

It's a Wired World

Teacher's Guide, Grades 6-8

Introduction

It's a Wired World gives students hands-on activities about electric circuits that teach them the basic principles of electrical safety. It also includes a page of natural gas safety tips. This booklet is appropriate for upper elementary and middle school students. **Please encourage students to take the booklet home and share it with their families, especially the home electric and gas safety inspection on the back cover.**

It's a Wired World has been formatted for use in classrooms or informal settings by cooperative learning groups of four to six students. However, the activities can easily be presented by the teacher or leader or by one small student group as a demonstration. Activities can also be done by students individually.

Materials for each activity are listed. Ideally, each small group would have its own set of materials. However, quantities in the materials list are given for a single group or person. Simply multiply by the number of groups to find how much you will need for a full class.

Following are objectives, background information, teaching strategies, and suggested assessment for each segment of the booklet. We have included a reproducible quiz at the end as a summary of learning.

PAGES 2-3

Main Ideas

Page 2: Electricity is part of our everyday lives. There are safety hazards associated with the equipment that brings it to us.

Page 3: Electricity travels in a closed path called a circuit.

Objectives

Students will

- Identify locations of potential danger in the circuit that runs from power plant to home or school and back.
- Build a circuit.
- Compare and contrast the circuit they built with the path of electricity from the power plant to home or school.

Materials

Give each group

- 1 D-cell battery
- 1 flashlight bulb
- 1½ feet of 22-gauge wire
- tape
- paper clips

What You Need to Know

Electricity only travels in a closed loop called a circuit. When you turn on a light or appliance, you are closing a circuit. Electricity will leave a circuit to take the easiest path to the ground. Safety hazards occur anywhere a person could come into contact with electrical lines or equipment. As long as a person is touching the ground (or

something in contact with the ground), electricity has the potential to travel through him or her, causing shock, burns, or even death.

Getting It Across

Have students read the information and follow the steps on the page.

Page 2: Ask students to share the potential safety hazards they identify.

Page 3: Ask students to share their successful and unsuccessful circuits.

Did They Get It?

Are students able to

- identify the circuit electricity travels from the power plant to the home and back?
- identify the circuit electricity travels from the battery to the lightbulb and back?

Answers

Page 2: Potential safety hazards include the following: *1. climbing transmission towers or contacting high-voltage lines or overhead distribution lines in your neighborhood with kites or balloons; 2. entering a substation (for example, to retrieve a ball or toy); 3. contacting the service drop to home or school with TV antennas, ladders, long poles, or if the lines come in underground, by digging; climbing trees near power lines; 4. playing on or around a pad-mounted transformer.* Other hazards students may think of include indoor hazards, such as using appliances near water in the bathroom or kitchen; putting fingers or other objects in outlets or toasters; overloading outlets; running cords underneath carpets; unplugging an appliance by pulling the cord instead of the plug.

Page 3: What requirements must be met in order for the bulb to light? *The wire must connect solidly at each terminal of the battery and at two places on the bulb (usually on the tip and on the side). If the connection is broken in any way, the circuit is not complete and the bulb cannot light.*

PAGES 4-5

Main Idea

Page 4: Students need to know the difference between conductors and insulators in order to understand when they are in danger of contacting electricity and when they are not.

Page 5: Water is an excellent conductor of electricity and if a person touches water that is electrified, even if he or she does not touch the source of the electricity, he or she will be shocked.

Objectives

Students will

- formulate operational definitions of insulators and conductors.
- demonstrate that water is a conductor of electricity.

Materials

Each group will need

- 2 alligator clips
- the circuits they made on page 3
- a banana, a metal paper clip, a rubber band, a metal fork, a wood pencil, a penny, plus a variety of other items such as aluminum foil, a toothpick, dirt, glass, paper, a drinking straw, and so on.
- a glass pint or quart jar
- 2 nails
- one 3" × 5" piece of cardboard or cardstock (so that the nails don't touch each other)
- salt
- water

What You Need to Know

Page 4: Students are able to work with these batteries and wires because the voltage is minimal (1.5 V per D-cell battery). The paper clip, metal fork, and penny should all be identified as conductors due to their metal content. The other materials are insulators.

