



black youth project

Launch Lesson 4-5 | The Promise and Peril of Social Media

Introduction

The Internet and the mobile phone are arguably the two most revolutionary advances in our lifetimes. These advances have also given way to a range of social and digital media platforms (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, etc.) that broaden people's networks and that allow for immediate information sharing. These social and digital media platforms have allowed political activists and social movements to more quickly and widely spread information, publicize injustice, and challenge systems of power. Yet social media also poses challenges with regard to creating true social change and the extent to which people's actions and interests are surveilled and used to maximize business profits. This unit will engage students in evaluating the promise and peril of social media, particularly concerning its usefulness toward social activism. By the end of the lesson, students will be expected to apply what they learned to an issue that is important to them and to create an imagined political and social media campaign around that issue.

Essential Questions:

- How does social media influence activists' choice of tactics or strategies for creating change?
- How does social media change what we think 'activism' means or looks like?
- How have Black and Latina/o activists used social media to politically mobilize and organize others?
- What are the opportunities and pitfalls of using social media in political activism?
- What is a political frame?

Enduring Understandings:

- Activists use social media to mobilize the public, document their activities and the injustices they witness, and to spread information.
- Social media can more quickly and more widely reach the public, but it is also a liability: one's activities on social media are often public and may be subject to surveillance

Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-Speaking and Listening.SL.11-12.1: Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one- on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on *grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues*, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Speaking and Listening.SL.11-12.2: Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) in order to make informed decisions and solve problems, evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source and noting any discrepancies among the data.

CCSS.ELA-Speaking and Listening.SL.11-12.5: Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.11-12.6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.11-12.7: Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Learning Outcomes:

- Students will learn about how activists use social media
- Students will learn about the relationship between social media and government surveillance
- Students will read and interpret a range of texts and media
- Students will learn how to analyze political frames related to the #IfTheyGunnedMeDown online campaign
- Students will learn about the uses and limitations of social media in activism
- Students will analyze the development of the DREAM and Black Lives Matter movements
- Students will research activist campaigns that use social media and analyze these campaigns given a rubric of factors
- Students will create their own imagined hashtags and political campaign strategies around a chosen social issue
- Students will follow a process of editing their own and other students’ presentations

Time: 2-3 class periods

Vocabulary: frame, hashtag,
surveillance

Materials: laptop, projector, copies of relevant documents, a class set of Chromebooks/laptops (needed on the second day)

Part IA

1. At the beginning of class, ask students to describe how people use social media, what hashtags are, and what are the potential dangers of social media. Many students may be able to describe the social aspects of social media use (e.g. Facebook, Instagram, Twitter).

7 minutes

2. Next, explain to students that over the next 2-3 classes, you will be exploring how activism benefits from and is challenged by social media (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, blogs, etc.). Share the key essential questions with students. Explain that students will be expected to identify a social issue that is important to them and create an imagined political and social media campaign around the selected issue.

3 minutes

3. Queue the YouTube video “Digital Media and Struggles for Justice” and project it in your classroom. This video was created by a team from the Black Youth Project and the MacArthur Youth and Participatory Politics Research Network. The video can be accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FvL2Dy-wtHs>

4. Play the first 14 seconds of the video, in which Sandra Bland speaks about the “power” of social media. Before the video plays, hand out a half slip of paper with the following prompt/Do Now activity (**see Document 1**):

Sandra Bland was a 28-year-old Black woman and activist from the Chicago area who was arrested in Texas and found dead in her jail cell in July 2015. Viral video footage of her dispute with a police officer (which led to her arrest) and the questionable circumstances of her death sparked nationwide protest about police brutality; the focus of national conversations of police brutality toward black males; and the comparative silence concerning state-sanctioned violence toward black women and other women of color. Read the following quote from her:

"This thing that I'm holding in my hand--this telephone, this camera--it is quite powerful. Social media is powerful. We can do something with this. If we want a change, we could really truly make it happen."

What do you think is “powerful” about social media? What are the advantages and opportunities of using social media for activism? What might be the disadvantages of using social media?

5 minutes

5. **Have students talk in small groups for 3-4 minutes** about their responses to the prompt. Then bring the whole class together for a larger conversation. Ask students to give examples of what social media is (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr, etc.); list students’ ideas of the advantages/opportunities and disadvantages/dangers of social media on the board; and ask students to consider the fact that social media provides wider networks and more immediate forms of information sharing. Help students to make connections between the nature and immediacy of social media and the opportunities it presents for political participation and activism.

In the example, we see a strong response after her death. How would this have looked differently if there was no social media. Affirm students’ responses, and be sure to emphasize that that response would not have been as immediate or as broad without social media.

