The Leader in e-Safety Education

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Safe Social Networking Strategies: TWITTER as a Learning Tool for the K – 8 Classroom

Overview

It is impossible to think of life in today's world without cell phones and the social networking applications that enable us to communicate through a text-based format. Twitter is an increasingly popular networking platform that can be used either via computer access or with a cell phone application. When used as an integral part of the classroom protocol and routine, Twitter can offer unique and meaningful learning opportunities that model responsible usage of social media and improved communication between teacher, parents and students.

As a matter of fact, if research on college students is any indication, Twitter use in the K – 12 classroom may actually lead to higher student engagement, which could result in better grades. In a study released in October 2012 from Michigan State University, it was discovered that college courses that engage students on Twitter may actually see higher interaction and better grades. In the report, "Twitteracy: Tweeting as a New Literary Practice," Michigan State professors Christine Greenhow and Benjamin Gleason found that students who were actively engaging with classmates and the instructor on Twitter were more interested in the course material—and ultimately received higher grades. The complete study report can be accessed at **http://www.kdp.org/publications/theeducationalforum/pdf/TEF764_Greenhow_Gleason%20(2).pdf**

This unit is designed to provide:

- definitions and how-to resources for implementing Twitter in the K – 8 classroom using the class-account strategy (for students who are under the age of 13)
- guidance for teachers on safe strategies for using Twitter age-appropriately in the classroom
- lesson and activity plans that use Twitter as a vehicle for learning
- examples of how Twitter can be used to facilitate work toward student mastery of standards-based benchmarks
- strategies to use Twitter as a communication tool that involves parents

Each lesson and activity section integrates strategies relevant to personal safety and security issues.

Unit Contents

1. Teacher Guide
   - Twitter Basics
   - Getting Started
   - Privacy Settings
   - All about Hashtags
   - Using Twitter with Parents
2. Reference Pages – to be used as needed for dialogue support, lesson presentation materials, student handouts, or for students to recreate into posters to reinforce Twitter strategies.
   - Think Before You Tweet – How to Make a Quality Tweet
   - Twitter Etiquette
   - Hashtag Savvy
3. Twitter Introductory Activity – First Tweets
4. Activity Briefs – 20 activity ideas to meaningfully incorporate Twitter into class work.

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Teacher Guide – Twitter as a Learning Tool in the K – 8 Classroom

Twitter Basics

What is Twitter?

According to the Twitter Web site, Twitter is a real-time information network that connects users to the latest stories, ideas, opinions, and news about what the user finds interesting. But, most often people think of Twitter as it is described on Wikipedia: An online social networking and microblogging service that enables users to send and read text-based messages of up to 140 characters.

What is a Tweet?

A tweet is a post or status update on Twitter of 140 characters or less.

How is Twitter Accessed?

Twitter is usually thought of as an app for smartphones – it is a mobile app, but it can also be used from a computer with Internet access, making it an ideal platform for use in the classroom.

- Once an account is created, use with a computer by just logging on and tweeting.
- Once the Twitter app is installed on a smartphone, "tweets" are sent like a text message.

Age Restrictions – Or Not?

Originally, Twitter posted a minimum age restriction of 13 years old. However, Twitter no longer directly imposes any age-usage criteria like many other social networks. Nowadays, Twitter likes to be portrayed as an all-inclusive, global application that helps connect the entire world. However, as i-SAFE recommends before using any Web site's services, read the Twitter terms and conditions page to get a better idea of what the real terms and conditions are. The company gets around imposing an age requirement by saying that the user must submit to the controlling law and jurisdiction of the State of California (where Twitter is based). And in California, a minor is not able to enter into an agreement of use (which is a contract) without the permission of a parent or legal guardian.

Bottom line: Twitter is perfectly legal for you and your students to use in the classroom as long as you receive parental permission. This permission can easily be incorporated into your Acceptable Use Policy permissions section, or use a traditional signed permission slip (template located at the end of this guide).

