

Lesson Plans for Developing **DIGITAL LITERACIES**



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Introduction: What's on the Other Side, When You Finally Cross the Digital Divide?

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Most young Americans possess little of the knowledge that makes for an informed citizen, and too few of them master the skills needed to negotiate an information-heavy, communication-based society and economy. Furthermore, they avoid the resources and media that might enliven them and boost their talents.

Mark Bauerlein, *The Dumbest Generation*

“Do you like this Olde English font? Or should I use Wingding?”

It must have been in the late 1990s, just after the much misinterpreted comment by Vice President Al Gore that he invented the Internet, that the term *digital divide* became, as many phrases do, one of the buzzwords to infiltrate educational circles as well as the culture at large. This divide seemed to name a socioeconomic issue, the fact that some groups, the middle and upper classes, had an easier time accessing the Internet and using it to their advantage, and others, the poor and disenfranchised, did not have that ability. It was thought that access was the key—if there were just computers in classrooms and an active Internet connection, everything would be fine. Legislation was introduced, bills passed, money appropriated, and computers were finally in schools. Those schools then got online access and, apparently, educators simply waited for the miracles that technology would bring.

The ensuing decade, and research by people like Larry Cuban in *Oversold and Underused: Computers in the Classroom*, would show that teachers did not really change their instruction, despite having access to computers and the Internet. The reasons for this lack of adoption are likely many, but one that seems logical is that teachers were never

students in a classroom that effectively used technology, so they didn't have a frame of reference to effectively use technology in their own teaching practice. Computers were treated as glorified typewriters that allowed students with bad handwriting to turn in papers that were easier to read, though most teachers quickly learned that every writing assignment needed a "Times font, size 12 ONLY" admonition, or there was a risk of students spending most of the lab time playing with fonts for the title of the paper.

Teachers who introduced students to PowerPoint in the mid- to late 1990s were treated to letters that spun about, were typed onto the screen with an authentic-sounding typewriter noise, or raced across the screen before screeching to a halt. Lost in all the bells and whistles was the content: Did the words make meaning? Or did the students work on the production more than their thoughts? Ultimately, was it really worth class time to teach these skills to kids at the expense of other, seemingly more important, content? It seemed that technology was mostly good for delivering flashy-looking products that masked mundane thinking, with the added burden of teacher unfamiliarity with the tools themselves. Many teachers sat in their schools' new computer labs and endured professional development on how to use the programs already loaded onto the computers. Long on technical talk about slides, documents, and hypertexts, and short on immediate practical concerns ("How do I shut off that screeching tire sound when the title slide plays?"), professional development was often a slow vehicle to changing the mindsets of teachers and their use of technology in the classroom.

The "Classroom without Walls"

It was within this technological environment of experimentation, shoddy implementation, and nascent visual interface to the Internet that I began my career in teaching English. On the first day of orientation at my first job, one of the first things my mentor told me to do was to go to the computer lab to reserve dates for students to compose their papers. Never mind that, as a brand new teacher, I had no idea what my students would be writing *about*; the key was to get those sacred Fridays in the lab so the students could type their papers and deliver them to me for grading over the weekend. Being a dutiful learner, or at least pretending to be at that point, I signed up my classes for the computer lab every Friday for the school year, because that was what I *should* do.

The learning curve in using technology is steep, but here are a few hard-earned insights should you find yourself in a similar

situation: First, coming up with writing assignments that are worth students' effort to write and type every Friday for the school year is not nearly as easy as it sounds. Second, if kids are forced to type something, they fully expect to get that something back, completely graded, the following Monday morning. Sure, I know better now, but then? I thought I was doing what every English teacher did—grade papers all weekend. The technology that was supposed to be making my life easier was, in fact, making it harder. Though, to be fair, it wasn't the technology's fault that I decided to assign a typed essay due every Friday, but it did make that task easier for kids, and I made an attempt to do what I thought was right. The effort was an academic failure, but at least I tried.

