To Be or Not to Be? That is the Social Networking Question

Written by Quentin Hancock
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According to a recent MacArthur Foundation study, teens typically use social networking sites to "hang out" with friends. Teens also put together personal pages as an expression of their style, creating something to make an impression on other teens who "hit" their site out of curiosity. In this MediaLit Moment, your students will explore the difference between personal pages they use primarily to communicate with friends and pages they design primarily to make an impression on people they don't know.   In the process, your students are likely to discover that they create different personas for themselves from page to page.

Have your students create a personal home page designed to impress someone they would like to meet.

AHA!: The "me" I show to my friends is different from the "me" I show to somebody I don't know!

Key Question #1 for Producers: What am I authoring?

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed.

Grade:☐ 9+

Materials: Computer, data projector, screen, high speed internet connection. OR printed screen shots of students' home pages and the new pages they've created.

HOMEWORK: Ask your students to start a home page which they would use to introduce themselves to someone they would like to meet. See the suggestions below for possible scenarios.

If they wish, students can create this as a subsection of their home page. If students do not yet have an account with a social networking site provider, this may be an opportunity for them to get started, though they could draw a plan of their new site as well.

POSSIBLE SCENARIOS/TOPICS: You've been asked to host a foreign exchange student in your home. Put together a page which tells the student about the US, the city you live in, and about yourself.   Or, let's say you would like to be a foreign exchange student in another country. Create a page in which you introduce yourself to a potential host family.

What's your dream job? What would your dream company be like? Now imagine that this company is looking for entry-level employees.

Put together a page that might impress the people at this company.

Create a page or profile to send to a group (offline or online) that you might like to join.

Is there a college or school you hope to attend in the future? Work on a page that you would like to send to that school.

Create a page for someone who's an expert at something you would like to learn more about (examples -- a comic/graphic novel illustrator, a fashion designer, a local musician).

IN CLASS: When students return to class, ask them to compare old and new pages. Ask them to complete the following fill-in-the-blank response:

The _____ (student's name) I see in my new page is _____

(personal qualities--for example, organized, scary, serious, laid-back, knowledgeable, etc.)

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In small groups, or as a class, discuss the differences between students' pages, (especially the different kind of people they appear to be from page to page).

Extended Discussion:

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

In small groups, students talk about their design process as well. What kinds/categories of items did they place in the new page that they did not have "up" on their old page?

Why?

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