

## LESSON: Presenting Ourselves Online

### Overview

Social networking sites like MySpace and Facebook are becoming increasingly popular among youth. Many people, however, do not spend time examining why and how they choose to present themselves in their profiles (i.e., the reasons why they are joining particular groups, presenting photos and/or videos, using certain applications, etc.). These pages, however, communicate a lot to viewers. Self presentation plays a large role in the development and maintenance of these pages and these mediums are an interesting place to analyze strategies for the reasoning behind self presentation.

The purpose of this lesson is to encourage students to think more critically about the strategies that people use to present themselves on social networking sites. Participants will critically analyze social networking profiles and engage in discussions with peers about the goals of individuals who created the profiles being examined. In addition, students will create a social networking profile for their group and then present it to the class, discussing why they chose to present particular characteristics.

### Objectives:

- Understanding of the basic concepts of social network profile construction
- Awareness of the intent and techniques of self-presentation on social networking sites
- Development of critical thinking skills about self-presentation on social networking sites

**Level:** Middle / High School

**Time:** 2 class periods

### Preparation and Materials:

- Poster board and markers
- Access to computers

### Procedures

1. Have students select three different Facebook or MySpace pages to analyze. As they are analyzing these profiles, students should answer the following questions:
  - What types of pictures do the users post on their profile? What do these pictures communicate to the viewer?
  - What types of activities and interests does the user include on their profile? What do these activities and interests communicate to the viewer?
  - What types of groups does the user include on their profile? What does membership in these groups communicate to the viewer?
2. After students have analyzed the three pages, have students answer the following questions:
  - What are some of the major differences between the ways that people present themselves in face-to-face interactions versus online environments?
  - How are self presentation strategies a reflection of the goals of the individuals who create these profiles?
  - In what ways do social networking sites enhance the way that people present themselves and in what ways can social networking sites inhibit the ways that people present themselves in online settings?

3. After students have analyzed the profiles and answered questions, have the class break into small groups of 3-4. Students should share their interpretations of self-presentation techniques and the intent behind these self-presentation techniques with other students.
4. Provide each group with a poster board. Have students develop a Facebook or MySpace profile for their group. Students will share this profile with the rest of the class, focusing on the intent behind the photos they chose to show and the activities, organizations, and interests that they add to this page.

## **Assessment**

The comments and analyses individual students provide for the profiles they have selected will offer a basis for assessment. Students in small groups will discuss their interpretations of the self-presentation techniques with one another. Assign one student volunteer in each group to act as the secretary and record what group members share; this will allow an examination of that information the group considers important along with their analyses of social networking sites.

Group presentations will allow teachers to assess the group members' understanding of self-presentation and construction of social networking sites.