In this environment, I was introduced to Nicenet.org, which bills itself as "the Internet Classroom Assistant." A very apt name, as it turns out, since it really did become an assistant of sorts for how I started to run my classroom. Nicenet is, of this writing, more than eleven years old, elderly by Internet standards, and while it was cutting edge and helpful in its day, its limitations have prompted me to move on to Google groups as a way of handling many of the chores I once accomplished through Nicenet; Google also conveniently allows me to integrate these activities with my Gmail account. But Nicenet still exists, providing a free, easily usable platform from which I learned one of the most valuable lessons I'd ever get on how to deal with the crushing flow of student written work: let students grade one another first. Of course, it's not that simple, and I'm being a bit facetious, but Nicenet gave me the ability to truly implement peer editing teams, a compositional strategy I knew to be helpful but that took so much time to implement fully that I was rarely able to use it effectively.

Nicenet was perfect—students could be online asynchronously and could read and respond when their schedules permitted (but within deadlines established with the peer editing team). Best of all, I didn't have to dedicate so much in-class work time to peer editing team meetings. If I'd had the skill and insight at the time, I would have tracked more closely the writing that my students workshopped in peer editing teams and compared it to the writing done in an "on-demand" setting. My experience now tells me that giving students the time and space to spend more quality time with one another's writing really helped improve their writing skills.

What I am sure of is that the tools of Nicenet began migrating into other aspects of my teaching. The Documents section of the site became the repository for missed assignments. The Links page let me

connect to annotated sites my students could visit for context to support whatever we were discussing in class at the time. I posted assignments that required students to post extended short-answer essays to a prompt, then craft 125-word responses to two other classmates' work. We held threaded discussions that could be used as data points for essays because the archived conversations were easily searchable. The Nicenet platform became, then, our classroom without walls. Every teacher dreams that his or her students are thinking and discussing the issues raised in class after they leave each period, but with Nicenet, that was almost guaranteed. Students enjoyed going online, they knew they had work to do, and they did it in cyberspace, not within the physical confines of my classroom. And the pile of papers I took home each weekend diminished considerably. Not because we weren't writing—we were writing more than ever—but because the interactive nature of Nicenet allowed the students to carry their own weight. They didn't simply wait for my decree on the quality of their work; instead, they were getting extensive, ongoing feedback from peers that was, quite possibly, more important to them than my opinion.

Gone were discussions about why Lucida Calligraphy wasn't an acceptable font for an academic paper, replaced by conversations that centered on the work itself and whether it resonated with an audience of peers. This was a liberating experience. Student writing measurably improved, not because of the technology, but because the technology became an integral vehicle for teaching what I already knew: when kids talk about their writing with people whose opinion they value, the writing improves. Nicenet facilitated and enhanced those discussions, and pointed me toward the understanding that technology isn't a means to an end; it's a tool for achieving ends that I, as a teacher, already had in mind. It showed me that technology is a pedagogical tool, like any reading strategy, and that some things are better served without the Internet, word processing, or any other tech-related tool. Socratic seminars, for example, can happen online, but in my experience they happen more effectively in a face-to-face environment. Learning to fit the tool to the task and adapt it as the needs of individual courses demanded took a while, but the lessons were definitely worth the effort.

Web 2.0? Did I Miss 1.0? And Whatever Happened to the Internet?

Clearly, the roles of technology, media, and content are constantly evolving in the English language arts (ELA) classroom. Using the Web

today is an entirely different experience than it was even at the turn of the millennium. In fact, the term *the Web* has a different meaning from that of *the Internet* of old. The Internet is no longer seen as an unknowable entity that exists in some unknowable place. Kids of all ages create “product” for the Internet all the time, and the production of knowledge and its dissemination is one of the fundamental differences between the Internet, the Web, and its newest incarnation, the Web 2.0. In the beginning, the Internet referred to a system of information available if you knew where to find it. A URL (uniform resource locator) was mandatory, because searching the Web for a site was a time-eating chore; there was no easy way to categorize, to sort, or to make sense of the results of early search engines, which limited the Internet’s efficacy and appeal to the casual user.

