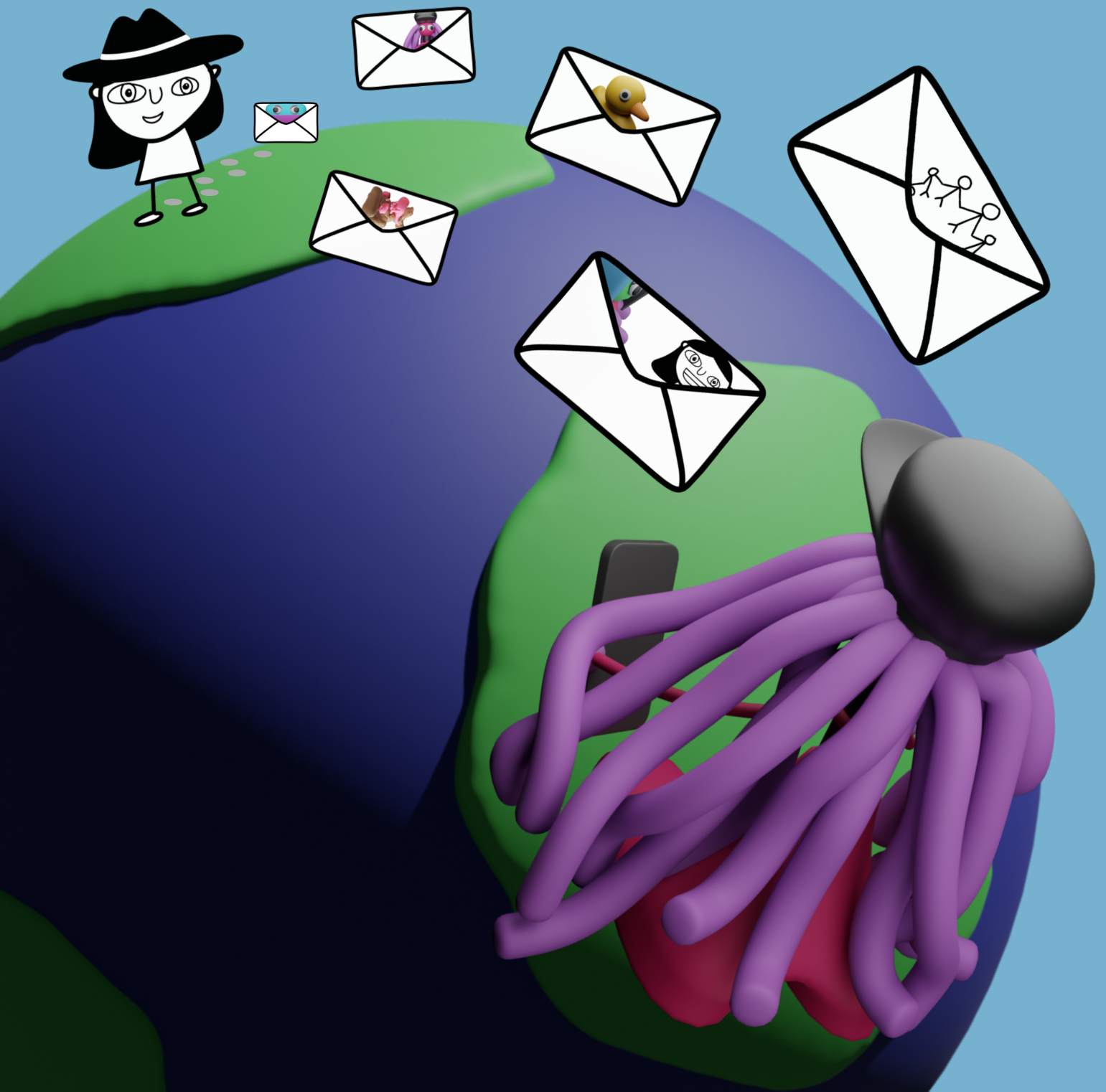


# Digital Footprint



### **Text & Illustrations**

Adam Foster  
Alfie Rodrigues  
Amber Readman  
Daisie Ringer  
Damien  
Erin Carter  
Jacob M  
Jayden B  
Jaxon Harrison  
Lacey Whitfield  
Mason M  
Millie  
Phillip Vacariu

### **Editorial Team**

Cristina Costa  
Nicole McIlvaney  
Jen Simpson

**Picture book consultant**  
Chrissi Nerantzi

**Visual Coordination, Concept, 3D art, complementary Illustration, and Book design**

Ody Frank  
[artstation.com/od-3d](https://artstation.com/od-3d)

2024

[CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)



This book is part of a three-book collection focused on different aspects of young people's (pre-teens) experiences with the digital world. It is also a resource for teachers, parents, mentors, and guardians in supporting conversations with and about young people's online engagements.

