



ADDRESSING HATE ONLINE: COUNTERING CYBERHATE WITH COUNTERSPEECH

Modern technology has provided groundbreaking advantages, opportunities and information and cannot be underestimated. The Internet, video and music sharing sites, social media and mobile phones have quite literally changed our world forever. Sadly, this ubiquitous communications technology also has become a place for people to communicate and spread hate, vitriolic language and bigotry.

“Cyberhate” has become a growing concern due to its impact on individuals, online communities and our society as a whole. Many online companies are working to strike a balance between protecting individual expression and ensuring that online communities are safe and welcoming for all people. This lesson provides an opportunity for students to define and learn more about cyberhate, reflect on their own experiences with cyberhate and explore the role of counterspeech in being an online ally.

See these additional ADL resources: [Responding to Cyberhate: Toolkit for Action](#), [Best Practices for Responding to Hate](#), [Bullying and Cyberbullying Prevention Strategies and Resources](#), [Challenging Biased Language](#) and [Navigating a Digital World: Tips for Youth](#).

Grade Level: grades 9–12

Time: 90 minutes or 2 class periods

Common Core Anchor Standards: Reading, Writing, Speaking and Listening

Learning Objectives:

- Students will review key vocabulary related to discrimination, prejudice and specific forms of prejudice.
- Students will learn about cyberhate, how it manifests itself online and the impact it has on individuals, the online community and society.
- Students will reflect on examples of cyberhate speech and counterspeech.
- Students will explore different responses to cyberhate.
- Students will consider the importance of countering cyberhate and come up with ways to do so with ally behavior and counterspeech.

Material:

- [Working Definitions \(Abbreviated Student Version\)](#), one for each student
- [Definition of Cyberhate](#) (one for each student or projected)

- “Mahopac students suspended for racial slurs after Mt. Vernon game” (*The Journal News*, March 6, 2014, www.lohud.com/story/news/2014/03/05/mahopac-students-suspended-racial-slurs-mt-vernon-hoops-game/6105485/);
- ‘Ugliest woman in the world’ teaches about true beauty (Voxxi, September 19, 2012, <http://voxxi.com/2012/09/19/ugliest-woman-in-the-world-true-beauty/>)
- “Nina Davuluri’s Miss America Win Spurs Racist Tweets” (*The Wall Street Journal*, September 16, 2013, <http://blogs.wsj.com/speakeasy/2013/09/16/nina-davuluri-crowned-first-indian-american-miss-america/>)
- A Lot of People Are Very Upset That an Indian-American Woman Won the Miss America Pageant (BuzzFeed, September 16, 2013, www.buzzfeed.com/ryanhatesthis/a-lot-of-people-are-very-upset-that-an-indian-american-woman, **Note:** include the tweets in this article)
- Harassment via Wikipedia Vandalism (Feminist Frequency, June 10, 2012, www.feministfrequency.com/2012/06/harassment-and-misogyny-via-wikipedia/)
- “Poll: ‘Just kidding’ doesn’t make online slurs OK” (Yahoo News, November 20, 2013, <http://news.yahoo.com/poll-just-kidding-doesnt-online-slurs-ok-082905343.html>)
- “Twitter Blows Up With Racist Reactions After P.K. Subban Scores Game Winner In 2nd OT” (CBS Detroit, May 2, 2014, <http://detroit.cbslocal.com/2014/05/02/boston-strong-racist-reaction-after-subban-scores-game-winner/>)
- “Facebook removes page of Hungarian anti-Semitic website” (Jewish Telegraph Agency, July 18, 2013, www.jta.org/2013/07/18/news-opinion/world/facebook-removes-page-of-hungarian-anti-semitic-website)
- chart paper, markers

Vocabulary:

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. Go over the words prior to the lesson and reinforce the definitions as they come up during the course of the lesson. (See ADL’s [“Glossary of Education Terms.”](#))

- | | | | |
|-----------------|------------------|----------------|--------------|
| • Advocate | • Cyberhate | • Misogyny | • Stereotype |
| • Ally | • Discrimination | • Offensive | • Taunts |
| • Compassion | • Harassment | • Prejudice | • Vandalize |
| • Counterspeech | • Hate Speech | • Scapegoating | |
| • Cyberbullying | • Intimidation | • Slur | |

WARM-UP: HERE I STAND

1. Explain to students that they will listen to some statements and decide to what extent they agree or disagree with the statement. The students will be indicating their opinion about each topic by positioning themselves along an imaginary line, depending upon whether they agree or disagree with a statement.

