Behaving Ethically Online: Ethics and Values

This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & CREATE: A Digital Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools: http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework.

Overview

In this lesson, students consider how we come to hold values and how they affect our behaviour, especially online. They begin by comparing their assumptions about how common positive and negative online behaviours are with accurate statistics, and then consider how believing that something is more or less common than it really is can affect whether or not we think it's acceptable. The teacher then uses a fable to introduce students to the ways that values can be communicated both overtly and implicitly and students discuss the ways in which their values have been communicated to them. They then turn specifically to the online context and consider what values they have learned about online behaviour and how they learned them. Finally, students consider scenarios that examine ethical questions online and role-play ways of resolving them.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- identify what values are, where they originate and how they are communicated
- explore moral dilemmas relating to online communication
- learn skills for managing emotions during online interactions
- practice preventing and managing conflict during online interactions
- create a media product

Preparation and Materials

Prepare to screen the NFB film *The Magic of Anansi (*https://www.nfb.ca/film/magic_of_anansi) or read a similar fable with the class. (The video is also available through the free NFB app for mobile devices if you want students to view it outside of class.)

Photocopy the handout *Online Values Scenarios.*

If you are doing the extension activity, photocopy the handout *Online Meanness Survey.* The survey questions are taken from MediaSmarts' 2013 survey *Young Canadians in a Wired World.* To get a sense of how often Canadian kids are mean or cruel online, see the report *[Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Cyberbullying: Dealing with Online Meanness, Cruelty and Threats](#)*.

You may also want to view the MediaSmarts video *[Media Literacy 101: Media Have Social and Political Implications](#)* or review the website section *[Key Concepts for Media Literacy](#)* for background on how media can communicate values.

Procedure

Start by asking the class to write down the percentage of students that they think:

- knowingly plagiarize
- do volunteer work
- are mean to others online
- help other people online
- forward sexts
- support an activist group online

Write each behaviour on the board and a few of the students' guesses for each. Then give accurate stats for each:

- Plagiarism: 1 in 10 students have knowingly plagiarized by Grade 10 (McQuade, Samuel C. III and Neel Sampat. *Survey of Internet and At-Risk Behaviors*, RIT Center for Multidisciplinary Studies, June 18, 2008.)
- Volunteer work: 58 percent of Canadians ages 15-24 volunteer with schools, religious organizations, sports and community associations (Vézina, M. and Crompton, S. (2012) *Volunteering in Canada*.)
- Mean to others online: 25 percent of Canadians in grades 4-11 say they have been mean to someone online. (Steeves, V. (2014) *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Cyberbullying: Dealing With Online Meanness, Cruelty and Threats.* Ottawa: MediaSmarts.)
- Help others online: 65 percent of Canadian students in grades 4-11 say they have done something to help someone who was experiencing online meanness. (Steeves, V. (2014) *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Cyberbullying: Dealing With Online Meanness, Cruelty and Threats.* Ottawa: MediaSmarts.)
- Forward sexts: 4 percent of Canadian students in grades 7-11 with access to cell phones said they had forwarded a sext someone sent them to another person (Steeves, V. (2014) *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Cyberbullying: Dealing With Online Meanness, Cruelty and Threats.* Ottawa: MediaSmarts.)
- Support an activist group online: 35 percent of Canadian students in grades 4-11 have gone online to join or support an activist group such as Greenpeace, Students Against Bullying or Free the Children. (Steeves, V. (2014) *Young Canadians in a Wired World, Phase III: Life Online.* Ottawa: MediaSmarts.)

Now ask students which of these were more common than they thought, and which were less common. Does it matter if we think some behaviours are more or less common than they really are? Why or why not? Let students discuss this question for a few minutes but don't resolve it.

Write the term "values" on the board and ask students to define it. There can be multiple definitions, but "what you think is important" and "a guide for knowing right from wrong" should be among them.

Explain to students that some of our values may have been directly *taught* and we may have unconsciously *absorbed* others by watching the world around us. Have students watch the video *The Magic of Anansi* (https://www.nfb.ca/film/ magic_of_anansi) or read a similar fable. (The video is also available through the free NFB app for mobile devices.) Ask students:

What is the fable's lesson? What values is it openly trying to teach? (It's more important to be kind than to be respected; people who are mean or cruel don't deserve respect.)

