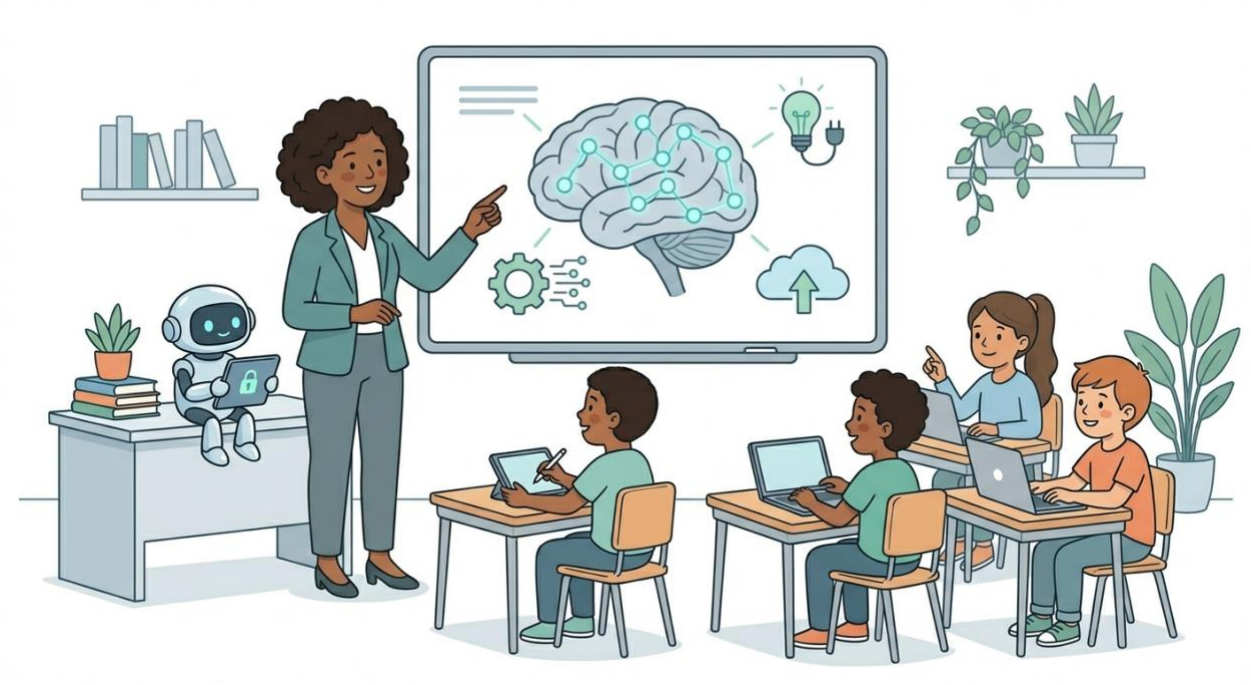

AI for Your Young Learners

Teacher's Guide to Safe, Ethical, and Effective AI Use in K-12 Classrooms

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www.educatorstecnology.com

Educators Technology

Introduction

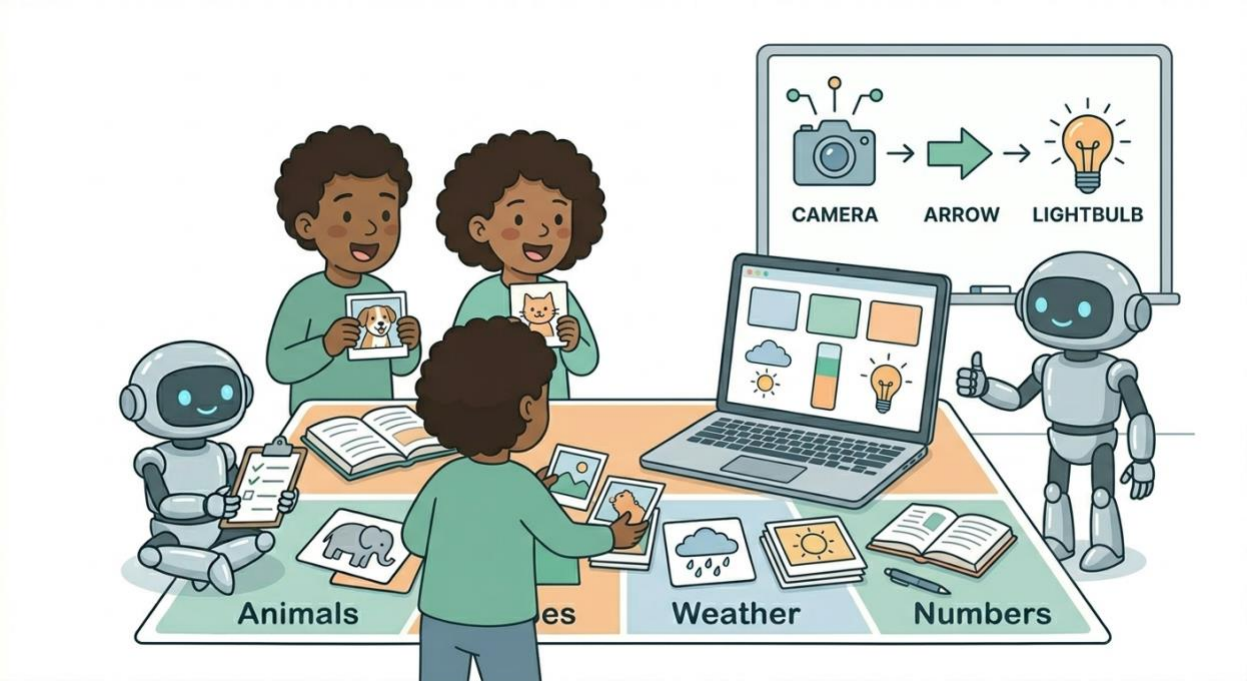
When it comes to using AI with younger kids, especially in primary school, I'm a late arriver. I've been writing about AI integration since ChatGPT launched in November 2022, and I've been blogging about edtech since 2011 through Educators Technology. But if I'm being straightforward about it, my AI work has always centered on teachers, researchers, and adult learners. That's the world I know best, and that's where most of my writing and research has lived.

