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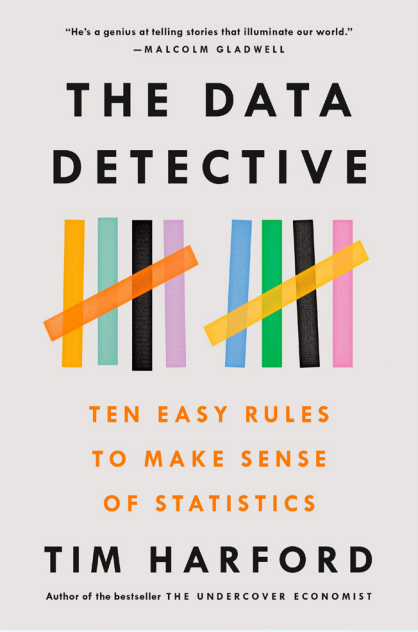
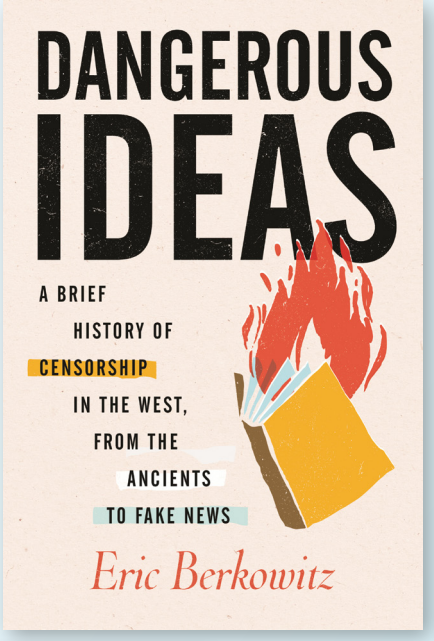
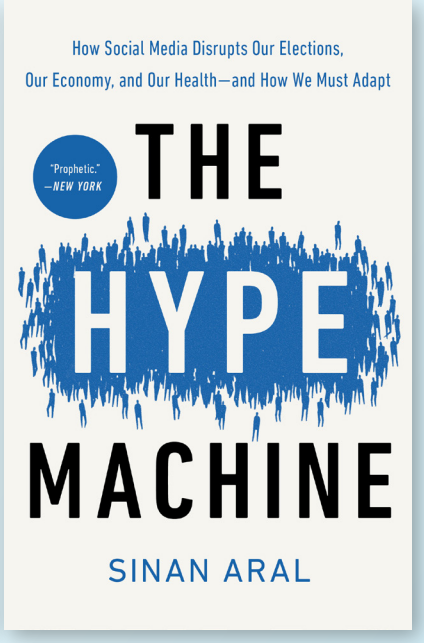
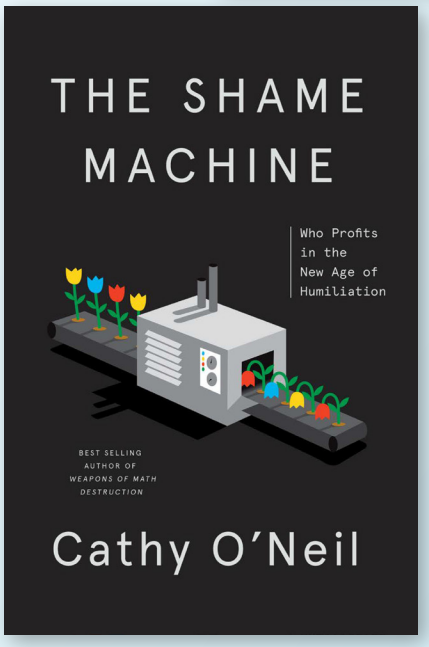
THEMATIC GUIDE
**MEDIA LITERACY**

