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LESSON PLAN—Weblogs: A Positive Approach to Blogging

Suggested grade levels 5-8

Learning Objectives

Learners will:

- Understand the security risks associated with online journaling and blogging
- Identify specific risky behaviors associated with online journaling
- Understand positive techniques to blog online

Materials / Preparation

- A copy of the reference and activity pages for each student
- Optional: PowerPoint presentation for this lesson is available

Procedures

Discussion 1

Ensure that all students have printouts of the newsletter activity sheet.

Engage the learners in a brief discussion in which they define the terms Online Journaling and Blogging, and identify, explain, and analyze the dangers involved. Guide the discussion to cover the following:

- Online journaling otherwise known as blogging is where a person provides periodic Web postings on a topic such as their day, a hobby, etc.
- Online journaling can be interactive with others visiting your site and making comments or posts.
- There are dangers involved in online journaling. What are some of the potential dangers? How can these dangers be prevented?
- Have the students refer to the newsletter: Online Journaling. Decide as a class how to cover the information provided in the newsletter. Some options include:
 - > Read articles together as a class and discuss.
 - > Divide class into small groups and read articles in small groups and discuss.
 - > Have students read articles individually and then meet back as a class or in small groups to discuss.
- Review the information covered in the newsletter as a class.
- Complete the fun corresponding newsletter activities to review concepts learned.

Create student groups of 3 or 4 to complete the following project.

Activity

Direct the students to engage in the project activity as directed on the activity page.

- Each group receives an activity page for each student. Students are to begin blogging on the topic provided on their sheet. The teacher will monitor class and keep time. After 4-5 minutes, have students stop. Students should then rotate their blog sheets clockwise. Students will then respond to the blog they have. Again monitor and keep time. Have students rotate after 2-3 minutes. Continue rotating so that all students get a chance to write on each blog sheet in their group.

- Once all blogs have been written on, have students discuss the benefits of blogging. Discuss whether the blogs revealed personal information or other items that can be used by predators, bullies, or others online.
- Having completed the blogging assignment, have groups brainstorm some safety rules for online journaling to keep it safe and fun.
 - > Option: Have students design posters displaying the safety rules they have developed in their groups.
- Proceed to Discussion 2.

Discussion 2

Provide time for the student groups to present their online journaling rules, and discuss. Each group should briefly include the following during the presentation:

- Share their rules on safe online journaling.
- Discuss what they learned from the blogging assignment.

Concluding discussion

Review the student-created tips for safe and secure blogging

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The Promise and Perils of Blogging

A place to write down your thoughts and feelings, your secret desires and hopes for the future—one that is open for anyone to read and comment on. Welcome to the Blog.

Blogs, or “weblogs” (“web” + “log”) are journals posted on the Internet. These online diaries are often hosted free of charge by companies who get money by placing click-through ads on the blog pages. What distinguishes the blog from any other web page is the format. The entries are posted in reverse chronological order, and each entry contains an area for comments from the readers. This enables topics to be discussed among the readers in an ongoing dialogue.

Blogs can be written by anyone, about anything: the school lunch, how to kill a spider, etc. The over four million bloggers leave no conversational stone unturned. Typically, a blog contains links to other blogs

The appeal of blogging to

teens is natural. Blogging has become a social event. A way to reach out and connect and share ideas of a personal nature in an impersonal forum. This private diary broadcast to millions of strangers is a way of getting attention while hiding behind a computer. It’s not surprising that blogging has so quickly become identified as a “teen” pastime.

The promise of teen blogging is that it nurtures important social skills, fills a need for self-expression, and builds writing ability. And most of the time it does just that. Careless blogging, on the other hand, can be dangerous in many ways.

The online sexual predator can over time glean enough information from a blog to put together a personal profile of the author. School name, names of friends, teachers, physical addresses, street names, town—anything and everything can be used by the sexual predator. While the teen posts what s/he

thinks are innocent details, s/he is in reality drawing a roadmap to her house. S/he is lulled into a false sense of security by what s/he sees as the anonymity of the Internet.