Teachers and school leaders have asked me many times over the past couple of years for recommendations and resources on using AI with kids. I'd share individual tools or point them to a framework I trusted, but I never had one dedicated resource to hand over, something that pulled together the best of what's out there in a way that's practical and organized. I kept meaning to build it. I kept not building it.

Now that AI is woven into nearly every tool students interact with, from the apps on their school-issued tablets to the platforms they use for homework, I thought it was time to finally include younger learners in the resources I create. This isn't a space I can stay on the sidelines of anymore. If I'm going to advocate for responsible AI integration in education, that advocacy has to include the youngest learners in our classrooms, not just the adults.

To that end, I've compiled this guide: a curated collection of trusted, vetted resources that I think can add real value to anyone working with kids in AI-enabled learning environments, whether you're a classroom teacher, a school leader, or a parent trying

to make sense of all this. I organized the resources into seven categories: frameworks and guidelines, curriculum and lesson plans, AI tools designed for student safety, professional development, family and parent resources, data privacy and legal compliance, and advocacy organizations. I also included 14 practical tips for introducing AI safely and effectively at every grade level.



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AI and Kids: Resources for Teachers

Below is a curated collection of practical resources available for teachers who want to use AI with kids. These resources are organized into seven categories: frameworks and guidelines, curriculum and lesson plans, AI tools designed for student safety, professional development, family and parent resources, data privacy and legal compliance, and advocacy organizations.

I. Frameworks and Guidelines

These are the big-picture documents that help schools and districts think through AI policy, age-appropriate implementation, and alignment with educational standards. Use these when you need to understand the landscape or build a case for responsible AI adoption.

1. TeachAI – AI Guidance for Schools Toolkit

Led by Code.org, ISTE, Khan Academy, ETS, and the World Economic Forum. Provides seven principles for developing AI guidance in K-12, sample policy language, downloadable resources for staff, parents, and students, and real-world guidance examples from districts and states worldwide.

https://www.teachai.org/toolkit

2. UNICEF Guidance on AI and Children 3.0 (December 2025)

The most comprehensive international framework for AI and children. Built on three pillars from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child: Protection, Provision, and Participation. Covers 10 core requirements for making AI systems safe, inclusive, and supportive of child development. Includes a practical implementation checklist.

https://www.unicef.org/innocenti/reports/policy-guidance-ai-children

3. AI4K12 – Five Big Ideas in AI

A national framework developed by AAAI and CSTA for structuring AI education across K-12. Organized around five big ideas: Perception, Representation and Reasoning, Learning, Natural Interaction, and Societal Impact. Guidelines are broken into grade bands (K-2, 3-5, 6-8, 9-12) with curated resources for each.

https://ai4k12.org/

4. U.S. Department of Education AI Guidance (2025)

Federal guidance on AI use in schools covering safe implementation, privacy considerations, and supplemental priorities for education funding related to AI.

https://www.ed.gov/about/news/press-release/us-department-of-education-issues-guidance-artificial-intelligence-use-schools-proposes-additional-supplemental-priority

5. State AI Guidance Tracker (AI for Education)

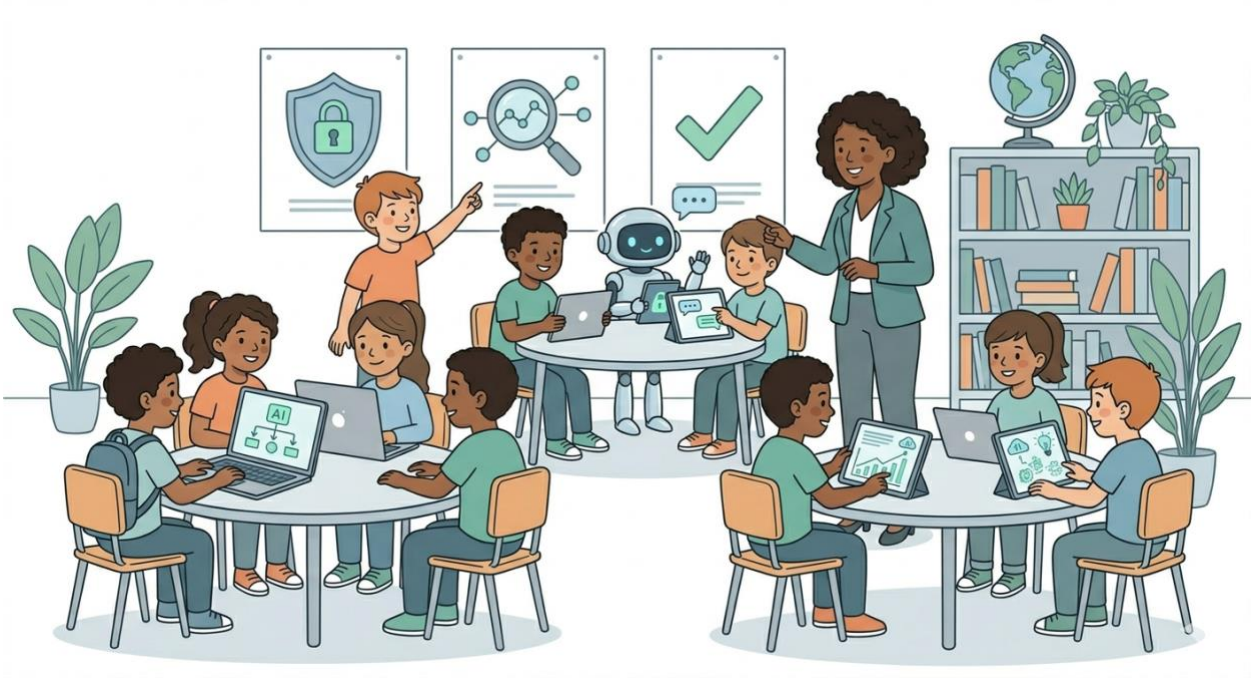
A live tracker showing which U.S. states have published AI guidance for K-12 education (28+ states as of mid-2025). Useful for seeing what other jurisdictions are doing and borrowing language for your own school or district context.