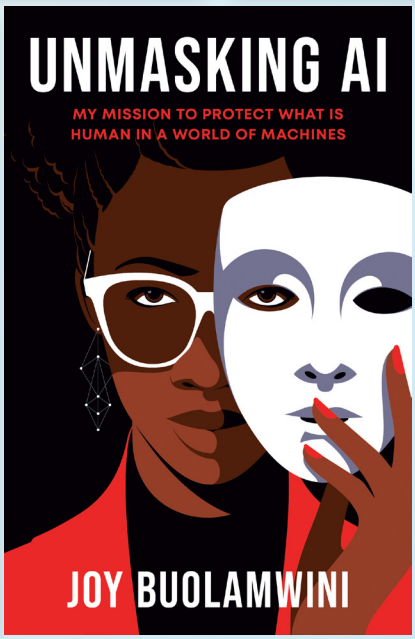
# Teaching Media Leadership
## HIGH SCHOOL



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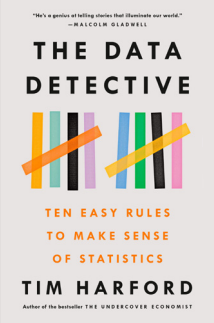
## INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 global pandemic forever changed the way humans interact with information and with each other. Social media saved us from disconnection, but it also provided an opportunity for the dissemination of disinformation, the rise of polarization, and the distrust of traditional news media. Add to this landscape the overwhelming propensity of teens and young adults who use YouTube and TikTok videos as their main news source, and the result is a disturbing prevalence of faulty algorithms, sneaky bots, hate speech, and fake news. Amidst this growing concern, it is imperative for high school educators and students to keep this guiding question in mind: *How can young people lead the charge against influences that diminish our ability to think critically, to find common ground, and to remain civil both in person and online?* The books in this set provide important information about media leadership for high school students. While the texts fall within the 9–12 Lexile bands, scaffolding suggestions are provided throughout the guide so that educators can make instructional decisions based on their knowledge of reader and task complexity. Teachers can choose one or any combination of books and strategies to use with whole-class instruction, reading circles, or independent reading, as they empower teens to lead by example in an increasingly digital world.

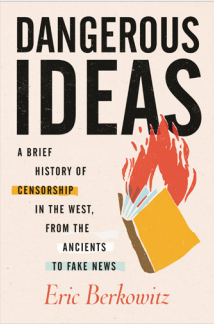
## ABOUT THE TITLES IN THIS COLLECTION

Listed below are brief summaries of the books in this guide:



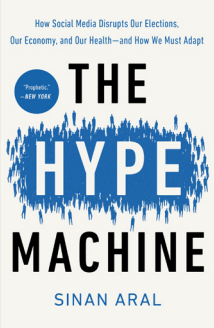

**Unmasking AI**
Ten Easy Rules to Make Sense of Statistics
TIM HARFORD
**978-0-593-08466-3**
Paperback | Riverhead Books | 336 pages | $18.00
Also available: **E-Book, Audio Download**

*The Data Detective*, by Tim Harford, applies artful storytelling to reveal a significant truth: statistics save lives and help us understand the world we live in.




**Dangerous Ideas**
A Brief History of Censorship in the West, from the Ancients to Fake News
ERIC BERKOWITZ
**978-0-8070-3624-2**
Hardcover | Beacon Press | 320 pages | $29.95
Also available: **E-Book, Audio Download**

Eric Berkowitz's *Dangerous Ideas* depicts the ongoing role of censorship in shaping society, as well as the elusiveness of truth in a digital world.

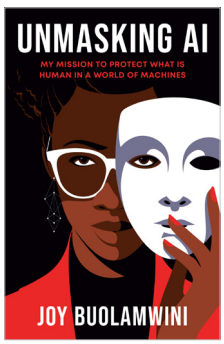



**The Hype Machine**
How Social Media Disrupts Our Elections, Our Economy, and Our Health—and How We Must Adapt
SINAN ARAL
**978-0-593-24040-3**
Paperback | Crown | 416 pages | $18.00
Also available: **E-Book, Audio Download**

*The Hype Machine*, by Sinan Aral, details the ways social media shapes every aspect of our lives, for better and for worse.