As the Internet grew, it underwent several distinctive phases, but the most prominent change was a switch from text-based information, where all material on the Web was in fact text, to a graphic interface, where the now seemingly ubiquitous idea of clicking an icon became the norm for operating on the Web. Now information really was at the fingertips of students. The application of the Internet as an educational tool and pedagogical strategy, though, has come along much more slowly, though many teachers now incorporate the Web in their lessons, their planning, and their teaching lives.

The switch to Web 2.0—the current name of the latest phase of Internet development—is a logical extension of the nature of the Internet. First named by Darcy DiNucci (according to *Wikipedia* [gasp!]), Web 2.0 encompassed the idea that the Internet would be a common platform not only providing information, like Web 1.0, but also allowing interactivity and productivity to increase. The platform of Web 2.0 would support all software applications, making virtually obsolete the necessity of purchasing programs. It would allow for endless variation and customization for each user. Most important, however, Web 2.0 marked the rise of the individual as participant on the Web, not simply the consumer. With the advent of blogs, wikis, and social networking sites, people no longer go on the Web just to grab information: they create it and post it. The Web is no longer the domain of only those who have the coding skills needed to build a webpage. The Web has the capacity to become an extension of the self.

“Mom? Is that you?”

We seem to be living in a moment of another type of digital divide, though one that is closing rather rapidly, and that is the divide between

creators and consumers on the Web. Social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook have been on the leading edge of Web 2.0 with their exceptionally fast growth, but nearly all sites now have adapted to incorporate the Web 2.0 sensibility.

In years past, a user who read a story on a news site had no technological capability for expressing his or her thoughts on the piece. Now, articles can be tagged, posted to Digg, incite active discussion forums where people can share opinions, and be shared, embedded, or emailed to others.

The story is no longer stuck on the page, or in this case, the screen; it is a potential piece of information that can be used or dismissed by the user with a few clicks of the computer mouse. News, or any other article posted on the Web, is no longer the province of the person or corporation who created and posted it; it is a unit of knowledge that can be manipulated as users wish—posting it to their own blogs, cutting and pasting it into a newsletter, or any other of a wide variety of applications. The uniform platform of Web 2.0 allows for the nearly seamless movement of information between destinations.

In addition to the appropriation and personalization of existing content, the uniform platform allows easy creation of new material. Websites are so easily created that, by some estimates, there are billions of them now on the Internet. No one really knows for sure. What is certain is that the role of the Web is increasing in the lives of nearly everyone, as evidenced by a 2009 article on CNN.com: “All in the Facebook Family: Older Generations Join Social Networks” outlines how the fastest-growing demographic on Facebook, women over the age of fifty-five, uses social networking sites to remain connected to their far-flung families (Sutter).

Facebook originally started as a college campus-based program that existed to keep students in touch with friends on campus and those who attended different universities. It has evolved, along with Twitter, into one of the most traveled-to destinations on the Web. The interconnection made possible by social networking sites is fundamentally changing the way people interact with online content, the way they perceive the roles of producers and consumers of media, as well as the way they view the role of the Internet in their lives.

To children who are “growing up digital,” a phrase coined by Dan Tapscott in the late 1990s, connection with others via the Web is simply a matter of daily life; there’s nothing at all unusual about using your phone to take pictures of your friends and then posting those photos on your social network site page. It’s an expectation—if an event

occurs but isn't blogged about, it may as well not have happened. For many students, life is lived online, the virtual reactions and conversations as real as any that take place face to face. The dangers of online life, too, are as real as those in "real" life. Stories of predators, cyber bullies, and stalkers abound, and students today, though they are perceived as being technologically savvy, are as naïve about online issues as they are about real-life dangers. They depend on the adults in their lives to help guide them through the thickets of life, both real and virtual, and it's the responsibility of the schools to add online skills to students' repertoires.