The idea behind this series of books is linked to a research project sponsored by Research England and led by Durham University, UK. The project aimed to actively involve young people (aged 7-9) in discussions surrounding their experiences of the online world to explore and foster their 'digital cultural knowledge'. Digital cultural knowledge describes the know-how and logic young people attach to their digital practices. It relates to the ways in which they explain and justify their experiences in and of the online world.

While many young people (including pre-teens) exhibit high levels of digital technical skills (how to use the technology) and have some knowledge of the benefits and pitfalls of the online world, their digital practices are not always so well-developed. These books were co-created with young people to promote deep thinking about digital experiences and to encourage informed online action. To achieve this, we engaged with those we aimed to influence: the young people themselves.

Thus, in developing these books, we worked with thirteen young people who are herein named as co-authors. The work developed over a space of two years, across a three-phase process. During this time, we were able to 1) explore young people's online engagement (including accounts of their social media activity); 2) work together with them on their understandings of digital practices, the messages they have assimilated and the vocabulary they use when talking about their digital practices, and; 3) co-produce the narratives that now feature in these books through lively discussions and art workshops which were, for them, \*the best\* part of the entire project! The project then progressed to post-production with the assistance of an illustrator who transformed the young people's creations into graphic form.

The books reflect this collaborative link and seek to capture the essence and ethos of the approach employed. In doing so, we have opted for a conversational and at times inquisitive writing style. The books aim to communicate simple yet powerful messages about serious issues with the purpose of creating spaces for reflection and debate amongst young people and with adults.

More concretely, the books are underpinned by a pedagogy of empowerment, appealing directly to reader's agency. This contrasts considerably with more cautionary approaches which, while well-intentioned and aiming to minimise online risks, can sometimes feel disengaged from young people's views. Our methods seek to work with and promote young people's informed views, while retaining advocacy of ethical online conduct.

We sincerely hope you enjoy the books as much as we enjoyed working on them. They are the labour of a genuine collaborative effort. Our wish is that they can have as much impact on you as they have had on us.

## Giving Thanks

It has been a great privilege and honour to work with such a lively group of young people. I speak for the entire research team when I say that we have learnt a lot from our dealings with them. We are so very appreciative of their cooperation and contributions. We are proud to have been co-authors in this work.

We would like to express our gratitude to the School Trust and its Director of Quality of Education, Catherine, for challenging us to conceptualise a project targeted at the social media learning of pre-teens/ young people. It has been a wonderful challenge to embrace. We are equally thankful for the hospitality, kindness and time given by the school that volunteered to host the project. A special thanks to Headteacher Louise and Teacher Hollie<sup>1</sup> for always accommodating our requests and for their patience with our activities. We apologise for all the glitter we may have inadvertently left behind after our interactive workshops! We are grateful for their unwavering enthusiasm, support and positivity.

We are also indebted to those who provided continuous support in the background, including: our funder Research England, who provided essential funds for the development of the project; the Durham research management team – Neil Heckels and Tracey Winn for supporting us across all stages of the project – from application through to its conclusion; and the Durham School of Education for the research time and their finance team, especially Lynsey Ferguson for helping us with our numerous purchases of workshop supplies and research materials.

We are also grateful for Michaela Oliver's contribution, who advised us on all stages of the project and supported this venture from the beginning.

On a personal note, I would also like to give special thanks to those who helped with the practical components of the research and worked by my side to make this project come to life. Thanks go to Jen Simpson and Nicole McIlvaney who assisted with the last two phases of the research. Your dedication and contribution to the research activities have been critical to the development of the project. Another special thanks goes to Ody Frank and Chrissi Nerantzi for their creative input, including guidance related to the development of picture books and the splendid illustrations that now feature in these books, and Bryan Mathers, who coached them on the technicalities of book printing.

The true value of co-production in research is revealed both in the learning and the bonds that develop in the processes of working together. It is truly magic. Thank you everyone for making it happen.