**The Shame Machine**
Who Profits in the New Age of Humiliation
CATHY O'NEIL
**978-1-984825-45-2**
Hardcover | Crown | 272 pages | $27.00
Also available: **E-Book, Audio Download**

Cathy O'Neil's *The Shame Machine* explores the relationship between shame and power, revealing the ways governments, companies, and systems exploit this powerful tool.




**Unmasking AI**
My Mission to Protect What Is Human in a World of Machines
DR. JOY BUOLAMWINI
**978-0-593-24183-7**
Hardcover | Random House | 336 pages | $28.00
Also available: **E-Book, Audio Download**

In *Unmasking AI*, Dr. Joy Buolamwini challenges readers to be algorithmic crusaders who battle the bias buried in the codes of artificial intelligence.

## BUILDING KNOWLEDGE

The books in this collection vary in complexity and include content that is new to some students. In order to provide an equitable environment where all students are prepared for context and reading demands, the following activities build knowledge and provide access to the texts.

### BEYOND THE HASHTAG

*The Hype Machine* explores both the benefits of social media and the dangers, including increased polarization in politics, health care, science, and religion. Prepare students for respectful civic discourse in the classroom, online, and in society by building awareness of polarized political ideologies that are amplified on social media platforms. Choose several current advocacy hashtags and write them on the classroom whiteboard one at a time. Hashtags might include #BlackLivesMatter, #BlueLivesMatter, #FridaysForFuture, #MAGA, #MeToo, #NeverAgain, and #LoveWins. As hashtags are written on the board, ask students to jot down words or feelings they associate with these ideologies. Afterward, compose a class list for each movement and discuss the opposing viewpoints that emerge. Explain the concept of "affective polarization," which means that the more polar our political and social views become, the less we trust or respect the opposing viewpoint. Ask students: *How can we maintain civility with those whose views differ from our own, both in the classroom and beyond? How can we assure ourselves that the hashtags we see online help us seek truth and open our minds rather than polarize us with either/or fallacies?* Explain that the texts in this set address this challenge.

### STATION ROTATION

Each of the books in this set includes discussion of algorithms and data, and how media-literate citizens must understand the uses, benefits, and pitfalls of statistics in order to avoid misinformation, disinformation, or statistical cynicism. Provide a quick introduction to the significance of statistics by conducting a "stations" learning experience. Explain that by briefly researching some times that statistics saved lives or revealed important truths, students will be better prepared to read and comprehend what they see online and the books in this set. Split students into small groups at various points around the room, designated by chart paper on the wall. Each station represents a significant statistics event in history. Stations are set up with an image, podcast, video, infographic, or text that groups quickly research and discuss before writing a summary on the chart paper. When groups have had sufficient time at a station, they can move to the next one, where they will examine the resources and add to what has already been noted by their peers. Though not every station must be visited by each group, students will eventually return to their original station, read their classmates' notes, and synthesize them into a summary clarifying the significance of the study. For a digital version of this activity, groups can create "thin slides" (www.eduprotocols.com/thinslide). Each slide contains one image and one sentence clarifying the topic's history and impact. Topics for the stations might include:

- Florence Nightingale's research on sanitary conditions in wartime hospitals
  prhlink.com/fgsciencenews
- Richard Doll and Austin Bradford Hill's British doctors, study on lung cancer and smoking
  prhlink.com/ytlungcancer

- COVID-19 and the impact of statistics, statistical cynicism, and misinformation
  prhlink.com/ftcovidstats
- Mount St. Helens volcanic eruption and its impact on future disaster forecasting practices
  prhlink.com/mtsthelens
- The "Big Lie" (2020 Presidential Election) and how statistics debunked disinformation
  prhlink.com/latimesbiglie

### WORD BANK

The texts in this set are at a reading level appropriate for high school and above, but recognizing that students have various background knowledge and access points, a word bank may be useful to help all students maximize learning outcomes. Rather than assigning the entire list, pre-teach the words and concepts that will be important in that day's lesson. Ask students to stop and note when these words or ideas are used in the text. After reading, have students rephrase meanings with partners or in writing. These terms and ideas might then be added to a classroom word wall or concept wall. A word bank for this set might include the following vocabulary: *artificial intelligence (AI), cancel culture, confirmation bias, deepfake technology, disinformation, echo chamber, fake news, influencer marketing, mass persuasion, misinformation, publication bias, sample bias, social bots, statistical*

## CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

The following activities engage students in reading, writing, thinking, and speaking about media leadership and the texts in this set.