2. Select a large open space and indicate the position of an imaginary line with the farthest right point representing a “STRONGLY AGREE” response and the farthest left point a “STRONGLY DISAGREE” response. In between these two positions, indicate “AGREE,” “IN BETWEEN/NOT SURE,” and “DISAGREE” along the continuum. Create signs with these words and hang them up on the wall.
3. Read each statement below, requesting students to take a few minutes to decide where they stand in the continuum and have them walk silently to that place and observe where others choose to stand. After everyone has chosen their spot, have students spend 3–5 minutes talking amongst themselves about why they are standing where they are.
 - The Internet is the most important innovation/invention ever created.
 - Teenagers are more likely to post their negative viewpoints online than in real life.
 - Freedom of speech extends to the Internet, social media and mobile phones; therefore, people should be able to post whatever they want online.
 - Most of what I see online is positive or neutral.
 - I feel badly when I see negative words and hate online, but I don’t think I can do anything about it.
 - Hate and bigotry directed at a group of people should not be allowed online.
 - Hate and bigotry directed at an individual should not be allowed online.
4. After students are finished going through all the statements, lead a whole-group discussion, using the following questions:
 - Was it easy or difficult to decide where to stand? Were some statements easier to decide and some more difficult?
 - How did it feel when most people had the same response as you?
 - If there was a time when you were alone in where you chose to stand, how did it feel?
 - Did you ever feel you needed to explain where you chose to stand? If so, why did you feel this way?
 - Did you ever decide to change your position when you saw you did not agree with a majority of the group, or after hearing others’ points of view?

REVIEW TERMS: DEVELOPING A COMMON LANGUAGE

1. Explain to students that we will be discussing “cyberhate” and that cyberhate often involves different forms of bias and discrimination. Therefore, it is important that we understand language and terms related to bias, prejudice and discrimination in order to understand how it is displayed online.
2. First, review these general terms, asking students if they know the definitions and sharing an example for each:

Stereotype: An oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences. Even seemingly positive stereotypes that link a person or group to a specific positive trait can have negative consequences. *Example:* “All girls are bad at sports.”

Prejudice: Prejudging or making a decision about a person or group of people without sufficient knowledge. Prejudicial thinking is frequently based on stereotypes. *Example:* “I hate girls.”

Discrimination: The denial of justice and fair treatment by individuals and institutions in many arenas, including employment, education, housing, banking and political rights. Discrimination is an action that can follow prejudicial thinking. *Example:* “Let’s not let any girls on our team.”

Scapegoating: Blaming an individual or group for something based on that person or group’s identity when, in reality, the person or group is not responsible. Prejudicial thinking and discriminatory acts can lead to scapegoating. *Example:* “If the girls weren’t talking so much, we wouldn’t have lost the game.”

- Distribute the [Working Definitions](#) handout to students. Explain that Part I includes the general terms that were just discussed and now we are going to review different forms of prejudice and discrimination, which are based on stereotypes, prejudices and negative attitudes toward members of a particular group. Review with students Part II of the handout which include the following forms of prejudice:
 - Ableism
 - Ageism
 - Anti-Semitism
 - Classism
 - Heterosexism/Homophobia
 - Islamophobia
 - Racism
 - Religious Bigotry
 - Sexism
 - Weightism
 - Xenophobia

WHAT IS CYBERHATE?

- Ask students: *How would you define cyberhate?* Come to a definition as:

Cyberhate: any use of electronic communications technology that attacks people based on their actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability or disease to spread bigoted or hateful messages or information. These electronic communications technologies include the Internet (i.e., websites, social networking sites, user-generated content, dating sites, blogs, online games, instant messages and email) as well as other information technologies.

- Distribute the [Definition of Cyberhate](#) handout to each student or write/project the definition on the board so everyone can see it throughout the lesson.

Students may ask about the differences between cyberhate and cyberbullying. You can explain that cyberbullying can be a form of cyberhate and both terms have similarities which include the following:

- They both use electronic communications and technology to direct negative messages to someone and they both can target a person because of their identity group, using slurs, comments and pictures/photos.
 - Cyberhate is not always directed at a specific person but instead can be directed at a group of people generally (e.g. Black people, Jewish people, LGBT people).
 - Cyberhate can include using slurs or sexist, racist, or homophobic, etc. language without attacking an individual person.
 - Conversely, as a form of bullying, cyberbullying intentionally targets an individual or group of individuals, and while mean-spirited, does not always include hate speech or references to identity. For example, cyberbullying can include posting mean comments and mocking someone using texts and posting embarrassing pictures of an individual but may not include the use of slurs or other prejudicial references.
- Ask students: *Can you think of any examples of cyberhate that you have heard about or witnessed?*

