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LESSONS

True Connections: Personal Experiences with Social Media

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GRADES 6–9

TYPE

INFORMATIONAL
MEDIA
MEMOIR
NARRATIVE
POETRY

Invite students to write about their personal experiences with social media and online platforms with this lesson from 826NYC.

SESSION 1 :

YOU WILL NEED

- Social Media Questionnaire Handout
- Writing Prompts Handout
- Computer
- Projector

BEFORE YOU START

Briefly introduce students to the lesson topic, exploring their personal connections with social media, and objectives: they'll discuss their use, habits, and opinions on social media; share personal experiences with social media and technology; and experiment with different writing formats and styles.

HOW TO BEGIN

Often, we introduce a writing workshop by way of sharing student writing, giving students an end in mind before they start the writing process. If time allows, you may opt to display a group of student quotes from the book True Connections and ask students which they agree or disagree with most:

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“My social media accounts are based on my life, but they aren’t what make my life.” — Jesenia

“Overall, I am grateful for my parents’ semi-strict attitude towards technology as I have witnessed first-hand how obsessed one can become.” — Rex

“Social media has become a tool for speaking without hesitation and eradicating listening. Instead of interacting with people and sharing their lives with each other, social media has become a shield for cowards and a microphone for those who don’t think before they speak.” — Madelyn

Social Media Questionnaire

Students will dive into the topic at hand by completing the following questions based on their personal experiences. Let students know that they may skip a question(s) if it isn’t relatable and spend more time answering questions they care about most.

- What’s your favorite website or online tool?
- What equipment do you use to communicate with others (phone, computer, ipad, etc.):
- How many hours a day do you spend using technology?
- How many hours do you use social media?
- How often do you text with friends?
- Create a list of your top five rules for posting something online (using Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, etc).
- Describe a time you felt great about something you posted online. Why did it make you feel good?
- If you could go back in time and change something you posted or take back a text you sent, which would it be and why?
- What advice would you give to younger people who are just getting started posting things online?
- What would you do if one day you woke up and the internet and phones stopped working? How would you go about your day?

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Finding Connections

Once students complete the questionnaire, break them into small groups to discuss their answers with one another. Ask for one point person in each group to share out on common trends they notice across their responses with the other groups afterward.

“To Post or Not to Post” Group Activity

Next, divide students into two groups, each with two support volunteers (or two student leaders). Tell students that you will project four scenarios and they will have to decide as a group whether or not they should post online. Volunteers or group leaders will lead students through the following questions:

- Does posting this online affect anyone negatively (including myself)?
- Is there anything in this post that I would look back on at regret posting?
- Is there anyone who might read this that I wouldn’t want to see it?

Once the group has decided whether or not they would post this online, they should either (A) come up with a solid argument for why they should be allowed to post this online or (B) come up with clear reasons for anyone who wants to make that post about why it isn’t such a good idea. As they discuss, if students want more information about the scenario, direct them to make certain assumptions that will help them come to a consensus as a group.

Scenario 1: News flash that you’ve broken up with your boyfriend or girlfriend

Scenario 2: A long rant about your terrible history teacher

Scenario 3: An old baby photo of you in the bathtub

Scenario 4: The street address where you’ll be meeting your friends at 4:00pm.

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Introduce True Connections Writing Prompt

Introduce the writing prompt. Students will share a personal experience with social media that illustrates its benefits, challenges, or both. Students may experiment with composing their piece within a social media platform. Show examples of the different forms their writing can take: the Twitter essay (a series of 140-character line tweets that tell a story), an Instagram story (utilizing either captions or a series of videos), an essay, a poem, etc. Finally, review the upcoming writing process together: brainstorming and freewriting, group workshopping, and revision.