Page 5: Teams will need to add a lot of salt to their water in order for electric current to flow. The voltage of the battery is so low that additional particles must be added to make the water *more* conductive. It is the impurities in water that make it a good conductor. Pure water will not conduct electricity. However, pure water is found only in the laboratory. That's why there is so much emphasis on the conductivity of water.

Getting It Across

Page 4: Have teams read the information and follow the steps on the page. Students should first test their circuit by connecting it without using any of the trial materials. Ask teams to share their predictions and results. Were the results the same? If not, why not? (Be sure the experimental set up was not at fault.) What conclusions can students draw about conductors and insulators? (They might generalize that metals are good conductors or glass or plastic is a good insulator.)

Page 5: Be sure students add plenty of salt to the water. Then have them predict, experiment, and note their observations. Share results. Emphasize that the salt is needed because the battery is weak. Its low voltage keeps them safe and allows them to experiment with electricity.

Did They Get It?

Are students able to

- list materials that are conductors and insulators?
- draw the path electricity traveled through their test circuits?
- state that water is an excellent conductor of electricity?

PAGES 6-7

Main Ideas

Circuits can carry a specific amount of electricity. That amount is measured in watts, volts, and amps. When there is some kind of "leak" in a circuit that allows the electricity out of its specified path, a short circuit results. The electricity will go to the ground, and if you are in the way, like Ben Franklin was, it will travel through you.

Objectives

Students will

- practice converting from one unit of measure to another.
- recognize that there are limits to the amount of current a circuit can carry.
- demonstrate a short circuit and define it.

Materials

Each group will need

- 6" of thick wire
- the circuits they made on page 3

What You Need to Know

- Watts, volts, and amps are the units of measure of electricity. Students need to understand these units and their relationship in order to calculate whether a circuit can carry the load required of it.
- A short circuit is a circuit through which electricity is not able to complete its travel because the circuit is grounded somewhere.
- It is important to emphasize that although Ben Franklin was not seriously hurt in the example, electricity is always dangerous. Electricity's unpredictability adds to its danger.
- Remind students that they are able to work with these batteries and wires because the voltage is minimal

(1.5 V per D-cell battery).

Getting It Across

Page 6: Help students read the opening narrative. They need to know that watts measure work, amps measure electric current, and volts measure the "pressure" of the current. You might help them remember the relationship by showing them that they can remember the formula $W = V \times A$ by remembering West Virginia, "W. VA." The application at the bottom of the page shows them one of the main reasons to learn this formula—so they can tell what causes a circuit to become overloaded.

Page 7: Have students read the information and follow the steps. **Be sure students understand that they should immediately disconnect the thick wire and battery after they observe what happens.** The wires will get hot.

Did They Get It?

Are students able to

- calculate the number of amps required by household appliances?
- describe a short circuit and compare it to the story about Ben Franklin?

Answers

Page 6

table lamp, 0.83 A; vacuum cleaner, 7.5 A; color TV, 1.42 A; answering machine, 0.05 A; space heater, 10 A; ceiling fan, 0.17 A; computer, 0.03 A.

1. You would need 21.25 A.
2. Yes.
3. The space heater.

Page 7

1. Students' predictions will vary.
2. Students' observations will also vary but should include an observation that the wires get hot.
3. Because the electricity traveled a shorter route than the intended circuit.
4. Ben Franklin functioned like the thick wire in the students' experiments. Electricity traveled through his body instead of through the circuit and he got shocked.

PAGES 8-9

Main Ideas

Electricity will always take the easiest route to the ground. It is this attribute of electricity that makes it dangerous to people, because we are almost always touching the ground or something in contact with the ground. Circuits have built-in safety equipment, such as three-pronged plugs, ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs), fuses, and circuit breakers, to help prevent dangerous situations.

Objectives

Students will

- identify the potential danger of electric shock.
- recognize that a person must be grounded to get shocked.
- build a basic switch and explain how it works.