Twitter Suggestions for Best Practices

Research on the use of Twitter in the classroom has been an integral part of recent studies on the integration of social media use in the classroom. In Everyone's All A-twitter about Twitter (2012), Kruger-Ross, Waters and Farwell compiled a list of best practices for Twitter use based on social media literature and their own experiences. The following list incorporates many of those suggestions for best practices, as well as i-SAFE recommended best practices that focus on proactive action targeted at safety and security issues of Twitter.

Introduction to Twitter and basic usage:

- Be sensitive to students' ability to incorporate the technology. Take time to explain the platform, its functions, your ideas for use in class, and expected etiquette before participating in a real-time Twitter discussion. If age-appropriate, student brainstorming on how Twitter can best be used in your class may be helpful as an introductory activity (see Activity #1).

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- Be clear about your expectations for assignments incorporating Twitter, just as you would be clear about details of any other assignment. For example, an introductory assignment for young students might be: Before class begins tomorrow, tweet a sentence using at least two of this week's vocabulary words.
- Especially in the beginning, have students draft tweets using a word processor prior to posting. This makes it easier to edit for spelling and grammar and to synthesize the tweet down to 140 characters. This method also reinforces the importance of editing in all forms of writing.

Digital literacy, safety and security issues:

- Communicate to parents how you will be using Twitter as part of the curriculum and/or as a communication tool, as well as how they may be expected to participate.
- Maintain a professional attitude. Social media makes it easy for boundaries to blur in communication. While Twitter can add to positive classroom interactions, it can also detract as students may begin to see the teacher-student relationship as being more informal than it should be. Create communication guidelines, clearly communicate these to your students and model them in your own usage.
- Serve as a Twitter role model by demonstrating netiquette through acknowledging retweets and @ mentions. Providing recognition within the context of the application helps students grasp the realities of how Twitter fits into the larger social media picture and promotes empowerment of usage, rather than a feeling of being overwhelmed.
- Understand the privacy settings. Select the class settings in accordance with your school's Acceptable Use Policies (if applicable) and your expectations for class involvement. For example, you will choose to allow everyone to see the class tweets or only let people you have approved see and follow the class.
- Depending on grade level of the class, it is recommended that a specific lesson on netiquette or Twitter etiquette and/or safety be given during the initial period of Twitter use with the class. (See the reference page in this lesson, Twitter Ettiquette: Dot and i's Straight-Up Safety Talk UNIT [Gr. K-2], Netiquette In The Cyber Community [Gr. 4], Text Messaging Safety [Grades 3-6], Advanced Textiquette: Twitter Safety Strategies [Gr. 7-12].)

Getting Started – Setting Up the Class Account

Follow the step-by-step instructions to create an appropriate account at **http://www.twitter.com**.

For most, it's easiest to create just one Twitter account for each class. You may also want to have a separate "teacher account" to be used for notifications and parent communications.

Hints and Helps:

Follow the prompts to sign up for an account.

- Enter your name, class/school e-mail address, and a password.
- **HINT:** Choosing a Username. The maximum length of a username is 15 characters. For your class try to find the balance between making the username as short as possible while adequately identifying the class.
- Follow the verification steps.

HINT: A checkbox is offered (checked by default) during the initial sign-up that says, "Tailor Twitter based on my recent website visits." Uncheck the box. It can also be checked or unchecked at any time under "edit settings."

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Part of the sign-up process includes a tutorial that helps you add people, organizations or topics that are of interest and that you will want to "Follow." For class use, skip this section initially by scrolling the list down until you see a small link labeled "Skip."

You will be prompted to add a character (avatar or photo) and a 160 character or less "Bio" (use this feature to describe the class).

The class profile: Fill out the profile of your class (160 characters or less) identifying that you are a classroom tweeting and include the following information:

- The age level of the students.
- A geographic location, such as your state, county, etc.

Activity idea: Part of the sign-up process is to upload an avatar. Let students create sample avatars then vote on the most popular. Scan the image and upload as your avatar.