Exploring Connections: Brainstorm and Draft

Students will select one prompt from the options below and create a list, freewrite, or mind map to begin brainstorming. You may choose divide students into pairs or return them to their small groups so that they can share their ideas with each other and get early feedback from their peers. Student may begin drafting their piece in their chosen format after they explore 2-3 prompts. You may wish to have students complete the drafts they start in class as homework, or extend the drafting process into another session as time allows.

Social Media

- How is your “real life” personality similar and different from your online personality?
- Tell us about a time when you felt you were really different online than the “real” you.
- What kinds of stories do you like to share with your friends online? How do you decide what you want to post?
- Tell us about a time you posted something that you later wished you hadn’t.
- Write about a time you saw someone post something about you online that wasn’t true – and what you did (or didn’t do) about it.
- Tell the story behind the most popular photo you’ve ever posted.

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- Have you ever met a good friend online? Tell the story of how you met.

Videos and Online Gaming

- Tell us about a video game that's changed your life.
- If you're a gamer, what's the best part about being a gamer? What's the worst part?
- Has there ever been a time that you didn't feel like you belonged in a gaming situation (because of your gender, age, etc.)? If so, tell us about that.
- Who are your favorite YouTubers? What do you like about them and why?
- Do you know anyone who has become YouTube famous?
- Would you want to be YouTube famous? If you were, what do you think you'd be YouTube famous for? Why?

Friendship in the Internet Age

- Imagine all social media went away. Would your friendships remain the same? Would they be with the same people? How would they be different?
- What's the text you most wish you hadn't written?
- What's the text you most wish you HAD written?
- What's the worst/funniest misunderstanding you've had because of texting or social media?
- If you could prevent one of your friends from ever texting again, who would it be and why?
- Has social media created jealousy and divisions among your friends? If so, tell us one story of how it has.

  What place online do you feel most at home?

Life Online

- How do your parents feel about your tech use?
- Do your parents or family use technology the same way you do, or differently? How so?

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- Do you ever take intentional breaks from technology or social media? Why or why not? What do you do with your time away from tech/social media?
- Do you ever wish you could detach? Or do you wish you could stay immersed? Please explain.
- Have you ever been a victim of cyberbullying? If so, what was it like and how did it make you feel?
- Have you been a cyberbully yourself, and if so, why did you do it?
- What's it like to navigate the online world if you're a teen for whom English is a second language? For immigrants or first-generation Americans, has it changed how you learn the language or made learning English easier or harder?

News Sources

- Do you feel like you can trust the news and other things you read online? Why or why not?
- What is the most reliable news source, in your opinion? Why?
- What is the most reliable place to find information for school work or your own writing, in your opinion? Why?
- Where do you learn most about the world, your community, and current events?
- How do you determine if a story is real? How do you determine if it's worth sharing?
- Have you ever shared a story from a news source or included something in a paper that you thought was true but later realized was not? How did that make you feel? Can you describe the experience?

Peer Workshop

Next, students will workshop their poems with their peers (and/or volunteers, when applicable) and share feedback. We like to use these general guidelines for giving peer feedback:

- Readers:
  - Lead with something positive.
  - Be specific. Not, "I liked it!" Give details!

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- Ask questions and talk it out. Don’t be shy — you’re helping the author achieve their desired reaction in a reader.
- Authors:
  - Listen, ask questions, seek clarification. Be receptive.

Individual Revision

Using the feedback from their peers, students will use ARMS to revise their work. Ask students to focus on the broad strokes, like author’s purpose and organization of ideas:

- **A**dd words and ideas
- **R**emove words or phrases that you don’t need
- **M**ove/change a word or placement of words or phrases
- **S**ubstitute words or phrases for new ones

Closing

Bring students back together. Ask students to choose one section, paragraph, or sentence from their draft to share with a small or whole group. Then, discuss general trends and connections students notice. You may post the following questions for students:

1. What surprised you or stood out?
2. Who’s piece or opinion did you connect with most and why?
3. Do you think the opinions you heard today represent the ideas and habits of your generation? How do you expect these opinions to change or manifest in 5-10 years?

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