Cristina Costa (On behalf of the research team)

This work was supported by Research England

<sup>1</sup> Full names and research site are not disclosed for privacy reasons

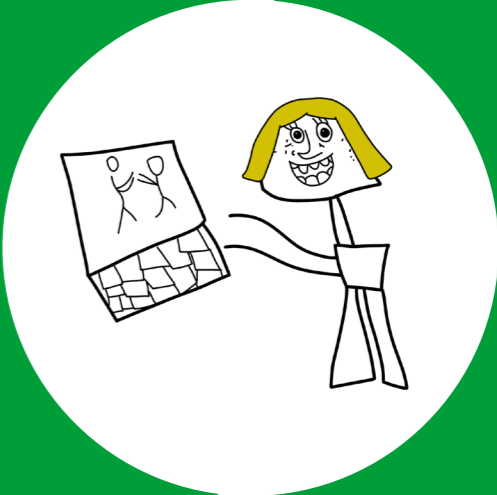
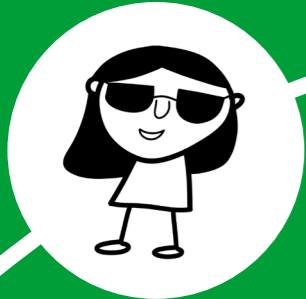


Research  
England

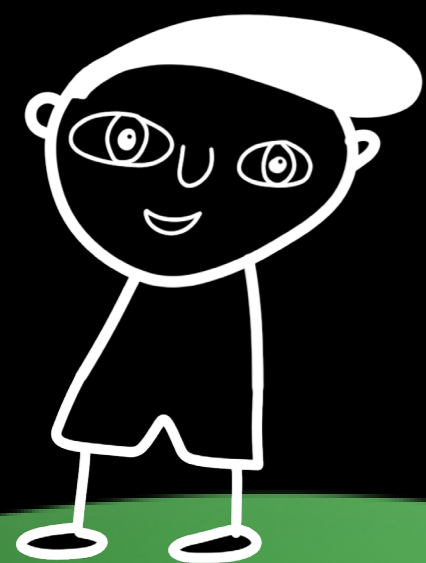


Durham  
University

A digital footprint leaves a trail of places, activities, and games that we have accessed on the internet.





