

THIS WEEKEND'S FAMILY ACTIVITY

Who Gets Paid?

GAME

SKILL: INCENTIVE AWARENESS

45 MINUTES

RECOMMENDED AGE RANGE

Ages 8–14 — old enough to understand that products have business models, young enough for the idea of “who pays for this?” to feel genuinely surprising.

WHAT YOU NEED

Paper and a pen for each player

A timer

A smartphone or tablet with internet access

A list of 5 free apps or tools your family uses

ACTIVITY STEPS

- 01 List Your Free Things (3 min).** Together, name five things your family uses regularly that are free: one free game your kid plays, Google or another search engine, YouTube, a social media or messaging app, and one AI tool from school if you know the name. Write each one across the top of a shared sheet. These are your five rounds.
- 02 Silent Guessing Round (5 min).** Set a 5-minute timer. Each player works alone to guess how each free thing makes money. Write your theory for every item. Ads? Selling data? In-app purchases? Future subscriptions? Habit formation for a paid version later? No discussion yet. Everyone guesses alone.
- 03 Reveal and Score (7 min).** Each player reads their guesses aloud for one item at a time. Then look up the answer together: check the company’s pricing page, Wikipedia, or search for “how does [name] make money.” Award 1 point for every business model identified correctly. A parent acts as judge. The answers are usually surprising.
- 04 The School AI Deep Dive (15 min).** Now focus on a free AI tool from your kid’s school. If you do not know the name yet, look it up together now. Search: who made this tool, is there a paid version, who invested in the company, when did their free offer start and when does it end. Investigate together. No guessing. Just looking.
- 05 Expert Pitch Round (15 min).** Each player picks one free tool not on the original list, has 3 minutes to research its business model, then presents it to the family. The goal: explain what the tool is, why it is free, and who actually benefits when people use it. The family votes on how convincing the explanation was, from 1 to 5. Highest total score wins. A player who finds a genuinely surprising business model earns a bonus point.

THE DEEPER LESSON

The companies racing to put free AI into classrooms are not doing it for educational reasons alone. They are building habits and market position. A child who understands that products have business models, even free ones, has a durable advantage that transfers to every piece of technology they encounter for the rest of their lives. The question “who gets paid?” is one of the most useful habits of mind a parent can build before the world starts answering it for them.

CONVERSATION STARTER

If a company gives your school something for free now but starts charging for it later, does it change how you feel about having used it all along?

Raised Nimble

You cannot out-compete AI. But you can out-human it.

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