Privacy Settings

Remember that Twitter is a public space and there is no reason to expect privacy when the "Protect my Tweets" setting is not checked.

Most of the communication taking place on Twitter is public and viewable to everyone, since the information posted is public. Because of this, data posted on Twitter may be re-published (made available) on other Web sites. For example, when posting from a smartphone, the user has the option to automatically post the information about to be tweeted on other social networks like Facebook. Additionally, anyone receiving a tweet can then share it with others.

Part of the experience of using Twitter with your class is to be able to connect with other classes and to include parents on student-learning experiences.

HINT: For younger students who are able to fully participate by typing in their own tweets, you may want to start out by protecting the class tweets until everyone is up to speed with using the format. You can use the protected account to monitor the content of student tweets and use it as a tool to help students improve on their Twitter style. At this stage you can opt to include parents by approving their accounts to receive class tweets.

Account Settings: How to Protect Your Tweets

1 Go to your account settings by clicking on the gear icon at the top right of the page and selecting Settings from the drop down menu.

2. Scroll down to the tweet privacy section and check the box next to Protect my Tweets.
3. Click the Save button at the bottom of the page. You will be prompted to enter your password to confirm the change.
4. Once you have activated the setting, navigate back to your homepage. You should see a notice reminding you that your tweets are now protected.

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According to the Twitter Help Center, when your tweets are protected, the following restrictions are put in place:

- People will have to request to follow you; each follow request will need approval.
- Your tweets will only be visible to users you've approved.
- Other users will not be able to retweet your tweets.
- Protected tweets will not appear in Twitter search or Google search.
- You cannot share permanent links to your tweets with anyone other than your approved followers.

If you have selected to protect the class account tweets, you can easily go back to the public option at any time.

Account Settings: How to Unprotect Your Tweets

1. Before unprotecting your tweets, review any pending follower requests and accept those you approve. Any follower requests that are left pending will not be accepted automatically when you switch to the public setting.
2. Go to your account settings by clicking on the gear icon at the top right of the page and selecting Settings from the dropdown menu.
3. Scroll down to the tweet privacy section and check the box next to Protect my Tweets.

Following and Followers

Following other similar classes can provide networking opportunities and new ideas on how to use Twitter.

There are various ways to find and follow other classes that use Twitter. One simple way is to connect with other classes known to you within your own school or district. To expand beyond those known to you, look at "Who to Follow" on the left side of your Twitter page. Click on Browse Categories and use the search bar. Try different search terms such as "elementary classes," "class pages," "Kindergarten," 1st grade," etc., to find appropriate classes to follow. You can also use these search strategies using Google.

Following others will generate interest in those who want to follow your class. If someone chooses to follow you, you do not need to follow them in return.

All about Hashtags (using the "#" symbol in tweets)

Understanding what hashtags are used for can greatly enhance lesson activities with Twitter.

What is a hashtag? When used in Twitter, the # symbol, called a hashtag, is used to mark keywords or topics in a tweet. In other words, it categorizes or organizes tweets. It is interesting to note that the use of hashtags was created organically by Twitter users as a way to categorize messages.

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Digital Literacy – Hashtag Savvy

Use the hashtag symbol # before a relevant keyword or phrase (no spaces) in a tweet to categorize it which will help the tweet show up more easily in Twitter search.

It doesn't matter where the hashtag is placed in the tweet. It can occur anywhere in the message – at the beginning, middle or end.

Clicking on a hashtagged word or phrase in any message shows you all other tweets marked with that same keyword or phrase.

Hashtagged words that become very popular often become trending topics which are provided in the "Trends" section of your Twitter homepage.

Remember, if you tweet with a hashtag on a public account, anyone who searches for that hashtag (word or phrase) may find your tweet.

Use hashtags appropriately:

- Avoid spam with hashtags – don't over-tag a single tweet with multiple hashtags. It is recommended that no more than two hashtags be used per tweet.
- Make sure the hashtag used is directly relevant to the subject matter of the tweet.