### CANCEL CULTURE ANALYSIS

*The Shame Machine* illustrates the dangerous use of societal shaming as a for-profit weapon by powerful individuals, organizations, and corporations. Build awareness and relevance around cancel culture by analyzing famous examples of the "shame machine" at work. Ask students to read "Taylor Swift Opened Up About Being Publicly Canceled After the Kim Kardashian Drama" (prhlink.com/tskkinstyle). As they read, ask students to look for answers to the questions Cathy O'Neil poses in *The Shame Machine*: "Who transmitted the shame?" "Who profited from it?" (p. 13). Then ask: *How did social media amplify the shaming? How can hashtags promote harm?* After reading, students can compare notes with a classmate before sharing out with the larger group. Next, invite students to partner up and analyze Swift's song "You Need to Calm Down," identified in the article as the artist's answer to trolls and cancel culture. Using the SOAPSTone protocol, ask students to cite evidence from the song that supports their analysis of Subject, Occasion, Audience, Purpose, Speaker, and Tone. Students should recognize references to the anonymity that bolsters shamers, and to the differences in human contact versus online culture. Discuss with the class: *What if shaming uncovers racism, sexism, bigotry, science skepticism, or political manipulation? Is shaming ever justified?* As an extension, discuss more recent shaming attempts on Swift via deepfake imagery, as well as the attempts to "cancel" her popularity at sporting events and with political candidates.

## PROPAGANDA CLOSE-READ

In *The Hype Machine*, author Sinan Aral reveals how in the "real-time communications ecosystem created by social media" (p. xi), lies spread faster than truth. Aral references his study as well as a speech by actor Sacha Baron Cohen. Challenge students to evaluate the role of online propaganda in spreading lies by watching Cohen's speech and reading Aral's scientific study. First, show students Cohen's 2019 speech to the Anti-Defamation League, where the actor proclaims social media to be "the greatest propaganda machine in history" (prhlink.com/abcsbc). Ask students to take note of words and phrases that seem significant or are intriguing in structure or meaning. Afterward, students can compare notes with a classmate before sharing with the group. Ask: *Do you agree with Cohen's assertion that "Democracy, which depends on shared truths, is in retreat, and autocracy, which depends on shared lies, is on the march?" What does he mean by "freedom of speech is not freedom of reach?"*

Next, direct students to perform a close read of Aral's *Science* article, entitled "The spread of true and false news online" (prhlink.com/sciencetruefalse). Students should read the complex article in small sections and, together with a classmate, discuss and annotate each section with a brief summary statement. Afterward, pose to the class: *Why, according to the study, do lies spread faster than the truth? How does the article illustrate the spiraling effect of fake news? How can misinformation be used to achieve political polarization?* As an extension, provide time for students to play Harmony Square, an online game reviewed by the Harvard Kennedy School that builds psychological resistance against the manipulation techniques used in political misinformation (harmonysquare.game/).