https://www.aiforeducation.io/ai-resources/state-ai-guidance

6. World Economic Forum – 7 Principles for Responsible AI in Education

A concise set of principles developed with TeachAI for guiding AI adoption in schools worldwide. Good starting point for schools drafting their first AI policy.

https://www.weforum.org/stories/2024/01/ai-guidance-school-responsible-use-in-education/



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II. Curriculum and Lesson Plans

Ready-to-use materials for teaching AI literacy, digital citizenship, and responsible AI use. These range from unplugged activities for young children to structured AI coding projects for older students.

7. Day of AI (MIT RAISE)

Free, hands-on AI literacy curriculum for K-12 developed by MIT. Lessons cover "What is AI?", generative AI, ethics, bias, and privacy. Hundreds of free professional development workshops during the 2025-26 school year. Part of the "Responsible AI

for America's Youth" campaign. Lessons are flexible and don't require a computer science background to teach.

https://dayofai.org/

8. ISTE AI Lessons and Resources

Hands-on activities ranging from unplugged exercises to chatbot building and simple video games. Specialized guides for elementary school, secondary school, elective courses, and computer science classes, plus a dedicated guide on AI ethics. Available in English, Spanish, and Arabic.

https://iste.org/ai-lessons

9. ISTE Guide on Ethics and AI for the Classroom

A downloadable PDF guide specifically focused on teaching AI ethics through hands-on projects. Useful as a standalone resource or companion to ISTE's broader AI lesson collection.

https://cdn.iste.org/www-root/2021-10/AI%20Ethics%20Guide%20EN.pdf

10. Google Be Internet Awesome AI Literacy Guide

Supplementary curriculum for grades 2-8 covering machine learning, data, and algorithms through age-appropriate lesson plans and classroom activities. Part of Google's $150M+ investment in AI literacy.

https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en_us/educators

11. Common Sense Education – Digital Citizenship Curriculum

Free, research-backed lesson plans covering cyberbullying, online safety, privacy, media literacy, and now AI literacy. Teacher-facing content with slides, handouts, and

quizzes. The updated curriculum weaves AI literacy through existing digital citizenship topics.

https://www.commonsense.org/education/digital-citizenship

12. Microsoft Minecraft Education CyberSafe Series

K-12 curriculum teaching online safety, digital awareness, and cybersecurity through immersive Minecraft experiences. The newest module, "Bad Connection?", is designed for ages 11-14 and covers AI-aware digital citizenship through gameplay.

https://www.microsoft.com/en-us/education/blog/2026/02/safer-internet-day-2026-helping-students-become-ai%E2%80%91aware-safe-and-smart-online/

13. Nearpod Digital Citizenship Library

Interactive lessons, assessments, and videos covering AI education, cyberbullying, media balance, digital footprint, and online privacy. Part of their 21st Century Readiness Program.

https://nearpod.com/blog/digital-citizenship-week-free-lessons/

14. BrainPOP Digital Citizenship Unit

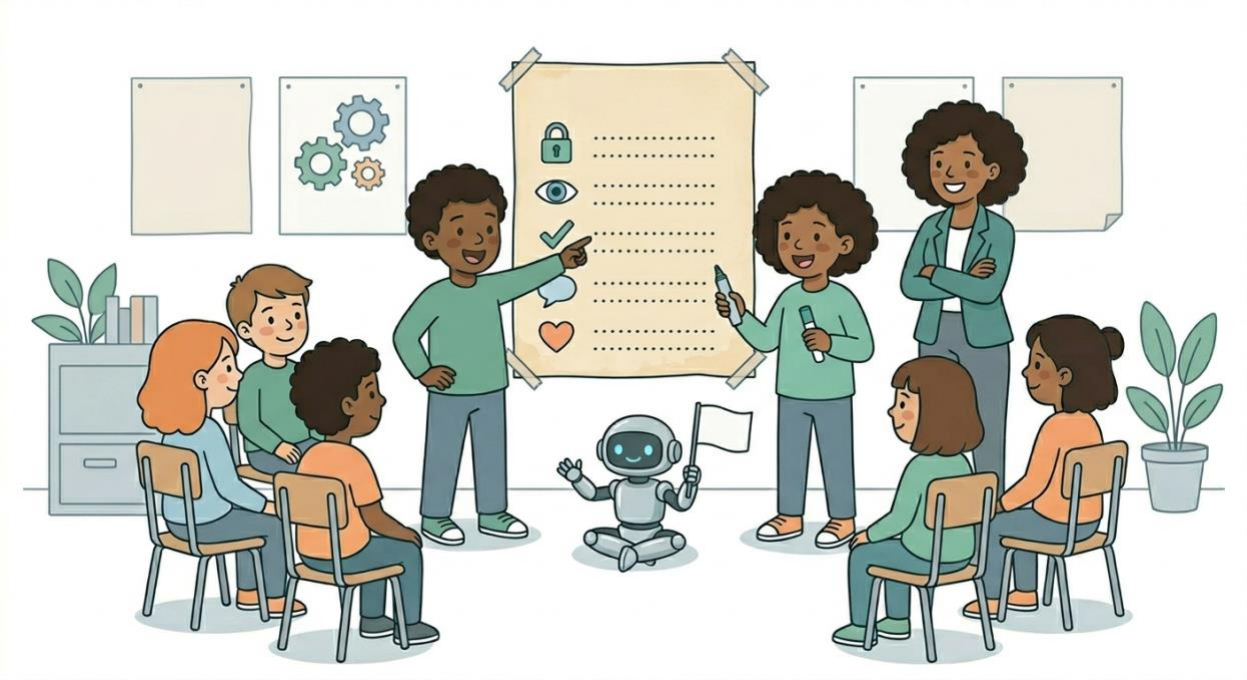
Over 20 topics across K-8 including cyberbullying, copyright, social media, and peer pressure, with AI literacy components being added to the curriculum.