10 minutes

6. **Play the next 4 minutes of the video** (end at 4:16 with Alicia Garza speaking about the use of the hashtag). Have students flip their half sheets over to the back, where there are two more questions (**see Document 1**). Give students 1-2 minutes to try to answer these questions individually before having them re-group with their partner or small groups to craft a collective response.

7. **Have student groups state their responses to the two questions.** List students’ responses on the board or project your computer screen in the classroom and type out the responses. Tell students to correct and/or add to their own responses on their half sheets.

15 minutes

Exit Ticket. Hand students the following reflection question, or something similar:

What is one word, phrase, or idea from today’s class that interests you? What is it? Why is it interesting to you? What questions do you still have about it?

TOTAL: 40 minutes (This is a good spot to end for classes on shorter block schedules. Five minutes remain for a potential exit ticket or other end of class activity).

Part IB

8. Graffiti Group Exercise. Tell students that next we will examine images in the news and the messages they send. Put students into groups of four. At each table or group of desks, hand out two large images of Michael Brown and two large pieces of paper onto which students will write individually and as a group.

Have students look at and analyze the first image, featuring Brown in a Nike Air tank top. You can access this image from this NYTimes webpage: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/13/us/if-they-gunned-me-down-protest-on-twitter.html?_r=0

Ask students to respond to the following questions:

- 1- What is this image showing?
- 2- What can you tell about Michael Brown based on this picture?

7 minutes

Then display the second image, also on the NYTimes webpage, of Brown looking into the camera. Ask students to talk with their groups and individually respond on their large pieces of paper to the following questions:

- 1- How is this picture different from the previous one?
- 2- Which picture do you usually see in the media?
- 3- Why do you usually see one picture more often in the media?
- 4- What might happen if we saw another image instead? What would happen if we saw another image that sent a different message?

8 minutes

Discuss these questions with the class as a whole. Discuss what the consequences are of choosing one image, with one set of social messages, over another image.

5 minutes

Display a video from the New York Times entitled “Key Hashtags_ in ‘Black Twitter’ Activism” (2 minutes in length). The video, and its corresponding article, can be found at

the following web address: http://www.nytimes.com/2014/08/13/us/if-they-gunned-me-downprotest-on-twitter.html?_r=0

Ask students to describe how, according to the video, activists are using social media to challenge injustice, oppression, and biased news reporting. Focus your discussion in particular on the #IfTheyGunnedMeDown campaign on Twitter. Push students to consider how social media enables activist communities to more publicly challenge biased political messages (including biased news reporting).

5 minutes

Then, explain to students these photographs each represent a “frame” (note, this is one of the vocabulary words of the lesson). Ask students to talk with one or two partners about what they think of when they hear the word “frame” or what they think the word means. Build on students’ responses. Explain that the word “frame” can be a verb or a noun. Framing someone or something is similar to taking a picture—choosing what to focus on, what angle to take, etc. [Definition] *A frame is a particular way of seeing or understanding a person, group, or issue. A frame is usually attached to certain ideas, beliefs, and/or stereotypes about a subject and usually packages those ideas, beliefs, and/or stereotypes in ways that appeal to the public.* In politics, people put controversial issues in certain frames in order to make people feel certain emotions or believe certain things. At this point, you may want to direct students to a written-out definition on the board or elsewhere in the classroom.

7 minutes

Next, tell students that they are going to apply their new knowledge of frames to the case of Sandra Bland. Display in either print or on the overhead projector a side-by-side image of Sandra Bland. You can find side-by-side images from either of these websites:

<http://heavy.com/news/2015/07/sandra-bland-mugshot-mug-photo-already-dead-photoshopped-edited-fake-conspiracy-theory-hoax-real-edited-photos/>

or https://www.buzzfeed.com/ryanhatesthis/people-are-speculating-that-sandra-bland-was-already-dead-wh?utm_term=.atzpgOqdO#.voke4yQLy

Ask students to discuss with their group members what political messages or ideas are in each image of Sandra Bland. Then ask students, How can activism on social media like Twitter challenge these negative *frames* in the news and media?

8 minutes

You can use the format below to create a handout if needed:

Frame 1	Frame 2
What political message(s)/idea(s) are in this frame?	What political message(s)/idea(s) are in this frame?
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
How can activism on social media like Twitter like #IfTheyGunnedMeDown challenge negative <i>frames</i> in the news and media? What can individuals and groups of people do through social media to challenge negative images?	

Have select groups share their responses with whole class. Lead discussion about how social media is used to frame issues or events in the news.