If we subscribe to the belief that schools should prepare students for the world they are about to enter, it is incumbent upon us to recognize the importance of the digital world and begin formulating a pedagogy that frames for students the shifting roles of information production and consumption, how to evaluate sources of information, and how to effectively use technology to communicate. Many of those skills lie squarely in the domain of the ELA teacher, so incorporating Web 2.0 technology into the everyday pedagogy of a school is a logical fit for English departments. The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE), the International Reading Association (IRA), and many business organizations, like the Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21), all recognize the need for schools to integrate technology training at a far deeper level than currently exists. Issues such as teacher readiness to embrace a more digitized world and the lack of a coherent pedagogy for teaching these new technologies effectively, as well as fitting them into the existing mission of the English department, remain obstacles.

Lesson Plans for Developing Digital Literacies is framed as a resource for teachers who find themselves in that transitional state between having a passing knowledge of Web 2.0 tools and bridging them into a more sophisticated understanding of how to integrate them into day-to-day instruction. One of the risks faced in creating a text like this is the timeliness of the information. Many of the websites and programs named in this text may, due to the fickle nature of the Web and its users, disappear overnight. Therefore, what we've attempted to do is to create pedagogy around a site or program that will allow teachers to implement the same lesson using a different site or program that does something similar; the tools might be slightly different but the process and results should be equivalent. Asynchronous chat programs, graphics programs, picture aggregating sites—all will evolve over time, and some of the sites named specifically in these lessons will disappear. But

the information on how to use these ideas instructionally will sustain the relevance of these lessons regardless of the life or death of a single program. If the Web 2.0 world teaches us anything, it teaches us to be nimble and adaptive with the tools at hand.

Finally, this book seeks to address a pressing issue in every ELA classroom—that of reading skills. With the introduction of every new technology, people lament the lost skills the prior generation valued. Reading is a skill that, through wave after wave of technology, detractors of new technologies lament as lost. While some of these complaints feel true—it does seem, for example, that our students read less and have less interest in reading for enjoyment—in many ways, the issue is moot. The Internet and its role in people's lives is more than a passing fad. If Sutter's CNN.com article is any indication, the connections being made via social networks seem to be replacing the social interactions we've experienced in the past.

The issue, then, is to figure out the place of the ELA teacher in this milieu. Do we embrace new technology and integrate it into our instructional practice? Or lament the loss of reading skills in our students, do what we can to remediate that, and continue on as we have in the past? At the risk of using an outdated cliché, it would seem the choice is clear—ELA teachers should not be the new buggy whip makers. We should be proactive in teaching our students to compose text with clarity, communicate with purpose, and read for understanding, all skills reinforced in any ELA classroom. To that effort, this text attempts, as much as possible, to build bridges between literature and the Web and between student composition around print texts and electronic resources, and to engage students in a wide variety of composition strategies.

The need for this engagement is pressing, as Mark Bauerlein points out in *The Dumbest Generation*. He discusses how the Nielsen Corporation, in an April 2006 "Alertbox," posted an article titled "F-Shaped Pattern for Reading Web Content" that explored how people scan a webpage widely at the top, then in gradually narrowing scopes of reading as they hunt for the most useful information. It seems that technology really is changing the ways people read and process information, just as each new introduction of technology has in the past.

Strategies for integrating technology require the same sound pedagogy that focuses on more "traditional" texts. Good teaching is, we believe, still good teaching, and the responsibilities of the ELA teacher haven't changed. We are still preparing students to read and write their world in ways that empower, change, and fulfill them.

