What is the dark web?

KS3 KS4 Ages 11-16 ⏰ 2 min read

When you browse the internet, you're only seeing the tip of an enormous iceberg. Below the surface lies something called the **dark web** — a hidden part of the internet that regular search engines like Google can't find, and normal browsers like Chrome or Safari can't access.

Think of the internet like a massive city. The regular web is like all the shops, restaurants, and buildings with big signs and street addresses that anyone can find. The dark web is like a network of underground tunnels with secret clubs that you can only reach if you know exactly where the hidden entrances are and have the right key.

How Do You Get There?

To access the dark web, you need special software called **Tor** (which stands for "The Onion Router"). Tor works by bouncing your internet connection through multiple computers around the world, making it nearly impossible to trace where you're browsing from. It's like passing a secret message through dozens of people before it reaches its destination — by the end, no one knows who started the chain.

Websites on the dark web don't have normal addresses like "google.com." Instead, they have strange addresses ending in ".onion" that look like random jumbles of letters and numbers.

What Actually Happens There?

Despite what you might have heard in films, the dark web isn't just a criminal marketplace. Yes, illegal activities do happen there — people sell things they shouldn't and do things that are against the law. But it's also used by journalists protecting their sources, people living under strict governments who want to communicate freely, and activists organising in dangerous situations.

Many people use it simply for privacy. In some countries, accessing certain websites or expressing particular opinions can get you into serious trouble, so the dark web provides a safe space for free communication.

Should You Visit?

The dark web isn't inherently dangerous, but it's not a playground either. It's like a big city at night — there are perfectly safe areas, but there are also neighbourhoods you'd want to avoid. Without proper knowledge and precautions, you could accidentally stumble into harmful content or dangerous situations.

For most people, there's no real need to visit the dark web. Everything you want to do online can be done perfectly well on the regular internet. But understanding that it exists helps you grasp how big and complex our digital world really is.

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