Who Are You Online?

LESSON PLAN grades 9-10

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Essential Question: How do you present yourself to the world online and offline?

Learning Overview and Objectives

Overview: Students explore how they and others represent themselves online, and the relationship between online and offline selves. They begin by looking at a slideshow of people and their avatars and reflecting on how people can present themselves online. Students then watch a video of a teen talking about what it means to be "real" or "fake" online and discuss the video in groups, relating these issues to their own online selves. They learn that assuming different personas online carries both benefits and risks.

objectives

Students will:

- Reflect on the similarities and differences in how people represent themselves online and offline

- Understand that they might choose to show different parts of themselves online, depending on context and audience

- Consider the risks and benefits of assuming different personas online, and think critically about what it means to be genuine in an online context

Digital Ethics Focus: (Self)   (Family and Friends)   (Community)

Materials and Preparation

Materials
- **Self-Expression and Identity Student Video — Ramon's Story**

Preparation
- Preview the slideshow used in Teach 1
- Preview the **Self-Expression and Identity Student Video — Ramon's Story**

Parent Resources
- Send parents the **Self-Expression Parent Tip Sheet — High School**

Differentiated Instruction

Have students create their own slideshow using the slideshow from the lesson as a guide. Students begin by taking their own photo and then creating their own avatar online. They then describe how they made their design choices.

Key Vocabulary

- **Represent:** To depict yourself to others as being a certain way or having particular characteristics
- **Persona:** An image and personality that you show to others
- **Avatar:** A graphic image that represents a person online
- **Anonymous:** Without a name or other information that identifies who you are
- **Inhibited:** Careful or restrained about your actions or impulses

teaching plans

Introduce (5 minutes)

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary words **represent** and **persona**.

ENCOURAGE students to think about how they represent themselves when they are online.

ASK *Does the way you represent yourself online differ from the way you represent yourself offline? What is similar and what is different about your online and offline selves?*

DISCUSS the idea that the Internet gives people the chance to express different parts of themselves and even try on different personas. In the lesson, they will explore how they represent themselves online, and all the possibilities, risks, and benefits involved in experimenting with their online selves.

Teach 1: Exploring Avatars (15 minutes)

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary word **avatar**.

EXPLAIN that you are going to show students some pictures by photographer Robbie Cooper that show how people represent themselves online. He took photographs of people and of the avatars they use in a variety of online worlds.

INSTRUCT students to watch the slideshow silently, and respond in writing to each slide as you show it, in their journals or on paper. Have them note the similarities and differences between the real people and their avatars. Encourage them to address characteristics beyond physical looks, and remind them that they should avoid passing judgment or making fun of anyone's avatar. Instead, they should speculate on why the people in the photos might have created these avatars. (Students should understand that they cannot be certain of these people's intentions without talking to them – they can draw conclusions based only on the information available in the photos.)

SHOW students the first 10 slides in the Avatar Slideshow from the *New York Times* (or have them look at the slideshow on their computers). View http://www.nytimes.com/slideshow/2007/06/15/magazine/20070617_ AVATAR_SLIDESHOW_1.html?scp=1&sq=avatar%20slideshow&st=cse.

INVITE students to take turns sharing their observations on each slide. The following sample responses may help you guide the discussion:

- Slide 1: Choi Seang Rak might represent himself as a girl because he'll do better in the game he's playing. Or maybe he wants to explore how others might treat a girl online.
- Slide 2: Tommy D. Graves might represent himself as a superhero who looks nothing like him because he wants to be anonymous and live out a total fantasy when he plays the game.
- Slide 3: Jean-François de la Fage might want to feel like a stronger, tougher version of himself.
- Slide 4: Ailin Graef might want an avatar that looks like her, wearing her favorite dress and with her best qualities exaggerated.
- Slide 5: Lucas Shaw seems to have created a barbarian character to match the virtual world of the game he is playing, rather than an avatar that resembles himself. He might want to escape to a fantasy world.
- Slide 6: Andreas Fisher is posing like his avatar, so he seems to be exploring the side of himself that wants to act like a superhero.

- Slide 7: Elizabeth Brown seems to want to look like herself, but her dramatic hair color makes her look magical, like her wizard character.
- Slide 8: Jason Rowe might want to experience moving around without a physical disability, and being strong and impervious to pain.
- Slide 9: Harisu is an actress, so maybe she wants to try playing a different character.
- Slide 10: John Palmer looks like he is into Buddhism, and he might want to see what it is like to be really devoted to his religion.

POINT OUT that in creating their avatars, people may make choices based on what kind of online world the avatars will inhabit. Encourage students to suggest how an avatar designed for a social networking site their friends use might differ from one created for a virtual world like Second Life or for a competitive gaming site.

Teach 2: Being "Real" or "Fake" Online *(20 minutes)*

DIVIDE students into groups of four or five.

ASK *What do you think it means to be "real" or "fake"?*

ASK *Do you think it's easier for people to be "fake" online than in real life? Why or why not?*

EXPLAIN to students that they will be watching a video in which a group of teens explores these questions.

SHOW students the **Self-Expression and Identity Student Video—Ramon's Story**.

