Essential Question: What are the benefits and risks of presenting yourself in different ways online?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: Students learn that presenting themselves in different ways online carries both benefits and risks.

Students first consider what it means to adopt a different identity online. Next, they watch the Self-Expression and Identity Student Video Vignette (Henry's Story) and discuss their responses to the different ways Henry presents himself to others on the Internet. Students complete the Take a Stand Student Handout, where they explore the ethics of exaggerating, deceiving, or adopting a different identity online. They complete the lesson by reflecting on the choices they make when they present themselves in different ways online, and the benefits and risks involved in doing so.

objectives

Students will:

- Reflect on the benefits and risks of presenting their identities in different ways online

- Evaluate – from an ethical point of view – the feelings, motivations, contexts, and possible outcomes associated with adopting different roles online

- Judge whether certain ways people present themselves online are harmless or harmful

Materials and Preparation

Materials

- ***Self-Expression and Identity Student Video Vignette (Henry's Story)***

- **Take a Stand Student Handout**

- **Take a Stand Student Handout – Teacher Version**

- Masking tape

- Paper and markers

Preparation

- Download the ***Self-Expression and Identity Student Video Vignette (Henry's Story)***

- Preview the video and be prepared to show it to the class

- Copy the **Take a Stand Student Handout**, one for each student

- Review the **Take a Stand Student Handout – Teacher Version** and be prepared to arrange the classroom to accommodate the activity by clearing space in the room and drawing the HARMLESS/HARMFUL line, with tape, down the center of the room

Parent Resources

- Send home the **Self-Expression and Identity Parent Tip Sheet**

- Send home the ***Self-Expression and Identity Parent/Teacher Intro Video***

Which Me Should I Be?

Key Vocabulary

• **Exaggerate**: To say something is more or greater than it actually is

• **Deceive**: To mislead or falsely persuade others

• **Motivate**: To have a reason or purpose to do something

• **Consequences**: Results; something that happens as an effect of a certain cause

• **Anonymous**: Having an unknown identity

teaching plans

Introduce

REVISIT the definition of **identity** from **Lesson 1: Your Online Self**. Remind students that the parts of their **identities** that they express online may be different from the ones they express offline. They may present themselves to others differently on the Internet than they would face to face.

REVIEW the Key Vocabulary words **exaggerate** and **deceive**.

ASK *Have you ever heard of people who exaggerated something about themselves online? Or people who deceive others by pretending to be someone else while they were on the Internet? Why do you think they did this?*

Sample responses:

- *I heard of a girl who exaggerated how many celebrities she had met, so that other people would be impressed*
- *One kid exaggerated his experience to get a job on the school paper*
- *Someone might pretend to be someone else to be mean or play a trick*
- *I know someone who has several different avatars in an online virtual game*

DISCUSS with students where these events took place (which website or online community). Solicit their initial thoughts on whether it is a good idea to do the kinds of things they described, and why.

Teach 1: Henry Online

REVIEW the Key Vocabulary words **motivate**, **consequences**, and **anonymous** with students. Explain that the last term will play an important part in the activity they will do following the movie.

REMIND the class that it's perfectly normal to try out different identities online. However, they have to think about what **motivates** them to do so, and the possible **consequences**. Tell them:

• *Sometimes you might express different parts of your personality online because you want to be accepted by friends or people in an online community. Or you might do it to experiment and see how others react.*

• *Other times, you might cross over into lying to or deceiving others by pretending you are someone you're not.*

• *It is important that you take responsibility for who you are and what you want to be online, and also consider how this might affect people you interact with online.*

common sense
media

EXPLAIN to the class you will now show them a video about Henry, a real boy who enjoys participating in an online world where he doesn't (fully) reveal his identity.

SHOW the *Self-Expression and Identity Student Video Vignette (Henry's Story)* to the class.

ASK *What do you think motivates Henry to hide how old he is?* (Guide students to provide examples from the video. Henry wanted to feel respected, as people thought he was older than he really is. He was trying to fit in to a community based on his knowledge and interests rather than his age.)

ASK *What were the consequences of Henry hiding his age?* (In this case, Henry's deception did not seem to harm himself or anyone else.)

ENCOURAGE students to keep the story of Henry in mind as you move on to the next activity.

Teach 2: Take a Stand

DIVIDE students into groups of four or five and DISTRIBUTE copies of the **Take a Stand Student Handout**, one to each student.

GUIDE students to complete the activity, referring to the **Take a Stand Student Handout – Teacher Version** for detailed instructions.

REVIEW the ethical questions involved in trying different identities online. Remind students that doing this can have both benefits and risks. These depend in large part on what motivates people to present themselves differently, as well as the online settings and situations. All these can affect the **consequences** of their actions. Students need to be especially careful about **exaggerating** or **deceiving** others online, because this can often have harmful consequences.

Wrap Up and Assess

REFLECT on the lesson by asking students to summarize the benefits and risks of presenting their identities in different ways online. Write two headings on the board: BENEFITS and RISKS. Have students add what they've learned to the list, encouraging them to use the Key Vocabulary words. You can use this list and student discussion as an assessment tool.

REMIND students to think about the following points.

• The Internet allows you the freedom to try out different identities online.

• When you present who you are differently online, be sure you are not harming yourself or those with whom you interact.

• Being anonymous or deceiving people online because you want to hurt someone is harmful and inappropriate behavior.

• You decide how to present yourself online. Only you can take responsibility for who you are and who you want to be online!

Extension Activity

Extend the **Take a Stand** portion of the lesson by having student groups write their own case studies involving situations in which people adopted a different identity online. Have students read aloud their scenarios to the class, and then have volunteers from the class take a stand on the HARMFUL/HARMLESS line. Ask students to explain their positions and discuss how they feel about the benefits and risks the situations pose.

Homework

To further explore what it feels like to try out a different role online, have students work with a friend or family member to make avatars for celebrities, and give them screen names. Students and their parents can create free online avatars by visiting meez.com or doppelme.com, or they can draw them by hand offline. Highlight the following questions for students and family members to consider about their famous person's avatar:

• *Why did you choose certain elements of identity for your celebrity's avatar?*

• *What does the avatar say about the celebrity or famous person?*

• *How would the avatar change depending on what online community they are interacting with (e.g., what website are they on, and how do people interact there?)*

• *How might the avatar be different if the celebrity or famous person made it?*

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

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

1. Creativity and Innovation

    a. apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes

    b. create original works as a means of personal or group expression

4. Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

    a. identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation

    c. collect and analyze data to identify solutions and/or make informed decisions

    d. use multiple processes and diverse perspectives to explore alternative solutions

5. Digital Citizenship

    a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology

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