

1.1 Lesson Plan: Welcome to the Blogosphere

Overview

Students create their own blogs, which they can use throughout the lessons and/or unit – and beyond – to share their views on political issues, candidates and campaigns; post original multimedia content; link to and embed election-related media; develop a network of interested commentators and activists; and reflect upon their learning.

Key Skills

NCSS Civic Ideas and Practices Expectations: Practicing forms of civil, civic discussion and participation consistent with the ideals of citizens in a democratic republic; using a variety of media to report findings from surveys, debates, petitions

McREL Language Arts Standards: Write a reflective composition (e.g., uses personal experience as a basis for reflection on some aspect of life, draws abstract comparisons between specific incidents and abstract concepts, maintains a balance between describing incidents and relating them to more general abstract ideas that illustrate personal beliefs, moves from specific examples to generalizations about life)

ISTE NETS Standards: 2b: Communication and Collaboration: communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats; **5b:** Digital Citizenship: exhibit a positive attitude towards using technology that supports collaboration, learning and productivity

Grades 7–12

Time Estimate One to two 45-minute class periods, plus homework

Required Resources Computers with Internet access

Preparation

Consult your school's policy for student publishing online. You may also wish to review resources on monitoring of student blog publishing (classblogmeister.com) and blog safety (www.edtechmag.com/k12/issues/january-february-2006/professional-edge.html). Key issues to consider include parental permission for blogging and whether to make student blogs open to the public or limit the audience to selected users. Opening student blogs to the public carries a greater burden of responsibility for both you as a monitor and your students as authors, but the experience of speaking to and receiving comments from authentic audiences is invaluable for both motivation and critical thinking.

Blogger (www.blogger.com) is one of several ad-free blog sites offering free accounts. You may also consider Edublogs (edublogs.org), which was designed with educators in mind. Before introducing this lesson, set up your own blog and post an entry following the steps that your students will follow, as outlined below. Alternatively, you may wish to model setting up a blog for students in class before inviting them to create their own blogs.

Prior to teaching this lesson, bookmark the Web sites used in the lesson on each computer in your classroom, or upload all links to an online bookmarking tool such as del.icio.us (del.icio.us). Preview the Web sites used in the lesson to make certain that they are appropriate for your students.

Procedure

- 1. Activate prior knowledge.** Ask students to share what they know about blogging and to name blogs with which they're familiar. Explain that blogging is a form of publishing that allows anyone to share his or her views and experiences with others and receive feedback.
- 2. Introduce the lesson.** Tell students that they will be creating political blogs. Have each student think of a title and several web address (URL) ideas. Emphasize the importance of the title and web address – this is how people will find and remember their blogs. Since this will be a political blog, brainstorm related words to help students come up with titles (citizen, civics, voting, election, etc.).
- 3. Create an account.** Have students go online and create free accounts. You may want to have students complete a tutorial at the blog hosting site before creating their accounts. Students will need to provide e-mail addresses, passwords and user/display names. [Note: Students can create free, safe e-mail accounts using Gaggle.net (www.gaggle.net) or Mailinator (www.mailinator.com)]. For safety purposes, you may wish to have students use only their first names when creating their user/display names.

Click on and carefully read "Terms of Service" before clicking the "Accept" box. This is an important habit to encourage. You may also want to budget time for discussing what's contained in this agreement.

Have students enter the titles and URLs they selected and check for availability of the URLs. As students complete this task, send around a paper for them to write their names, blog titles and URLs for your later convenience.

- 4. Set permissions.** In this step, you execute the level of control over audience and publishing you have chosen for your students' blogs. Choose who will have author, reader and commenting privileges for the student blogs.
- 5. Define a blogger identity.** Have students find the "About" section of their blogs. Discuss what information might be appropriate for students to include in this section and what might be inappropriate. Assign students to complete this section. You may wish to approve their descriptions before having them post them on their blogs.
- 6. Add images and other elements.** Perhaps the most dynamic aspect of blogging for students is the opportunity to embed images, video and audio files to express their ideas and tastes. Students should be encouraged to personalize their blogs with embedded content as they begin to explore their political personalities and the types of self-expression facilitated by this technology.

Invite students to choose one or more images from the Internet that express some aspect of their feelings on politics. You may want to briefly discuss Section 107 (the Doctrine of Fair Use) on copyright issues and explain that your students' use of copyrighted images may fall under the "fair use" exemption if their use transforms the purpose of the image. You may also want to review "Copyright and Fair Use in Teaching" at the Center for Social Media (www.centerforsocialmedia.org/resources/fair_use_and_teaching/), which outlines best practices for the application of fair use to media literacy education and online video production.

Many of the social media tools students will explore in subsequent lessons, including the Let's Get Political quiz, Ask Your Lawmaker, the Idea Generators and You Decide, are embeddable. You may wish to have students add these widgets to their blogs before or after completing the related activities.



7. **Add links.** Model how to create links by linking from your own blog to one or more student blogs. Have students add links to classmates' blogs and/or relevant Web sites, as appropriate.
8. **Add tags/labels.** Tagging, or labeling, enables bloggers to organize their content and allows readers to locate specific posts and comments. Although students will not be able to practice tagging until they have created their first entries, you can explain how tagging works and model the use of this functionality on your own blog. You may want to assign a particular tag, or tags, to each assignment in the unit for easy reference.
9. **Create an online learning community.** Engage in a discussion to establish etiquette for commenting on each other's blog entries. Bud the Teacher's wiki (www.budtheteacher.com/wiki/index.php?title=Main_Page) offers sample blogging guidelines created by students and teachers across the country. You may wish to create your own version with students.

Grouping to Meet the Needs of Diverse Abilities

You may want to group Web-savvy students with beginners to encourage peer-to-peer learning.

Have groups of 2–3 students work together to create one blog, sharing an e-mail address and password for the group. Each student makes a personal entry for each assignment, but all three students post to the same blog.

Assessment

By reviewing students' blogs, you will be able to assess whether they have acquired the skills to create blogs, post appropriate content, and comment respectfully on others' work. You may also check to see if they can add images, links and tags/labels.

Extensions

- Use blogs as a venue for student assignments and/or reflections on assignments throughout the unit. Encourage or require commenting on other students' blogs and/or sharing with peers, family and the community beyond the classroom.
- Use blogs as an ongoing assignment venue for students to comment on and connect to news and views related to politics.
- Make a connection with another school and class (from anywhere!) and exchange blog comments regularly.