READING ACTIVITY: EXAMPLES OF CYBERHATE

1. Tell students that they are going to read about some specific situations and general trends involving cyberhate.
2. Have students count off by 7s (1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and so on). Instruct students to form groups according to their number (all 1s together, 2s together and so on).
3. Distribute to each student in their group the article corresponding to the students' grouped number (i.e., all the students in group #1 get article #1, all the #2s get article #2, etc.):
 1. [Mahopac students suspended for racial slurs after Mt. Vernon game](#)
 2. ['Ugliest woman in the world' teaches about true beauty](#)
 3. [Nina Davuluri's Miss America Win Spurs Racist Tweets](#) and [A Lot Of People Are Very Upset That An Indian-American Woman Won The Miss America Pageant \(including tweets\)](#)—give both articles to students in this group
 4. [Harassment via Wikipedia Vandalism](#)
 5. [Poll: 'Just kidding' doesn't make online slurs OK](#)
 6. [Twitter Blows Up With Racist Reactions After P.K. Subban Scores Game Winner In 2nd OT](#)
 7. [Facebook removes page of Hungarian anti-Semitic website](#)
4. Instruct students to read the articles silently. Then, as a group discuss the article answering the following questions:
 - What happened?
 - What form of prejudice and/or discrimination was displayed (e.g. racism, sexism, anti-Semitism, etc.)?
 - According to the article, was there any response?
 - What do you think could happen if these situations of cyberhate go unchecked?
5. Following their small group discussions, have each group present their article(s) and responses to the above questions to the rest of the class.

A WORD ABOUT FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Students may ask whether “freedom of speech” protects hate speech online. In other words, can people who use hate speech online get in trouble or arrested for using it? Explain that in the United States, the government cannot prohibit most speech even if it is hateful because the U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment guarantees the right of freedom of speech and press to all Americans. However, the government does not control the Internet, and companies like Facebook, Twitter and YouTube can establish their own rules regarding what speech is acceptable and what speech is not permitted on their platforms. These rules are often included in what they call “Terms of Service” and when you create an account, you are asked to agree to them. If you post something that violates those Terms of Service, someone can report it and it will be reviewed by

A Word About Freedom of Speech cont.

the company and may be removed. Even though speech on major Internet platforms is not protected by the Constitution, most of the major companies encourage freedom of expression whenever possible, and recommend responding to hate speech with counterspeech.

MICRO-LAB: EXPERIENCES WITH CYBERHATE

Divide students into groups of three. The students will talk together and respond to the questions below. This is a structured and timed activity. Each student will have one minute (uninterrupted) to respond to each question below. Then you will call “switch” and the next student will respond to the same question. After all three students have addressed the first question, you will conduct this same process for the second and third questions. Before starting the questions, review the definition of cyberhate again.

NOTE: Encourage students to share to their level of comfort. Remind them to challenge themselves to share as fully as possible, but that if they don’t feel comfortable sharing, they can pass.

- Have you (or someone you know) ever experienced cyberhate or have you “witnessed” it online? What happened?
- What impact did this have on you or the person involved? If you have not experienced it, how do you think you would feel if you were that person?
- Did you do anything about the cyberhate you witnessed, or did you want to? If so, what? What could you do in the future?

Following the micro-lab, ask students: *Is there anything you would like to share from your group? Did you have any new realizations as a result of the small group discussion?*

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT CYBERHATE?

1. Ask students: *Can anyone share about a recent time that you were an ally to someone—either a friend, an acquaintance, a stranger or family member?*

Define **ally** as “someone who speaks out on behalf of someone else or takes actions that are supportive of someone else.” The ally behavior could be something small like a classmate agreeing with a point you made in class or something bigger such as confronting a friend who says something mean about a mutual acquaintance.

Record important words or phrases on the board under the word “Ally.”

2. Ask students the following questions:
 - What do you think would happen if no one ever confronted cyberhate?
 - What would happen to the individuals who are targeted as well as the online community and society in general if no one ever did anything about it?
 - How can we be allies in our electronic lives and confront cyberhate?

