The Ups and Downs of Digital Life

Essential Question
What are the possibilities and potential pitfalls of using digital media in our social, connected culture?

Lesson Overview
Students reflect on the possibilities and pitfalls of digital media for themselves, for their relationships with people close to them, and for society at large.

The class will kick off with the video, “Perspectives on Social Media,” which provides an overview of the curriculum topics and introduces some of the possibilities and pitfalls of digital life through kids’ stories and quotes. Using The Upsides and Downsides of Digital Life Student Discussion Guide, students will then discuss these upsides and downsides – for themselves, their friends and family, and communities.

Learning Objectives
Students will be able to ...
• articulate some of the positive and negative possibilities of digital life.
• determine different ways that media impact them, their friends and families, and society.
• reflect on their use of digital media, especially those areas of digital life that can be most ethically charged.

Materials and Preparation
• Preview the video, “Perspectives on Social Media,” and prepare to show it to students.
• Copy the Ups and Downs of Digital Life Discussion Guide, one for each student.
• Review the The Ups and Downs of Digital Life Discussion Guide – Teacher Version.

Family Resources
• Send home the Digital Life Parent Tip Sheet (Middle & High School).
introduction

Warm-up (5 minutes)

ASK students to raise their hands if they ...

- are part of a social networking site.
- use a social networking site at least three times a week.
- use the Internet to communicate with their friends.
- use the Internet to play games with others.
- use the Internet to post creative work.
- have had something good happen to them by using the Internet.
- have run into some kind of problem, or ended up feeling upset, because of something that happened on the Internet.

INVITE students to silently reflect on their Internet use and digital life, using the following questions:

ASK:

If the Internet, cell phones, or other forms of digital media did not exist, would your life be better or worse?

How would you feel if you could not use digital media for a week? Would your life be different in any way?

Students’ answers will vary.

teach 1

Watch the Video (5 minutes)

SHOW student the video, “Perspectives on Social Media.” You may wish to play the video all the way through one time and then play it a second time for Teach 2, pausing after each section to ask the discussion questions on the The Ups and Downs of Digital Life Discussion Guide – Teacher Version.

teach 2

Use Discussion Guide (30 minutes)

DISTRIBUTE the The Ups and Downs of Digital Life Student Discussion Guide to each student.

REFER to the The Ups and Downs of Digital Life Student Discussion Guide – Teacher Version to help students reflect on their place in the connected culture. Throughout the discussion, guide students to think about their own digital lives, as well as the activities of their friends, families, and society at large. Have them reflect on the many positive, and sometimes negative, possibilities brought about by their participation in digital life.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary the terms pitfall, digital native, and digital tourist, if needed.
Wrap-up (5 minutes)

CONCLUDE the discussion by asking students to think about themselves as digital citizens. What do they have to do to be good digital citizens? Does this represent a change in behavior for them? If so, in what ways? You can use the discussion responses to assess students’ understanding of the video.

WRITE the following question on the board and ask students to write a few sentences in response:

With Power Comes Responsibility: What does that mean in regards to your digital life?

You may review their answers to assess their understanding of the lesson objectives. Have they successfully reflected some ups and downs of digital life?

Extension Activity

Have students create a podcast or song set in 2020 about the way that digital media has changed the world. Here is a scenario from Future Problem Solving Program International, Inc. (www.fpspi.org) that students can use as material for their podcast or song.

Sensory Overload

Musak, iPods, cell phones, visual imagery, TV, advertising, the Internet, fusion food, exotic restaurants, sports, entertainment, animated billboards, and flashing signs are just a few examples of the kinds of sensory input people receive on a daily basis. Even the average supermarket has more than 30,000 products. Scientists have discovered that this overwhelming assault on our senses impacts our brainwaves. Our senses are continually inundated in ways that would not have been thought possible in our grandparents’ and great grandparents’ era. We embrace multitasking in all areas of our lives, even as investigators raise questions about its effectiveness and advisability. What is the possible future impact of this sensory overload, and how will we accommodate our need to process increasing amounts of information? (From: www.fpspi.org/topics.html, with minor modifications.)

At-Home Activity

Have students interview adult family members who may have not grown up with a computer, or digital devices at all. What were their daily lives like? How did they connect with family and friends? How did they do their schoolwork? How did they learn about and apply for jobs? Looking back, what were some of the benefits and drawbacks of not having the kind of technology we have today?
Directions
Use the following questions to reflect on the many positive, and sometimes negative, aspects of your digital life.

1. What are some of the ways that kids in the video participate in digital life? Do you do any of those things? How else do you use the Internet for good purposes?

2. What did the girl in the video mean by saying the Internet could be “messy”? 

3. Do you think there are ways that digital media can make relationships stronger? Are there ways that digital media can ruin relationships?

4. Why do you think the girl in the video said that she didn’t want people to “know who she was”? How do you feel about people knowing your identity online?

5. Some people say that kids know more about digital media in their lives than adults, such as parents and teachers, do. What do you think?

6. What did the girl in the video mean when she says, “It’s easier to experiment online”?

7. Students talked about “commenting on other people.” What did they mean by this? What are the potential good things about that? What are some negatives?

