



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 9 to 12
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Duration:	2 hours

Introduction to Online Community Engagement



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

Overview

Students often feel detached from the political arena, and this lesson plan we have designed is to help inspire curiosity and action with your secondary students due to the very real connection between early civic engagement and citizens that are active and engaged with politics for their lifetime.

Students are introduced to civic education through a series of activities which will ask them to work together to engage with their larger communities through curiosity, conversation and creation. Current events happening at the neighbourhood, municipal or federal level will act as starting points for each activity.

This lesson is designed as part of the three-part series *Creating Digital Content for Community Engagement*, which includes:

- Introduction to Online Community Engagement
- [Digital Storytelling for Community Engagement](#)
- [Digital Outreach for Community Engagement](#)

However, each is also designed to be delivered as a standalone lesson and any two of the lessons can be taught together without the third.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- in a group, learn how to research a current issue in their neighbourhood, community or country
- as a group, brainstorm possible solutions to an issue and choose the best approach
- learn how to effectively use the Internet as a research tool to determine the history of an issue, key players, and to assess the reliability of sources
- present to a larger group a summary of the topic, issue and solution



Preparation and Materials

Review the following backgrounders:

- *Wikipedia in the Classroom: Teaching students about information authentication*
- *Tips on Authenticating Information* (<http://mediasmarts.ca/internet-mobile/authenticating-information>)

Prepare to distribute the following handouts:

- *Community Engagement Activity*
- *Community Engagement Project*
- *Community Engagement Pitch*
- *Tip Sheet: How to Search the Internet Effectively*

Procedure

Activity 1: Do you Consider Yourself Politically Involved?

This activity is designed to help answer the question asked by students: “Why should I care or be involved in the political world, especially because I am not legally eligible to vote yet?”

Start by asking students to raise their hands if they consider themselves politically active. (Likely relatively few hands will go up.) Ask what they consider the term “politically active” to mean: most will likely suggest being part of organized electoral politics or in an offline activist group. After a few students have volunteered their definitions, distribute the handout *Community Engagement Activity* and have students complete it. As a class, go through each of the 5 categories and have one student speak to their experience in each:

1. Online (posting on Facebook, writing a blog)
2. In-person activities (discussion at the dinner table)
3. Civic engagement (volunteering)
4. Activism (petitioning)
5. Formal politics (joining a political party, donating to a candidate)

Prompt student reflection with questions like:

- What was the issue you were involved with and how did you get initially involved? Was there someone who invited you to participate or did you discover the issue/cause independently?
- Are you currently involved with the same cause or a different one?
- What was your experience like? Did you find it effective or a satisfying experience?
- In your opinion, how effective are the different categories?
- With the shift in politics to more and more online forums and outlets, do you think there is still value in the face-to-face participation?
- What are the advantages to the on and offline methods?



Activity 2: What do YOU Care About?

Have the class brainstorm a variety of different issues that concern them at the school, community, provincial/territorial or federal level. Write your list on the board.

Distribute the handout *Community Engagement Project* and divide the class into groups of 3 to 5 students. Each group will research **one** of the topics they have brainstormed (do not allow more than one group to do each topic). Distribute the tip sheet *How to Search the Internet Effectively* to help them find accurate and relevant information.

Activity 3: What are You Going to Do About It?

Now have the groups brainstorm possible solutions or their opinion to this current event or challenge. Ask them to consider: what is your ultimate goal and how can you achieve this goal?

Tell students to make sure their goals are realistic (for example: raising public awareness, getting a certain number of signatures for a petition, creating a concrete change, influencing public policy, etc.) and to refer to the *Community Engagement Activity* handout to be reminded of the variety of methods we can engage with political issues on and offline.

Activity 4: Project Presentation

In the form of a “Pitch”, each group will have 5 minutes to present to the class:

- an overview of the topic
- why they chose the topic
- the current challenge this event faces
- what solution or action for improvement the group proposes for this topic

Following each pitch, each of the other groups should give at least one piece of constructive feedback.

Assessment/Evaluation

If the lesson is being delivered as part of the larger unit, you may deliver formative feedback on their research and their pitch. If this lesson is being delivered on its own, you may evaluate students using the *Community Engagement Project* rubric.



