Building Community Online

Essential Question
How can websites foster community online?

Lesson Overview
Students examine websites that foster positive community. They explore the factors that increase community engagement on the Internet, such as social media messaging and sharing photos, videos, information, or opinions. They then apply what they have learned about building online community by designing their own websites that foster community.

Learning Objectives
Students will be able to ...

- observe and analyze the factors that foster positive community, both offline and online.
- identify characteristics of websites that excel at creating positive online community.
- demonstrate their understanding of how to build positive community online.

Materials and Preparation
- Large sheets of drawing paper or butcher paper, several for each group of four or five students, and colored markers
- Copy the **Design a Community Website Student Handout,** one for each student.
- Browse the following websites listed in the chart in Teach 1, such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Wordpress, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Goodreads, Yelp, Wikipedia, and Digg. Students will be asked to describe how some of these sites help build community. (Note: Make arrangements to get access to sites that might be blocked by the school filter.)
- Be prepared to project or recreate the **Sites That Build Community − Blank Version**.
- Read over the **Sites That Build Community − Sample Completed Version**.

Family Resources
- Send home the **Connected Culture Family Tip Sheet (Middle & High School)**.

Estimated time: 60 minutes

Standards Alignment −

Common Core:

grades 9-10: RI.4, RI.10, W.6, W.7, W.8, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.3, SL.4, SL.5, L.4a, L.6

grades 11-12: RL.4, RL.10, RI.4, RI.10, W.6, W.7, W.8, W.9, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.2, SL.3, SL.4, SL.5, L.4a, L.6

NETS·S: 1a-d, 2a, 2d, 3a-d, 4a-c, 5a-d

Key Vocabulary −

foster: to nurture or encourage

social media: online communications that promote user interaction, feedback, and content sharing

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Warm-up *(10 minutes)*

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **foster**.

DRAW a concept map with the word *community* in the middle. Have students suggest events that foster community, and list them in circles around the central word.

Sample responses:

• Events like football games and dances

• Extracurricular activities like clubs, sports, and yearbook

• Group projects in class

ASK:

What kinds of things make a community feel positive and foster participation?

Sample responses:

• Options for getting involved

• Helping everyone feel welcome

• Sharing interests

ENCOURAGE students to think of some ways that community can break down within a school.

Sample responses:

• When some community members are mean or disrespectful to others

• When there is little opportunity for input by community members

• When members don't find the activities fun or interesting

POINT OUT that there are many similarities offline and online about how community is built or broken. Explain that they will explore sites that use different methods to build positive online community, and that such communities can thrive only if users are engaged and participating.

teach 1

Investigate Model Websites *(20 minutes)*

PROJECT the **Sites That Build Community—Blank Version**. Alternatively, recreate the chart on the board.

INVITE students to provide sample responses orally for at least one of the sites in each column. Refer to the **Sites That Build Community—Sample Completed Version** for sample responses. These responses should reflect specific ways that each site builds a sense of community. Students might point out ways that a site encourages people to share their ideas, how a site offers tools for posting information to the community, or how a site allows users to see each others' opinions and reviews. If students are stuck, you may visit some of the sites and analyze them together.

DISCUSS how building positive community online depends on the quality of both the website and its users. A website that wants to engage its users includes fun or interesting features and encourages people to actively participate. Users then begin to create their own content and invite more users to join in. Users are more likely to want to participate if there is a positive and welcoming environment, and if the content they find there is respectful and accurate.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **social media**.

ASK:

How do some of the websites you identified fit the definition of social media?	Encourage students to draw on their examples of how sites foster community to describe how users interact and create content.
What would happen to each site if it failed to build an online community?	Have students explain why Facebook, Twitter, and other popular social media sites could not exist without their users and the interactions among those users.
What do you think might happen to these sites if they were full of negative, disrespectful, or inaccurate content?	Guide students to consider how fewer people might want to participate in a site dominated by this kind of content. Also, guide them to think about the negative impact on anyone who is insulted. Discuss how some content of this kind will be inevitable on a site where people are mostly free to post whatever they want.

teach 2

Create a Community *(25 minutes)*

DIVIDE students into groups of four to five and distribute the **Design a Community Website Student Handout**, one per group. Also provide each group with large sheets of drawing paper and markers.

INTRODUCE the following list of guidelines for building online communities:

- Assign someone to manage the community.
- Make the purpose of the community clear to users.
- Involve users in some way and feature the members.
- Build relationships with users who have strong voices or are very active.
- Encourage debates, but make sure users feel safe.
- Look to members to recruit their friends.
- Allow users to help run parts of the site.

(Adapted from Richard Milligan's article, "The Fundamental Laws of Online Communities." http://www. feverbee. com/2009/10/11fundamentallawsofonlinecommunities.html.)

CHALLENGE groups to design a community website. The site should be aimed at building a community of users who interact and collaborate. Have students follow the directions on their student handouts to plan the site, and then have them sketch out their homepage on paper.

INVITE students to share the concepts for their websites with the class and describe what community features they have included and why. Have them name which guidelines they applied in designing their websites.

Wrap-up *(5 minutes)*

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives. You may want to ask students to reflect in writing on one of the questions, using a journal or an online blog/wiki.