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2 How Did That Get on My Facebook Page? Understanding Voice, Audience, and Purpose on Social Networking Sites

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Context

We are curriculum specialists for Portland Public Schools, an urban district with more than 40,000 students, who represent seventy-two different languages. The demographics of the district are 54 percent White, 14 percent African American, 15 percent Latino, and 10 percent Asian, with 45 percent of our students eligible for free or reduced meals. This lesson has been developed for students in grades 9–12, though most of the discussion questions and activities could be modified to be appropriate for middle school students.

Rationale

Just as fish probably never look around and comment on the water, most of our students never really look around and think about the cyber sea in which they swim. And they do a lot of swimming. According to a study by the Kaiser Family Foundation, “8–18 year-olds devote an average of 7 hours and 38 minutes to using entertainment media across a typical day,” and according to a study released by Cox Communications, “the vast majority of teens (72%) have a social networking profile” (“Teen Online”). Through this lesson, students will critically examine their own and other students’ Facebook pages (though the activities are easily applicable to MySpace pages as well). They will

look at the role, audience, and purpose of key elements on their page by asking essential questions, such as:

- Why is this picture, link, or comment on my page? How did it get here?
- What are these elements saying about me as the author of my page?
- What are the marketing and advertising forces that are driving specific elements on my page?
- What do my privacy settings allow me to share and to protect?
- What are the ethical implications of the elements of my page?

This lesson is not intended to scare students or to discourage them from their online writing and communicating; only through this type of critical reflection on the medium itself and its integrated parts will students become responsible and aware consumers of the new technologies. Just because we teachers are often considered digital immigrants and may be uncomfortable with these new literacies, it would be irresponsible of us not to prepare our students with and for these technologies. This lesson tries to ensure that students are asking the right questions about the ways they communicate and to encourage them to be active, aware, and ethical participants in this environment.

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Understand how voice changes depending on audience, purpose, and medium
- Recognize the multiple modes of communication within social networking sites
- Analyze the effects of their word and image choices on their known and potential audiences
- Evaluate the commercial and marketing elements of social networking sites
- Identify and assess the role of security settings on social networking sites

NCTE/IRA standards addressed: 3, 4, 6

Materials/Preactivity Preparation

If you are not a regular Facebook user, you may want to set up an account (it's free, though not without costs, as you'll see below) to

familiarize yourself with the functionality and types of communication available on social networking sites. Additionally, to prepare, you may want to preview a few videos available on YouTube about Facebook, some of which may not be appropriate for classroom viewing, but they will give you some insights into the similarities and differences between online and offline communication. Because the links will have changed or expired by the time this book goes to press, search on YouTube for “Facebook in Real Life,” and you will have a number of short (and funny) videos from which to choose.

Ideally, the activities in this lesson would be completed in a fully functioning computer lab with all students at their own computers working on their own Facebook or MySpace pages. There are, however, several potential difficulties in achieving this ideal situation, including limited computer access, district policy that blocks access to social networking sites, and students who do not have their own Facebook accounts. Some possible solutions are to contact your district administrators to receive temporary proxies that allow for limited, teacher-supervised access to the site; have students work in pairs or small groups with a single computer and/or Facebook account; or have students complete these activities at home or at a public library. While the steps in the lesson describe students working with their own Facebook pages, all the activities can be completed by working with a partner or small group with one account.

Time Frame

This lesson consists of three parts, designed to fit into approximately three 50-minute class periods, with an additional class period devoted to assessment. As you will see, however, most of the sections are discrete activities and can be completed or eliminated to fit your specific scheduling needs.

Description of Activity

Introduction

Before students begin to look closely at their Facebook pages on the computer, take a few minutes to have them do a personal self-inventory on their Facebook usage. It is not necessary to have students write their answers, but you may wish to have them share with one another so that they get an idea of how their Facebook usage compares to that of their peers. Some questions you might want to ask are:

- How long have you had your Facebook account?
- Did you change from a different social networking site? If so, why?
- Why did you set up your Facebook account?
- How often do you check your Facebook account (for example, once a day, once an hour, a few times a week)?
- What is the average amount of time you spend once you have logged in?
- What are the first three things you check when you log in?
- What is your favorite form of communicating while on Facebook (e.g., status updates, wall-to-wall posts, poking, inbox, live chat)?