Wikipedia in the Classroom: Teaching students about information authentication

Discussions with teachers about the Internet in the classroom often come back to a particular refrain: "Students just don't know how to do research anymore; all they use is Google and Wikipedia."

It's certainly true that students need to learn better research skills: in my own time as a teacher, I was frequently amazed to see supposed "digital natives" who did not have the slightest clue how to do a Boolean search, how to judge the likely usefulness of a Google hit before clicking on it, or even how to open links in a new page so they wouldn't have to navigate back to Google if it didn't pan out.

Forbidding students from using Wikipedia, though, is a bit like telling them not to use the library. In fact, Wikipedia is a lot like a library: it has a lot of different things in it, assembled by a variety of people from a variety of sources; some of them are useful, some less so. We don't forbid students from using the library; instead we teach them how to find what they need there, and to judge whether a source is useful and reliable.

Henry Jenkins, Head of Comparative Media Studies at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), suggests that learning to use *Wikipedia* is a good way for students to acquire what he calls *New Media Literacies*, particularly those termed Collective Intelligence (collaborating with others in creating, obtaining and judging information), Judgment (assessing the reliability and usefulness of information), Networking (finding, synthesizing and spreading information) and Negotiation (moving between different contexts, formats and communities.)[1]

The main concern teachers have with Wikipedia, of course, is its reliability. It's true that because of its open structure, Wikipedia is susceptible to error – but in practice it seems to be less so than one might expect. In fact, a well-known article in the magazine *Nature* found it to be on a par with the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in its science articles. Roy Rosenzweig, Professor of History and New Media at George Mason University, found it was about as accurate as Microsoft's professionally-developed *Encarta* encyclopedia and compared well to the prestigious *American National Biography Online*. [2] More importantly, the problems Rosenzweig finds with Wikipedia – its articles often favour lively detail over historical significance, they adopt a post of neutral objectivity rather than reflecting the ongoing debates among historians – are common to all tertiary texts such as encyclopedias. In effect, Rosenzweig is saying that Wikipedia is no worse as a source than a high school history textbook, most of which share similar flaws.

While the problem of reliability should not be ignored, Wikipedia can be used to teach students to be critical readers. As a consequence of its openness, Wikipedia offers many ways to judge the reliability of its articles. To begin with, any Wikipedia user who is concerned about the quality of an article can place a cleanup banner, for instance, that the tone of the piece may not be fully neutral, that it may lack corroborating sources, or that the author or a contributor to the article may have a conflict of interest with its subject. In this way Wikipedia is no different from any other source (particularly any online source), in that it must be approached critically and skeptically.

Wikipedia has a number of other features for judging the reliability of an article, though they are less obvious than the cleanup banners. For instance, almost every *Wikipedia* article is rated based on its accuracy, completeness and style. These ratings follow a somewhat eccentric scale from Stub (a basic description, meant to be expanded) to Start (more developed than a stub, but lacking in outside sources) and ascending to C, B, GA ("good article") status to A; Wikipedia recommends that only articles with a GA status or better be used in serious research. Articles can also be nominated for "Featured Article" status on the grounds of being "professional, outstanding, and thorough; a definitive source for encyclopedic information." (A guide to this rating scale can be found at <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/>



[Wikipedia:Version 1.0 Editorial Team](#).) These ratings are found on the article's Discussion page, accessible through one of the tabs at the top of the page.

Another useful tab for verifying reliability is the one leading to the History page. This page summarizes all of the edits that have been made, allowing a reader to see the changes that have been made to the article since its creation.

Aside from teaching students to check the reliability of articles, teachers can introduce students to the idea that knowledge is not a fixed body of facts but rather is constantly evolving – and students can be part of that evolution. Using the Edit tab, which is the source of *Wikipedia's* fame, teachers can have students edit an article with the aim of raising its rating.

Using Wikipedia in the classroom has its challenges and it, like any encyclopedia, should never be a student's only source. Its flaws, though, highlight issues that students will encounter with even the most authoritative sources, and provide a unique opportunity to teach students to view all sources of information critically.

MediaSmarts has recently created a resource aimed at helping teachers integrating Wikipedia into the classroom. [Taming the Wild Wiki](#), a lesson for students in grades 7-9, helps teachers incorporate Wikipedia into their classrooms and teaches students how to use it in an effective and responsible way.

