



Build Your Ideal Community

Essential Question

How do you build a positive online community?

Lesson Overview

Students will consider the characteristics of positive online communities that promote responsibility and respect.

Students investigate the online virtual world, Whyville, to learn about how its policies and practices help users be safe, responsible, and respectful. They then reflect more generally on how online community can be built or broken. Then they create charters for a fictional online community.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to ...

- identify core principles of healthy online communities.
- analyze the positive individual and community practices for building a community online.
- establish guidelines and norms for building ethical online communities.

Materials and Preparation

- Copy the **You Build it Student Handout**, one per group of four or five students.

Family Resources

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

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Standards Alignment –

Common Core:

grade 6: RI.2, RI.3, RI.7, RI.8, RI.10, W.4, W.6, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.2, SL.6, L.6

grade 7: RI.2, RI.3, RI.8, RI.10, W.4, W.6, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.2, SL.6, L.6

grade 8: RI.2, RI.3, RI.8, W.4, W.6, W.10, SL.1a, SL.1b, SL.1c, SL.1d, SL.2, SL.6, L.6

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

Key Vocabulary –

community: a group of people who are together for a common purpose, interest, or in a specific location

governance: the act of running something, such as a town or a community, according to a set of rules

charter: a document that explains how a community is organized, including the rights and responsibilities of the members of the community

introduction

Warm-up (5 minutes)

INVITE students to define the Key Vocabulary term **community**. Then provide the definition.

POINT OUT to students that their class is a community, their school is a community, and their neighborhoods are communities. Other communities include their sports teams, after-school clubs, religious groups, and volunteer groups. Explain that many people in the class are also members of online communities, where they go to websites to meet with friends, make new ones, or share common interests through social media.

ASK:

What are some online communities that you are a part of?

Write students' examples on the board. Identify students who are members of the same or similar communities, such as social networks, game sites, etc.

Sample responses:

- Facebook
- Everquest
- Edmodo

How are online communities different than offline communities? How are they similar?

Sample responses:

- People meet face to face offline, but people do not meet in person in online communities.
- You are probably more likely to interact with strangers in online communities.

What are some examples of how you can be a good member of one of these communities?

Sample responses:

- Welcome people.
- Ignore people who are being rude.
- Try to hold others to the stated policies of the site.

teach 1

Introduce Whyville (10 minutes)

INTRODUCE students to Whyville (whyville.net/smmk/nice), a virtual city where people can play games, hang out with friends, and build a society together.

HAVE a student volunteer read aloud the About Use section of the website (www.b.whyville.net/smmk/top/gatesInfo?topic=about).

ASK:

What are ways you know this is a community?

Sample responses:

- Users are called “citizens.”
- There are many ways for members to interact.
- It seems to have a governance structure because of the “clams” system and public services.

What are some positive elements of this community?

Sample responses:

- There are activities for people to do.
- There are places for them to get together.
- There are games for them to play.

Do you think this is an online community that you would like to be part of? Why or why not?

Students' answers will vary.

teach 2

List Ideas for Building/Breaking Community (15 minutes)

DISCUSS with students how online community in a virtual world like Whyville can be built or broken. You can do this by exploring Whyville in more depth if you have the time and technology, but it is not necessary.

DRAW two columns on the board. Label one "BUILD" and one "BREAK." List students' responses to the following questions under the correct headings.

ASK:

What are the qualities of positive online community?

- *What is the best way to welcome people into an online community?*
- *What actions can people take to be helpful or provide support?*
- *How do people make it a fun place to be?*
- *Whose responsibility is it to make sure the community is safe and ethical?*

Sample responses:

- People are welcoming.
- Members treat each other with respect.
- Members speak out if someone is being rude to someone else.

How might people "break" the feeling of a positive online community?

- *What might people do to make others feel excluded?*
- *How might people be hurtful or cause harm?*
- *What systems are in place to deal with problems that arise, such as mean members, harassment, or other behaviors that are even more hurtful?*

Sample responses:

- By creating an unwelcoming environment
- When people get hurt or cyberbullied
- When members do not have clear options for getting help

teach 3

Build an Ideal Community (10 minutes)

DIVIDE students into groups of four or five.

DISTRIBUTE the **You Build It Student Handout**, one per group.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary terms **governance** and **charter**.

READ the directions aloud with students. Tell them that a meteorite has upset the magnetic balance of the Earth, and as a result all online data has been interrupted. Then tell them that the world is back online, but there are lasting problems. All existing online communities have been wiped out. Let them know that their functioning, exciting online community is now gone. Then let them know that their group has an opportunity to rebuild the community, but it's up to them to accomplish this.

HAVE students work together to read and fill out the **You Build It Student Handout**. When they are finished with the charter, have them draw a homepage for their community. Let them know that with this document they may be able to make the community even better than it was before. Remind them to review the information on the handout from Whyville to get ideas for how to build their communities.

closing

Wrap-up (5 minutes)

When students have completed their work, have each group read their charter in front of the class, alongside the drawings of the home pages they have created. You can assess how well they understand the lesson objectives by the elements they include in their charters.

ENCOURAGE the class to ask questions to clarify or challenge the charters.

EXPLAIN that the most successful communities will be those with charters that emphasize responsibility to the community, promote respect for others, offer concrete protections for participants from rudeness and cruelty, and are safe, fun places to join.