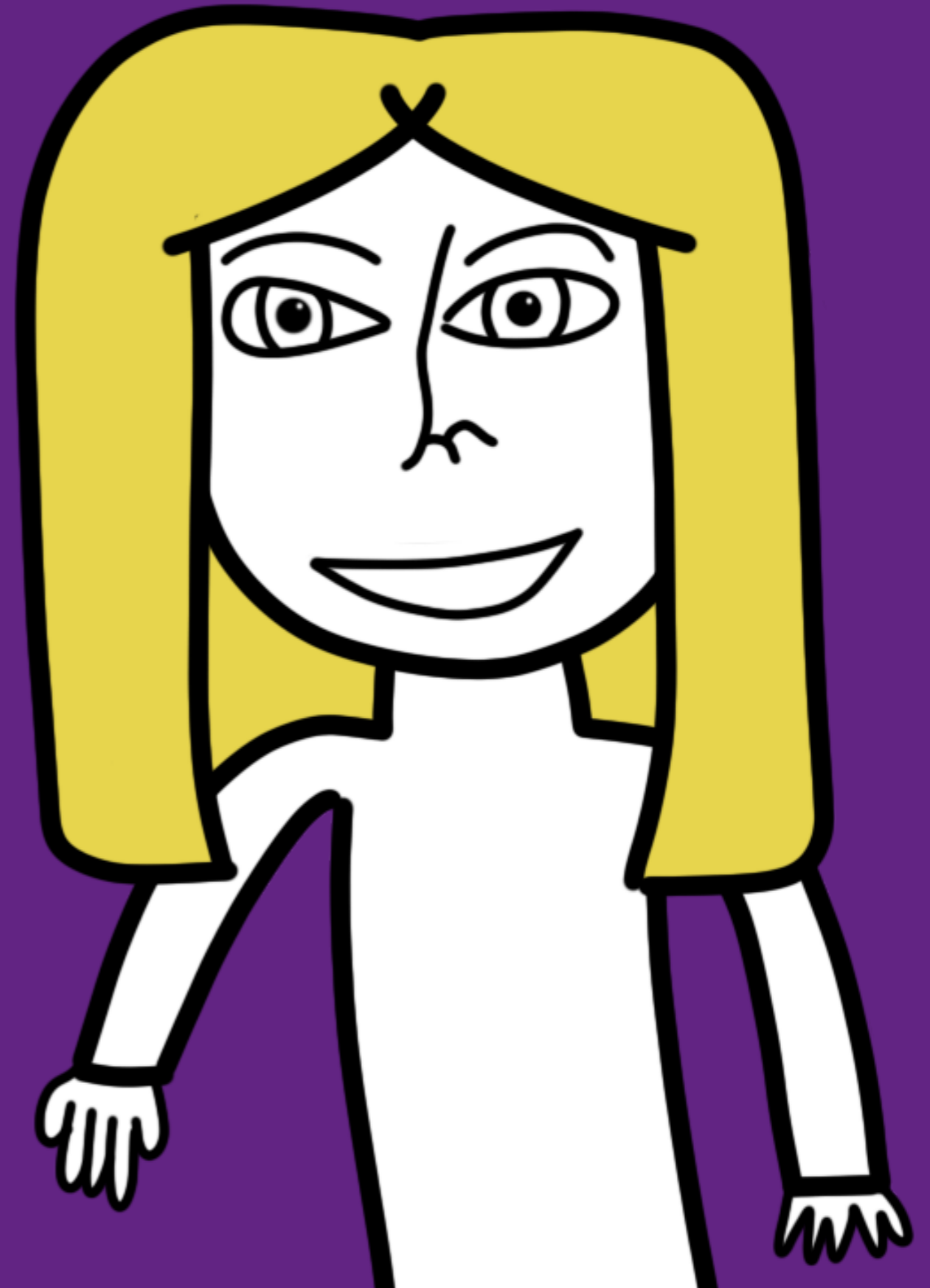


These digital footprints can tell us about the person through their **contributions** and **interactions online**.

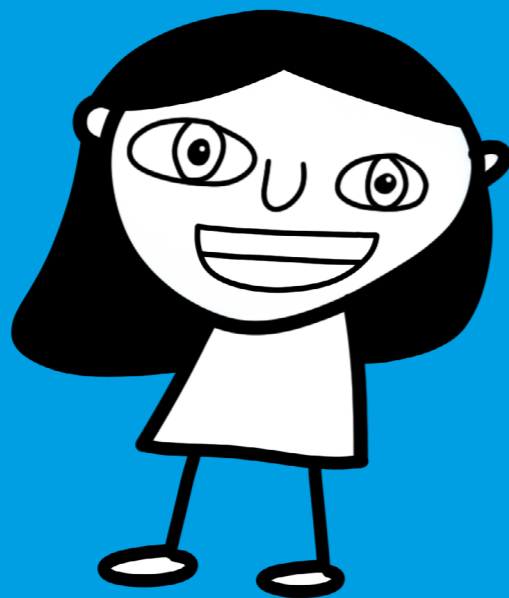
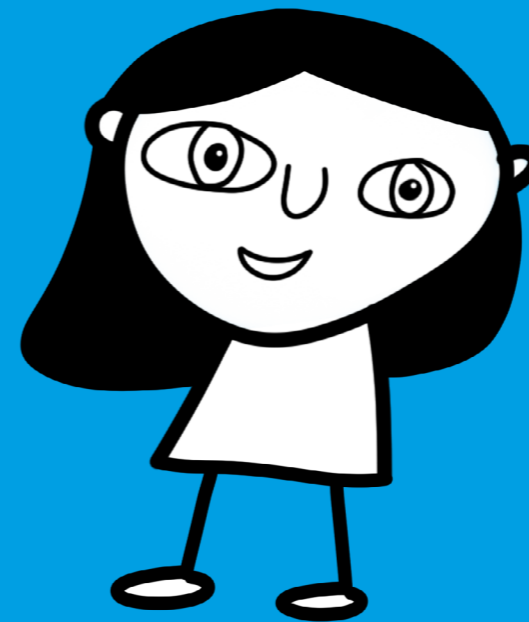
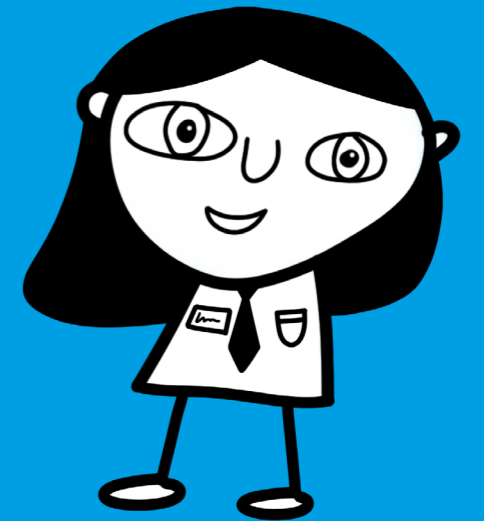
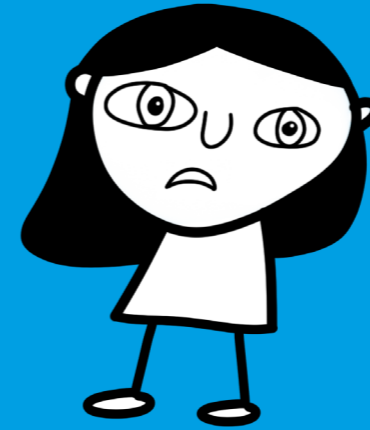
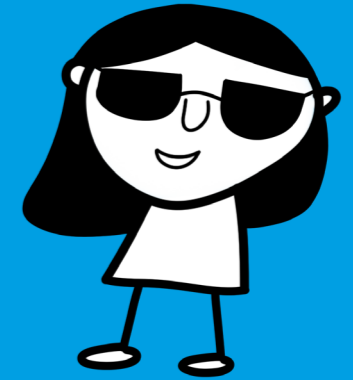
What do your online connections say about you?