If students do not have a Facebook account—or a similar social networking site—you can ask them to respond to the following:

- Why do you not have an account?
- Do you find that many of your friends do or do not have accounts? What are their reasons for having or not having one?
- Describe your main methods of communicating with friends: phone, texting, email, etc.?
- Do you ever feel pressure from others to join Facebook or similar sites?

Part 1: What's on My Page?

There are many ways to design or set up a Facebook account. For the purpose of this portion of the lesson, we look specifically at the Info and Photos pages. Begin by having students log into their Facebook account and open their Info page. Give students a few minutes to reread the information they have included. Some people choose to spend a considerable amount of time including many facts and details; others complete their profiles with minimal information. Where do your students fall? Ask students to think about how they decided what information they would include by answering the following:

- Are there certain categories that you purposefully did not include? Why?
- At the bottom of the Info page is a list of the groups or pages the Facebook user has joined. How do you decide which groups or pages to join?

Have students choose one of their groups and discuss with a partner why they joined this group and what their membership in the group might say about them.

An essential topic to consider is the idea of online privacy. Facebook continually updates its privacy policies, so students have to read and understand the implications of the new policies quite often. Questions to consider are:

- Do you understand that when you agree to Facebook's privacy policy, you agree that some information will be viewable by everyone? For example, as of December 2009, a user's name, profile photo, and the names of work and school networks are all available to everyone.
- What other information is available to everyone? What information is available only to friends?
- What does *privacy* mean to you? Do you think this term means something different to people in your parents' generation?

Much has been made of employers or university admissions offices searching social networking sites to learn more about potential employees or students. Have students discuss with a partner who they think might have looked at their profile, and whether they are comfortable with the information they have shared being viewed by people they don't know well as well as by those they do. A couple of interesting questions to ask regarding this that never fail to generate lively discussion are:

- If your grandmother asked to be your friend on Facebook, would you accept her? Why or why not?
- Who is the intended audience for your Facebook page and how is that reflected in what information you share and do not share?

Honestly, the latter is a very difficult question because Facebook, by definition, has so many different audiences, and Facebook users typically have multiple purposes for their communications.

Next, have students open their Photos page. Give them a few minutes to glance through both the photos that have been added by others and a few of the albums they have chosen to create. Once they've had a few minutes to review, ask them to think about the following:

- How do you filter the pictures you add to your Facebook photo album before you post them?
- How do you determine which picture you will use for your profile photo? How often do you change your profile picture?
- Who has permission to see the pictures in your album?

In addition to students being able to post their own pictures, anyone on Facebook can post pictures and place a "tag" on the photo

that identifies the people in it. Any photo in Facebook with your tag will also be posted to your Facebook page. Ask students to consider:

- Have you had pictures appear on Facebook that you were not happy with? Did you remove the tag(s)?
- Did you contact the person who tagged the photo to let him or her know you were not happy about being tagged?

Ask students to discuss with a partner the ethical conflicts or concerns that might arise about posting and tagging pictures on Facebook.

Another section of their page that students should consider is the listing of their friends. Direct them to scan through their list of friends (for some this may take a while). As they scan, ask them to consider the following:

- How many friends do you have? What percentage of these friends are also friends offline?
- Who do you most often communicate with when on Facebook (e.g., close friends, friends, acquaintances)?
- Are these people you normally communicate with when not on Facebook? Explain.

Other topics you might want students to discuss with a partner concern the ethics involving friends on Facebook, such as:

- How do you decide who to friend or not to friend?
- Have you ever “unfriended” someone? Why? Were there any online or offline effects? Have you ever been “unfriended” or not been added as a friend? Again, what were the online or offline effects?

