



Black Youth Project

Teaching Unit: The Promise and Peril of Social Media

Memorandum

The unit entitled “The Promise and Peril of Social Media” was designed in partnership with Chicago Public Schools’ Office of Civic Engagement and Service Learning. The unit was designed as part of their *Participate* curriculum, which engages youth in Chicago Public Schools with studies of activism and social movement in the high school civics curriculum. The lessons in this unit are therefore designed to enrich the history, social studies, or civics curricula aimed at high school students. It is linked to Common Core Standards and features a performance assessment at the end.

The first two pages include a conceptual introduction to the unit; essential questions; enduring understandings; specific Common Core Standards; learning outcomes; and a description of the time frame, materials, and vocabulary words covered within the unit.

Part IA engages students with an online video (“Digital Media and Struggles for Justice”) that was created by the Black Youth Project, in collaboration with the MacArthur Foundation Research Network on Youth and Participatory Politics, which features various activists of color speaking on how social media is used in current activist organizing efforts. The video also engages the pitfalls associated with social media and how activists think about issues of surveillance and social engagement in the digital age. Students will engage individually and collectively with the video, which serves as a launch point for deeper conversation and critique in the unit.

Part IB introduces the concept of framing, the ways in which ideas, beliefs, and stereotypes are packaged for public consumption. Students apply their knowledge of framing in the media to cases including Michael Brown, Sandra Bland, and the #IfTheyGunnedMeDown campaign. For homework, they either continue to practice the identification and critique of media frames or learn about the surveillance of groups such as Black Lives Matter.

In Part II, students continue to watch the online BYP/YPP video. In this lesson, students engage directly with the question of the efficacy and security issues involved in activists’ use of social media. Students learn about NSA surveillance of the general public, and how undocumented youth and others use social media to create community as well as to organize. For homework, students then reflect visually on how their own images might be negatively framed by others (e.g. the media) as well as how they image themselves differently. This exercise applies the

knowledge of framing to students' own lives, while also providing students with an opportunity to challenge stereotypical framing of youth of color.

In Part III, students research the Black Lives Matter political mobilization effort as well as organizing efforts and movements of their own choosing. Students then construct their own hypothetical organizing campaign around an issue that they care about. Their organizing effort must include weighing the benefits and costs of particular strategies, including social media use. Students will work in groups to create these hypothetical organizing campaigns, peer edit each other's' work, and present their ideas to the class.