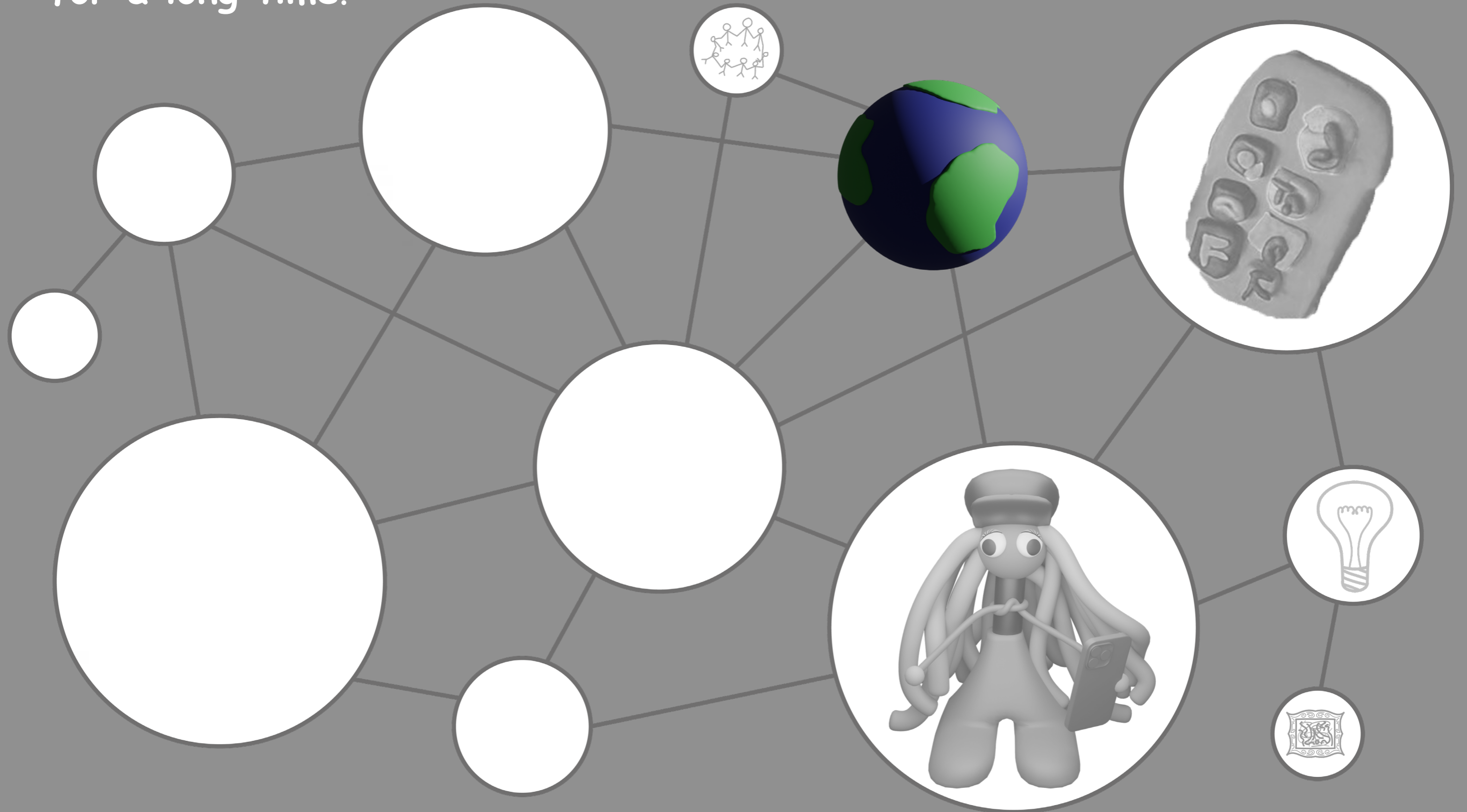
What do you want your online activity to say about you?



Our online posts create a representation of ourselves.

