Tech giants challenge California child-safety law

LEVEL B2


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I. WARM-UP

1. What features keep you scrolling on social media?
2. Who should set online rules for children: parents, firms or governments?
3. What is one helpful and one harmful part of your favourite app?

II. KEY VOCABULARY

lawsuit
a legal case brought to a court to solve a dispute

enforce
to make sure a law or rule is followed

prohibit
to officially not allow something

exploitative
treating people unfairly to gain an advantage

autoplay
a setting that plays the next video automatically

recommendation
content suggested to a user by a system

constitution
a country's highest set of laws and principles

liability
legal responsibility for something, such as harm or damage

III. READING

Google, Meta and TikTok filed lawsuits in California to stop the state from enforcing Assembly Bill 1709, a new child-safety law for social media.

The law prohibits platforms from offering under-16s psychologically exploitative features, including autoplay and personal recommendations, and accounts must be deleted if the features are not switched off.

The companies argue the rules violate the US constitution and Section 230, which limits platforms' liability for user content. They also say California is forcing a single way to present content and replacing parents' judgement about what their children see.

California's attorney general, Rob Bonta, said his office will defend the law. Governor Gavin Newsom signed it on 10 September. It is due to take effect on 1 January 2027 unless a judge voids it or puts it on hold. Critics such as the Electronic Frontier Foundation call the measure overreaching.

Supporters argue it targets features that can drive compulsive use. Google, which owns YouTube, and Meta, which owns Facebook and Instagram, say they already offer teen safety tools. TikTok is owned by ByteDance.

Reading text adapted from reporting by **The Guardian***: "Google, Meta and TikTok sue California to...". Original article linked at theenglishwire.com.*

IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which companies brought the court cases in California?
2. What features for under-16s does the law prohibit?
3. When is the law due to take effect?
4. On what legal grounds do the firms challenge the law?
5. Who said the state will defend the law?

V. DISCUSSION

1. Should autoplay and recommendations be limited for children? Why or why not?
2. Do you agree that the law replaces parents' judgement? Why or why not?
3. Do company safety tools work, or is law needed as well?
4. What simple changes could make social media less addictive?

VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Future perfect continuous

Use will + have been + verb-ing to show an action continuing up to a future time. Signals: by + future date; for + period; since + starting point. Forms: will have been working/changing.

> *"By 1 January 2027, platforms* **will have been adjusting** *designs."*
>
> *"By then, critics* **will have been arguing** *for narrower rules."*

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each sentence with the future perfect continuous form.

1. By 1 Jan 2027, engineers (test) ___ tools for months. _____
2. By 1 Jan 2027, moderators (flag) ___ risks for weeks. _____
3. By 1 Jan 2027, supporters (push) ___ changes since 10 Sep. _____
4. By next summer, I (study) ___ online safety for three years. _____
5. By 1 Jan 2027, lawyers (prepare) ___ cases for months. _____

Teacher's Notes

TEACHERS ONLY

These notes are designed to help you get the most out of this lesson. Please do not share this page with students.


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I. LESSON GUIDE

- Timing: 8–10 minutes warm-up, 10 minutes vocabulary, 12–15 minutes reading and comprehension together, 8–10 minutes for grammar, 12–15 minutes discussion.
- Pre-teach or check: lawsuit, enforce, prohibit, exploitative, autoplay, recommendation, constitution, liability. Drill pronunciation of multi-syllable items.
- Run the reading as jigsaw pairs: A reads paragraphs 1–2, B reads 3–4, then they explain to each other before tackling questions. This lesson involves child safety and potential mental health harm; preview the topic, start discussion in pairs, and allow students to speak about the news rather than personal family stories.
- Differentiate: stronger students summarise each side's main arguments in 60 words; others highlight three key facts and one concern from the text.

II. DISCUSSION FACILITATION TIPS

1. Elicit examples first, then ask for one benefit and one risk for under-16s.
2. Take a quick poll, then pair students from different camps to compare reasons.
3. Ask for one concrete tool and one legal step, and test them with a counterexample.
4. Have groups redesign a feed with fewer hooks, then share one practical tweak.

III. EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

Debate: In two teams, prepare 3-minute opening statements for or against AB 1709's key limits.

Writing: Write a 100-word platform notice explaining how you will change autoplay and recommendations for under-16s.

IV. ANSWER KEY OVERVIEW

Comprehension questions: short factual answers from the text.

Grammar exercise: Future perfect continuous

Discussion: open-ended. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

Answer Key

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IV. COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1. Which companies brought the court cases in California?
   Google, Meta and TikTok.
2. What features for under-16s does the law prohibit?
   Psychologically exploitative tools like autoplay and personal recommendations.
3. When is the law due to take effect?
   On 1 January 2027, unless a judge blocks it.
4. On what legal grounds do the firms challenge the law?
   The US constitution and Section 230.
5. Who said the state will defend the law?
   California's attorney general, Rob Bonta.

V. DISCUSSION

Open answers. Accept any reasonable ideas supported by examples and reasoning.

VII. GRAMMAR EXERCISE

Complete each sentence with the future perfect continuous form.

1. By 1 Jan 2027, engineers ___ tools for months. **will have been testing**
2. By 1 Jan 2027, moderators ___ risks for weeks. **will have been flagging**
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VI. GRAMMAR FOCUS

Key point: Use will + have been + verb-ing to show an action continuing up to a future time. Signals: by + future date; for + period; since + starting point. Forms: will have been working/changing. (Examples constructed.)

> *"By 1 January 2027, platforms* **will have been adjusting** *designs."*
>
> *"By then, critics* **will have been arguing** *for narrower rules."*