5 minutes

Exit Ticket. Hand students an end-of-class reflection sheet. For instance, you can ask them the following question:

Based on what you have learned about frames, respond to the following questions:
(1) In your own words, what is a “frame”?
(2) How are “frames” usually used in the media?
(3) How might you use frames in your own life or work?



HOMEWORK OPTION A: If the teacher chooses, she or he can have students analyze a political cartoon for homework. Model political cartoons can be found at the following two addresses: <http://boingboing.net/2015/04/29/political-cartoon-skewers-bias.html> or <http://www.cagle.com/2015/11/black-lives-matter/> Both political cartoons explore the issue of racial bias in the media.

A useful step-by-step approach to analyze political cartoons is to ask these two questions:

- (1) In your opinion, what is the artist's main message in the political cartoon?
- (2) What pictures or words does the artist use to communicate his message to you?

HOMEWORK OPTION B (challenge): If students appear to have a strong understanding of framing, or if the teacher wants to further challenge certain students, the teacher can give students an alternative homework assignment that examines how the government has been tracking (surveilling) the activities of Black Lives Matter. You access an article from *Mother Jones* on the Department of Homeland Security's surveillance of Black Lives Matter at the following web address:

<http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/07/homeland-security-surveillance-black-lives-matter>

TOTAL: 45 minutes (This is a good spot to end for classes on shorter block schedules.

Five minutes remain for a potential exit ticket or other end of class activity).

Part II

1. **Play the remainder of the YouTube video** "Digital Media and Struggles for Justice" and project it in your classroom. Queue the video at 4:16 and play it until the end

at 8:25. Before class has begun, also write the following three quotes and positions on the board so that the students can discuss them at the end of the class:

- a. "You can't be a Facebook revolutionary. That doesn't exist."
- b. "Surveillance is the business model of the Internet"
- c. "Social media had lots of pitfalls for both activists and students"

After the class has watched the video, engage students in a "Stand and Declare" exercise about their responses to questions A through C. Post papers with the term "Agree," "Strongly Agree," "Disagree," and "Strongly Disagree" in the four quadrants of the classroom. Engage students in conversation about these statements. If students work on homework Option B, connect the conversation to surveillance of Black Lives Matter. But then ask the class, "But would we even know who Sandra Bland was without social media? Or Trayvon Martin or Michael Brown, for that matter?"

Agree	Strongly Agree
Disagree	Strongly Disagree

At the end, have students summarize the pros and cons of using social media.

20 minutes

2. Listen with your class to the first four-and-a-half minutes of a National Public Radio (NPR) report revealing the first major revelation of the National Security Agency's mass surveillance system. The radio broadcast is entitled "NSA, Verizon and The Future of Domestic Spying." Listen until you reach the 4:33 minute mark. You may also want to print out the transcript (accessed at:

<http://www.npr.org/2013/06/06/189233514/the-nsa-verizon-and-the-future-of-domestic-spying>). The radio broadcast can be accessed at

<http://www.npr.org/2013/06/06/189233514/the-nsa-verizon-and-the-future-of-domestic-spying>

With your students, discuss what metadata is and how it is collected.

(Optional) For more immediate discussion of surveillance and social media, go to The National Public Radio (NPR) report "NSA Harvests Contact Lists From Email, Facebook" at the following email address: [http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/10/15/234776676/report-nsa-harvests-contact-lists-from-email-facebook)

[way/2013/10/15/234776676/report-nsa-harvests-contact-lists-from-email-facebook](http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2013/10/15/234776676/report-nsa-harvests-contact-lists-from-email-facebook)

To make the this content comprehensible to a range of learners, including English Language Learners, you may want to print out the news article, have students read the article aloud in partners, and then play the 4:55 minute radio broadcast. The radio broadcast summaries 2013 findings from the *The Washington Post* revealing that the

National Security Agency had been “harvesting” (i.e. collecting and mapping) the contact lists of hundreds of thousands of U.S. citizens and how such practices encroach on citizens’ privacy.

10 minutes

3. Explain to students that now that they are informed about the opportunities and problems that social media presents activists, they will now study how two activist movements have used social media: The DREAM movement among undocumented youth and the Black Lives Matter movement. Explain that they will study these movements and then create their own hashtag and political campaign about a social issue that is important to them. Break students up into partners or designated groups, and tell them that they will work in partners/groups explore these two movements and to create their hashtag and political campaign around an issue. Give students two purposes for reading: How are young people in this social movement *using* social media? How is social media used as a tool to build community? Have students annotate these articles based on these questions.