This perceived anonymity gives rise to the other dangers of blogging: cyber bullying and slander. Without the physical immediacy of an audience, teen bloggers are less likely to see and understand the damage their words can do. Schoolyard gossip finds its way into a blog, and the target of the gossip suffers at the hands of unknown online assailants.

Blogs can be used to the same effect by cyber bullies. The damage done by cyber bullying cannot be overstated—just recently 13-year-old Ryan Halligan committed suicide as a result of cyber bullying. Teens, especially when it comes to blogs, sometimes forget that anything posted on the Internet has an unintended audience, and therefore, unintended consequences

Bloggng: Breaking It Down

- *Blogs: Journals posted on the Internet.*
- *Weblogs: Another name for blogs.*
- *Blogs are maintained in chronological order by date of post. People who read the blog are usually welcome to post replies, their thoughts, etc. This makes most blogs interactive.*
- *Bloggng makes the writer feel like they are writing confidentially because they are behind a screen. However, the reality is that anyone online can read the blog. This can be dangerous.*

Protecting Your Blog

If you're thinking of creating your own online blog, here are some tips you can follow to ensure your safety.

1. Password-protect your blog. Make sure that nobody knows your password other than your parents.
2. Do not include very personal and detailed information (places you hang out, malls, etc.) in your blog.
3. Do not complete a profile or include name, address, phone number, school, zip code, e-mail address, or screen name in your blog. This is exactly the kind of information a predator is looking for, so don't do it!
4. Do not release any personal information about *anyone else* you know either. Doing so would be just like telling a predator "I'm not interested in speaking with you, but my best friend Chelsea would be more than happy to."
5. Pretend that you are a predator. Read your writing and see if you can pick out details that lead to revealing personal info about you. If you come across anything objectionable, change it so it is less identifying to the unknown and potentially dangerous reader.
6. Do not include photos of yourself or others in your blog.
7. Do not leave your blog page open and your computer unattended. Someone could step in and write something as you.
8. Do not spread gossip or slander about your classmates.



A Student's Tips for Safer Blogging

It is important to realize the great dangers that come along with blogs. Unless you want everyone on the Internet to read about your personal life, you want to keep your online blog confidential. Keep in mind that the Internet is very populated, and there are always going to be those people, predators, who want to sneak into your personal life to gain information about you and cause trouble.

Predators are on the Internet 24 hours a day, picking a target and trying to formulate a plan to capture their prey. You may wonder what I mean by "capture." I'm sure you have heard the news stories of

someone (usually a minor) who meets an Internet "friend" in person, and then is hurt or, killed, by the stranger.

"The predator has gained information about his prey, and often his source of information is—you guessed it—online blogs."

If you aren't careful, you could find yourself in a very uncomfortable and possibly dangerous situation.

Predators love to put puzzles together. Each bit of personal information gives the predator a piece to your life's puzzle. Keep in mind that a little information leads to bigger answers for the predator. Given enough pieces, they would be able to see your entire life story—all from the information you have unknowingly donated to them.

Keep the following tips in mind as you go about creating your blog. These simple measures can, and most likely will, make a difference. Have fun, and more importantly—Stay safe on the Internet!

*By Christopher
A Student from Florida*

Blogging Activity

Divide into groups of 5 or 6. Each student receives an activity page and begins by selecting a different blog topic below within the group. Circle or highlight the topic on the page (So that each page will designate a different topic). Each student blogs on their topic for 2-3 minutes.

When time is called, rotate the blog sheets clockwise. Respond to the new blog topic for another 2-3 minutes. Continue rotating so that all students get a chance to write on each blog topic in the group.

Blogging Topics:

Highlight one to start the blog on this page.

- A daily journal of what you did at school today.
- A journal of the movies you love to watch, your favorite movie, actors, etc.
- Random thoughts on what is happening in the news.
- A Blog relating to a favorite hobby or pastime of yours.
- A Blog on TV shows you watch or don't watch.
- A Blog on what you do while on the computer.