https://www.brainpop.com/classroom-solutions/digital-citizenship

15. Cyber Civics

Standards-aligned, CIPA-compliant curriculum for grades 4-8 with 130+ scaffolded lessons on digital citizenship. Useful for schools that want a structured, year-long program covering the full spectrum of digital life.

https://www.cybercivics.com/



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III. AI Tools Designed for Student Safety

These platforms are specifically built for educational use, with privacy protections, teacher controls, and age-appropriate safeguards that general-purpose AI tools don't offer.

16. SchoolAI

A student-facing AI platform where teachers control what students can and can't do. Includes built-in safety alerts for bullying, abuse, or neglect. Teachers monitor all conversations via a private dashboard. Student data is never saved or used to train models. Supports AI tutoring, pulse checks, bellringers, and exit tickets.

https://schoolai.com/

17. Khan Academy Khanmigo

AI tutor and teaching assistant built on GPT-4 with a "walled garden" approach. Guides students to find answers themselves rather than giving direct answers. Safety features include moderation technology, daily interaction limits, parent visibility into chats, and flagged-content alerts. Free for teachers, with student and parent versions available.

https://www.khanmigo.ai

18. Khan Academy's Framework for Responsible AI in Education

Khan Academy's published framework explaining their approach to safety, data practices, and responsible AI design for educational tools. Useful as a model for evaluating other AI tools.

https://blog.khanacademy.org/khan-academys-framework-for-responsible-ai-in-education/

IV. Professional Development for Teachers

Courses, webinars, and training programs to build teacher confidence and competence with AI in education.

19. AI for Education (aiforeducation.io)

Free resource library, self-paced online course covering intro to AI, prompt engineering, ethical implications, and introducing students to AI. Weekly webinars and a curated prompt library for educators. Works directly with state education departments on AI guidance frameworks.

https://www.aiforeducation.io

20. ISTE+ASCD Leading in the Age of AI PD Programs

The largest provider of AI professional development for educators. Courses cover academic integrity risks, overreliance, privacy, bias, equity, misinformation, and cybersecurity. Also offers the Microsoft Elevate for Educators Credential aligned to the AI Literacy Framework.

https://iste-ascd.org/ai

21. Google AI Educator Series

Self-paced courses and AI-powered simulations available in 13+ languages. Developed in partnership with ISTE+ASCD.

https://edu.google.com/intl/ALL_us/learning-center/google-ai-educator-series/

22. NEA AI in Education Hub

Professional learning courses, a practical guide for vetting AI tools (evaluating ethics, equity, effectiveness, and security), policy tools, model school board resolutions, and templates for engaging state leaders. Includes the first-ever NEA policy statement on AI in education.

https://www.nea.org/ai

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Family and Parent Resources

The following is a curated collection of resources to share with families so they can support responsible AI use at home and understand what's happening in the classroom.

23. Common Sense Media – Parents' Ultimate Guide to Generative AI

Covers what parents need to know about kids using ChatGPT and similar tools, written in plain, accessible language for non-technical audiences.

https://www.commonsensemedia.org/articles/parents-ultimate-guide-to-generative-ai

24. Common Sense Media + Day of AI Family Toolkits

Three toolkits designed for parent education: "What is AI for Families," "Talking to Kids About AI: Privacy, Fairness, and Responsibility" (November 2025), and "Using

AI Wisely for School Success" (February 2026). Free and ready to distribute at parent nights or through school newsletters.

https://dayofai.org/news/day-of-ai-and-common-sense-media-launch-essential-toolkit-for-parents-and-families-talking-to-kids-about-ai-privacy-fairness-and-responsibility

25. SafeAI.School

Free resources grounded in UNICEF, EU AI Act, and UNESCO frameworks. Includes a family charter, conversation scripts, interactive quizzes, and 3 short videos made directly for kids aged 8-15. Educates families about their rights regarding AI use in schools.

https://safeai.school/

26. Understood.org – How to Teach Students to Use AI Responsibly

A guide for both families and educators. Especially useful for students with learning differences, covering how AI can support executive function, planning, and organization. Emphasizes privacy protection, modeling responsible AI use, and consistent rules between home and classroom.

https://www.understood.org/en/articles/ai-responsible-use-students

27. Internet Matters – Using AI Safely

UK-based organization with practical guidance for parents on how children interact with AI, covering safety, privacy, and age-appropriate use. Good for schools with international families or those looking for a non-U.S. perspective.

https://www.internetmatters.org/tech-and-kids-digital-futures/using-artificial-intelligence-safely/

Data Privacy and Legal Compliance

Guides for understanding COPPA, FERPA, and student data protection when using AI tools in schools.

