



Essential Question: How do you build a positive online community?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: Students will consider the characteristics of positive online communities that promote responsibility and respect.

Students investigate the online virtual world, Whyville, to learn about how its policies and practices help users be safe, responsible, and respectful. They then reflect more generally on how online community can be built or broken. Then they create charters for a fictional online community.

objectives

Students will:

- Identify core principles of healthy online communities
- Analyze the positive individual and community practices for building a community online
- Establish guidelines and norms for building ethical online communities

Materials and Preparation

Materials

- **You Build It Student Handout**

Preparation

- Make copies of the **You Build it Student Handout**, one per group of four or five

Parent Resources

- Send home the **Connected Culture Parent Tip Sheet**
- Send home the **Connected Culture Parent/Teacher Intro Video**

Key Vocabulary

- **Governance:** The act of running something, such as a town or a community, according to a set of rules
- **Charter:** A document that explains how a community is organized, including the rights and responsibilities of the members of the community



Build Your Ideal Community

teaching plans

Introduce

DISCUSS how everyone in the room is a member of many communities. DEFINE “community” as a group of people who are together for a common purpose, interest, or in a specific location. Point out that the students’ class is a community, their school is a community, and their neighborhoods are communities. Other communities include their sports teams, after-school clubs, religious groups, and volunteer groups. Explain that many people in the class are also members of online communities, where they go to websites to meet with friends, make new ones, or share common interests through social media.

ASK *What are some online communities that you are a part of?* (Write them on the board. Identify students who are members of the same or similar communities, such as social networks, game sites, etc.)

Sample responses:

- *Runescape*
- *Whyville*
- *Class Google Group*

ASK *How are online communities different than offline communities? How are they similar?*

Sample responses:

- *People meet face to face offline, but people do not meet in person in online communities*
- *You are probably more likely to interact with strangers in online communities*

ASK *What are some examples of how you can be a good member of one of these communities?*

Sample responses:

- *Welcome people*
- *Ignore people who are being rude*
- *Try to hold others to the stated policies of the site*

Teach 1: Introduce Whyville

If technology allows, INTRODUCE students to Whyville, a virtual city where people can play games, hang out with friends, and build a society together. (Whyville website: <http://whyville.net/smmk/nice>). Read aloud the About Us section: <http://b.whyville.net/smmk/top/gatesInfo?topic=about>. Students can read along if the website is projected.

Whyville.net

About Whyville

Welcome! Whyville is a virtual world geared for teen and pre-teen girls and boys.

Whyville's millions of registered "citizens" come from all over to learn, create, and have fun together. Whyville is their world. Whyville has places to go, things to do, and of course, people to see. Whyville has its own newspaper, its own Senators, its own beach, museum, City Hall and town square, its own suburbia, and even its own economy - citizens earn "clams" by playing educational games. And much, much, much more!



ASK *What are ways you know this is a community?*

Sample responses:

- *Users are called “citizens.”*
- *There are many ways for members to interact.*
- *It seems to have a governance structure because of the “clams” system and public services.*

ASK *What are some positive elements of this community?*

Sample responses:

- *There are activities for people to do.*
- *There are places for them to get together.*
- *There are games for them to play.*

ASK *Do you think this is an online community that you would like to be part of? Why or why not?*

Teach 2: List Ideas for Building/Breaking Community

ENGAGE students in a discussion about how online community in a virtual world like Whyville can be built or broken. You can do this by exploring Whyville in more depth if you have the time and technology, but it is not necessary. DRAW two columns on the board. Label one “BUILD” and one “BREAK.”

ASK *What are the qualities of positive online community?* (List responses under the “BUILD” heading, and use the prompts below to generate more specific responses from students about what actions help build community.)

Sample responses:

- *People are welcoming.*
- *Members treat each other with respect.*
- *Members speak out if someone is being rude to someone else.*

“BUILD” prompts:

- *What is the best way to welcome people into an online community?*
- *What actions can people take to be helpful or provide support?*
- *How do people make it a fun place to be?*
- *Whose responsibility is it to make sure the community is safe and ethical?*

ASK *How do students break an online community?* (List responses under the “BREAK” heading, and use the prompts below to generate more specific responses from students about how people break a community.)