ASK:

What are some of the similarities and differences between building a community online and offline?	Similarities: It is vital to have group participation and interaction. Differences: Online communities usually include people who have never met face-to-face. Also, the online community is often larger, and communication among its members is sometimes more public.
How did you apply the guidelines for building an online community when you created your site?	Students should be able to name and explain several of the points outlined in the guidelines for building an online community, discussed in Teach 2.
What kinds of things foster a positive online community and help it grow, and what factors might make a community break down?	Students should recognize that a respectful, inclusive environment with interesting and accurate content is more likely to attract and maintain a community of users; the opposite factors can make a community break down.

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Directions

Your group's challenge is to choose a topic and then design a website that gives teens a space to exchange advice on that topic. This is a peer-advice site, which means that the site creators don't give out the advice; instead, users ask for and receive advice from one another. Your website should include features and tools that will help foster positive community among its teen members — for example, networking, blogging, photo sharing, user reviews, and crowdsourcing.

First, review guidelines for building an online community. Then use those guidelines to answer these questions.

What is the purpose of your website?

_____

What type of users will your website seek out, and how will you attract them?

_____

What social media features will your website have for fostering community? Choose four features and explain how you will use each one. Also, explain why you believe each will help build a sense of community.

- _____

  _____

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How will you ensure that your community stays positive? How will you encourage everyone to participate?

_____

_____

What is your website called?

_____

_____

On a large piece of drawing paper, make a drawing of the website's home page. Make sure the drawing highlights the social media features you listed above. If you have time, you can design some of the linked pages too.

Building Community Online

Directions

Together, fill in the boxes for the following chart. You may want to visit and analyze some of the sites' features.

Type of Site	Social and Professional Networking	Blogging and Microblogging	Photo and Video Sharing	Reviews and Quality Ratings	Collective Intelligence
Names of Sites					
Examples of How Sites Foster Positive Community					
Examples of How Community Can Break Down					

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Directions

Together, fill in the boxes for the following chart. You may want to visit and analyze some of the sites's features.

Type of Site	Social and Professional Networking	Blogging and Microblogging	Photo and Video Sharing	Reviews and Quality Ratings	Collective Intelligence
Names of Sites	Examples: • Facebook • LinkedIn	Examples: • Wordpress • Tumblr • Twitter	Examples: • Flickr • YouTube • Instagram	Examples: • Yelp • Goodreads	Examples: • Wikipedia • Askville • Digg
Examples of How Sites Foster Positive Community	**Sample Response:** Facebook allows you to stay updated on news in friends' lives.	**Sample Response:** Twitter allows you to post your own material, and also "retweet" or respond to others.	**Sample Response:** Flickr allows you to share photos with many people at once and can turn photos into albums.	**Sample Response:** On Goodreads, how you rate a book can influence what others think of it.	**Sample Response:** On Wikipedia, everyday users get to add to the knowledge base about any given topic.
Examples of How Community Can Break Down	**Sample Response:** People can post negative or disrespectful comments on other people's Facebook pages.	**Sample Response:** People can keep their identities hidden and post false or harmful information.	**Sample Response:** People can put embarrassing or private videos of others on YouTube.	**Sample Response:** People can spam the results by posting lots of negative or positive reviews under different names.	**Sample Response:** On Wikipedia, the information can be false or misleading if people don't check their facts before they post.

_____

Building Community Online

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1. **How is a positive community built, and how can it break down? Read each example below and circle whether it's a "community builder" or a "community breaker." The first one is done for you.**

Community members are mean or disrespectful	Community Builder (Community Breaker)
Community members help everyone feel welcome	Community Builder Community Breaker
Community members don't like to participate in activities	Community Builder Community Breaker
Community members have lots of options for getting involved	Community Builder Community Breaker
Community members feel they can share their interests	Community Builder Community Breaker
There is little opportunity for members' input	Community Builder Community Breaker

2. **Complete the following sentence.**

_____ **media are online communications that promote user interaction, feedback, and content sharing.**

3. **What do all social media sites have in common?**

a) They all engage users with fun or interesting features

b) They reward the most popular users with free Internet access

c) They encourage people to participate

d) Both a and c

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1. **How is a positive community built, and how can it break down? Read each example below and circle whether it's a "community builder" or a "community breaker." The first one is done for you.**

Community members are mean or disrespectful	Community Builder ⬭(Community Breaker)
Community members help everyone feel welcome	⬭(Community Builder) Community Breaker
Community members don't like to participate in activities	Community Builder ⬭(Community Breaker)
Community members have lots of options for getting involved	⬭(Community Builder) Community Breaker
Community members feel they can share their interests	⬭(Community Builder) Community Breaker
There is little opportunity for members' input	Community Builder ⬭(Community Breaker)

2. **Complete the following sentence.**

   _____ media are online communications that promote user interaction, feedback, and content sharing.

   Answer feedback
   The correct answer is "**social**." Social media allow users to connect online.

3. **What do all social media sites have in common?**

   a) They all engage users with fun or interesting features

   b) They reward the most popular users with free Internet access

   c) They encourage people to participate

   d) Both a and c

   Answer feedback
   The correct answer is **d**. All social media sites engage users with fun and interesting features and encourage people to participate. Think about your favorite social media site. Would you still want to spend time on the site if you weren't interested in what you could do on it?

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