Beyond Basics: Coding Workshops for Middle School Girls
How to Incorporate a Theme into a Workshop

Each of our workshops is organized around a central, non-computing theme. We’ve used themes including the plight of honey bees, copyright issues, and technology for people with disabilities. When planning a workshop, we take time to think about the different ways the theme could be integrated and choose one or two that seem like they’ll work the best. The time spent planning is worthwhile because students are more engaged in thinking about how they can use new computing skills to solve real problems. Here are some suggestions of what’s worked for us.

**Planning**

- Pick a theme before you start planning the details of your workshop. Then you have a framework to use for planning activities around.

- You’ll want to spend some time thinking about the different ways your theme could be integrated and choose the one(s) that work best for you.

- You can either incorporate the theme in every activity with a small discussion and/or set specific theme-related activities and specific coding activities.

- Bring in guest speakers who are experts in fields related to the theme.

- Consider age-appropriate themes, activities, and time durations. You can challenge them but consider how to determine when it becomes too much and how to scale back.

**Implementation**

- Consider whether a discussion of recent news coverage of events related to the theme would be appropriate. Reevaluate this as the workshop progresses.

- Be respectful of your theme and students’ emotional responses to it.

- Don’t overdo the theme to the point that your students get bored or scared.

- Be prepared to take breaks and help moderate student discussions to cool down emotional temperatures.

- A well-chosen theme will make asking comprehension, discussion, and extrapolation questions easier. For example, our theme of technology for people with disabilities made it easy to ask students designing custom user controls “Does it make it easier for someone with manual dexterity? If so, how?”