Now that students have had some time to review the specifics of their Info and Photos pages, wrap up this part of the lesson by asking them to think back on the parts of their pages they examined and explain whether their Facebook page is an accurate reflection of who they are. What would they change, add, or delete to present themselves more accurately to their intended audience?

Part 2: How Do I Communicate?

Ask students to look through their sites and list the various methods of communication within the Facebook environment. They should come up with many of the following, though they may need some prompting to see each of these as distinct modes of communication:

- Inbox
- Status updates

- Wall postings
- Live chats
- Poking

After students have generated their lists, they should read a few of their postings in each of these categories and then explain, in writing or in a discussion with a partner, the similarities and differences between these modes of communication. For example:

- Do you use more formal language in your inbox than in wall postings?
- Do you tend to use one mode of communication for some friends and a different one for other friends? Why?
- Do you have different purposes for using the different modes of communication?
- How do you compare the ways you communicate on Facebook with the other ways you communicate with friends: phone, email, texting, Twitter, etc.?

Next, ask students to find messages they wrote to two very different people. Maybe the people are different by age, by gender, by profession, or some other factor. What's different and similar about the messages? Why? What specific language choices did they use? Why?

Finally, ask students to reread two postings they made to two different friends. One should be a friend they see offline regularly and the other should be a friend they communicate with mostly online. Again, students should compare their language choices and purposes for writing to these two friends. Some people like to use the terms *bridging* and *bonding* to describe different communication purposes. We "bridge" with people we are getting to know and would like to make more connections with, and we "bond" with people we already know and would like to deepen our connection with. Ask students to consider which of their friends they bridge with and which they bond with on Facebook. How do they bridge and bond with people in offline communication?

Two highly effective tools for helping students think about their communication purposes are the following reading strategies:

Strategy 1: RAFT

Role (Who is the speaker of the message?)

Audience (To whom is the message delivered?)

Format (What is the mode of communication: email, letter, video, etc.?)

Topic (What is the purpose of the message?)

Strategy 2: SOAPSTone

Speaker

Occasion

Audience

Purpose

Subject

Tone

Ask students to analyze at least one of their written pieces from Facebook using one of these reading strategies. RAFT tends to be a little easier than SOAPSTone for younger students. As an extension activity, you might have students compare one of their Facebook pieces with one of their offline pieces.

Part 3: Who's Paying?

Facebook, like most social networking sites, does not charge to use its service, but in 2009, it was able to earn \$550 million, according to Nicolas Carlson of *Business Insider*. How does it do this? This portion of the lesson examines the commercial side of Facebook. It is important to begin with an opportunity for students to define and discuss the following terms: *advertising*, *marketing*, and *commercialism*. For older students, you may also want to ask about terms such as *stealth marketing* and *consumerism*.

The first step, after discussing the terms, is to have students look at the ads that surround their Facebook page. You may need to inform them that the ads on their page are not the exact ads that appear on other people's pages; they are somewhat individual to each user based on preferences they have identified. Students should make a list of all the products advertised there, refreshing their page a few times to see new ads appear. Ask them to write down what they think these advertisements have in common. Are most of them, for example, ads for clothing or food or music? Students should then pair up with another student to compare the ads on each other's pages. What do they have in common? Which are unique? Do ads for certain topics—e.g., shoes, fast food, music—seem to appear more often than others? Why? Wrap up this focus on advertising by having students do some detective work. Have them try to figure out what elements on their page (recalling their work in Part 1 of the lesson) might have triggered certain ads to appear there. They should look over their profile, groups they have joined, and pages they have visited. Ask them to make some inferences about why specific ads appear on their page but do not appear on their partner's page.