4. Hand out printed articles (or have students view via tablets or laptops if available) about undocumented students’ use of social media. Have students read the document in groups. Students should not spend more than 20 minutes on the reading. After they finish the reading they should watch the following Colorlines video “DREAMers Come Out: ‘I’m Undocumented, Unafraid, and Unapologetic’” at the following web address: <http://www.colorlines.com/articles/dreamers-come-out-im-undocumented-unafraid-and-unapologetic>

Students can answer the following questions:

Questions:

1. What role did the Internet play in the lives of undocumented youths like Juan Escalante?
2. What does the website DreamActivist.org do?
3. How are immigrant rights organizations using social media?
4. What are some benefits of an online community?

If students need more background context, use two videos from PBS documentary “Don’t Tell Anyone (No Le Digas a Nadie)” focusing on Angy Rivera, an undocumented youth. One video (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/donttellanyone/video/meet-angy/>) introduces Angy and her story, while another video

(<http://www.pbs.org/pov/donttellanyone/video/coming-out/>) shows Angy comparing coming out as undocumented to coming out as LGBTQ.

15 min

5. Bring class back together and engage students in a discussion about how the phrases “coming out of the shadows” and “undocumented, unafraid, and unapologetic” *frame* immigration differently than the term “illegal immigration.” Engage students in conversation about the power in naming oneself. What does it mean when people take control over naming themselves?

10 min

Exit Ticket. Give students an end-of-class writing activity responding to the following question: In 2-3 sentences, describe how activists or undocumented students have used social media to create community for themselves and to organize themselves? In 2-3 sentences, describe the problems and security issues involved in using social media for political activity.

6. Homework: Ask students to draw two pictures, one picture depicting how a news channel might represent them and another picture depicting how students see themselves. Have students write a paragraph responding to the following questions:

What does Picture 1 depict? How does this picture an example of a frame?
What choices did you make in drawing this picture to send a certain message?

What does Picture 2 depict? How does this picture an example of a frame?
What choices did you make in drawing this picture to send a certain message?

5 minutes

Total: 60 minutes

Part III

- 1. Have student groups go to the “Black Symbols Matter” timeline** on the *Cultural Organizing* website (or handout print out for students to use if technology is not readily accessible). Once there, students can explore the timeline and different political forms surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement. The web address is as follows: <http://culturalorganizing.org/black-symbols-matter/>
- 2. In groups of 2-3, students should explore the website** and identify hashtags, symbols, and political activities from the Black Lives Matter Movement.
15 min
- 3. Direct students to research a new movement or a particular Black Lives Matter event on their own on in your groups.** See the handout (Document 2) for more specifics about what this research could look like.
20 min
- 4. Hand out printouts or tablets/handouts to student groups or partners.** Before class, the teacher might want to create a model hashtag and political campaign example on Google Powerpoint. The teacher might also want to model for students and hand out a list of directions for how to use Google Presentation.
10 minutes
- 5. Tell students they are to continue** working together in partners or small groups to create a hashtag around an important issue, to think of the challenges of using social media in your activism, to brainstorm other kinds of political activity, and to identify symbols that could further expand their political issue campaign.
25 minutes
- 6. Direct student groups to pair up and present to each other.** Have groups provide each other with warm and cool feedback to each other, and then regroup to revise their work and integrate the other group’s feedback.
20 minutes
- 7. Later in the class, have students share** their hashtags and political campaigns to the class either through presentations or a gallery walk.
15-20 minutes
- 8. Once done with the presentation or gallery walk,** revisit the essential questions with students. Hold final discussion or ask for students to answer the three essential questions through an exit ticket.

TOTAL: 110-115 minutes

Extension

Gender and Silence Read the MSNBC article “The Time Has Come To ‘Say Her Name’” on the #sayhername campaign highlighting the lives, experiences, and challenges faced by black women and other women of color (including trans women). Ask students if they think that the experiences of women are talked about less in the national conversation about police-based violence. (Article can be found at this web address: <http://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/the-time-has-come-say-her-name>)

Debating an Issue: Have students read two articles from the *New York Times* “Room for Debate” on the question: “Should Tweets Cost You Your Job”. These short, 1-page essays educate students about the risks of social media to one’s employment and about the long-term impact of what people call a “digital imprint.” Have students read the two essays in groups of 2-3 and then hold a short class discussion. A teacher could hold a fishbowl like style discussion with a group of 5 students in the middle, the rest of the class on the outside of the fishbowl, and 1-2 seats that are empty where outside students can rotate in to discuss the readings. (Articles can be found at this web address: <http://www.nytimes.com/roomfordebate/2013/04/02/should-social-media-activity-cost-you-your-job>)