Sample responses:

- *By creating an unwelcoming environment*
- *When people get hurt or cyberbullied*
- *When members do not have clear options for getting help*

“BREAK” prompts:

- *What might people do to make others feel excluded?*
- *How might people be hurtful or cause harm?*
- *What systems are in place to deal with problems that arise, such as mean members, harassment, or other behaviors that are even more hurtful?*
- *Whose responsibility is it to deal with problems among members?*



Build Your Ideal Community

Teach 3: Build an Ideal Community

REVIEW the Key Vocabulary with students.

DIVIDE students into groups of four or five. Hand out the **You Build It Student Handout**, one per group. Read the directions aloud with students. Tell them that a meteorite has upset the magnetic balance of the Earth, and as a result all online data has been interrupted. Then tell them that the world is back online, but there are lasting problems. All existing online communities have been wiped out. Let them know that their functioning, exciting online community is now gone. Then let them know that their group has an opportunity to rebuild the community, but it's up to them to accomplish this. Have students work together to read and fill out the **You Build It Student Handout**. When they are finished with the charter, have them draw a home page for their community. Let them know that with this document they may be able to make the community even better than it was before. Remind them to review the information on the Handout from Whyville to get ideas for how to build their communities.

Wrap Up and Assess

When students have completed their work, have each group read their charter in front of the class, alongside the drawings of the home pages they have created. You can assess how well they understand the lesson objectives by the elements they include in their charters. **ENCOURAGE** the class to ask questions to clarify or challenge the charters. **EXPLAIN** that the most successful communities will be those with charters that emphasize responsibility to the community, promote respect for others, offer concrete protections for participants from rudeness and cruelty, and are safe, fun places to join.

Sample questions:

- *What are the responsibilities of members to each other?*
- *What happens if someone in the community doesn't follow the charter?*
- *What would your role be in helping members follow the charter?*

CONCLUDE the lesson by telling students that in both the real world and online, the most powerful element for a successful community is to create a climate of mutual respect in which:

- People demonstrate respect so that others feel safe and welcome
- People feel comfortable and at ease
- People behave responsibly
- If people do not feel safe, there are clear rules and expectations for solving the problem

REMINDE students that creating positive online communities that are inviting and enjoyable is their responsibility.



Extension Activity

Students create a word cloud (also known as a tag cloud) about the imaginary online community they have created. (A word cloud is an online word generator that highlights the most popular or repeated words from any piece of text by emphasizing size, color, and placement.) Have students type out their entire charter, word for word, and save it as a Word file. Using Wordle (<http://www.wordle.net/>, free online), students can instantly create a



word cloud. Tell them to copy and paste in the text of their charter into Wordle, and it will create a word cloud. They can then manipulate the size, look, and feel of the word cloud. Have students print out their word clouds and then post them on the wall. Students can view a gallery of word clouds describing visions for a utopian online community. After they are done, ask them which words they notice are used most frequently in all of the word clouds, and what this might say about which elements are important in building a positive online community.

Alignment with Standards – National Educational Technology Standards for Students® 2007

(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

1. Creativity and Innovation

Students demonstrate creative thinking, construct knowledge, and develop innovative products and processes using technology. Students:

- a. apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes
- b. create original works as a means of personal or group expression

2. Communication and Collaboration

Students use digital media and environments to communicate and work collaboratively, including at a distance, to support individual learning and contribute to the learning of others. Students:

- a. interact, collaborate, and publish with peers, experts, or others employing a variety of digital environments and media
- b. communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats
- c. contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems

3. Research and Information Fluency

Students apply digital tools to gather, evaluate, and use information. Students:

- a. plan strategies to guide inquiry
- b. locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and use information ethically from a variety of sources and media

4. Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

Students use critical-thinking skills to plan and conduct research, manage projects, solve problems, and make informed decisions using appropriate digital tools and resources. Students:

- a. identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation
- b. plan and manage activities to develop a solution or complete a project
- c. collect and analyze data to identify solutions and/or make informed decisions

5. Digital Citizenship

Students understand human, cultural, and societal issues related to technology and practice legal and ethical behavior. Students:

- a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology
- b. exhibit a positive attitude towards using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity
- c. demonstrate personal responsibility for lifelong learning
- d. exhibit leadership for digital citizenship

Common Sense Media is an independent, nonprofit resource that helps families and educators teach kids how to be safe and smart in today's 24/7 media world. Go to www.commonsensemedia.org for thousands of reviews and expert advice.