More information and examples for using hashtags is found in individual activities.

Using Twitter with Parents

Twitter is a great way to maintain up-to-date communication with parents. Parents can sign up to receive tweets from teachers, to learn about activities, tests, projects, and more.

To help ensure that parents get timely information that is not integrated with class tweets and activities, create a separate account set up specifically for parent-communication purposes and encourage all parents to follow. For example, this type of account can be used to inform and/or remind parents about schedules, holidays and school or class events, as well as upcoming assignment due dates and test schedules.

HINT: For parent communication accounts, explain the intent in the "Bio" such as: This is an account used by Mrs. Teacher for communication to class parents.

Encourage parents to follow the class account to let them get a real-time view of how students are using and learning with the technology. Be clear, however, that unless invited to respond to class activities, parents should not tweet in place of their children engaged in class Twitter activities.

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Think Before You Tweet – How to Make a Quality TWEET

A tweet is limited to 140 characters, so it usually takes some thought to make the best use of those characters!

A Quality Tweet is:

- Specific
- Informative
- Precise
- Clear
- Creative
- Rich in content
- Valuable to a conversation

A Quality Tweet might also include a resource link or a photo.

A Quality Tweet does NOT include:

- Bad language
- Gossip
- Mean comments
- Information unrelated to the conversation

Activity

Think about what makes a good tweet and a bad tweet. In the space available, create an example for each of the bullet points on this page.

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Twitter Etiquette

Netiquette is made from the word “etiquette” and refers to using good manners (the way you behave) when communicating online. Twitter etiquette is about using good manners when using Twitter.

When using Twitter for school assignments, Twitter etiquette includes using the general rules of good behavior you use at school, as well as guidelines for producing good written work.

Twitter in School – Etiquette Tips:

- Follow your teacher’s guidelines for using Twitter in class.
- Do not use the class Twitter account for anything other than class assignments or projects.
- Use appropriate language.
- Be polite and respectful of others in all tweets.
- Think *quality* over quantity: Keep your tweet short and to the point.
- Add something of value to the conversation: Add to the ideas of others and avoid just copying what someone else says.
- Give credit where credit is due: Try to use your own original thoughts and ideas, but if you need to share the ideas of someone else, give them credit.
- Respond with an answer if someone asks you a question or makes a response to your tweet.
- Don’t use Twitter to spread gossip or other information that is not related to an assignment.

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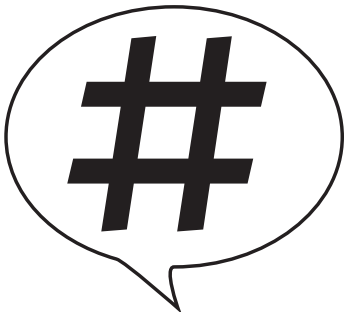
Hashtag Savvy



Hashtags are a simple way to organize Twitter conversations by topic. When used for class activities, a hashtag is used to identify which activity a student is referring to. A search for a specific hashtag will reveal the set of messages that contain the phrase.

It doesn't matter where the hashtag is placed in the tweet. It can occur anywhere in the message – at the beginning, middle or end.

Clicking on a hashtagged word or phrase in any message shows you all other tweets marked with that same keyword or phrase.

Use hashtags appropriately:

- Make sure the hashtag used is directly relevant to the subject matter of the tweet.
- For class tweets, use the hashtags identified by your teacher to make sure your tweet is associated with the correct activity.
- Avoid spam with hashtags – don't over-tag a single tweet with multiple hashtags. It is recommended that no more than two hashtags be used per tweet.

The first high-profile application of the hashtag was by San Diego, California resident Nate Ritter, who included #sandiegofire in his frequent posts on the October 2007 wildfires that occurred all over San Diego County and threatened many populated areas.