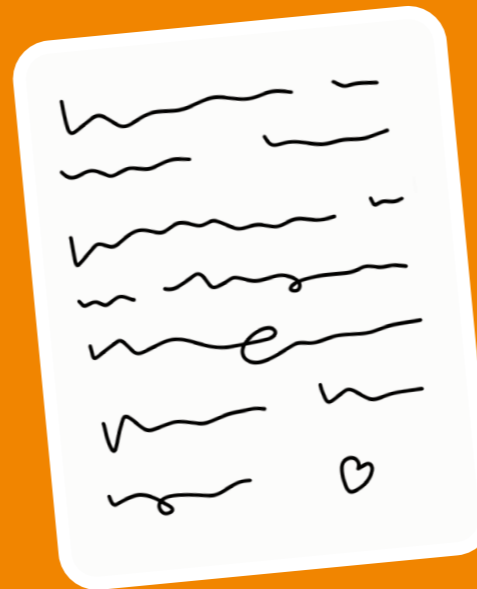
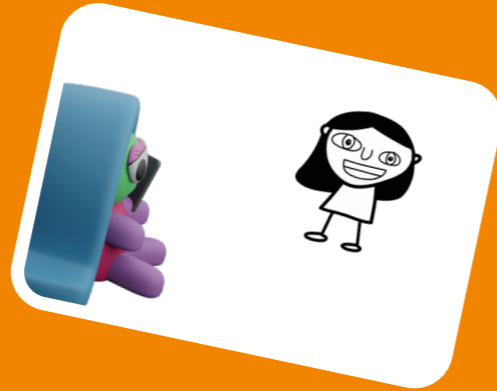
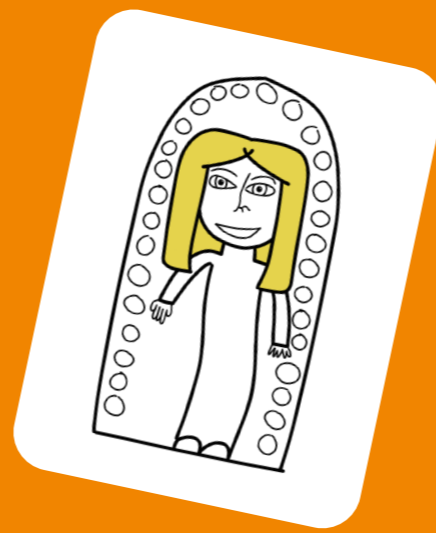


Unlike footprints in the sand, snow, or mud, digital footprints don't automatically disappear and could be there for a long time.





Online what we post and share creates a representation of us, how others may see us.