## AI CLAIMS, EVIDENCE, REASONING

In *Unmasking AI*, Dr. Joy Buolamwini warns readers that we are unprepared for the bias and accountability issues that come with artificial intelligence algorithms. Show students Dr. Buolamwini's "Gender Shades" video (prhlink.com/gendershades), which discusses the author's research, and ask them to apply the CER approach to analyze her **C**laims, **E**vidence, and **R**easoning. Once students have recorded their notes, discuss the author's use of "the coded gaze" to represent algorithmic bias. Ask: *How does Dr. Buolamwini support her claims with evidence?* Students should note her study of scientific trials and data analysis, not only on herself, but on other subjects of color. Next, share with the class Dr. Buolamwini's "AI, Ain't I A Woman" poem adaptation video (prhlink.com/ytaintiawoman), where she combines spoken word art and scientific data to illustrate AI misgendering of strong black women such as Michelle Obama, Oprah Winfrey, Serena Williams, and the author herself. Discuss: *How does the author's poetry performance add to our understanding of her research?*

Finally, distribute the NBC News article that details the case of Randall Reid, who was falsely arrested and held for days due to faulty facial recognition technology

(prhlink.com/nbcrandallreid). Ask students to once again apply the CER protocol in order to identify claims, evidence, and reasoning in the article. Discuss the article's claim that "technology is far more likely to misidentify Black and other people of color." Ask: *How does the article support Dr. Buolamwini's research? How does looking at three different online sources (research video, spoken word performance, and news article) impact our understanding of this social issue?*

## DATA HEADLINES

*The Data Detective* explores the ways statistics help us see and understand the world. Help make statistics relevant and accessible to students by modeling a routine for analyzing visual media. First, share with students examples of everyday data found online or in newspapers. One source is *USA Today*'s "visual explainers" (www.usatoday.com/graphics/), which include charts, graphs, infographics, and more. Use a timely chart or graph to illustrate "See, Think, Wonder" analysis protocol. Display the graphic data and ask students to consider:

- What do you see?
- What do you think about that?
- What does it make you wonder?

The protocol provides time for students to digest the numbers and consider the type of graph before diving into interpretation. Once they are clear on the purpose and meaning of the data, challenge students or partner teams to create a short, catchy headline that illustrates the data's big idea(s). Provide a spot for students to post their data headlines, such as a Padlet, Jamboard, or a similar digital space. Invite students to look for everyday examples of statistical data and contribute them to a digital or classroom bulletin board. For regular practice with data analysis, students can visit the *New York Times* "What's Going On in This Graph?" feature, which provides a weekly graph on topics interesting to teens, such as social media, snack foods, high school sports, and more (www.nytimes.com/column/whats-going-on-in-this-graph). Students can practice analyzing these visuals as a class, or they can interact with the data, with moderators, and with other viewers via links on the *New York Times* website.

## TAKE A STAND: HATE SPEECH

In *The Shame Machine* and *The Hype Machine*, authors delve into the rise of online hate speech. Ask the class: *How do we define "hate speech"?* Form a class definition along the lines of "an attack in person, in print, or online that targets someone due to gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, ability, or a similar affiliation." Next, ask: *What is freedom of speech?* Discuss the idea that freedom of speech protects individual opinions and beliefs, but the increase in crimes spurred by online attacks is raising serious questions about regulating hate speech. Next, play the NPR audio clip "Free Speech or Hate Speech: When Does Online Hate Speech Become A Real Threat?" (prhlink.com/nprspeech). Ask students to list all reasons presented both for and against hate speech regulation.

Next, ask students to read Today's article entitled "Colleges are revoking admissions offers due to racist posts" in order to consider the impact of hate speech and the arguments for and against its regulation (prhlink.com/todayadmissions). As they read, students should apply the "Take a Stand" thinking routine by completing the following steps (prhlink.com/takeastand):

- "Take a stand" by annotating their perspectives in the article margins.
- "Stand back" by listening and sharing in small groups.
- "Look again" by returning to annotations and determining whether thinking has changed.
- "Look beyond" by applying the reading, thinking, and discussion protocol to a broader landscape.

As a class, discuss: *What are the possible consequences for those who post hate speech and those who are the subject of its content? Is there a line between free speech and hate speech? How can we demonstrate leadership in this issue?* In the answer to the last question, provide students with the #NoToHate tips sheet (prhlink.com/unnotohate), which discusses pausing before posting, fact checking what you see, and reporting hate speech.