Materials

Give each group

- 1 bulb holder
- 1 brass fastener
- several paper clips, large and small

Groups will also need

- the circuits they made on page 3
- a piece of cardboard

What You Need to Know

Electricity always travels the easiest path to the ground. Birds sitting on an electric line do not get shocked because they are not touching anything that is touching the ground. The lines they sit on are insulated from the ground by glass or ceramic discs that do not allow the line to touch the pole, which would be a route to the ground. However, if those birds take flight and their wings touch two lines at once, or if they touch the pole and the wire at the same time, they will get shocked and could die.

Switches are a convenient way to open and close a circuit. Circuit breakers and fuses are like automatic switches that open a circuit if it becomes overloaded.

Getting It Across

Have teams read the information and follow the steps on the page.

Page 8: Use the example of the bird on the wire to be sure students understand that they are in danger because they are always grounded. You might suggest that they try to find ways not to be grounded and evaluate the ideas as a class. (Remember that rubber tennis shoes or rubber kitchen gloves *cannot* shield a person from electric current. Utility workers use special equipment to touch electric equipment.)

Page 9: If students cannot figure out how to construct a switch, here is a diagram.

Did They Get It?

Are students able to:

- identify dangerous situations around electricity?
- explain what grounding has to do with the danger of contacting electricity?
- build a switch and explain how it works?

Answers

Page 8: Top left picture: *Putting a fork in a toaster is dangerous because the metal fork could conduct electricity and the person could be shocked.* Top right picture: *These wires are dangerous because the insulation is missing.*

Bottom left picture: *It is dangerous to have an electric radio near water because water conducts electricity.*

Bottom right picture: *It's dangerous to try to retrieve a kite from power lines because you give electricity a path to the ground, and it can travel down the kite and through you!*

Page 9: Sample explanation: When the switch is turned on, the contact points of the brass fastener or the paper clip connect to the wires and complete or close the circuit. The bulb lights. When the switch is turned off, the arms break the connection, and the circuit is open. The bulb goes out.

PAGES 10-11

Main Ideas

Students wire a simple distribution system, which demonstrates again that the path electricity travels from the power plant to homes and back is a circuit just like the one they built. The model distribution system also allows students to understand the function and dangers of substations.

Objectives

Students will

- design and build an electric circuit for a model shoebox cabin.
- wire the cabins together to learn the function of distribution lines and substations, and how neighborhoods are linked to power plants.
- trace the path of electricity from its source at the power plant to the substation to the cabins and back again.
- be able to identify potential dangers of substations.

Materials

Give each group

- 4 feet of wire
- 1.5 feet of wire
- one or two colors of yarn
- the bulbs, bulb holders, and batteries from their circuits
- 1 shoebox or other small box
- art supplies such as scissors, tape, glue, pencils, crayons, rulers, drawing paper, construction paper

What You Need to Know

- The bulb holders will be very useful in this activity, if students have not already used them.
- The shoebox cabin village works best if no more than four cabins are hooked together. Hook up the D-cell batteries in series (like a flashlight) to power the network.
- Substations are a crucial link in the electricity distribution network. Electricity from many different power plants comes into a substation. The voltage level is stepped down, and the electricity is distributed from the substation to homes, schools, and businesses.
- Be sure students understand that substations do not actually generate electricity, even though in the shoebox cabin network, the batteries are located in the substations. Electricity is generated at the power plants.

Getting It Across

Have teams read the information and follow the steps on the page. Have teams show each other the path that electricity follows in each cabin. When the shoebox cabin network is complete, ask students to trace the path of electricity from the power plant through the cabins and back again.

Did They Get It?

Are students able to

- successfully draw the electrical circuit for the cabin and transfer the drawing to the model?
- wire the cabins together into a network?
- identify the hazards of substations and make appropriate signage to warn people away?
- identify the power plant as the source of electricity, and trace the circuit electricity travels from the power plant to the substation to the cabins and back again?

PAGES 12-13

Main Ideas

Appropriate behavior in electrical emergencies is counterintuitive. Instead of rushing to help, everyone must be certain that the source of electricity is no longer live. Otherwise, the would-be rescuer will also be shocked.

Objectives

Students will

- practice research and interview skills.
- analyze information to find the cause of an electrical accident.
- identify bodily effects of contact with electricity.
- apply their knowledge of circuits to explain how to prevent electrical accidents and how to behave in situations involving downed power lines.
- recognize that in an electrical emergency, the best help may be to stay away.