Create Your Own Hashtags

One hashtag can have several meanings. For instance, #tt can stand for everything from Trending Topics, to Travel Tuesday, to Twitter Takeover. You can use any appropriate keyword or phrase for your hashtag, but it's always a good idea to check ***www.tagdef.com*** for different tag definitions.

Trends

Beginning July 1, 2009, Twitter began to hyperlink all hashtags to search results containing all recent posts mentioning either the hashtag or the standard spelling of such words, provided that such words are written in the same order of characters.

In 2010, Twitter introduced "Trending Topics" on the Twitter front page, to highlight frequently used hashtags. Today, you will find trending topics in the "Trends" section of your Twitter homepage.

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Finding Followers Based on Hashtags

Classroom learning experiences can be enhanced by using hashtags to help you find groups of followers who share your same interests. For example, are you going to start a #WildlifeGarden? Searching Twitter for that hashtag comes up with some great suggestions on who to follow and sites to visit.

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Twitter Introductory Activity – First Tweets

Learning objectives:

- Age-appropriately understand definitions related to Twitter
- Age-appropriately understand the basic format of a tweet
- Individually, or as part of a group, compose and post a tweet

Materials and Preparation

- Create a class Twitter account
- Smart Board or computers or other mobile device used in the classroom with Internet access
- Have access to the class Twitter account ready for exploration by students

Discussion

Facilitate an age-appropriate discussion that defines Twitter and provides the basics of how it works.

Twitter is:

- a way to "connect" with others
- a social network
- abbreviated blogging; micro-blogging; a way to communicate to and with a global audience

In the classroom, Twitter can be a learning-network tool.

Example discussion prompts include:

- Ask students if they know about Twitter (most will). How do they know about it? Do their parents use it?
- Ask students for input on how they define the application. (Simple answers should include: a way to connect with others – a social network. More advanced answers should include the term "micro-blogging.")
- What is a tweet? (A message sent or read on Twitter.)
- Why do we associate Twitter with micro-blogging? (Text is limited to 140 characters or less in a tweet.)

Inform students about how Twitter will be used in class. This explanation may be as simple as, "We will take some time to learn about how to use Twitter with some of our learning activities and assignments."

Activity – First Tweets

Provide students with access to the class Twitter homepage.

Explain the following:

- The class Twitter account is only to be used for tweets by members of your class (including the teacher).
- The account has a password. Options: (1) (recommended) The teacher will log in and log out for student use in the classroom. (2) Students will be given the password in order to complete assignments outside of the classroom.
- The text for a single tweet can only be 140 characters or less.
- When a student posts a tweet to the class account, s/he must end the tweet with their first name (example: By Sam) so that the author can be identified.

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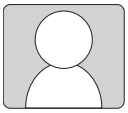
- The format of a posted tweet shows the class account name, the class username preceded by the @ symbol, and the tweet ending with By (student name).
- Don't get hung up on learning the format before seeing it (in the activity).

Get ready to Tweet

Explain that each student will share something they learned (or observed while learning) this week. It might be easiest to stick to a particular subject, activity or book read.

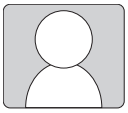
- For students who are not yet able to type in their own tweets, have them brainstorm a list of potential tweets. Write down the tweets that will be used on the board and read them together to reinforce reading skills.
- For older students, individually or in pairs, have them write or use a word processor to compose their tweets.
- **Instruct students to *LABEL* their tweets with By (Name) at the end of the tweet.**
  For example, By John
- Review the tweets with students. At this point avoid being critical on content, as long as the tweets are on topic.
- If desired, to introduce hashtag use, have students use the following hashtag within their tweet: #whatilearned OR a hashtag followed by the specific project, like #ourcaterpillars.
- Provide access to the Twitter homepage and have students input their tweets.
- Review once everyone has posted.