- 1 Jenkins, Henry. *What Wikipedia can Teach us About the new Media Literacies (part one)*. June 26, 2007. <http://henryjenkins.org/2007/06/what_wikipedia_can_teach_us_ab.html>
- 2 Rosenzweig, Roy, *Can History be Open Source? Wikipedia and the Future of the Past*. Center for history and new media. 1999. <<http://chnm.gmu.edu/essays-on-history-new-media/essays/?essayid=42>>



Community Engagement Activity

Put a check in the box next to any of the activities listed below that you've done.

1. The Twittering Classes: Online Discussion
 - I circulated or reposted political information on social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter
 - I used email or instant messaging to discuss societal/political issues
 - I blogged about a political issue
 - I participated in an online group about societal/political issues

2. Somethin' to Talk About: OffLine Discussion
 - I discussed a societal/political issue face-to-face or on the phone
 - I wrote a letter to the editor about a political issue
 - I made a public speech on a political issue
 - I organized a public event or meeting about politics

3. Taking It to The Streets: Activism
 - I signed a petition
 - I boycotted/"buycotted" a product
 - I was part of a protest

4. Community Revival: Civic Engagement
 - I worked with others on an issue in my community
 - I was active in a group or organization
 - I donated to a societal/political cause
 - I did volunteer work

5. In the System: Formal Engagement
 - I contacted an elected official about an issue that concerns me
 - I attended a political meeting
 - I volunteered in an election
 - I donated to a political party or candidate
 - I am or have been a member of a political party

(Adapted, with permission, from the checklist *Political Participation Activities* created by Samara Canada.)



Community Engagement Project

Topic:

Group members:

List 3 sites used for research:

1.

2.

3.

If you could interview someone knowledgeable about this issue in your community, who would it be?

What is the background or history to this story? Draw out a timeline of the events on separate paper.

Who are the key players?

If there is a major obstacle that you can identify, what is it?



Community Engagement Pitch

In the form of a “Pitch”, each group will have 5 minutes to present to the class:

- an overview of your topic
- why you chose your topic
- the current challenge this event faces
- what solution or action for improvement your group proposes for this topic

Your group will also give at least one piece of constructive feedback following each of the other groups' pitches.



How to Search the Internet Effectively

Search Engines

Internet search sites can search enormous databases of Web pages, using titles, keywords or text. You can maximize the potential of search engines by learning how they work, and how to use them quickly and effectively.

The challenge is to ask your question the right way, so that you don't end up overwhelmed with too many search results, underwhelmed with too few, or simply unable to locate the material that you need. As with most skills, practice makes perfect!

Getting Started

Before doing a search, it's important to define your topic as completely and succinctly as possible. Write down exactly what information you're looking for, why you're looking for it, and what you're not looking for. This will help you to discover the best keywords for your search.

Keywords

With the exception of search engines such as AskJeeves.com, which will take questions in the form of actual queries, most work best if you provide them with several keywords. So how do you determine which keywords will work best?

Most users submit 1.5 keywords per search, which is not enough for an effective query - the recommended maximum is 6 to 8 carefully chosen words, preferably nouns and objects. (Search engines consider articles and pronouns clutter.) Avoid verbs, and use modifiers only when they help to define your object more precisely - as in "feta cheese" rather than just "cheese."

Now you have your keywords. How do you enter them into the search engine?

Use of Phrases

Your most powerful keyword combination is the phrase. Phrases are combinations of two or more words that must be found in the documents you're searching for in the EXACT order shown. You enter a phrase - such as "feta cheese" - into a search engine, within quotation marks.

Some searches provide specific options for phrases, while others don't allow them at all; but most will allow you to enter a phrase in quotation marks. Check the "Help" files of the search engine you're using to be sure what it accepts.

Punctuation and Capitalization

Most search engines are insensitive to case: you can type your queries in uppercase, lowercase, or a mix of cases. If you use lowercase, most engines will match on both upper and lower case; so for general searches, lowercase is the safest form to use.

Not all search engines handle punctuation the same way. When in doubt, consult the "Help" file.



Boolean Basics

"Boolean" searching (named after George Boole, the 19th-century mathematician who founded the field of symbolic logic) is a powerful technique that can narrow your search to a reasonable number of results, and increase the chance of those results being useful. Boolean searches are simple to learn and tremendously effective. The three most commonly used Boolean commands (or "operators") are AND, OR and AND NOT.

