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# CONFRONTING CYBERHATE: OLD NAVY AND MALIA OBAMA BACKLASH

Online hate speech, or cyberhate, is often in the news. There have been two recent news stories which highlight two very different responses to cyberhate. Old Navy aired a commercial that featured an interracial family (African-American and White) that instantly received a great deal of hate speech through emails, tweets and comments. Almost as quickly as this backlash ensued, supporters of the ad responded by posting comments and pictures of their interracial families using the hashtag #LoveWins. During the same time period, Fox News' online announcement that Malia Obama would be attending Harvard University and taking a "gap year" incited hate speech, so much that Fox decided to dismantle the comments section of their article about it. These news stories point out two very different approaches to cyberhate—shutting down the hate speech (as Fox News did) and allowing the hate speech to remain, with counterspeech posted in response (in the case of the Old Navy ad).

This lesson provides an opportunity for students to explore and learn more about cyberhate using these two recent news stories, and to reflect upon the best way to confront cyberhate.

See these additional ADL resources: *Current Events Classroom lessons* "[Addressing Hate Online: Countering Cyberhate with Counterspeech](#)" and "[Is Gaming a Boys' Club? Women, Video Games and Sexism,](#)" [Navigating a Digital World: Tips for Youth](#) and [Best Practices for Responding to Cyberhate](#).

**Grade Level:** grades 6–8

**Time:** 45 minutes

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

**Learning Objectives:**

- Students will learn what cyberhate is and identify recent examples.
- Students will compare and contrast two different responses to recent cases of cyberhate.
- Students will take a position and write a persuasive essay about what they think is the best way to respond to cyberhate.

**Compelling Question:** What is the most effective approach for addressing online hate speech?

**Material:**

- [Definition of Cyberhate](#) (to project on board/smart board)

- “Upbeat Interracial Ad for Old Navy Leads to Backlash. Twice.” (*The New York Times*, May 4, 2016, [www.nytimes.com/2016/05/05/us/upbeat-interracial-ad-for-old-navy-leads-to-backlash-twice.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/05/us/upbeat-interracial-ad-for-old-navy-leads-to-backlash-twice.html), one copy for half the students)
- “Here’s What Caused Fox To Shut Down Comments On its Article About Malia’s Harvard Plans” (BET.com, May 5, 2016, [www.bet.com/news/national/2016/05/04/fox-news-has-to-shut-down-racist-comments-on-malia.html](http://www.bet.com/news/national/2016/05/04/fox-news-has-to-shut-down-racist-comments-on-malia.html), one copy for half the students)
- [Persuasive Letter Graphic Organizer](#) (one copy for each student)

### Vocabulary:

Review the following vocabulary words and make sure students know their meanings. (See ADL’s [“Glossary of Education Terms.”](#))

- |                      |               |                  |
|----------------------|---------------|------------------|
| • Affirmative Action | • gap year    | • miscegenation  |
| • backlash           | • hashtag     | • prestigious    |
| • bigoted            | • inclusion   | • race relations |
| • boycott            | • interracial | • scrutinized    |
| • cyberhate          | • irony       | • solidarity     |

### INFORMATION SHARING

1. Ask students: *Why has Old Navy been in the news lately?* Explain that Old Navy recently posted an advertisement on Twitter that featured an interracial family. Within hours of posting the ad, there were extreme negative reactions to it, with people using hashtags such as #BoycottOldNavy and #WhiteGenocide in addition to messages such as “Stop promoting miscegenation or else I’m taking my \$\$\$ elsewhere!!!” and “I don’t shop at stores that are anti-White and promote race mixing.” However, another set of responses surfaced soon thereafter, with people expressing their rejection of the biased messages and many posting photos of their own interracial families using the hashtag #LoveWins.
2. Then ask: *What have you heard about Malia Obama, President Obama’s daughter, being in the news lately?* Explain that it was announced recently that Malia Obama chose Harvard University as her college and decided to take a gap year (a year off in between high school and college which students take to travel or work) before attending Harvard in 2017. This news was published in print and social media, but when a story about it was posted on Fox News’ website, the comments section of the article got overrun with racist comments to the extent that Fox News felt obliged to shut the comments section down altogether.
3. After you share information about both these incidents, engage students in a brief discussion by asking:
  - What do you think about what you learned?
  - What do you think about the response and reaction?
  - Can you think of other examples of this?

## WHAT IS CYBERHATE?

1. Explain to students that the initial response in both of these examples is called online hate speech or cyberhate. Ask students: *What is cyberhate?* Define **cyberhate** as follows, using the Definition of Cyberhate to project on the board/smart board.

