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Curriculum Units by Fellows of the National Initiative
2008 Volume III: Democracy in Theory and Practice

MySpace in Democracy: inquiry on how social networks and media technologies promote and disrupt democratic practices

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This unit draws upon social studies, and media literacy and inquiry to explore how social networks and media technologies promote and disrupt democratic practices. It is intended for middle grade students (grades 6th-8th). Students will conduct inquiry on how the proliferation of social networking sites, search engines, and electronic media shapes democratic practices. Inquiry and critical thinking will be core skills students will master. To lead students to master research skills this unit will use media literacy and free speech topics to provide students with seed ideas for their own inquiry. Students will analyze, explore, compare and contrast the impact various communication technologies have had on the press and free speech practices. Students will research, and explain pros and cons of "cyber" free speech. Students will use critical thinking skills to evaluate and assess the credibility, accuracy, and reliability of search engines and social networking sites. Students will conduct Webquests to evaluate internet safety websites for their relevance, bias, reliability, media style and persuasion techniques. Furthermore, students will learn effective searching technique and safe practices for using the Internet. Lastly, students will synthesize what they have learned to create their own media public service products. Students' public services media products will model internet safety practices, and the role search engines and social networking sites play in providing youth a voice in democratic societies. Ultimately, students will conduct inquiry on free speech and information technologies, using the very technologies and social networks that interplay to promote and disrupt democratic practices.

(Developed for Social Studies, grade 6; recommended for Social Studies and Media Literacy, Middle School grades)

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