AND means "I want only documents that contain both/all words." For instance, the search "London" AND "Big Ben" AND "Buckingham Palace" AND "Trafalgar Square" would return only documents that contained all four keywords or phrases. AND is the most frequently used Boolean command.

OR means "I want documents that contain either word; I don't care which." The query "London" OR "Big Ben" OR "Buckingham Palace" OR "Trafalgar Square" would return all documents that contained even one of these four keywords or phrases. Use OR to string together synonyms; be careful about mixing it with AND.

AND NOT means "I want documents that contain this word, but not if the document also contains another word." The query "London" AND "Big Ben" AND NOT "Buckingham Palace" would return documents that include London and Big Ben, but not those that also include Buckingham Palace. Remember that AND NOT only applies to the word or phrase that immediately follows it.

Most search engines support the AND NOT command. It is sometimes called BUT NOT or NOT, and is sometimes indicated by placing a minus sign (-) before the term or phrase to be removed. (Check the search tips of the engine you're using to see which form of AND NOT it accepts). Before you apply AND NOT, see what results you get from a simpler search. AND NOT is a great way to weed out results you don't want, such as pornography.

Quick Tips

- Use nouns as query keywords. Never use articles ("a," "the"), pronouns ("he," "it"), conjunctions ("and," "or") or prepositions ("to," "from") in your queries
- Use 6 to 8 keywords per query
- Where possible, combine keywords into phrases by using quotation marks, as in "solar system"
- Spell carefully, and consider alternate spellings
- Avoid redundant terms
- Check the "Help" function of the particular search engine you're using, since they all have their own quirks and preferences

A successful Internet search can take several tries. But remember: it's estimated that there are between 200 and 800 million documents online - with no master system for organizing this information! No wonder effective searches take knowhow, patience and ingenuity.

To find out about more about search engines, check out [Search Engine Watch](#). This site has the latest information about the best search engines available, searching tips, and much more.

Source: *Search Tutorial: Guide to Effective Searching of the Internet* by the WebTools Company. Republished with permission.

The information in this document has been extracted from the complete version of Search Tutorial: Guide to Effective Searching of the Internet, which was researched, written and maintained by The WebTools Company, of VisualMetrics Corporation.



Task Assessment Rubric: Community Engagement Project

	Learning Expectations	Achievement
<p>Use</p> <p>Skills and competencies that fall under “use” range from basic technical know-how – using computer programs such as word processors, web browsers, email and other communication tools – to the more sophisticated abilities for accessing and using knowledge resources such as search engines and online databases and emerging technologies such as cloud computing.</p>	<p><i>Community Engagement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> use social media and participative technology use digital media to be part of a community exhibit leadership as a digital citizen <p><i>Making and Remixing:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> download and access different information types from the Internet participate in society through online engagement in democratic actions (e.g. lobbying, petitions, parliament) search, collect, process, evaluate, share and stores data and information using various devices, applications or cloud services locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media <p><i>Finding and Verifying:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> apply digital tools to gather, evaluate and use information 	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>
<p>Understand</p> <p>“Understand” includes recognizing how networked technology affects our behaviour and our perceptions, beliefs and feelings about the world around us.</p> <p>“Understand” also prepares us for a knowledge economy as we develop information management skills for finding, evaluating and effectively using information to communicate, collaborate and solve problems.</p>	<p><i>Community Engagement:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> show awareness of the discourse on both the issues and the opportunities involved in new media <p><i>Making and Remixing:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> understand that anyone can publish on the Web, so not all sites are equally trustworthy 	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>



	Learning Expectations	Achievement
<p>Create</p> <p>“Create” is the ability to produce content and effectively communicate through a variety of digital media tools. It includes being able to adapt what we produce for various contexts and audiences; to create and communicate using rich media such as images, video and sound; and to effectively and responsibly engage with user-generated content such as blogs and discussion forums, video and photo sharing, social gaming and other forms of social media.</p> <p>The ability to create using digital media ensures that Canadians are active contributors to digital society.</p>	<p><i>Community Engagement:</i> identify and participate responsibly in online networks that foster positive community</p> <p><i>Making and Remixing:</i> contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems</p>	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>

