

LESSON

Activism Online

This lesson introduces children to different ways young people have used the internet to work toward positive social change.

Grade Level 3-5

Subject: Digital Literacy, Reading & Language Arts, Social Studies

Social Justice Domain: Justice, Action

Handout: Taking Action Online, Tracking Strengths and Weaknesses

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Define two to three different ways that people in their age group can participate in online activism
- Consider strengths and weaknesses of the internet as a tool for activism
- Identify and work on a problem or pressing issue in their school or community

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- How can digital technologies be used to help achieve social change?
- What are some of the strengths and weaknesses of the internet as a tool for activism?

MATERIALS

- “Taking Action Online” handout
- “Tracking Strengths and Weaknesses” handout

Vocabulary

activism [AK tuh viz uhm] (*noun*) the taking of action to achieve social change

civic action [SIH vik AK shuhn] (*noun*) working actively, usually in a collaborative group, to empower citizens

petition [puh TIH shuhn] (*noun*) a written document signed by people to demand a kind of change

hashtag [HASH tag] (*noun*) on social media sites, a word or phrase that starts with the sign # and is used to identify messages about a particular theme or topic

Series Overview

As technology advances and the social landscape shifts, it is crucial for students to become digitally literate citizens. In this series, elementary students will learn the ins and outs of media literacy, from choosing reliable sources and understanding online searches to navigating online security and participating in digital communities.

Lesson Overview

The internet can be a powerful tool for social justice and civic action, and kids are often excited to learn about how they can use digital technologies to work for change they believe in. The beginning of this lesson introduces children to different ways young people have used the internet to work toward positive social change.

Kids will also have a chance to think about some of the strengths and weaknesses of the internet as a tool for activism, especially among people their age. This will give them the opportunity to consider how other channels compare and contrast to digital ones.

Finally, students will think about a local issue they care about and generate an action plan that involves using digital technology to educate others or impel activism in their school or community.

Procedure

INTERNET ACTIVISM

1. Ask students if they have ever heard of the idea of using the internet for social action, or in simpler terms, using the internet to help people or to do something good. As a group, discuss what activism is and what it might mean to work on activism using digital media.

2. Pass out the “Taking Action Online” handout. Give students time to read the handout independently. Alternatively, you can read the handout to students or pair them up with partners to read. Ask students to underline any unfamiliar words and highlight key ideas. Then, bring students back together and discuss the following questions.

- What are some of the ways young people used the internet for activism?
- How does the internet help students with their activism?
- How did the stories in this handout make you think and feel?

STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES

1. Explain to your students that, as with any tool, the internet has pros and cons. Some people see mainly strengths in the internet as a tool for social organizing, while others see more disadvantages. Give students the “Strengths and Weaknesses” handout. Ask them to work with partners to complete the handout, listing at least three strengths and three weaknesses of the internet as a tool for action.

Some possible strengths include being able to reach more people, being able to work quickly, getting a lot of broad attention, working from grassroots, putting control in the hands of a younger generation and incorporating videos and images along with text.

Some possible weaknesses include the need for people to be able to access the internet in order to be involved, the fact that many kids do not have access to social media, the concept of slacktivism (using the internet for social activism can make you feel like you are doing more than you actually are), and the possibility of echo chambers (activists talk to each other but it is not always clear whether anyone is listening).

Your students may also come up with strengths and weaknesses of their own, which is fine. You can use your instincts about whether or not it makes sense to offer ideas as they work. If students need more support in coming up with ideas, encourage them to return to the “Taking Action Online” handout you began with for stories. They can focus on one of the examples in the handout and analyze what they believe did and did not work well within the example.

2. Bring students back together to share some of the ideas and questions that came up as they worked on the “Strengths and Weaknesses” handout.

CHANGE IN YOUR COMMUNITY

1. Ask students to think about a school or community issue they have been working on or would like to see addressed. Facilitate a short discussion about how the internet might help people work on this problem.

2. Break students into small groups, and ask each group to come up with a hypothetical plan of three different ways they might use digital media to work on the problem they identified. Each group should create an illustrated outline or plan for how they would use the internet to work on the cause they care about. Leave students time to share their action plans with each other and relate them back to the strengths and weaknesses you discussed, and if time permits discuss examples as a class.

DO SOMETHING

Creating a hypothetical plan might not be enough for all of your students! If you have time and family support, see if you can help students carry their plans out. Make sure to keep security and privacy in mind as you support your students in what is likely to be their first real effort at digital social action. Leave plenty of time to reflect on the experience and consider the strengths and weaknesses of taking this approach to achieve social change.

Alignment to Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.4

Determine the meaning of general academic and domain-specific words or phrases in a text relevant to a grade 4 topic or subject area.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.5

Describe the overall structure (e.g., chronology, comparison, cause/effect, problem/solution) of events, ideas, concepts, or information in a text or part of a text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.7

Interpret information presented visually, orally, or quantitatively (e.g., in charts, graphs, diagrams, time lines, animations, or interactive elements on Web pages) and explain how the information contributes to an understanding of the text in which it appears.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1.a

Come to discussions prepared, having read or studied required material; explicitly draw on that preparation and other information known about the topic to explore ideas under discussion.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.4.1.b

Follow agreed-upon rules for discussions and carry out assigned roles.

EXTERNAL LINKS

“Youth, Activism and the Power of Digital Media” <http://www.youthforchange.org/latest-posts/2016/8/12/youth-digital-media-and-ac...>

“‘Cool Tool’ or a Means for Effective Engagement?” Youth, Justice and Social Me...

<http://www.youthpolicy.org/blog/internet-governance/youth-justice-and-social-me...>

“Youth Activism Project” <http://jearl.faculty.arizona.edu/content/youth-activism-project>

x



LFJ Workshops Now Available!

Learning for Justice offers affordable professional development workshops for current K-12 classroom teachers, administrators and counselors, and for anyone who coaches classroom teachers and administrators. Explore the schedule and register today—space is limited!

Register Today!