What values does the fable communicate and which of the characters' traits and actions are rewarded and punished? (In *The Magic of Anansi*, the tiger and snake show that it's bad to be vain or arrogant; Anansi shows that it's good to be clever and that we shouldn't judge by appearances.)

Now ask students where values come from. Under the heading "values" that you wrote earlier, make a list which includes:

- family
- friends and peers
- religion
- media (you may wish to specify different media forms – books, TV, games, etc.)

(Note: students are often skeptical of the idea that media, especially entertainment media, have "real" meaning. You may wish to show them the MediaSmarts video *Media Literacy 101: Media Have Social and Political Implications* to help them understand how all media communicate values.)

Point out that we may get conflicting values from different groups we're part of – different messages from family, peers, media, etc. – and that this can sometimes make us confused and cause conflict.

Now ask students to think about the values they've learned about the *online* world. What things have they learned are right or wrong online? Which online behaviours do they think will be rewarded and which will be punished? Are there things they've been *told* are wrong that they don't think people get punished for? (For example, an online game might have rules against trash-talking other players but never enforce them.)

Ask students how many of them have rules at home about online issues such as streaming or downloading music and videos, treating people with respect and not going to particular sites. How many have talked about these issues with their parents? What messages have they gotten about these issues from peers or media? Do some of those differ from the messages they've gotten from their parents?

Distribute the handout *Online Values Scenarios* and read Scenario 1, "Sam and Laura," aloud with the class. Discuss how the situation might be resolved, focusing particularly on *how* the characters might decide what is the right thing to do. For example:

- Do you think what Laura did was OK? What made it OK or not OK? Does it make a difference that Sam was just learning the game?

- How do you think it would make you feel if someone did to you what Laura did to Sam? Do you think you would want to keep playing the game with them?
- Do you think what Laura did should be against the rules of the game? Why or why not?
- Do you think other players should have stopped Laura from doing what she did? Why or why not?
- Do you agree with the principle that you should "treat others the way you'd like them to treat you"? How do you think it applies in this situation?

Now have students form pairs and assign each pair one of the remaining scenarios. (Some scenarios will be assigned to more than one group.) Each scenario presents two points of view in an online conflict. Have each pair read their scenario and then role-play the scenario in front of the class, trying to find a positive resolution to the situation. Each pair also watches another pair's role-play as commenters: they have the power to freeze the action of the role-play and make comments and suggestions to the role-players to guide them towards a positive resolution, but it's up to the role-players to decide how the story goes. Give the commenters one sample question to consider in each scenario, but encourage them to consider other questions as well.

Sample questions:

- Scenario 2: Did the mean things Max did to Sasha make it okay for Sasha to do mean things to him?
- Scenario 3: Is Alex's right to privacy more important than his parents' duty to look after him?
- Scenario 4: Is it more important for Khalil to be able to decide what happens to his song or for Julie to decide what happens to her video?
- Scenario 5: Is it more important for Sophia to help her friend or to make sure that she's not helping her friend bully someone else?
- Scenario 6: Is Jennifer's right to do what she wants with her property (the picture) more important than Maria's right to dignity?

Assessment and evaluation: Students can be assessed or evaluated on the quality of their thinking and their understanding of values and ethics both as role-players and commenters in the final exercise.

Extension: Have students conduct a survey of cyberbullying rates at their school using the handout *Online Meanness Survey* and then create posters or skits to publicize the results. Make sure that they emphasize the positive over the negative findings – for instance, if the survey finds that 25 percent of students have been mean to someone online that means that 75 percent **haven't** been.

Online Values Scenarios

Scenario 1: Sam and Laura

Sam is playing an online game for the first time. Laura sees Sam's character appear in the game and attacks him, but because Sam is still learning the game, he can't defend himself and his character dies. His character reappears in the same place a few seconds later and Laura kills his character again. When his character reappears again, he says to Laura (over the game's chat channel) "Stop shooting at me, I'm still learning the game."