Example: Ms. Judd's first grade class (username: Judd1st) has been learning about the metamorphosis of the Monarch butterfly by observing caterpillars in a classroom habitat. Students were instructed to tweet an observation they made about the caterpillars and to use the hashtag #ourcaterpillars. Their class tweets might look like this:



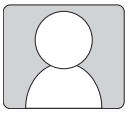
Ms. Judd Grade 1 @Judd1st

#ourcaterpillars Some caterpillars are hanging from a twig. By Sam and John



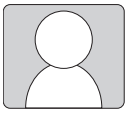
Ms. Judd Grade 1 @Judd1st

#ourcaterpillars One caterpillar is in a chrysalis and it is green. By Sarah



Ms. Judd Grade 1 @Judd1st

#ourcaterpillars There are still some tiny caterpillars eating leaves. By Jesse and Toby



Ms. Judd Grade 1 @Judd1st

#ourcaterpillars When caterpillars get big they hang upside-down. By Serena

Conclusion

Follow up the activity with any questions students may have.

Brainstorm ideas for a new Twitter activity.

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Activity Briefs

Remember to make tweeting part of your classroom ROUTINE. It should be an integral part of the day, not a separate subject.

20 ideas for incorporating Twitter into daily classroom learning.

1. Have everyone compose a tweet on paper and then vote on the best quality tweet to publish.

2. Assign students to tweet about specific subject or topics. Option: Have students collaborate on the creation of appropriate, relevant hashtags.

3. Assign a Twitterer of the day to post information about class activities and progress. This is a good one to use Twitter to share class activities with parents.

4. Have students use Twitter to record observations of science projects.

5. Use the 140 character format to reinforce how to be concise in writing.

6. Write a progressive, collaborative story in tweets. Assign each student a number and have them write a continuation of the story from the tweet of the student ahead of them. Option: Students agree to take turns to contribute to an account or story over a period of time.

7. Create a progressive poem. Similar to the collaborative story mentioned above, students compile poetry as each student contributes one line that flows with the one written before.

8. Use Twitter to practice descriptive writing. Assign something to describe and limit each student description to one tweet.

9. Have each student tweet about a current event and use the tweets as a foundation for a current events discussion.

10. Create a “Twit Board” to notify students of assignments, schedules, events, or other important information.

11. Ask students to read an article or chapter and then post a brief summary of the key point(s).

12. Share a “Twit Link” (hyperlink). Have students regularly share one new hyperlink to a useful Web site they have found. This is a good activity to supplement a specific class project.

13. Follow a famous person and document their progress. For example, during the recent U.S. Presidential elections, many people followed @BarackObama and kept up to date with his speeches, etc.

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14. Choose a famous person from the past and create a Twitter account for them. Choose an image which represents the historical figure and over a period of time write regular tweets in the role of that character, in a style and using the vocabulary you think they would have used (e.g., William Shakespeare, Julius Caesar).

15. Include your Twitter followers to provide ideas for assignments. For example, to inspire students with ideas of what to write about, provide a hashtag like #ideasforwriting and ask followers, like other classes and teachers, to tweet their best ideas.

16. Use the 140 character format to write poems.

17. Follow an issue or topic through Twitter. Use the search feature to research what others are tweeting about the issue or topic.

18. Role play. Have students tweet in character – ideas and quotes from historical figures or literary characters.

19. Track the government. Many local and national government organizations maintain their own Twitter feeds which students can track and learn from.

20. Write a review. Use the Twitter format to write micro-reviews of movies, books, music, etc.

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Class Participation in Twitter Project

PARENT PERMISSION FORM

Teacher's Name: _____

Grade: _____

Student's Name: _____

Class Twitter Account Username: _____

I give permission for my child to use the class Twitter account named above to participate in learning activities.

I understand that the Twitter account is managed and monitored by the classroom teacher for educational purposes only.

_____	_____	_____
Signature of Parent or Legal Guardian	**Printed name of Parent or Guardian**	**Date**

Class Participation in Twitter Project

PARENT PERMISSION FORM

Teacher's Name: _____

Grade: _____

Student's Name: _____

Class Twitter Account Username: _____

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