

Digital (and other) Communities

Lesson Plan for Middle School

OVERVIEW & PURPOSE

Our work is founded on the idea that oral history can be a very powerful way for students to connect with the past. With this in mind, we begin this lesson by connecting students with the past through oral history and using insights gained to shed some light on what's going on in our world today. This lesson starts by defining community, then walks students through a series of discussions and activities that give them opportunities to reflect on their own communities, especially those they develop through social media. Finally, students will explore how communities develop around social justice issues and how those communities are mobilized using social media.

OBJECTIVE

1. To encourage reflection on the many ways we create and are part of communities.
2. To help students reflect critically on the role that social media plays in their lives.
3. To introduce students to some online social justice movements and give them opportunities to share other resources they may already know about.
4. To increase awareness of the many ways in which students can create or join communities and bring about change they want to see in the world and to generate momentum for doing so.

MATERIALS NEEDED

1. Pen/pencil
2. Journal, notebook or a few pieces of paper.
3. [Digital Communities Survey](#)

ACTIVITY

Part One:

1. Warm Up: Word cloud. Ask students what they associate with the word “community” and write it on white board/smart board.
2. Introducing Ms. Keith Edwards. Read/paraphrase the following: “Meet Ms. Keith Edwards, who has lived her entire life in Northside. She was the first black woman to serve on the UNC police force. Because she was treated very unfairly and was not paid as much as the other officers, she sued UNC and she won. You are about to listen to an audio clip where Ms. Keith talks about what it was like to be one of the first black students to attend an all-white school in Chapel Hill. She had lived and gone to school in her Northside neighborhood; listen to what she says about how she felt in her neighborhood compared to how she felt in her new school.
3. Play this short audio clip:
<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/search?q=keith%20edwards>
4. Ask students to share what they’ve heard. Here are a few questions you might ask students. How does Ms. Keith describe her school? How does she describe her community? Compare and contrast.

School	Community

5. Now it’s time for students to begin reflecting about their communities. Where do they feel like they are “in a cocoon, safe”? Are there places where they feel threatened the way Ms. Keith did at school? They might take a few minutes to record their thoughts.

6. You might note that in our “communities” we often feel a mixture of comfort and discomfort. In this exercise, students can begin to reflect on their communities and how it feels to be a part of them. Working individually, students can jot down their thoughts about the following questions. Think of this as a self-interview!!! (This survey can be found at the link above.)
 1. How do you communicate with your friends and family? What sorts of things do you do and talk about?
 2. Now think especially of the time you spend online and on social media. Which social media sites do you use (facebook, instagram, something else?) or another online platform (Reddit, discord, online games, etc.)? What do you like about them? If you don't do social media, why not?
 3. Do you consider your social media sites and platforms to be “communities”? Why or why not?
 4. Do you feel “safe” online or not? Why or why not?
 5. What do you think your life would look like if you didn't have social media?
 6. Can you imagine having a community where all your interactions are face-to-face or on the phone? (Like Ms. Keith's)
7. Have students form groups to share and record their thoughts on these questions. Alternatively, ask students to volunteer to share their reflections with the class. How you do this depends on what you think your students feel most comfortable sharing in a group setting.
8. Now, explain the follow-up assignment (below) to students and set a time by which they should complete this.

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Researching Digital Communities

- 1. Find 2-3 people you consider part of your community (family, friends, relatives) and ask them the same questions you answered in part 5 above. In addition to people your age, try to find people from different generations/ages (someone your parents' age, your grandparents' age.)**
- 2. Write a short description of each interview mentioning ONE HIGHLIGHT of each interview.**
- 3. Compare your self-interview with these other interviews. What are some ideas you share? What are some differences?**
- 4. Has listening to other people's ideas changed anything about how you think about social media? (Example: My cousin Jamie says that she is on Instagram all the time but doesn't feel like she can be completely herself because of what people might think. OR: My friend Mario says he spends way too much time online but feels comfortable talking with other gamer nerds.)**

Part Two:

MATERIALS NEEDED

- 1. Computer or laptop**
- 2. Paper and markers for creating a poster (or access to an online poster-creation site like Canva)**

ACTIVITY

9. Once students have completed the interviewing, they are ready to move on! This second part requires a laptop or computer. You can introduce the transition by explaining along these lines: "In your last assignment, you interviewed yourself and someone you know well. Did you both agree that social media or some kind of online platform played an important role in your community? (Probably for most people, the answer is "yes.") So, let's take this to the next level."

10. Ask students: “Do you think social media can bring people together, form communities and bring about some real changes in the world?” Give them some time to brainstorm as a class. Some may even be able to give examples of online campaigns.

11. Using their laptops, direct students to the the following site and give them time to read through it. (15-20 min)

<https://www.mic.com/articles/138404/13-twitter-hashtags-th-at-made-identity-part-of-everyone-s-conversation#.i1hiC03qB>

12. Once they have finished, discuss a few examples of viral hashtag campaigns related to themes of identity, diversity, justice and action.

13. Ask students to choose one of the hashtags that is most interesting to them.

14. Students should then see what else they can find about what these groups are doing, beginning with their Facebook page and their Twitter and Instagram feed.

15. Using drawing materials or an online site like *Canva*, ask students to create a poster with all of this information on it:

____ **Your hashtag campaign**

____ **The creator of the campaign**

____ **The year of its creation (if known)**

____ **5 sample responses people wrote**

16. Ask each student to present their posters to the class.

17. **Wrap-Up:** What do you want to change? How can you create a “safe space” and mobilize people online? If you could come up with a hashtag for an online community or campaign, what would it be? On an exit pass, ask students to write down their hashtag! #you’re done!