Scenario 2: Sasha and Max

Sasha likes to upload videos of herself playing soccer and Max often leaves nasty comments on the videos. Sasha finds a computer in the school lab where Max has left his social networking account logged in, so she finds that she can post or delete anything she wants on his account. She pretends to be him and posts nasty comments on all of his friends' photos and then changes his password so he can't take them down. When Max finds out that Sasha has locked him out of his account he reports her. She says he deserved it for doing mean things to him.

Scenario 3: Alex and his Mom/Dad

Alex writes a message to his friend Pascal about their plans to spend the weekend playing their favourite online game. After he has sent the message, he realizes he sent it to his Mom by mistake. He knows that his parents worry sometimes about how much time he spends playing games and doesn't want to have another talk about it. He decides to log into her email account and delete the message. When his parents get home, though, he finds out that his Mom read the message before he had a chance to delete it. She thinks that his trying to hide it is a sign that he has a problem. He thinks that his Mom shouldn't have read the message as soon as she realized it wasn't meant for her.

Scenario 4: Khalil and Julie

Khalil asks his friend Julie to make a video for his band's song. By the time she's finished making the video, Khalil's band has decided they don't like that song and have stopped playing it. Khalil tells Julie not to post the video online. Julie says that she should still be able to post the video because she made it.

Scenario 5: Sophia and Doug

Sophia sees that a girl named Annelle has posted mean things about her friend Yuki on Yuki's social networking page. A lot of Yuki's other friends have already posted angry comments on Annelle's page. Sophia leaves a comment calling Annelle a nasty name and telling her to leave Yuki alone. Later, Sophia gets an angry message from her friend Doug, asking why she would help Yuki bully Annelle. Sophia says she was just defending Yuki but Doug says that Yuki started it by previously posting an embarrassing picture of Annelle.

Scenario 6: Maria and Jennifer

Jennifer is looking at the pictures she took on her phone and deciding which ones to post. She finds one she took at a party that she thinks looks really good. The problem is that her friend Maria is also in it and her hair is standing up in a way that makes her look silly. When she posts the picture, some of their friends tag it with Maria's name. The next day Maria finds out she's been tagged in the photo and people have left comments making fun of her hair. She doesn't even remember when the picture was taken, and she wishes that Jennifer had asked her before posting it. Jennifer says that since she took the picture she had a right to decide whether to post it or not.

Online Meanness Survey

1. **Has anyone ever said or done something mean or cruel to you online that made you feel bad?**

   _____Yes   _____No

   If you answered Yes, how often was it a serious problem for you?

   _____ Often

   _____ Sometimes

   _____ Rarely

   _____ Never

2. **Have you ever said or done something mean or cruel to someone online?**

   _____ Yes   _____ No

   If you answered Yes, what did you do? (*Check all that apply*)

   _____ Called someone a name

   _____ Threatened to physically hurt someone

   _____ Spread rumours

   _____ Posted or shared an embarrassing photo or video of someone else

   _____ Harassed someone sexually (said or did something sexual when the person did not want you to)

   _____ Made fun of someone's race, religion or ethnicity

   _____ Made fun of someone's sexual orientation

   _____ Harassed someone in an online game

   _____ Other

3. **If you answered Yes, why did you do it? (*Check all that apply*)**

   _____ I was just joking around

   _____ The person said something mean and cruel about me first

   _____ The person said something mean and cruel about my friend first

   _____ I wanted to get even with the person for another reason

   _____ My friends were doing it

   _____ I was bored

   _____ I was angry

   _____ I did not like the person

   _____ Other

   _____ I don't know

4. **When someone has said something mean or cruel online to someone else, have you ever done anything to help the person who is being picked on?**

   _____ Yes   _____ No

5. **Has anyone ever threatened you online (for example, said things like "I'm going to get you" or "You're going to get it")?**

   _____ At least once a day

   _____ At least once a week

   _____ At least once a month

   _____ At least once a year

   _____ Less than once a year

   _____ Never

6. **If you answered At least once a day, At least once a week or At least once a month, did you think it was a serious problem for you?**

   _____ Often

   _____ Sometimes

   _____ Rarely

   _____ Never