



Flamers, Lurkers, and Mentors

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Facilitator's Guide

Lesson Overview (Grades 6-12)

Ethical participation online doesn't just include the ability to jump into situations and make your opinions heard. A large part of ethical participation is "thinking before you type," that is, choosing *not* to jump in when it's inappropriate or futile and choosing to *carefully* speak when situations grow heated. Furthermore, sometimes one's very presence—even without speaking or writing down one's thoughts—is enough to make a difference. By developing good judgment about when to step in and when to back off, youth can fruitfully participate in discussion and debate—both online and offline.

In this activity, students will break into small groups. Each group will discuss a different online dilemma. After deciding how they would act, they will create short presentations about their choices. The class as a whole will then weigh in on the choices each group made and reflect on times when they have made similar choices in their daily lives.

During this lesson, students will:

1. Explore how their choices to speak in different ways or stay silent can harm and/or benefit the communities in which they participate.
2. Present their own judgments, describing whether they would stay silent or speak and how they would speak in different hypothetical online situations.
3. Engage in discussion and constructive critique of one another's decisions.
4. Explain some passive actions and why they may in fact be participatory.

Ethical thinking skills highlighted in this lesson:

- Reflecting on different **roles and responsibilities** within a community.
- Considering the **community-level consequences (benefits or harms)** of individual decisions.



New media literacies highlighted in this lesson:

- **Negotiation**—the ability to travel across diverse communities, discerning and respecting multiple perspectives, and grasping and following alternative norms.

Learning Objectives

After this lesson, students should be able to:

- Reflect on the meaning of “participation” online and that it does not only mean “posting” but also includes passive actions, such as viewing a web page or choosing not to speak up.
- Understand that sometimes remaining silent, not posting, or not visiting a webpage can be as important a decision as speaking up.
- Recognize that they have a responsibility to think through posting, not posting, visiting pages, or not visiting pages online.
- Consider the possible effects to themselves, to others, and to the broader community of any decision they make to post, not post, visit pages, or not visit pages online

Materials Used

- Situation Sheets (for each situation you plan to use)

Lesson Introduction

Write the terms “flamer,” “lurker,” and “mentor” on the chalkboard. Ask the class to say what they think each of those terms means in the context of online life. Ask them what each type of person does. That is, a student might say, “a flamer leaves mean comments.” Or they might say, “a lurker sets up a profile on a site, but doesn’t do anything else,” or “A mentor uploads lots of videos to YouTube—that’s how they learned about the community rules well enough to help people.” Brainstorm different ways that each of these types of people participate in online communities. If the class doesn’t quickly reach conclusions, read them the following definitions:

Flamer—A person who gets into arguments and, instead of having a reasonable discussion, insults people or states his/her opinions in very blunt or insensitive ways.

Lurker—A person who surfs the Web, exploring and even joining various online communities, but never posts or comments on anything.



Mentor—A person who seeks out new members of a community and helps them learn how to fit in by orienting them to the rules, guidelines, norms, and values of the community.

Next, have the class try and come up with some ways these people could clash with one another. For example, a student might say, “a mentor might try to get a flamer to stop violating the community’s rules.” Introduce the idea that you should think about three levels of impact when you take an action—**effects on yourself, effects on others, and effects on the larger community.**

Invite the class to think more carefully about some situations in which people might clash online. Online clashes can happen very quickly; explain that the class is about to do an activity that will allow them to slow down time and think carefully about what they would do in some tense online situations. If you like, explain that this activity is like training in sports: you train your muscles slowly and often, so that when you need to call upon them, you can act quickly and be sure they’ll respond.

Lesson Instructions

- 1. Introduce** the lesson. (This should take no more than a quarter of the allotted class time.)
- 2. Break the class into small groups.** Each group will be assigned one situation to work on. Hand out the Situation Sheets.
- 3. Allow the groups to discuss their situations** and develop short presentations about their situations and *why* they chose to act in the ways they chose to act. (This should take no more than a quarter of the allotted class time.)
- 4. Each group should present their situation,** including the decision they came to about how to act. They should emphasize the decision-making process. (This should take no more than a quarter of the allotted class time.)
- 5.** After each group presents, **the class should discuss their presentation** and whether they agree or disagree with the decisions that the group made. (This should take no more than a quarter of the allotted class time.)
- 6.** (Optional) For homework, ask students to write a few sentences about a time they chose to step into an argument (or stay out of it). Do they think they made the right choices?
- 7.** (Optional) For homework, ask students to make up their own Situation Sheets, based on experiences they’ve had online.



Lesson Discussion Questions

- Do you think that this group chose to act like a **flamer**? Like a **lurker**? Like a **mentor**?
- Do you think that the benefits of this group's action are really as important as they say they are? Or do you think they are more important?
- Do you think that the harms that might come from this group's action are as unimportant as they say they are? Or are they less important?
- If you disagree with this group's chosen action, why?
- If you disagree with this group's chosen action, what would you do instead? Why?