8. One girl in the video said that she got a lot out of other people commenting on her work. Have you ever gotten feedback for something you did online? Was it a good experience? Why or why not?

9. What are some of the things the kids in the video said about respecting creative work? What do you have to be careful about online?

10. What does it mean to be a “good digital citizen”? What are some examples of good digital citizenship?
Directions
Throughout the discussion, guide students to think about their own digital lives, as well as the activities of their friends, families and society at large. Have them reflect on the many positive, and sometimes negative, possibilities brought about by their use of, or exposure to, digital media and the Internet.

1. What are some of the ways that kids in the video participate in digital life? Do you do any of those things? How else do you use the Internet for good purposes?

Sample responses:
- The kids in the video commented on a social networking site.
- The kids in the video posted stories.
- They kids in the video played games online.

2. What did the girl in the video mean by saying the Internet could be “messy”?

Sample responses:
- You can find out a lot about a person on the Internet.
- The Internet can be too personal.
- You might post something you wish you hadn’t.

3. Do you think there are ways that digital media can make relationships stronger? Are there ways that digital media can ruin relationships?

Sample responses:
- Yes, people are connected to a larger community than the people they know offline.
- Yes, people can get to know others who are geographically far away.
- People can say nasty things when they are anonymous.
- It is sometimes easier to misinterpret what people mean online.

4. Why do you think the girl in the video said that she didn’t want people to “know who she was”? How do you feel about people knowing your identity online?

Sample responses:
- The people are strangers. She didn’t want strangers to know about her.
- She didn’t want people to know personal things about her.
5. Some people say that kids know more about digital media in their lives than adults, such as parents and teachers, do. What do you think?

Sample responses:
- Many adults are fearful that kids know more than they do about digital media since they did not grow up with it and are constantly trying to catch up. The unknown can be scary.
- Some adults are very knowledgeable about digital media, especially certain teachers.
- Adults can be helpful to kids in solving interpersonal conflicts the kids may have with others over digital media.
- Kids text a lot more than adults; adults email a lot more.
- Kids have a lot of technical skill to share with adults; adults have life wisdom to share with kids.

6. What did the girl in the video mean when she says, “It’s easier to experiment online”?

Sample responses:
- On the Internet, people don’t know who you are.
- You are anonymous online.
- You can pretend you’re a whole different person online.
- You could be a boy if you’re a girl, or a girl if you’re a boy.
- You could pretend to be a different age – you can be treated like an adult.

7. Students talked about “commenting on other people.” What did they mean by this? What are the potential good things about that? What are some negatives?

Sample responses:
- It means tagging each other’s pictures.
- It’s a way of doing online what you do offline.
- It’s a way for people to anonymously say bad things about each other.
- It could be a fun way to connect to each other and give people props.
- People can say mean things.
- People can really hurt each other’s feelings this way.
- It can be embarrassing.

8. One girl in the video said that she got a lot out of other people commenting on her work. Have you ever gotten feedback for something you did online? Was it a good experience? Why or why not?

Answers will vary.
9. What are some of the things the kids in the video said about respecting creative work? What do you have to be careful about online?

Sample responses:
- The people are strangers. She didn’t want strangers to know about her.
- She didn’t want people to know personal things about her.

10. What does it mean to be a good digital citizen? What are some examples of good digital citizenship?

Sample responses
- A good digital citizen is someone who uses the Internet and other digital tools for good purposes, such as more inclusive communities, positive collaboration, pro-social causes.
- A good digital citizen speaks out if others are being harassed or bullied online.
- A good digital citizen doesn’t comment negatively on someone else’s work or pictures.
- A good digital citizen does not post information about another person that they might not want posted.
1. A ______________ describes someone who grew up with computers, video games, and the Internet from the time she or he was born and is comfortable using these technologies.
   a) digital native
   b) nerd
   c) science teacher

2. Malia’s teacher told her class that when it comes to being online, “with great power comes great responsibility.” What does this phrase mean?
   a) Computers use a lot of electricity to access the Internet.
   b) The Internet is a very powerful tool, so you have to be careful how you use it.
   c) Only responsible people use the Internet.

3. There are positive things and negative things about spending time online. Read the sentences below, and then circle whether they are positive or negative.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Positive</th>
<th>Negative</th>
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1. A ______________ describes someone who grew up with computers, video games, and the Internet from the time she or he was born and is comfortable using these technologies.

   a) digital native
   b) nerd
   c) science teacher

   Answer feedback
   The correct answer is a. People who have grown up with digital media usually use it differently than those who did not.

2. Malia’s teacher told her class that when it comes to being online, “with great power comes great responsibility.” What does this phrase mean?

   a) Computers use a lot of electricity to access the Internet.
   b) The Internet is a very powerful tool, so you have to be careful how you use it.
   c) Only responsible people use the Internet.

   Answer feedback
   The correct answer is b. The Internet is a powerful tool. Being responsible about how you use it will help you, and others, have a good time online.

3. There are positive things and negative things about spending time online. Read the sentences below, and then circle whether they are positive or negative.

   Answer feedback

   | a) You can share your creative work with many people online. | Positive | Negative |
   | b) It can be easy to misunderstand what people say online. | Positive | Negative |
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