# Social media for social action

## LESSON OBJECTIVE:

▸ **Explore reasons for engaging in digital activism**

▸ **Understand that there are different ways to engage in social activism online**

▸ **Analyze and evaluate pros and cons of digital activism**

▸ **ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS**
- ▸ How can people use technology and social media as tools for social activism?
- ▸ What are possible benefits of online social activism and what are its possible limitations or negative effects?

▸ **AGE**
- ▸ 11-19 years old

▸ **MATERIALS**
- ▸ "Where I stand prompt" Handouts (6-8, 9-12)
- ▸ Thinking Notes
  **tolerance.org/classroom-resources/teaching-strategies/close-and-critical-reading/thinking-notes**
- ▸ Pens/Pencils
- ▸ Copies of "Millennials and the Age of Tumblr Activism" by Valeriya Safronova
  **nytimes.com/2014/12/21/style/millennials-and-the-age-of-tumblr-activism.html**
- ▸ Chart paper posters
- ▸ Markers
- ▸ Exit cards (index cards or sticky notes for an exit card parking lot chart)

▸ **PREPARATION**
- ▸ Collect chart paper, markers, pens/pencils and index cards for each student
- ▸ Print a "Where I stand prompt" Handout according to grade level

▸ **ISTE DIGCITCOMMIT COMPETENCY**
- ▸ ENGAGED: I use technology and digital channels for civic engagement, to solve problems and be a force for good in both physical and virtual communities.

## SUPPORT MATERIALS

Visit **facebook.com/fbgetdigital** to access resources for parents and young people that can complement the lesson students took on Empowerment today.

## LESSON OVERVIEW

This lesson will engage students in the debate about the efficacy of social media as a tool for social change. While some researchers and activists have written about the empowering effects of online social engagement, others critique the limits of what some people have coined armchair activism, clicktivism or slacktivism. Students will explore the effectiveness of viral hashtag campaigns representing themes related to identity, diversity, justice and action. Using articles to craft arguments, students will discuss and evaluate the pros, cons, limits and possibilities of online activism.

## PROCEDURE

1. Before the lesson, designate and label three different parts of the room "Agree," "Disagree" and "Undecided." You will need this for the "Where I stand" activity.

2. As a warmup, ask students to respond in writing to one of the following three prompts:

    ▸ What is activism?

    ▸ What are different ways people can engage in activism around a social cause or world issue using technology? (Technology can include anything from the Internet to cell phones to social media sites and more.)

    ▸ How can technology be used as a tool for activism? (Note: Encourage students to include specific examples when they can.) Students will list their ideas.

3. Put students into small groups and ask them to share their responses. Afterward, ask them to discuss in their groups which tools or uses of technology could be most powerful to make change and why. Elicit a few responses from the whole group.

4. Introduce the debate around technology—especially the Internet and social media—as tools for activism and social change. Inform students that scholars and activists have presented both pros and cons of digital activism. Have students record the definition of "activism" in their notebooks and then engage in a short conversation about what digital activism means. Note that, while some advocates and researchers might emphasize the possibilities of digital activism, others might stress its limitations.

## WHERE I STAND ACTIVITY

1. Provide each student with a copy of the "Where I stand" prompts. Ask students to reflect on the prompts and note their responses to prepare for the whole-class activity. After giving students a few minutes to think about and respond to the prompts in writing, show them the three designated areas (Agree, Disagree, Undecided) around the room.

2. Read aloud the first prompt, giving students the opportunity to move to the area representing the response they chose. Emphasize that students should try to think critically for themselves and resist being swayed by peers and remind students of community guidelines that promote a safe space for exchanging ideas.

3. Once students are in these three smaller groups, ask them to share the supportive reasoning behind their responses, using their written "Where I stand" reflections as a reference. Ask a student in each group to serve as a scribe and, on chart paper, take notes on the main points discussed in their small group.

4. Ask one or two speakers from each group to share their group's charted ideas with the whole class.

5. Repeat this procedure for the second prompt.

6. Ask students, "Was anyone's mind changed about either of the prompts during the activity, especially those who were undecided?" Elicit a few responses from the whole group.

7. Tell students they're going to participate in a reading activity to further their thinking on digital activism. Ask them, "What are some possible benefits of digital activism and what are its possible limitations or negative effects?" Have students think about this question and share initial thoughts with a partner. Elicit a few responses from the whole group.

8. Thinking Notes: Provide students with a copy of the New York Times article "Millennials and the Age of Tumblr Activism" by Valeriya Safronova. Follow the protocol for the Thinking Notes strategy. For the second reading, as noted in the third item in the Thinking Notes strategy protocol, students can be provided with a choice of independent or collaborative reading.

9. After students have completed the Thinking Notes exercise, facilitate a whole-group discussion around the uses, pros and cons of digital activism discussed in "Millennials and the Age of Tumblr Activism." As students share and respond, encourage them to use textual evidence from the article to support their ideas. Chart pros and cons noted by students during the discussion.

10. Close by asking students to complete an exit card connecting the themes of the lesson to the students' interests and agency related to social action. You could use the following question or create your own: What social issues do you feel passionately about and would want to engage in online and/or offline? Why?

## VOCABULARY

**Activism** [ak-tuh-viz-uh m] (noun) a practice that emphasizes direct vigorous action, especially in support of or opposition to one side of a controversial issue

**Slacktivism/clicktivism** [slak-tuh-viz-uh m; clik-tuh-viz-uh m] (noun) actions performed via the internet in support of a political or social cause but regarded as requiring little time or involvement

**Sources:**
*merriam-webster.com*
Google Dictionary

*tolerance.org/classroom-resources/tolerance-lessons/social-media-for-social-action*

# "Where I stand" prompts

Select two for the activity.

1. **Social media (for example, Facebook, Twitter or Instagram) can be a powerful tool to make positive social change.**

2. **It is more meaningful to take social action offline (in real life) than it is to engage in social action online.**

3. **Young people today are more interested in social justice issues than young people 20+ years ago because of social media and technology.**

4. **Sharing a hashtag or article related to a social issue is not real activism.**