ASK *Ramon talks about how some people exaggerate or seem very different online than in person. How do you explain these differences between their online and in-person personas?* (Guide students to draw on points that Ramon has made. He thinks some people want to seem tougher or cooler than they are offline so they will be more accepted.)

ASK *Are there risks for creating an online presence that is very different than the offline one? Are there benefits?* (Guide students to identify risks, such as setting up false expectations for others, spurring violence, and depending on online communication to the detriment of in-person communication. Benefits are that you can enter interest-driven communities that you couldn't before, you can take time to compose your thoughts before responding to others, and you can experiment with the opinions you put forth and how you present yourself.)

ASK *What are other reasons why people might feel they can act in ways online that they wouldn't act offline?*
Sample responses:
- You have time to plan what you want to say, and you can shape how you want to come across to others.
- You can't see other people's faces, so you don't see their reactions.
- Because you can't see other people, you might behave differently based on your assumptions about who you think they are and what they're like online.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary words **anonymous** and **inhibited**.

DISCUSS the idea that people may feel less inhibited when they are online. This is especially true if they are anonymous or are interacting with people who don't know them offline. (Even when they know the people, it's easy for people to feel anonymous when they are online, because they are alone with their computer or phone.) People might feel free to invent new personas online, or they might change particular parts of themselves.

ENCOURAGE students to think of the risks and benefits involved in being anonymous or feeling less inhibited online. Have them identify types of behaviors this might encourage, and urge them to provide concrete examples

Are there any benefits to being anonymous or being less inhibited online?

Some reasons include:
- You might feel freer to say things you're really thinking.
- You might be able to try things out that you can't in the offline world.
- You can highlight or emphasize the parts of yourself that you feel good about.

Are there risks involved with being anonymous or less inhibited online?

Some reasons include:
- You are not accountable for your actions, so you might do or say things you wouldn't offline.
- You might behave in ways that are unsafe or harmful to yourself.
- You might behave in ways that are disrespectful or harmful to others.

INTRODUCE students to the idea that it may be possible to "stay real," even when they are representing themselves in different ways online, by staying true to who they are and to how they would treat themselves and others in the offline world.

INSTRUCT students to work in groups to come up with a set of advice for "Staying Real Online." Examples include:
- Present yourself in a way that's positive and not harmful to you.
- Treat people the way you would treat them in person.
- Don't say or do things that harm other people, or betray their trust.
- Never get into a relationship that is not safe.
- Avoid getting involved in a community that is not appropriate.

INVITE groups to share their lists with the class. You may wish to have volunteers create a poster combining the best responses to display in the classroom.

Have students create their posters using Glogster (www.glogster.com).

Wrap Up and Assess *(5 minutes)*

Use the questions below to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives.

ASK *How does your persona change depending on the context, online and offline?* (Students should be able to describe some of the similarities and difference between their various online and offline "selves.")

ASK *What are the benefits and problems with being anonymous or less inhibited online?* (Students should be able to describe several of the risks and benefits identified in Teach 2.)

ASK *What responsibilities do you have to yourself and others to "stay real" online, even when you exaggerate or act differently?* (Students should be able to name several pieces of "Advice for Staying Real" they developed in Teach 2.)

Extension Activity

Have students prepare a presentation on "Staying Real Online." Break the class into small groups, assign each group one of the pieces of advice, and have them design a role-playing exercise of an online situation in which a student faces a dilemma, and what would happen if that student does or does not follow the advice.

As a high-tech option, have students prepare PowerPoint presentations on "Staying Real Online," with talking points and examples for each piece of advice.

Homework

Have students create three avatars of themselves for three different social networks:

1. A school social network where teachers, students, and parents communicate
2. A social network where you connect mainly with friends and people you know
3. Second Life, where you communicate mainly with people you don't know in real life

Lead a discussion in which students are asked to describe what guided their choices as they made each avatar. Encourage them to consider whether they would want to use one of their avatars in a different online setting (their school avatar for their game site, for example), and explain their choice.

Instead of drawing their avatars on paper, have students use online tools such as Meez (www.meez.com), Build Your Wild Self (www.buildyourwildself.com), Portrait Illustration Maker (http://illustmaker.abi-station. com/index_en.shtml), or Marvel Create Your Own Superhero (http://marvel.com/games/play/31/create_your_ own_superhero).

Alignment with Standards – National Educational Technology Standards for Students© 2007

(Source: International Society for Technology in Education, 2007)

1. Creativity and Innovation

    a. apply existing knowledge to generate new ideas, products, or processes
    b. create original works as a means of personal or group expression
    c. use models and simulations to explore complex systems and issues
    d. identify trends and forecast possibilities

2. Communication and Collaboration

    a. interact, collaborate, and publish with peers, experts, or others employing a variety of digital environments and media
    d. contribute to project teams to produce original works or solve problems

3. Research and Information Literacy

    a. plan strategies to guide inquiry
    b. process data and report results

4. Critical Thinking, Problem Solving, and Decision Making

    a. identify and define authentic problems and significant questions for investigation
    b. plan and manage activities to develop a solution or complete a project
    d. use multiple processes and diverse perspectives to explore alternative solutions

5. Digital Citizenship

    a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology
    b. exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity
    c. demonstrate personal responsibility for lifelong learning