3. Create a list of ideas that includes the following:
 - Report it. Show students the [ADL Cyber-Safety Action Guide](#), which lists twenty internet companies (Facebook, Twitter, Amazon, YouTube, etc.) where you can easily access the company's cyberhate policies and a link to register your complaint. Also show YouTube video [When Users Ask Us To Remove Content](#) to understand what happens when content is flagged by a user.
 - Talk with family, friends, classmates about what you have seen.
 - Respond directly to the person (if you deem it appropriate and safe).
 - Speak out about it. You can do so amongst your friends and online community.
 - Learn more about how you can combat specific forms of bigotry and hate speech.
 - Applaud positive content that affirms people and communicates respect for diversity.
 - Be an ally by reviewing ADL's [Be An Ally](#) and [Are You Ready to Be An Ally?](#) handouts and discuss how these ideas apply to being an ally when it comes to cyberhate.
 - Develop and participate in Counterspeech (this will be discussed in more depth below).
4. Share with students the [Confronting Hate Online](#) handout for other ideas.

UNDERSTANDING COUNTERSPEECH

1. Ask students: *What do you think "counterspeech" is?* Explain that counterspeech is a process of exposing hate speech for its dishonest, false and hurtful content, setting the record straight, and promoting the values of respect and diversity.
2. Share with students one or more of the following examples of counterspeech, either by summarizing the stories or reading them aloud:
 - [School Now 'Supports' Bullied 9-Year Old, Says He Can Bring My Little Pony Backpack To Class](#): A nine-year old North Carolina boy, who had been the target of bullying for bringing a My Little Pony backpack to school, had been told that he could no longer use the backpack in school. Following a week of viral news reports and the creation of a "Support for Grayson" Facebook page with 70K+ followers, the superintendent reversed that decision.
 - [Honey Maid's Awesome Response to Anti-Gay Backlash](#): Recently, Honey Maid launched a commercial "This is wholesome" that celebrates all families, showing an interracial family and a family with two Dads. Honey Maid received a lot of hatespeech on Facebook and Twitter, labeling the ad "disgusting" and calling for a company boycott. Honey Maid created a new clip, showing two artists taking printouts of the angry Tweets and Facebook comments and rolling them into tubes, which they then stand upright and use to form the word "Love."
 - [Blogger Lindsay Bottos Is Using Her Internet Haters' Own Words to Fight Back](#): A blogger named Lindsay Bottos, the target of cyberhate focused on her looks, artwork and personal life, stands up for herself by creating a Tumblr photo exhibit of herself with the hateful words pasted into the photos. In this way, she embraces and "owns" their hateful words by making them part of her artwork.
3. Ask students the following questions:
 - How was the cyberhate addressed in these examples?

- Thinking back to the ally behavior you talked about in the beginning of the lesson, would you consider these examples ally behavior and “counterspeech”? Please explain.
- Can you think of other examples of counterspeech?

CREATING OUR OWN COUNTERSPEECH

1. Have students work in pairs or triads (or they can work alone if they would prefer) to develop at least one response to a situation involving cyberhate. It could be something they read in one of the articles or a situation they or another student discussed. Brainstorm with students the different possibilities of how they can express the counterspeech, including the following examples:
 - Make a video.
 - Write a blog.
 - Write a comment to a Facebook or Twitter posting.
 - Write a comment in response to a hateful article.
 - Create a Tumblr, Facebook page, Twitter or Instagram account in support of someone who is a target of cyberhate.
 - Create a word cloud with your message.
 - Use [PowToon](#) to make an animated message. Here is an example of one called [Fighting Back Against Bad Things Online – Facebook](#).
2. Give students 15–30 minutes to work on their projects. This could also extend into homework or another class period in order to bring it to completion. Bear in mind that students will likely need access to computers to publish and share their counterspeech. Have students display their counterspeech around the room. Some students will need computers to display their examples so make sure they save their work on a flash drive and have access to at least one computer in the room where work is being exhibited. Have students do a “gallery walk” around the room to look at all the examples of counterspeech.

CLOSING

Explain to students that for the past several years, Facebook has been asking researchers, scientists, psychologists and engineers to help design a more compassionate interface and tools for Facebook. One idea that came up (but failed to get implemented) was a “compassion” button to click on for when someone is feeling sad or upset. Right now, the only button is the “like” button and that does not work in these cases. You can also write a comment but that takes longer and Facebook is looking for simple tools that just require a click.

You can read this article, [“Facebook’s Compassion Research Day,”](#) together or share a summary of it. Ask students to think about ideas they have for creating “compassion” elements on social media as a way to let someone know they care, defend someone who is being bullied or to empathize. Have each student share one idea they have for Facebook or their favorite social media site. If there is a lot of interest in this, consider having the students flesh out their idea into letter format and send them to Facebook or the appropriate social networking site.

