

Digital piracy (a worksheet)

Activity 1

Discuss the questions with your partner.



1. Do you think digital piracy is wrong?
2. If yes, why do so many people download content without paying for it?
3. How does digital piracy affect the entertainment industry and authors?
4. How is digital piracy different from borrowing something from a friend or a library?
5. Is there a moral difference between downloading an illegal video or just watching it on YouTube?
6. Is it OK to torrent a book if it's the only way to get it and you can't reimburse the author anyway?
7. Why is downloading a pirated copy condemned as stealing from the author, but not buying a second hand book?

Activity 2

Read the article by Cheryl Koevoet.

Based on what you've read, prepare 5 questions for your partner.

I spent three long years penning a novel that had been simmering and maturing in my mind for more than 20 years. As a wife and mother of four with a full-time job, I worked hard, I mean HARD in the weekends and evenings (long after everyone was asleep) writing, re-writing, proofing and editing the story that was to become my debut novel.

In my regular day job, I earn roughly \$100 a day. If I were to translate that same hourly rate into the time I spent writing that novel, I probably could have earned somewhere between \$280,000 and \$350,000. A year later, after I had queried hundreds of over-committed literary agents with

no luck, I made the tough decision to self-publish. I spent more than \$10,000 on publishing costs, cover design, editing and proofreading, marketing -- even giving away free copies in the hopes that people would read it in exchange for an honest review on sites like Goodreads and Amazon.

Then, wonder of wonders, people started to buy it and royalty payments amounting to nickels and dimes began to trickle in. (My publisher took 94% of the profits and I got less than 6%.) But at least my book was selling!! I was ecstatic that reviews were starting to come in as well, the overwhelming majority of them being extremely positive. I was happy and all was right with the world.

Until I googled the title of my book.

Less than a month after my cherished debut novel's release, pirated copies were already out there, searchable through Google and being offered for free for anyone who wanted them. (The Kindle version was selling for \$3.99 on Amazon -- apparently an obscene amount for the pirates.) I was devastated and angry. I felt robbed and violated. And all I could think of how unfair it was, all the thousands of hours I had poured into my book to get it just right. I informed my publisher right away who proceeded to tell me that, as a self-published author and rights-holder, it was my responsibility to go after the people who were doing this. After all the money I had shelled out to the publisher to get the book produced, I did not receive this news with a joyful spirit.

Going after the perpetrators became a full-time job -- I had to thoroughly research how one goes about reporting instances of DMCA copyrights abuse, digging up the email addresses of these people stealing my books by searching mazes of server proxies and torrent sites, costing hours of precious time I would have rather spent with my family. In the end, I finally gave up. For every 20 that were reported and dealt with, another 40 new ones would pop up to take their place. I decided my time would be better spent writing new stories and tried to forget how violated I felt each time a new "free e-book download" link of my book would appear. I eventually became the proverbial sadder but wiser girl who, through it all, managed to gain a wealth of publishing experience with just a smidgen of bitterness. Thankfully, it wasn't enough to ruin my otherwise positive outlook on life. And can you guess what would probably give me the most joy that I could imagine as a published author? Yep. To find an actual, physical copy of my book on the sale rack of a used bookstore.

Source: <https://www.quora.com/Why-is-downloading-a-pirated-copy-of-a-book-condemned-as-stealing-from-the-author-but-not-buying-a-second-hand-book>

Activity 3

Have a look at these arguments for digital piracy. With your partner think of a counterargument for each of them.

- 1. I wouldn't have bought that book in a shop. I only downloaded it because it was free. So the author hasn't really lost a sale.*
- 2. Digital books cost too much. If they were cheaper, more people would buy them legitimately.*
- 3. Writers earn so much. Bet Dan Brown wouldn't notice if I just downloaded a copy.*

4. Surely the loss is to the giant publishing corporations, not to the authors themselves.
5. I want to make sure I like a book before I buy it. I download books onto my e-reader, and if I like them, then I buy them legitimately. If not, I delete the book and move on. Why buy something you might not enjoy?
6. Isn't downloading a book online just the same as borrowing a book from the library, or from a friend? Either way, you don't pay for the book.
7. Authors will have to change with the times. It worked for the music industry.
8. Downloading stuff is so easy. And everyone does it.

Activity 4

Match the counterarguments with ideas from the previous activity.

- A.** Yes, books are expensive. But when you buy a book, you're not just buying paper and binding. And when you buy an e-book, you're not just buying pixels. You are buying the expertise of editors, copy-editors, proofreaders and a whole army of professionals – not to mention the author and the author's agent – all of whom work hard and deserve to make a living. The price of the book includes all this.
- B.** Downloading a book illegally means robbing the author of a sale. And if an author doesn't make enough sales, then they will get dumped by their publishers. Basically, pirating books puts authors out of business. And not all publishers are giants. Lots of small publishers have already gone under because they simply can't compete.
- C.** You are still taking something without paying for it. This is like stealing an expensive bottle of champagne, and saying to the arresting officer: "Obviously, if I'd been paying for this, I would have chosen a cheaper brand." Theft isn't the same as getting stuff free.
- D.** The book has been paid for. What's more, the author gets a small, (but for some, quite important) fee for every time a book is taken out. E-theft hurts authors and publishers, but it also hurts our libraries, which exist to allow people to read books for free, without hurting anyone.
- E.** Like authors, a lot of musicians struggle to survive. But bands make money through touring and merchandising. Authors can't do that.
- F.** Most authors don't earn enough to make a proper living. Many have to take secondary jobs just to make ends meet. Sure, some authors make a lot of money, but they are the exceptions. Most just can't afford to lose the thousands of sales that are being lost right now through e-book theft.
- G.** You don't steal a bar of chocolate, taste it and then go back and pay for it afterwards. Every purchase is a risk. Take the risk, or do without. Or borrow the book from a library.
- H.** There are plenty of decent people out there. The question is: are you one of them?

Adapted from "[A Few Words About Piracy](#)" by Joanne Harris

Activity 5

Choose one of the opinions and debate with your partner.

Opinion A: Freedom of access to information benefits everyone.

Opinion B: An eBook, a program or a film is a luxury, not a right and deserves to be paid for.