Sample questions:

- *What are the responsibilities of members to each other?*
- *What happens if someone in the community doesn't follow the charter?*
- *What would your role be in helping members follow the charter?*

CONCLUDE the lesson by telling students that in both the real world and online, the most powerful element for a successful community is to create a climate of mutual respect in which:

- People demonstrate respect so that others feel safe and welcome
- People feel comfortable and at ease
- People behave responsibly
- If people do not feel safe, there are clear rules and expectations for solving the problem

REMIND students that creating positive online communities that are inviting and enjoyable is their responsibility.

Extension Activity

Have students create a word cloud (also known as a tag cloud) about the imaginary online community they have created. (A word cloud is an online word generator that highlights the most popular or repeated words from any piece of text by emphasizing size, color, and placement.) Have students type out their entire charter, word for word, and save it as a Word file. Using Wordle (www.wordle.net), students instantly can create a word cloud. Tell them to copy and paste in the text of their charter into Wordle, and it will create a word cloud. They can then manipulate the size, look, and feel of the word cloud. Have students print out their word clouds and then post them on the wall. Students can view a gallery of word clouds describing visions for a utopian online community. After they are done, ask them which words they notice are used most frequently in all of the word clouds, and what this might say about which elements are important in building a positive online community.

Build Your Ideal Community

Directions

A meteorite upsets the magnetic balance of the Earth, and as a result all online data has been interrupted. Then the world comes back online, but there are lasting problems. All existing, online communities have been wiped out. Your functioning, exciting online community is now gone. Your group has the opportunity to rebuild the community, but it's up to you to accomplish this. Work together to fill out the charter below. When you are finished with the charter, draw a home page for your community. With this document, you may be able to make the community even better than it was before.

We were able to save some documents from one Web community, Whyville. Use these clues to help think about the kinds of rules you want in your community.

Example 1: Whyville Tour Guides and Chat License. When kids earn their Whyville chat license, they are able to chat with one another. Maybe there is a similar privilege, or right, that people in your community can earn after they gain certain knowledge.

<http://b.whyville.net/smmk/whytimes/article?id=2903>



Example 2: Whyville Watch Call Box is a place on the site where Whyville citizens can obtain information about how to keep the community safe. Maybe you can create a place on your site where people can get information about how to keep the community strong.

<http://b.whyville.net/smmk/callbox/callbox?noSkin=1>

Whyville Watch Call Box

Help Keep Our Community Safe

In Whyville, citizens take an active role in assuring our city stays a safe place for everyone. This means that we all help out by keeping an eye out for trouble.

So what do you do when someone is acting up?

Depending on the situation, you have several options.

Example 3: The “Silence” Tool allows users to block people who will not leave them alone. Use this tool to help think about the kinds of rules you want in your community.

<http://b.whyville.net/smmk/callbox/callbox?noSkin=1>

The Silence Tool

To use: **doubleclick** on the person’s face, and choose **silence** from the menu.

After you silence someone, you won’t have to hear him anymore.

Use this tool when you’ve told someone to stop saying something to you, but he won’t stop. You always have the right to determine what you want to hear. You can even decide to never listen to this person again. If that’s what you want, choose **silence permanent**. Read [this article](#) for more information.

YOUR CHARTER

(1) **ONLINE COMMUNITY NAME.** (The name should reflect the mission and values of your community.) _____ .

(2) **CREATED BY.** (student names) _____, _____, _____, _____, _____ .

(3) **PURPOSE.** What is the main goal of your community? What shared interests have brought members together? _____ .

(4) **MOTTO.** (Again, this should reflect values such as responsibility and respect.) _____ .

(5) **OUR MEMBERS.** People who join our community are _____ (adjective), _____ (adjective), and _____ (adjective).

(6) **ACTIVITIES.** (What do members do together to interact and have fun, such as chat, blog, game, etc.?) _____ .

(7) **GREETINGS.** When newcomers come, we welcome them by _____ .

(8) **ACTIVITY THAT UNITES US.** The main activity (e.g., writing a blog about the environment) we do together is _____ .

(9) **IF CONFLICT ARISES.** If someone's feelings are hurt, we _____ .

(10) **AVOIDING HARM.** We protect each other by _____ . This rule helps keep us all safe because _____ .

(11) **LOGO.** (Draw or describe.):

On a separate sheet of paper, draw a picture of your community's home page.

Build Your Ideal Community

1. A community is a group that comes together for a common purpose, interest, or in a specific location. Which of the following is NOT an example of a community?

- a) Members of a volleyball team
- b) Players in a virtual game world
- c) A person alone watching a movie online

2. True or false: In an online community it's okay to disrespect other people.

- a) True
- b) False

3. Some actions can build a sense of community while other actions can break down a community. Read the following examples and decide whether they are “community builders” or “community breakers.” Circle the correct answer.

| | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|
| a) Treating each other with respect | Community Builder | Community Breaker |
| b) Speaking up if someone is rude to someone else | Community Builder | Community Breaker |
| c) Teasing someone | Community Builder | Community Breaker |
| d) Excluding some people from the community | Community Builder | Community Breaker |

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- a) Members of a volleyball team
- b) Players in a virtual game world
- c) A person alone watching a movie online**

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **c**. When a person watches a movie online alone, that person is not interacting or sharing interests with others.

2. True or false: In an online community it's okay to disrespect other people.

- a) True
- b) False**

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **b**, False. Members of all communities, whether online or offline, should always try to make each other feel safe and welcome.

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Answer feedback

Building a community means creating a welcoming environment for members. Breaking a community means making certain members feel unwanted.