Practice Twitter Use in the Classroom (Note: This is for older students, i.e. eleventh and twelfth graders). Teacher creates a classroom twitter account (e.g. @LewisHighEnglish11) and students create twitter accounts for classroom-only use. Have students follow your classroom twitter account. From that account, create a unique hashtag about a reading or a movie in the class (for example, #Eng11SelmaFilm). Post a question on the classroom account twitter feed with the hashtag included (e.g. #Eng11SelmaFilm Compared to readings in class, is LBJ misrepresented in the movie?). You could also hand students a list of questions to which they could respond. While students are watching a movie or reading a text (in class or out of class), students could tweet, respond to tweets, or repost tweets based on the reading or film.

Please note: If twitter is inaccessible or if teachers and/or students would rather not use it, an alternative is padlet.com, a collaboration tool. Teachers can create their own accounts, create unique URLs, and have students post their comments on the webpage.

Document 1: Half Sheet Writing Prompt/Do Now Handout

Front of Half Sheet:

Sandra Bland was a 28-year-old Black woman and activist from the Chicago area who was arrested in Texas and found dead in her jail cell in July 2015. Viral video footage of her dispute with a police officer (which led to her arrest) and the questionable circumstances of her death sparked nationwide protest about police brutality; the focus of national conversations of police brutality toward black males; and the comparative silence concerning state-sanctioned violence toward black women and other women of color. Read the following quote from her:

"This thing that I'm holding in my hand--this telephone, this camera--it is quite powerful. Social media is powerful. We can do something with this. If we want a change, we could really truly make it happen."

What do you think is “powerful” about social media? What are the advantages and opportunities of using social media for activism? What might be the disadvantages of using social media?

What you said:

What your group said:

Back of Half Sheet:

1. According to activists in the video, how has social media *changed* the work of organizing and activism today?

What you said:

What your group said:

2. According to Alicia Garza, what is the hashtag used for? Do *you* agree or disagree with her statement?

What you said:

What your group said:

Document 2: Black Lives Matter Organizer and Final Assessment Brainstorm

Name _____

Date _____

Go to the “Black Symbols Matter” timeline on the *Cultural Organizing* website. This timeline represents the political activity surrounding the Black Lives Matter movement. The web address is <http://culturalorganizing.org/black-symbols-matter/>

In the following four squares, write down the hashtags, symbols, political activities, and other things that you see in the timeline. After you finish researching the Black Lives Matter Movement, turn to the next page to create your OWN political campaign on an important social issue.

<p>Hashtags <i>(What is the purpose and meaning(s) of each hashtag?)</i></p>	<p>Symbols</p>
<p>Other Political Activities (protests, rallies, art, political writing, film/movies)</p>	<p>Things that Interest You</p>

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Now that you have studied the Black Lives Matter movement and read about the strengths and limitations of social media-based activism, your task is to think about an issue that is important to you. This issue could be something local, national, or global.

1. Research a new movement or a particular event in the Black Lives Matter Campaign
2. Create a hashtag that a person could post on Twitter or other social media.
3. Think about what could go wrong with your hashtag campaign on social media sites like Twitter. (For instance, what would be some challenges if you were to have a political hashtag campaign online?)
4. Brainstorm different political activities (protests, political writing, art, etc.) that you could do to educate the public about your chosen issues. Perhaps these other activities could help overcome those challenges.
5. Draw or print out and glue symbols that could represent your chosen issue

Research:

New Movement/ Black Lives Matter Event: _____

Website/News Source: _____

Why is this website/news source credible? What might make it uncredible? _____

What did I learn from this event/movement? _____

What were the benefits and risks of this activist event/movement?

What will I apply from this event to my own activist project? _____

My Own Project Brainstorm:

Question: What Frame are you trying to create? _____

What are the potential benefits and other positives that could come out of this activism? _____

What might go wrong? Why might my plan not be successful? What are some obstacles that I need to overcome? _____

Fill out the following brainstorm on the next page:

Use the following brainstorming sheet to think through how you will create your frame and how you will plan against potential pitfalls:

<p>Hashtag Campaign <i>(What is the purpose and meaning of this hashtag?)</i></p>	<p>Pitfalls/Risks and Benefits <i>(What could go wrong on Social Media? What are the benefits and risks of my activism and use of social media?)</i></p>
<p>Other Political Activities <i>(petitions, protests, art, political writing, etc.)</i></p>	<p>Symbols</p>

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Now use Google Presentation to create 1-3 slides about your hashtag, political activities, and symbols
OR

Create a poster that describes your activist project using the hashtag, political activities, and symbols