Ads are only the most obvious form of marketing found on Facebook. Marketers use many other methods in an attempt to influence Facebook users' purchasing choices. Ask students to look through their group pages. Questions for them to consider are:

- How many of your pages are linked to consumer products?
- How and why did you join that group?
- How many unsolicited requests or messages for commercial products do you have in your inbox or on your wall? What about games, surveys, and other activities? Do they have commercial connections? Examples might be surveys of favorite restaurants, a quiz about Harry Potter characters, or free song download offers.
- How do you think these marketing features came to be on your page, and do you think these elements might influence your purchasing decisions?

An interesting extension activity would be to ask students to research the business aspects of Facebook and other social networking sites. Questions to consider are:

- Who owns them?
- How do they make their money? How much money do they make?
- Which sites are most successful, and why?

Also, students should consider the similarities and differences between the advertising and marketing that appears on Facebook and that appearing on or in other, more traditional forms of media, such as television, magazines, and radio.

Assessment

Throughout this lesson, students have explored their Facebook pages by identifying the elements on their pages, by analyzing how they tend to communicate online, and by trying to understand the commercial aspects of the social network. Students have had a chance to respond to many of the bulleted questions and have discussed their responses with a partner or a small group. These activities have led up to two different types of assessment: a personal reflection and an argumentative essay.

A prompt for the personal reflection (see Handout 2.1 on the companion website) could be: How does your online self (as represented on Facebook or a similar site) compare to your offline self? If students are not regular users of an online social networking site, they



could compare a friend's Facebook page to that person's offline persona. Questions they should consider as they write their reflection are:

- How does your online representation compare to your offline persona?
- How is your online communication with others similar to or different from your offline communication?
- What advertising and marketing forces affect your online activities, and how does the commercialism compare to your offline activities?

Another effective culminating assessment is to ask students to demonstrate what they have learned by writing an argumentative essay in the form of an op-ed piece or letter to the editor. Students might also enjoy using their pieces in a class debate afterward. Topics that work well for this include:

- Does online communication on social networking sites enhance or diminish offline communication skills?
- What are the benefits or drawbacks to having Facebook access blocked at school?
- Is it ethical or appropriate to post a picture of someone without his or her express written consent?
- Are offline friendships more satisfying and real than online friendships?
- Does Facebook create "drama" for adolescent relationships and communication?
- Should advertisers have access to the profiles and preferences that Facebook users have created so that they can generate specific advertisements for each user?
- What levels of privacy—if any—should exist on Facebook and other social networking sites?

Connections and Adaptations

We have found that because the topic of this lesson is so engaging for students, it is difficult to stay within the identified three classroom sessions. You'll note that we have already described several extensions to the lesson, including the investigation of Facebook's revenue and the ethics of friending and unfriending. Students may also enjoy examining the issues around online privacy, especially regarding how they relate to commercial and marketing forces. A final extension might be to ask students to research the ways that communication technologies have changed over time, from the Gutenberg press to telegraphs to the

Internet, and how they have impacted society. Because these technologies change so rapidly, it's possible that by the time this book goes to press your students will be saying, "What's Facebook?" Nevertheless, these activities, regardless of the actual medium, will help give students the skills and the awareness they need to communicate effectively both on- and offline.

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Lesson Plans for Developing DIGITAL LITERACIES

Technologies and their instructional applications change. As teachers, we need to learn to change with them. To help us capitalize on technologies and tools students may be using outside of the classroom, Mary T. Christel and Scott Sullivan have compiled a follow-up to their successful 2007 collection, *Lesson Plans for Creating Media-Rich Classrooms*, with a new set of lessons designed to help you integrate a variety of digital applications—Web 2.0 and beyond—into the courses and units you’re already teaching.

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- Developing the digital process portfolio
- Creating a classroom Ning
- Using discussion boards
- Collaborating, composing, and communicating using Google Docs
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- Improving reading skills and/or through interactive technology
- Podcasting the traditional book review
- Using microblogging to explore character and style

The text includes numerous teacher resources and also directs readers to a companion website that offers student handouts, more resources for teachers, and samples of student work.

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