## E.S.C.A.P.E MEDIA ANALYSIS

*Dangerous Ideas* explores the pros and cons of exposure to multiple viewpoints. Explore with students how "free speech" includes media bias, fake news, and online behaviors that can lead to misinformation and civil discord. Pose this question and provide time for small groups to discuss: *What is your primary source for the news?* Next, ask students to read the *USA Today* article "Influencer, celebrity, journalist? Teens are turning to YouTube for news, survey shows" (prhlink.com/usatodayytinfluencers). Discuss as a group: *Why does Common Sense Media say "it is cause for concern" that the majority of teens are getting their news information from social media rather than newspapers or news sites? Since teens in the survey see news organizations as more trustworthy, why do they still prefer YouTube, Instagram, or Snapchat?*

Next, ask students to select a controversial news story and watch video clips or read articles from three different networks or media sources. Students can use the AllSides media bias chart (prhlink.com/allsidesmediabias) to select a left, right, and centrist source. Ask students to use the E.S.C.A.P.E method of information analysis by working individually or in groups to analyze Evidence, Source, Context, Audience, Purpose, and Execution. Afterward, ask students: *What similarities and differences did you notice? What specific examples of objectivity or bias did you see? Which source seems the most credible and why? Why is it a good idea to get our news from a variety of media sources?*

## BURSTING BUBBLES & ESCAPING ECHOES

*Unmasking AI* and *The Hype Machine* warn students about manipulative algorithms that direct users into filter bubbles and echo chambers. Challenge students to be proactive in establishing online identities that are open to

multiple views. Show the class the TED Talk "Beware online 'filter bubbles'" (https://prhlink.com/filterbubbles). In it, digital activist Eli Pariser explains the use of algorithmic filters that produce personalized echo chambers for online reading. Ask students to try Pariser's experiment by entering a search term into their internet browser. Next, students should turn to a partner and compare results. How do the results differ? Now, ask students to search the settings of their social media accounts and look for "ads interests." Then, ask students the following questions: *How have these platforms profiled you? Is that characterization accurate? How might your online profile influence the types of news stories you are seeing?* Explain to students that they can make adjustments to their social media settings in order to protect their feed from bias, clickbait, and misinformation. One simple switch is to tell the program to deliver content chronologically instead of using an algorithm. Students can use the audit directions for multiple social media platforms found at Consumer Reports (prhlink.com/consumerreports).

## LATERAL READING

In *The Data Detective*, readers are warned about publication bias and are encouraged to get the backstory for anything they read online. Introduce a new method of source analysis with well-known YA author John Green. Show students "Check Yourself with Lateral Reading," one of Green's popular "crash course" videos, which frame topics in an engaging manner for teens (prhlink.com/ytlateralreading). In the video, Green explains that the internet demands a new type of reading. Rather than reading an article or website from top to bottom, readers need to stop, open up new tabs, and look for more information about who or what is beyond the information. After watching the video, students can apply the lateral reading technique to an unfamiliar online source:

- Open a new browser.
- Search the name of the unfamiliar source.
- Check what trustworthy sites say about it (snopes.com, politifact.com).
- If the source seems untrustworthy, don't waste time reading it. Find another source.

After students have practiced the lateral reading technique, discuss the growing distrust in mainstream media that Green references in his video: "Sometimes we conclude that because no source is inherently objective, all information is equally unreliable. And that is dead wrong." Ask students: How can we keep unreliable or deceptive online sources from, as John Green says, "hijacking our consciousness"? How can we be knowledgeable and skilled media users rather than being part of the problem? Remind students to use lateral reading every time they go online (prhlink.com/shegposter). As an extension, share The Trust Project's newly developed "trust indicators" that help consumers make informed choices about which news sources to trust (thetrustproject.org/trust-indicators/).