28. SchoolAI – FERPA and COPPA Compliance Guide for School AI

Practical guide for understanding how FERPA and COPPA apply to AI tools in schools, including vendor agreements, consent requirements, and data governance best practices.

https://schoolai.com/blog/ensuring-ferpa-coppa-compliance-school-ai-infrastructure

29. Student Privacy Compass – EdTech Service Provider's Guide (2025)

An issue brief on how edtech providers (including AI tools) should handle student data. Useful for teachers and administrators vetting new tools and understanding what questions to ask vendors.

https://studentprivacycompass.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/09/2025-EdTech-Guide.pdf

Advocacy and Policy Organizations

Organizations working on AI safety policy for children and publishing ongoing research, toolkits, and policy recommendations.

30. The Safe AI for Children Alliance (SAIFCA)

Works to build safer AI futures for children. Publishes regular newsletters and updates on AI safety policy developments affecting education and child welfare.

https://www.safeaiforchildren.org/

31. Common Sense Media – AI Initiatives

Tracks AI policy developments, publishes research (including a white paper on Generative AI in K-12 Education), and releases toolkits for districts. Their AI Toolkit for School Districts (June 2025) is specifically designed for district-level AI implementation and governance.

https://www.commonsensemedia.org/ai

Tips for Using AI Safely and Effectively with Kids

The following are some helpful and practical tips to help you introduce AI in age-appropriate ways, protect student privacy, build critical thinking, and create classroom cultures where AI becomes a learning tool.

1. Know the Age Rules Before You Pick a Tool

Most mainstream AI tools, including ChatGPT, Gemini, and Copilot, require users to be at least 13 years old. That's a legal requirement under COPPA (Children's Online Privacy Protection Act), which restricts the collection of personal data from children under 13 (SchoolAI, 2025). If you teach elementary students, general-purpose chatbots are off the table unless your school has obtained verifiable parental consent and the tool's terms explicitly allow it.

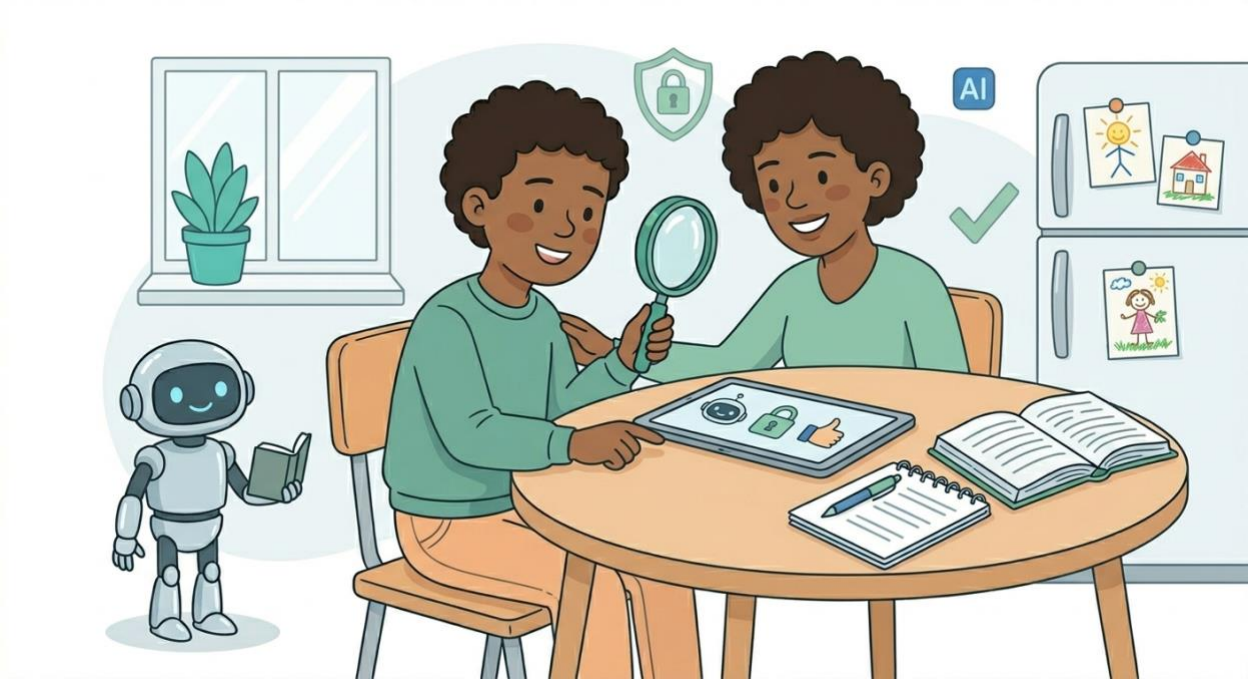
For younger kids, stick to education-specific platforms built with student safety in mind: SchoolAI, Khanmigo, Google's Be Internet Awesome AI Literacy Guide, or Teachable Machine. These tools are designed with guardrails, teacher dashboards, and data protections baked in.

For middle school and up, broader tools can work, but only with clear guidelines and active supervision. Vermont's state guidance recommends no AI chatbot use for PreK–2, curriculum-embedded AI only for grades 3–5, structured education-specific chatbots for grades 6–8, and broader AI fluency for grades 9–12.