I  dancing

I  movies

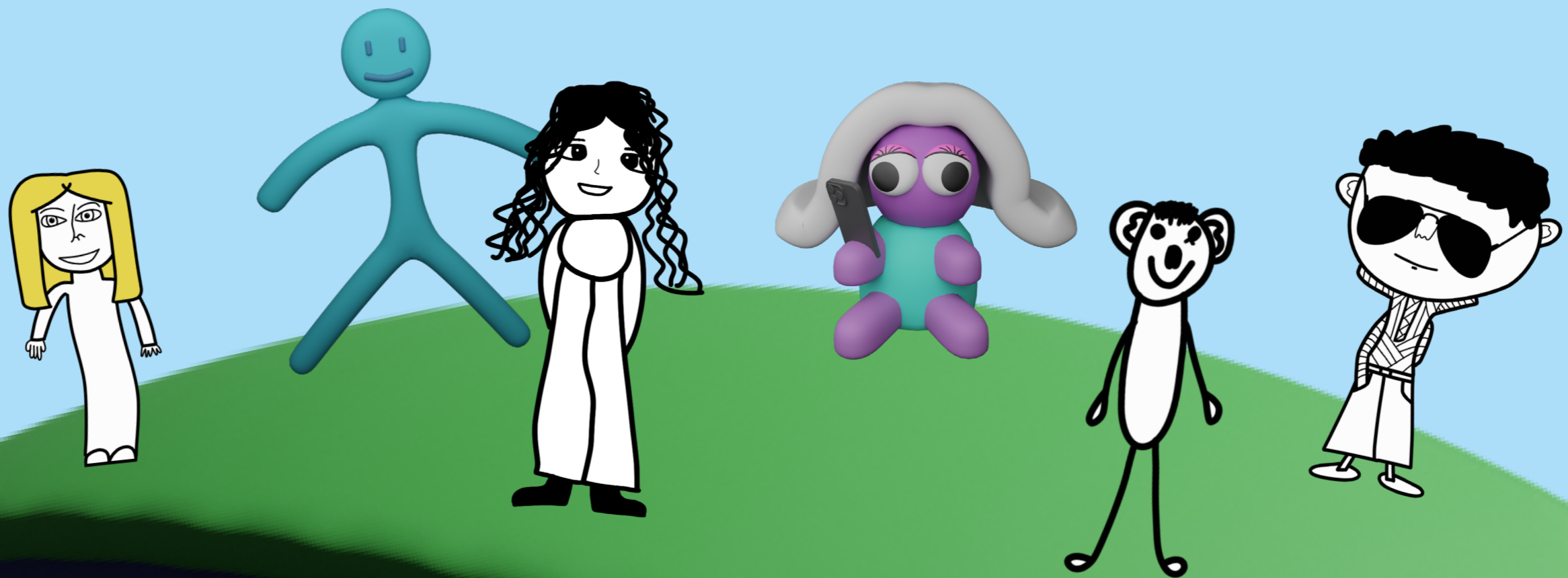
I  making stuff



Online participation offers the opportunity to **express ourselves** and explore who we are.

We are all - adults and young people - responsible for our digital footprints.

Our online participation allows others to form an opinion about us: how people see us.



Top tips for a responsible digital footprint

Tip #1

Always be kind

Tip #2

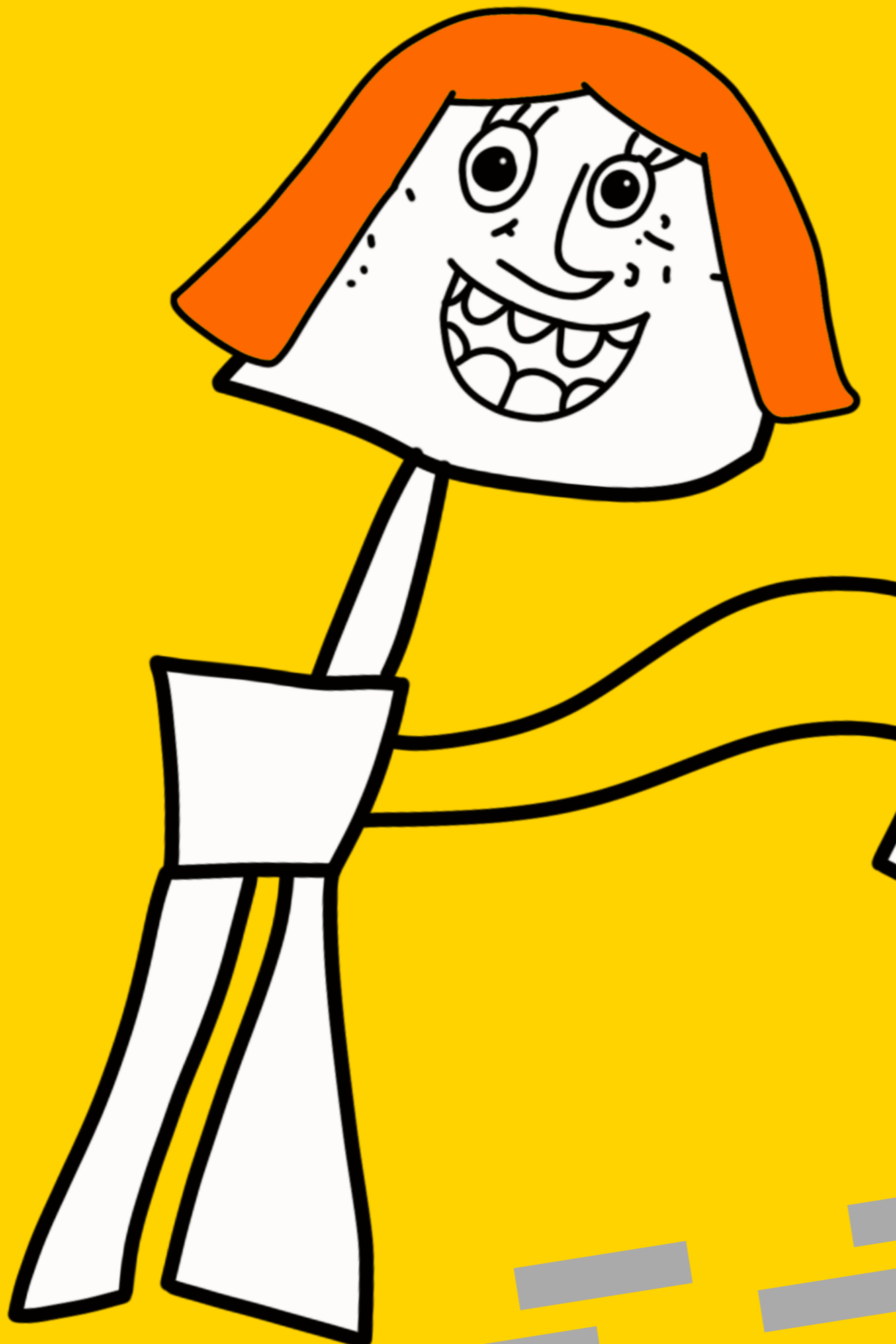
Don't be mean

Tip #3

Be respectful



What does your footprint look like?