## CIRCLE OF VIEWPOINTS

In *Dangerous Ideas*, author Eric Berkowitz discusses how traditional methods of speech suppression, like book banning, are amplified in an online environment. Ask students to read the *MIT Technology Review* article "The book ban movement has a chilling new tactic: harassing teachers on social media" (prhlink.com/techbookbans). Ask students to apply the "circle of viewpoints" strategy as they read (prhlink.com/circleviewpoints). In the circle of viewpoints routine, students brainstorm a list of different perspectives on the issue, choose one perspective to explore, and develop questions from that point of view. By ensuring that all viewpoints are represented (students do not necessarily need to select the perspective they are most comfortable with), the class is encouraged to see beyond one perspective and understand that the reasons people come to their points of view are based on varying backgrounds and reasons.

Once students have read the article and created their list of questions, facilitate a large-group discussion about the topics generated. Ask students: *What does the teacher in the article mean when she says, "This type of rhetoric is going to get people killed"? Is this an overstatement? Should parents and the general public target teachers' private social media accounts? Does such behavior constitute stalking and harassment? Where does the concept of free speech apply here? Can it be used by both sides of the issue?*

## PERFORMANCE-BASED ASSESSMENT

Challenge students to produce a product illustrating their media leadership learning with others in the school and community. Topics for this culminating activity can be found in the texts and activities in this guide. Students should select a specific subject they find interesting, engaging, or that they would like to learn more about. For instance, they might choose to focus on propaganda, hate speech, AI bias, statistical manipulation, censorship, cancel culture, or political disinformation. Students might also address the guiding question: *How can young people lead the charge against influences that diminish our ability to think critically, to find common ground, and to remain civil both in person and online?* As a model, show students the video "Civil Discourse Online" (prhlink.com/civildiscourseed). In the video, a Parkland High school shooting survivor discusses how social media has changed the messaging and impact of social change movements. The speaker formats his video by posing and answering four questions about what he has learned. Students might choose to film a similar product covering their own topic, using the model video as a template. They could post their videos on Flip or an online board like Padlet or Jamboard. Or, students might choose to create an infographic, a website, a video story, or a podcast. For resources, students should use at least one text from this set, as well as other information they gather both online and off. Provide clear expectations with models or rubrics, and integrate checkpoints throughout the process.

## DISCUSSION AND WRITING PROMPTS

The following questions integrate themes found throughout the texts in this set and can be used for journaling, essays, small-group discussions, and large-group seminars.

**1**

What are some advantages that come with access to technology and the internet?

What are some dangers or disadvantages?

What steps can we take to use technology for good?

**2**

What are some questions we can ask to decide if online information is truthful or fake?

**3**

How can we respectfully disagree with opinions while always respecting facts?

**4**

What information should never be shared online, and what should you do if asked?

**5**

What is important to remember when posting a picture or video online?

Consider your own and other people's safety and wellness.

**6**

How do our offline activities and relationships contribute to our physical, mental, and emotional health?

What steps can we take to balance our online and offline lives?

**7**

What are some sites, apps, and tools that help people stay organized, healthy, and connected?

**8**

When is it okay to use a cellphone, tablet, or computer around others, and when is it not okay?

**9**

What are some ways people can be unkind online?

What should you do if you witness cyberbullying?

**10**

What are some signs that an ad or message is either a phishing attempt or clickbait?

## RESOURCES

The following resources provide more information and ideas for engaging students in media safety education.

Be Internet Awesome! Google Digital Safety and Citizenship Curriculum
prhlink.com/gstaticsafety

Civic Online Reasoning Collection
cor.stanford.edu/curriculum

Decoding Media Bias
prhlink.com/pbsmediabias

9 Resources for Teaching Digital Citizenship
prhlink.com/istedigitalcitizenship

NCTE Position Statements on Media Education
ncte.org/statement/media_education/

Quick Digital Citizenship Lessons for Middle and High School
prhlink.com/csdigitalcitizenship

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THIS GUIDE

Laura Reis Mayer is a professional learning consultant from Asheville, NC. She develops content and facilitates learning for national education organizations. A twice-renewed National Board Certified Teacher (NBCT), she taught middle school, high school, and college English, speech, drama, and literacy. She has written more than thirty teacher guides for multiple publishers.

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