder...] So, look at the first three digits of that total [108] and go to that page in the dictionary. Now, what is the last digit of the number? [9] So, I want you to tell me what is the ninth word on that page in the dictionary. [Repeat the word out loud so that everyone can hear.] Finally, open the envelope and tell everyone what it says. [If you have prepared and performed the trick properly, the words will be the same. Bow to the audience and thank your volunteers.]

Now, obviously, I don't have special mind-reading powers. That was just a trick. However, how would you feel if people *could* read your mind and then use that power to control what you think, how you behave and even what you buy? I'm not sure that I would feel happy about that. Yet, if you use social media, that is precisely what you are inviting people to do, as I found out from this FYI Investigates documentary from Sky Kids.

3. Sharing the documentary excerpt

Prompt: play the video excerpt from the documentary *FYI Investigates: Who's Controlling Your Mind?* (time 4:42 – 8:05). Refer to how shocked the young people in the video were. Get a show of hands from the students as to whether and how often they use social media. Reflect that the dangers go beyond just bullying. Acknowledge that data harvesting might be a price that students are willing to pay for using social media, but they might also want to think about what and how much information they share.

Discuss the presence of misinformation online and warn that algorithms channel people into 'echo chambers' where they only get one perspective. Also mention the rise of AI chatbots which mimic the behaviour of 'perfect' friends. Assert that not all technology is bad but everyone needs to think twice before they believe or trust what they see online. They should nurture reliable friendships and identify trusted adults whom they can talk to. Conclude by stating that, ultimately, the only person who should be controlling your mind is you.

[Play the excerpt from the documentary *FYI Investigates: Who's Controlling Your Mind?* (time 4:42 – 8:05)]

Now, I don't know about you, but I found that a little disturbing. I mean, I think I was already aware of it to a certain extent, but it was interesting to see how shocked these young people were about just how much they had revealed about themselves to powerful, hidden forces.

No doubt, you're familiar with some of the risks of social media – but I wonder if, up until now, there has been rather too much emphasis on how it can open opportunities for bullying and other unkind behaviour. Of course, that is still a serious issue, and it might be that some of you have already had some bad experiences. But there is a whole extra layer of potential harm out there, which might be affecting us in ways that are not always obvious.

So, let's have a show of hands. Who uses social media platforms or messaging apps? Keep your hands up if you use them every day. Keep your hands up if you probably take a look within every free hour that you have. Well, it seems that you'll be making someone very happy. And probably very rich. Because, the longer you're engaged, the more they're learning about you.

There's a lot of corporate hand-wringing that goes on about this. Mostly it goes along the lines of 'We only want to optimise your experience' or 'We want to send you advertisements that are carefully tailored to your interests' or some such weaselly-worded spin. But really, it's mostly for their benefit, not yours.

Now, you might say that this is a price you're willing to pay for the convenience of online shopping or the fun of scrolling through some memes or seeing a pic of one of your friends' weekend meals. And that's fair enough – there is no such thing as a free lunch. That said, you might want to be careful what and how much you send into the ether... in case it comes back to bite you.

You might also pause before you believe what you see online. You've probably heard about conspiracy theories, where people use the open invitation of the internet to make bizarre claims based on little or no solid evidence. No, planet Earth is not flat. No, the MMR vaccine does not cause autism. But the dawn of AI is making misinformation even more difficult to spot, especially through things like deep fakes. What's more, the algorithms are forever channelling your content so that your perspectives become ever more blinkered until you're in what's known as an echo chamber, only exposed to increasingly extreme versions of views you've shown some affinity for.

But then again, information isn't necessarily inaccurate just because someone who doesn't like what he hears screams 'fake news' at you.

So, where does that leave you? Well, first of all, I want to reassure you that of course, not all technology is bad. However, people are finally waking up to the idea that there should be greater control over things like AI and social media. Above all, *you* have to take the initiative. It is really important to talk to people – real people – whom you trust, such as adults who have shown that they care for you. It is also important to nurture your friendships. Now, real friends – as opposed to AI chatbots – are not perfect. Sometimes you will fall out. Sometimes you might disagree. But the best ones will stay with you and show by their actions that you can trust them. Isn't that better than opening your heart to a computerised friend, who might seem like they're perfect but are, in fact, leading you down paths that are not good for you?

What I'm really saying is that it is better to be aware and be prepared. Because the only person who should be controlling your mind is you.

4. Reflection

Let's take a moment to be grateful for the benefits of technology but also to be wary of its dangers. Let's think about the people whom we can trust and make sure that we, too, can be trusted by those who rely on us. Finally, remember that your mind and your choices should be your own, and what you decide to believe should be done using the best available information. Remember, **you** are in charge of **your** mind.

5. Ending

Take this opportunity to deliver any school notices or other announcements.

6. Final farewell and dismissal

Have a lovely day (or evening, depending on when your assembly is). Mind how you go!

Music suggestion

This Is Me – Keala Settle from *The Greatest Showman*

Back in the classroom

Why not explore this topic further, using one or more of the following ideas?

- Invite students to share any uncomfortable experiences they might have had with social media, gaming platforms and/or messaging apps (without mentioning any names). Encourage them to focus on what steps they took to protect themselves and who helped them to deal with it.

- Ask students to rate how happy they would be to trust the following people with personal details about themselves on a scale of 1 to 5, where 5 is the most happy.

- ☐ their form teacher
- ☐ a stranger who sat beside them on a train
- ☐ their best friend
- ☐ their parents or carers
- ☐ a tech billionaire
- ☐ their local shopkeeper
- ☐ their doctor

Discuss their answers and suggest that posting information to unknown people on the internet is no different from telling the random person on the train.

- Hold a class debate on the following statement: *The government should play a much greater role in the regulation of social media platforms.*