*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.*

2. Ask students: *What other examples of cyberhate have you seen or heard about? Did you see if there was a response to the cyberhate and if so, what was the response like?*

## READING ACTIVITY

1. Explain to students that they will now learn a little more about each of these news stories. Divide the class in half by having students count off by 1s and 2s (1, 2, 1, 2, 1, 2 and so on). Distribute the first article about Old Navy ("[Upbeat Interracial Ad for Old Navy Leads to Backlash. Twice.](#)") to half the class (the #1s) and distribute the other article about Malia Obama ([Here's What Caused Fox To Shut Down Comments On its Article About Malia's Harvard Plans](#)) to the other half of the class (the #2s). Give students 10 minutes to read the article they were assigned.
2. Pair students up by creating partners with a #1 and a #2 student in each pair. Instruct the students to spend 5–10 minutes explaining what they read in their article to their partner.
3. After students have shared the articles with their partners, engage students in a class discussion by asking the following questions:
  - What is going on in these news stories? What kind of bias is being displayed with these examples?
  - What more did you learn about these recent incidents by reading your article and hearing about your partner's article?
  - What was the response to the Old Navy ad? What was the response to the article about Malia Obama?
  - How were the responses to cyberhate different? How were they similar?
  - Why do you think such different responses were used?
  - What are the pros and cons of each strategy?

## WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT CYBERHATE?

1. Explain to students that these two news stories used different strategies to address and confront cyberhate. Ask: *What are other ways to address cyberhate?* Have students call out their responses and record them on the board/smart board.
2. In addition to the students' ideas, make sure that the examples include the following:
  - Talk with family, friends and 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.
  - Report it. (You can show students ADL's [Cyber-Safety Action Guide](#), which lists social media and other Internet companies (e.g. YouTube, Yahoo) where you can access the company's cyberhate policies and a link to register your complaint.)
  - 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](#) resources.
3. Explain that the strategy of creating the #LoveWins hashtag, posting photos and other comments in response to the Old Navy ad is called counterspeech. Ask: *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.

Ask: *How was the response to the Old Navy ad counterspeech? Have you seen other examples of counterspeech? What do you think are the pros and cons of counterspeech?*

### WRITING ACTIVITY

1. Ask students: *What do you think is the most effective way to address and confront cyberhate?* Explain to students that given all of the ideas for addressing cyberhate they brainstormed earlier and the two recent examples they read about, they should come up with an opinion/position about that question. They should imagine an example of cyberhate in their minds (either using the news stories or something else they witnessed—for more examples see the lesson [Addressing Hate Online: Countering Cyberhate with Counterspeech](#)) and write a persuasive letter that would go to the company or news site explaining what they think should be done about it.
2. Distribute a copy of the [Persuasive Letter Graphic Organizer](#) and have students begin to work on their persuasive essay by completing it. You can give them the option to talk with a partner in order to think through their thoughts before using the graphic organizer. If you haven't already taught persuasive essays, explain that students should state their opinions clearly, provide at least 2–3 main reasons (including quotes, statistics, examples or other information) to support their opinion and what they would say to those with a different point of view. If more time is needed, they can finish the essay for homework.
3. When students have completed their essays, have some share aloud with the class.

### CLOSING

Have students do a go round in which they share one new strategy they learned today to confront cyberhate.

### ADDITIONAL READING

- [Cheerios Commercial Featuring Mixed Race Family Gets Racist Backlash](#) video (*The Huffington Post*, May 31, 2013)
- ["Facebook and Twitter Crack Down on Hate Speech"](#) (PBS News Hour Extra)
- ["Honey Maid's Awesome Response to Anti-Gay Backlash"](#) (Diversity Inc., April 10, 2014)

- [“John McCain’s son to the ‘ignorant racists’ criticizing an Old Navy ad with an interracial couple: ‘Eat it’”](#) (*The Washington Post*, May 2, 2016)
- [“Sounds like black privilege to me”: Rampant racism forces Fox News to close comments section on Malia Obama article](#) (Salon, May 3, 2016)

## COMMON CORE ANCHOR STANDARDS

Content Area/Standard
Reading
Standard 1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
Standard 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.
Writing
Standard 1: Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.
Standard 5: Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
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.

## 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.

# PERSUASIVE LETTER GRAPHIC ORGANIZER

Student Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**Directions:** Use this organizer to outline your persuasive letter before writing.

**State your opinion/position about the most effective way to address and confront cyberhate.**

**Provide background information about the issue.**

**List at 2-3 main reasons that would convince someone of your position (use examples, statistics, quotes, etc.).**

**Indicate what those who have a different point of view might say.**

**Indicate what you might say in response.**