What You Need to Know

Page 13: This is an introduction to the idea that other people may not be able to help someone trapped in a car with a power line on it. The best help onlookers can be is to call 911 or the local emergency number. Students

may think that if a person is already shocked or burned, the danger is over. But if the source of electricity is still live and near or touching the victim, the situation could be deadly for someone who approaches too closely.

Getting It Across

Page 12: Have teams read the information and research their topics. As teams share their stories with the class, ask the class to identify how the accident happened, how electricity affected the body (if possible), and how the accident could have been prevented.

Page 13: Have students read the information on the page. Ask them why the best help might be to stay away from someone who has been shocked or burned. (*Because the helper could become part of electricity's path and also get hurt.*) Ask students to name the steps to take in the event of an electrical emergency. (*1. Stay away from the person who is hurt. 2. Tell an adult to turn off the power at the circuit box. 3. Call for help.*) Ask students why no one should use water to put out an electrical fire. (*Because water conducts electricity. The person dousing the flames could be shocked as electricity travels through the stream of water, or water could spread out in a pool from the victim and the source of electricity and hurt anyone standing in that water.*)

Did They Get It?

Are students able to

- name the causes of electrical accidents in the examples they find?
- list several safety “rules” that could have prevented these accidents?
- demonstrate how to leave a car with a power line on it?
- describe the dangers to the rescuer in an electrical emergency and list appropriate steps to take?

PAGES 14-15

Main Ideas

Letting other family members know about electrical safety is one of the best ways to reinforce student learning.

Objectives

Students will

- develop questions to survey family members.
- draw conclusions about what students know from the answers to their questions.
- correct any misconceptions family members may have.
- learn basic natural gas safety tips.

What You Need To Know

Page 14 asks students to organize their knowledge and share it with their families. Surveys will reveal parents' and siblings' misconceptions or lack of knowledge. Page 15 describes common natural gas hazards in and around the home. Emphasize the gas pipeline safety tips, as leaks from natural gas pipelines can be especially dangerous.

Getting It Across

Have students read the information on the page and follow the directions. Help students organize the survey results and make comparisons.

Did They Get It?

Are students able to

- draw accurate conclusions about what family members do and do not know about electrical safety?
- recap some basic electrical safety principles and natural gas safety rules?

Summary Quiz

Fill in the blanks.

1. Electricity travels in a closed path called a _____.
2. In the circuit that serves your home, the electricity comes from the _____.
3. Name three conductors:

4. Electric current is measured in _____. The “pressure” behind it is measured in volts. The work of electricity is measured in _____.

Write or draw your answer in the space provided.

5. Describe two dangerous situations around electricity outdoors:
6. Describe two dangerous situations around electricity indoors:
7. Describe or draw the path electricity would take if a person contacted electricity because the insulation on the cord of their electric lawn mower was cracked and the grass was wet.
8. What should you do to stay safe if you suspect a natural gas pipeline leak?

Answers to Quiz

1. circuit
2. power plant or generating plant
3. Answers will vary. Examples: wire, paper clip, water, nails
4. amps, watts
5. Climbing transmission towers; contacting high-voltage lines or overhead distribution lines in your neighborhood with kites or balloons; entering a substation (for example, to retrieve a ball or toy); playing on or around a pad-mounted transformer; contacting the service drop to home or school with TV antennas, ladders, long poles, or if the lines come in underground, by digging; climbing trees near power lines.
6. Using appliances near water in the bathroom or kitchen; putting fingers or other objects in outlets or toasters; overloading outlets; running cords underneath carpets; unplugging an appliance by pulling the cord instead of the plug.
7. Electricity would travel from the power cord of the lawn mower through the water in the grass, and up through the person’s legs. Depending on the position of the person at the time of contact, electricity could simply travel up one leg and down the other. Or it could travel up one leg, through the heart, and out a hand that was touching the mower handles.
8. Do not use electricity or fire. Get far away from the area and stay away until safety officials say it is safe. Ask someone to report the leak to 9-1-1 and your local natural gas utility.