## How to use this book:

The key goal of this collection of books is to elicit young people's voice and to prompt dialogue between different parties about the online practices of ourselves and others. A fundamental purpose of this dialogue is to establish some form of mutuality and to develop a shared and informed understanding of practices and experiences.

While it is tempting to create resources or books that suggest specific ways of approaching social media, the main purpose of these books is to prompt discussion and to build space for meaningful conversations.

The work behind these books was organised around the principle that young people have views to share and experiences to reflect on; views and experiences that are worth listening to, pondering about, and engaging in dialogue with. **We propose that the books are used as part of a shared reading experience** – amongst young people and/or between young people and adults - so that the text, as well as the illustrations that accompany it can be considered, debated and processed together.

The purpose of these books does not differ substantially from other resources available that aim to encourage young people to adopt an ethical conduct online, but the methods we are encouraging try to be distinctive. We have opted to organise the books around statements, questions and sometimes provocations as motifs for discussion. **The texts reflect affirmations, probes and conversations** we had with young people regarding their knowledge and use of social media, and now we hope they can **encourage further debate** in this format.

Our approach departs from a commonly used strategy employed in picture books dealing with social media issues, which tend to introduce a fictional character going through a problematic moral issue, with the rest of the narrative leading the character onto a righteous path. The books in this collection do not aim to provide recipes for online conduct or absolute answers; they aim to **create opportunities for young people and adults to think through and reflect on social media issues.**

A final goal of these books is to **equip young people with key language linked to social media.** Book 1 - on Social Media – features boxes with word explanations, while the other two books use words in bold to signal the importance of such language. Bringing into focus vocabulary associated with social media practices is another strategy to **prompt thinking and debate** in this area, and to give young people a language through which they can meaningfully articulate their views and contribute to development of a shared understanding.

We are keen to learn how the books are used: both as suggested and/or how they have been adapted to meet particular needs, settings or preferences. If you would like to keep in touch, propose further projects and collaborations, or translate the books into other languages, please contact: [cristina.costa @ durham.ac.uk](mailto:cristina.costa@durham.ac.uk) without the spaces.

Free copies of the books and additional resources are available at:

<https://tinyurl.com/SMpicturebooks>

“These seemingly simple yet vibrantly presented books create a set of resources that enable children to reflect in depth on what it means to be part of an online world. Through simple statements and questions children are prompted to consider how they access and use online tools, to think about their purpose and to recognise the essential need to be making careful and considered choices about when and how they interact in digital spaces. Clear and concise the important messages contained in these books are ones that children need to discuss and interrogate so that they can make the decisions they need to keep them safe online. Used as a stimulus for conversation these books offer the potential for rich and probing dialogue to enable children to effectively regulate their own digital lives.”

Jane Kennedy, Lead Advisor Professional Learning & Commercial Engagement, Education Durham, Durham County Council

“These playful, colourful and energetically illustrated books capture the immediacy of youthful creative expression demonstrating the important role that art can play in helping young people come together to explore challenging topics and differing views. Tackling themes of social media awareness, digital privacy and safety, this short series provides an important platform for young readers to think about these topics with creativity and imagination.”

Dr John Hammersley, Art and Design Educator, University of Leeds

“Excellent books offering age-appropriate opportunities for discussion and reflection in the classroom and beyond. Simple but powerful illustrations which will attract interest, and prompt thinking.”

Dr Haroula Stathopoulou, Programme Co-Director DPsych Counselling Psychology, City St. George's, University of London

“The books as a whole set the stage for young readers to not only consider how they engage with social media but also to ask deeper questions about their online safety, self-presentation and the lasting impact of their digital actions. These books also serve as a useful tool for fostering conversations about the digital realm, offering young people a platform to express their ideas, concerns, and thoughts on the rights, responsibilities, benefits, and risks of navigating online spaces. The vibrant illustrations further enhance the books, celebrating the young co-authors' contributions and giving them a sense of ownership over the content. Crucially, the books acknowledge that young people have the agency to make informed and responsible decisions when given the right information. This marks a shift from the more traditional, moralistic approaches that 'guide' young people without leaving space for exploration and dialogue.”

George Sfougaras, artist and educator



**Research  
England**