2. Never Enter Student Data into a General-Purpose AI Tool

This one is non-negotiable. Don't paste student names, grades, IEP details, behavioral notes, or any personally identifiable information into ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini, or any tool that isn't explicitly approved by your school district for student data. These tools may store inputs, use them for model training, or process them on servers with no FERPA compliance (SchoolAI, 2025).

Use initials or pseudonyms if you're drafting lesson feedback with AI. Better yet, use a tool like SchoolAI or MagicSchool that has direct FERPA and COPPA compliance agreements. The 2025 COPPA amendments shifted the default from opt-out to opt-in consent, which means vendors now need explicit parental permission before using student data for anything beyond the immediate educational purpose (Edutopia, 2025). Know your district's policy, and when in doubt, keep student information off general AI platforms entirely.



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3. Teach Students That AI Gets Things Wrong, Confidently

One of the biggest risks with AI in the classroom isn't that students will use it. It's that they'll trust it without questioning. AI models generate plausible-sounding text by predicting the next word in a sequence. They don't verify facts, check sources, or flag uncertainty. They can fabricate quotes, invent citations, and present completely false information with total confidence (MIT Sloan EdTech, 2025).

Teach students the habit of verification from day one. A useful framework is the Three Source Rule: never accept information from AI unless you can confirm it in at least three independent, credible sources (Project Pals, 2025).

Older students can use the CRAAP Test—Currency, Relevance, Accuracy, Authority, Purpose—to evaluate both AI outputs and the sources they find (Muir, 2025). The

goal is to make students skeptical in the way good researchers are skeptical: not dismissive, but alert.

4. Use AI as a Thinking Partner, Not an Answer Machine

Research on cognitive offloading consistently shows that students who rely heavily on AI for answers perform worse on independent tasks. A 2025 study published in *Frontiers in Psychology* describes this as a "cognitive paradox": AI can enhance learning when used strategically, but it erodes critical thinking when it replaces the student's own reasoning process (Frontiers in Psychology, 2025). The practical move here is to frame AI as a collaborator.

Teach students to avoid using AI for final answers and instead opt for brainstorming, drafting outlines, and generating questions. Harvard's Graduate School of Education recommends thinking about AI across three dimensions: teaching *about* AI (how it works, where it fails), teaching *with* AI (using it as a classroom tool), and teaching *for* AI (building the skills students need to work alongside AI in their futures) (Harvard GSE, 2023).

5. Teach Prompting as a Thinking Skill

Prompting is a skill that maps directly onto the kind of thinking we already value in education: being specific, asking good questions, breaking problems into parts, and iterating based on feedback. When students learn to write better prompts, they're practicing metacognition. A 2024 study in the *International Journal of Educational Technology in Higher Education* identified three interconnected skills for students in the AI era: AI literacy, prompt engineering, and critical thinking. The researchers found that students who learned structured prompting techniques showed stronger analytical engagement with AI outputs (Walter, 2024).

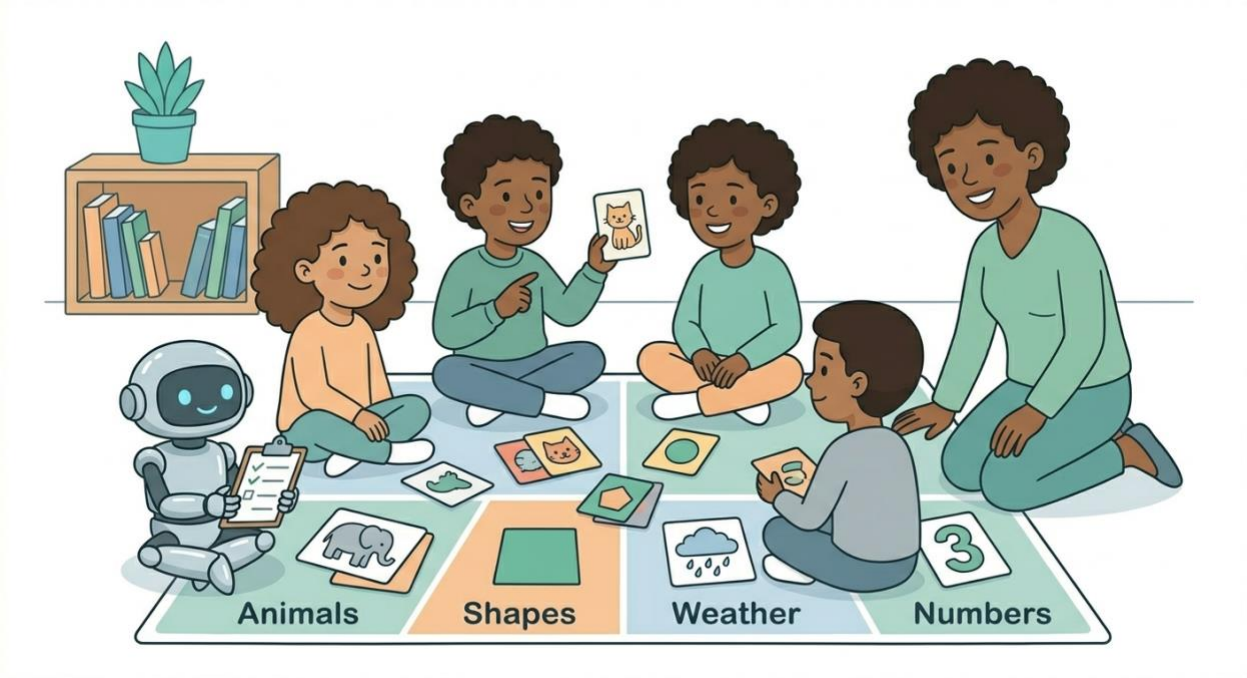
Start simple. Ask students to compare the output of a vague prompt ("tell me about volcanoes") with a specific one ("explain how shield volcanoes form differently from stratovolcanoes, with examples from the Pacific Ring of Fire, written for a 7th grade audience"). The difference is immediately visible, and the lesson writes itself: the quality of what you get from AI depends entirely on the quality of what you ask.