ADDITIONAL READING

- [Family Online Safety Institute](#)
- [“Facebook and Twitter Crack Down on Hate Speech”](#) (PBS News Hour, June 24, 2013)
- [International Network Against Cyberhate](#)
- [Examples of Racist Material on the Internet](#) (Australian Human Rights Commission)
- [Hate Speech Watch](#) (Youth Department of the Council of Europe)
- [“Facebook’s Compassion Research Day”](#) (The Interdependence Project, December 10, 2013)
- [“Sick of Internet comments? Us, too – here’s what we’re doing about it”](#) (*Chicago Sun-Times Voices*, April 12, 2014)

COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.
Standard 4: Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
Standard 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
Writing
Standard 6: Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing and to interact and collaborate with others.
Speaking and Listening
Standard 1: Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

WORKING DEFINITIONS (STUDENT ABBREVIATED VERSION)

OVERVIEW

- All forms of prejudice and discrimination can be both *conscious* (obvious and deliberate) and *unconscious* (unspoken and based on assumptions).
- Each of the categories used to describe people, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, social class, age and ability, include a variety of different groups; for example, the category of *age* includes many groups, including children, teenagers, young adults, middle-aged people and older people. Within each large category, there is typically one group that maintains a dominant position over other groups in the same category. For example, in the category of gender, males are the dominant group, as evidenced by their ability to earn 20% more than females for doing the same job.
- All forms of prejudice and discrimination can be both *personal* (an individual act of meanness or exclusion) or *institutional* (supported by the power of society and giving unearned privileges to members of a dominant group while disadvantaging members of other groups).

PART I. GENERAL TERMS

Stereotype: An oversimplified generalization about a person or group of people without regard for individual differences. Even seemingly positive stereotypes that link a person or group to a specific positive trait can have negative consequences. *Example:* “All boys like sports.”

Prejudice: Prejudging or making a decision about a person or group of people without sufficient knowledge. Prejudicial thinking is frequently based on stereotypes. *Example:* “I hate boys.”

Discrimination: The denial of justice and fair treatment by individuals and institutions in many arenas, including employment, education, housing, banking and political rights. Discrimination is an action that can follow prejudicial thinking. *Example:* “Let’s not let any girls on our team.”

Scapegoating: Blaming an individual or group for something based on that person or group’s identity when, in reality, the person or group is not responsible. Prejudicial thinking and discriminatory acts can lead to scapegoating. *Example:* “If the girls weren’t talking so much, we wouldn’t have lost the game.”

PART II. FORMS OF PREJUDICE

The following definitions describe different forms of prejudice and discrimination, all of which are based on stereotypes and negative attitudes toward members of a particular group.

Ableism: Prejudice and/or discrimination against people because of their mental or physical abilities.

Ageism: Prejudice and/or discrimination against people based on their age.

Anti-Semitism: Prejudice or discrimination that is directed towards Jews. Anti-Semitism is based on stereotypes and myths that target Jews as a people, their religious practices and beliefs, and the Jewish State of Israel.

Classism: Prejudice and/or discrimination against people because of their social or economic status (how much money their families have or do not have; where they live, the kind of clothes they wear, etc.).

Heterosexism/Homophobia: Based on the thinking that homosexuality is wrong and/or that all people are straight (that all boys date only girls, and girls date only boys). **Homophobia** is hatred or fear of people who are or who are believed to be gay.

Islamophobia: An irrational fear or hatred of people who are or who are perceived to be Muslim or of Arab descent.

Racism: Prejudice and/or discrimination against people based on physical characteristics such as skin color, hair texture and eye shape.

Religious Bigotry: Prejudice and/or discrimination against people based on their real or perceived religious beliefs and practices.

Sexism: Prejudice and/or discrimination based on a person's sex. *Example:* Someone tells a joke or puts a person down because the person is male or female.

Weightism: Prejudice and discrimination based on one's weight, especially overweight/obese or extremely thin people.

Xenophobia: Prejudice and/or discrimination against anyone or anything that is perceived to be foreign or outside one's own group, nation or culture. Xenophobia is commonly used to describe negative attitudes toward foreigners and immigrants.

DEFINITION OF CYBERHATE

Any use of electronic communications technology that attacks people based on their actual or perceived race, ethnicity, national origin, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, disability or disease to spread bigoted or hateful messages or information. These electronic communications technologies include the Internet (i.e., websites, social networking sites, user-generated content, dating sites, blogs, online games, instant messages and email) as well as other information technologies.