Concluding Takeaways

This lesson is designed for students to learn a variety of participation styles to choose from when interacting in a community. Through discussion and presentation of their chosen actions in different scenarios, students will be able to reflect and critique one another and walk away armed with different approaches towards good judgment when handling ethical dilemmas that might arise during their online lives.



Assessment

Through participation in class activities and discussions and/or answers to optional assessment questions, students should demonstrate they can:

- Reflect on the meaning of “participation” online and that it does not only mean “posting” but also includes passive actions, such as viewing a web page or choosing not to speak up.
- Understand that sometimes remaining silent, not posting, or not visiting a webpage can be as important a decision as speaking up.
- Recognize that they have a responsibility to think through posting, not posting, visiting pages or not visiting pages online.
- Consider the possible effects of posting, not posting, visiting pages, or not visiting pages online—consequences for themselves, for others, and for the broader community.

Assessment Questions (Optional)

- In your news feed on Facebook, you see that one of your friends has posted something that you think might offend people from certain religious groups. What do you do? What considerations inform your decision?
- Your friend sends you a link that she says is an embarrassing video of a student who goes to your school. Would you watch it? Would you forward the link to others? Explain the considerations that inform your decisions.



Situation: Halo 3

Here's the situation:

You're playing Halo 3, a shoot-'em-up video game, on X-box Live with people you don't know. The game is supposed to figure out how good you are and match you with other players that are at about the same skill level. But one person you're playing with, "Knightr1der," just stinks! He keeps messing up your team, and it's really annoying that he keeps bringing you down. Using voice chat, you hear him say that this is his first time playing the game: He logged into a friend's account so that he could play against more skilled opponents.

What would you do?

There are many options. Just some of them include:

- You could tell Knightr1der to stop using his friend's account.
- You could keep playing, and give Knightr1der tips on how to get better.
- You could keep playing and not say anything about it.
- You could quit the game and try and find other people to play with.
- Or, you could do something entirely different!

Before you decide on an option, ask yourself:

- Will what I do have any effects on me? How will I feel about what I choose?
- Will what I do have any effects on Knightr1der? How will he feel about my actions?
- Will what I do have any effects on the other players in the game? What?
- If everybody behaved the way I do, would the game be more fun?



Situation: YouTube

Here's the situation:

One of your friends sends you a link to a YouTube video. Your friend is really offended by it: She says it's very, very offensive, and she just wanted to vent about it to you. Naturally, you're curious about what made your friend so mad. If you click the link and watch the video, though, the creators of the video will see that you chose to watch it. Unless you choose to leave a comment or a rating out of five stars, they won't have any idea what you thought of it.

What would you do?

There are many options. Just some of them include:

- You could watch the video and, if you were offended, leave an angry comment.
- You could watch the video and, if you were offended, give it a low starred rating.
- You could watch the video and not leave a comment.
- You could refuse to watch the video.
- Or, you could do something entirely different!

Before you decide on an option, ask yourself:

- Will what I do have any effects on me? How will I feel about what I choose?
- Will what I do have any effects on the people who made the video?
- Will what I do have any effects on other people who use YouTube and stumble across this video?
What kinds of effects?



Situation: Facebook

Here's the situation:

Over the course of a few days, two of your Facebook friends get into a fight over a controversial subject. You don't have any opinion on the subject, but they're really, really angry with each other about their differing views. You're not very close friends with either of these people, but because their notes and status updates appear on your news feed, you're exposed to their argument.

What would you do?

There are many options. Just some of them include:

- You could leave a comment on one or both of their profiles.
- You could send an email or a private message to one or both of them.
- You could update your status message and ask them to stop.
- You could ignore their updates until they cool down.
- You could defriend them.
- Or, you could do something completely different!

Before you decide on an option, ask yourself:

- Will what I do have any effects on me? How will I feel about what I choose?
- Will what I do have any effects on the two people that are fighting?
- Will what I do have any effects on my Facebook friends? How about on people who stumble across my profile, or profiles of the people that are fighting? What?



Situation: Fan Fiction

Here's the situation:

A person you don't know, "AnnaBanana," posts a story to a fan fiction website. There, anyone can post stories they write for other people to read. Unfortunately, AnnaBanana's story is really, really bad. You read it, but you wish you could get a refund on the time you spent! There's a box for "reviews" where you can send AnnaBanana your comments on her story. People who are looking for reading material can use these reviews to help them decide which stories to read.

What would you do?

There are many options. Just some of them include:

- You could bluntly tell her how you feel about her story.
- You could offer constructive criticism about her story.
- You could tell your friends not to read her story.
- You could find a different story to read and not respond to AnnaBanana's at all.
- Or, you could do something completely different!

Before you decide on an option, ask yourself:

- Will what I do have any effects on me? How will I feel about what I choose?
- Will what I do have any effects on AnnaBanana? On her feelings? On what she chooses to do in future?
- Will what I do have any effects on other people who might consider reading AnnaBanana's story?