6. Talk About Bias Early and Often

AI models are trained on massive datasets scraped from the internet, which means they absorb every bias present in that data: gender stereotypes, racial biases, cultural blind spots, and historical omissions. Kids actually grasp this quickly because fairness is something they care about deeply. You don't need a computer science background to have this conversation.

Ask students to generate images or text about professionals (doctors, engineers, leaders) and see whose faces and stories show up. Ask AI to write a story about a family and notice what assumptions it makes. The Computer Science Teachers Association recommends "algorithm auditing" activities where teens test AI systems for bias, document what they find, and propose fixes (CSTA, 2025).

For younger students, simpler activities work: design your own "fair robot" and think about what voices, languages, and backgrounds it should understand. The point is to move students from passive consumers of AI to active evaluators.



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7. Co-Create Your Classroom AI Policy with Students

Imposing rules from the top works for fire drills, not for technology that students will use independently for the rest of their lives. A far more effective approach is to co-create your classroom AI policy with your students. The Krause Center for Innovation recommends posing the challenge directly, something like 'Our class will use AI tools this year. What guidelines should we follow to use them ethically and effectively?' (Krause Center, 2025). Give students time in small groups to draft 3 to 5 rules. Then bring the groups together, debate, refine, and vote.

Research shows that students who participate in building their own guidelines develop stronger ownership over ethical behavior and are more likely to follow the rules they helped write (Freiberg, 1999; Guay, 2002). Most student groups independently arrive

at principles around transparency (say when you used AI), verification (check what AI tells you), privacy (don't share personal info), and honesty (don't pass off AI work as your own). The resulting document should be a living agreement, revisited and updated as the class learns more about what AI can and can't do.

8. Match Activities to Developmental Stages

Not all AI activities work for all ages and developmental readiness matters. For PreK through Grade 2, AI learning should be unplugged: sorting games, pattern recognition activities, storytelling about robots and machines, and conversations about how smart devices work (ASCD, 2025). For Grades 3 through 5, introduce curriculum-embedded AI tools with close teacher supervision.

Teachable Machine from Google is excellent here because students train a simple AI model themselves (to recognize images, sounds, or poses) and see exactly how training data affects outcomes. For Grades 6 through 8, structured education-specific chatbots become appropriate. Tools like SchoolAI and Khanmigo give teachers control over what students can access. Introduce prompt design, bias analysis, and fact-checking as explicit skills.

For high school, broader AI fluency development is the goal (Ed Week, 2024). Students can use general-purpose AI tools with clear expectations around attribution, verification, and ethical use.

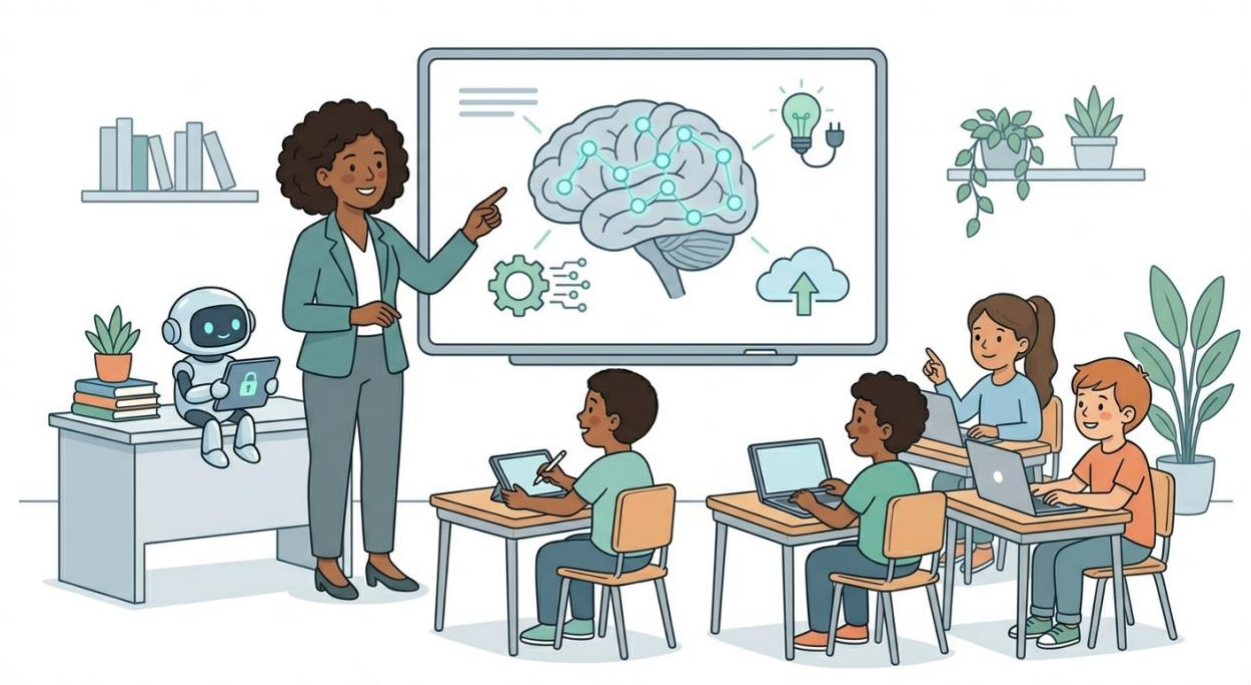
9. Keep Hands-On Activities at the Center

The best AI education doesn't start with a lecture. It starts with something students can build, test, or break. MIT's Day of AI offers free, flexible lesson plans where students build simple AI systems and see the results in real time (Day of AI, 2025).

Google's Teachable Machine lets students train image recognition models with their own photos. Scratch and Tynker include AI-powered coding projects where kids build chatbots and games.

For screen-free options (especially for younger kids), Safe AI Kids has published a collection of 50+ unplugged AI activities covering concepts like machine learning, algorithms, and data patterns using physical materials (Safe AI Kids, 2025). AI treasure hunts, where students find examples of AI in their daily lives (recommendations on Netflix, autocorrect on their phones, facial recognition in photos), make the abstract concrete.

The key principle is this: understanding AI isn't about knowing what large language models are. It's about experiencing how input shapes output, how data affects results, and how decisions get embedded into systems.



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10. Communicate Clearly with Parents and Families

Parents want to know three things: what AI tools their children are using in school, what data those tools collect, and how that data is protected (Stanford Report, 2025). Before introducing any new AI tool, send a clear notification home that includes the tool's name and purpose, what student information it collects, how long data is retained, and whether it's shared with third parties. Common Sense Media and Day of AI have published a series of family toolkits specifically designed for parent education: "What is AI for Families," "Talking to Kids About AI: Privacy, Fairness, and Responsibility," and "Using AI Wisely for School Success" (Day of AI & Common Sense Media, 2025–2026).

SafeAI.School offers a Family AI Charter template, conversation scripts, and short videos made directly for children aged 8 to 15 (SafeAI.School, n.d.). If your school hosts parent nights, AI literacy is one of the most relevant topics you could cover right now.

11. Model the Behavior You Want to See

Kids learn more from watching how you use AI than from anything you say about it. If you use AI to help plan a lesson, say so. If you generated discussion questions with a chatbot and then edited them, tell the class. If AI gave you something wrong and you caught it, share that story too.

Understood.org's guide for educators emphasizes that children model the AI usage they observe from adults (Understood.org, 2025). Transparency about your own process, including mistakes and adjustments, teaches students that AI is a tool that

requires judgment, not a magic oracle. This also normalizes the idea that using AI is fine and that being honest about it is the standard.

12. Build AI Literacy Into Everything, Not as a One-Off Lesson

AI literacy isn't a unit you teach in October and forget about. It's a layer that runs through every subject. When students research a history topic, talk about how AI might generate convincing but inaccurate historical claims. When they write creative stories, explore how AI handles character development versus how a human writer would. When they analyze data in science class, compare AI-generated analysis with their own observations.

The Global Partnership for Education argues that critical thinking in the age of AI is a "survival skill" that needs to be taught across all subjects, not isolated in a tech class (GPE, 2025). ISTE's approach aligns: their AI literacy resources are designed to integrate into existing curricula, not replace them (ISTE, n.d.). Common Sense Education's updated digital citizenship curriculum now weaves AI literacy through lessons on media literacy, online safety, and privacy (Common Sense Education, 2025).

13. Set Boundaries That Protect Without Blocking

Banning AI doesn't work. Students will use it outside school whether teachers allow it in class or not, and a ban sends the message that AI is something to hide. The smarter move is to set clear, purpose-driven boundaries. Decide which tasks benefit from AI collaboration (brainstorming, revision, research scaffolding) and which ones don't (first-draft writing when the goal is voice development, exams testing independent knowledge, creative work where originality is the point).

Be specific. "You may use AI to generate three alternative thesis statements, but your final thesis must be your own and you must explain why you chose it" is a boundary that teaches. "Don't use AI" is a rule that students will break silently. Child Trends' five lessons for preparing schools for AI emphasize that effective policies give students clear, task-specific guidance, not blanket prohibitions (Child Trends, 2025). SchoolAI and Khanmigo are particularly useful here because teachers control what students can access, see every conversation, and get alerts for safety concerns.

14. Stay Updated

AI capabilities, policies, and safety standards are evolving faster than any other area in education technology. What was cutting-edge in 2024 is baseline in 2026. A tool that was safe last semester may have changed its data practices. A policy your state adopted in 2025 may already have been updated. Build a habit of checking in regularly with trusted sources.

AI for Education runs weekly webinars and maintains a free resource library (AI for Education, 2025). ISTE+ASCD offers ongoing professional development through the Google AI Educator Series (ISTE+ASCD, n.d.). The NEA's AI in Education Hub provides policy updates, vetting guides, and model school board resolutions (NEA, 2025).

TeachAI's toolkit is regularly updated with new sample guidance from states and districts around the world (TeachAI, 2024). You don't need to become an AI expert. You need to be a confident, informed adult who can guide students through technology that will shape their academic, professional, and personal lives.

About the Author

Med Kharbach, PhD, is an educator, researcher, and the editor of Educators Technology (educatorstechnology.com). A former K-12 teacher with nearly two decades of teaching experience across K-12 and higher education, Med currently serves as an Instructor at Mount Saint Vincent University, where he teaches Critical Theory and Education at the graduate level. He is the author of Teaching with AI: Practical Strategies to Integrate AI in The Classroom, and co-author of The AI Turn in Academic Research and The BEARA Framework for Pedagogical Integration with Dr. Jonathan Woodworth. His work focuses on AI literacy, assessment in the age of AI, and practical classroom applications of educational technology. You can read more about Med and his research at medkharbach.com.

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