Grade 9 Lesson Plan

Think Twice:

Responsible Use of Social Media as a News Source

Toronto Metropolitan University

the dais

Grade 9: Think Twice: Responsible Use of Social Media as a News Source

Grade Level: 9
Subject/Strand: English
Topic: Responsible Use of Social Media as a News Source
Duration: approx. 65 mins (x 1 period)
Prep time: approx. 45 mins.

Lesson Description

This lesson will equip students with an understanding of the importance of consuming credible news, and with strategies for seeking out informative and accurate news content. The lesson will also highlight the impacts of different types of media, with emphasis on their suitability for reaching different audiences and for communicating different types of messages. In the course of considering both the content and form of their news intake, students will reflect on the influence of emotional appeals, sources of polarization, and how they can seek out news to stay better informed.

Process

The lesson begins by encouraging students to think about the news they have seen/heard recently, and to reflect on why it is important to access accurate and credible news sources. Then, as a class students will do the "Media Reflection" activity, which will give them the opportunity to consider the distinct characteristics of different forms of media.

Based on this activity, the teacher will guide a class discussion about the effects of finding news on social media platforms, introducing concepts such as polarization and credibility. Afterwards, in small groups, students will do the *Understanding Bias* activity, which will prompt them to identify and assess for different forms of bias. To consolidate the learnings from both activities, the lesson ends with students individually generating questions for evaluating news content, and then sharing their ideas with the class.

The Ontario Curriculum, English, Grade 9 (2023), Learning Goals, Success Criteria:

Curriculum Expectation – A2. Digital Media Literacy

Demonstrate and apply the knowledge and skills needed to interact safely and responsibly in online environments, use digital and media tools to construct knowledge, and demonstrate learning as critical consumers and creators of media.

Learning Goal

I can articulate a list of practical tips that I and my peers should keep in mind when reading and viewing texts online.

Specific Curriculum Expectation	Success Criteria
A2.4 - Evaluate the use of various forms, conventions, and techniques of digital and media texts. Consider the impact on the audience, and apply this understanding when analyzing and creating texts.	I can identify differences in how information is presented across mediums and explain how these differences might shape an audience's perspective. I can identify different types of media, explain what bias is, and determine different approaches social media content creators use to appeal to my emotions.
A2.5 - Demonstrate an understanding of the interrelationships between the form, message, and context of the intended and unintended audience, and the purpose for production.	I can identify the advantages and disadvantages between types of media, and how the type of media can influence the way I perceive a message.

Curriculum Expectation - C1. Knowledge about Texts

Apply foundational knowledge and skills to understand a variety of texts, including digital and media texts by creators with diverse identities, perspectives, and experience. Demonstrate an understanding of the patterns, features, and elements of style associated with various text forms and genres.

Learning Goal

I can identify and evaluate various elements of digital and media texts, and explain how creators use various elements to (implicitly and explicitly) convey a message to an intended audience.

Specific Curriculum Expectation	Success Criteria
C1.4 - Evaluate how images, graphics, and visual design create, communicate, and contribute to meaning in a variety of texts.	I can identify differences in how information is presented across mediums and explain how these differences might shape an audience's perspective.
C1.5 - Identify various elements of style in texts, including voice, word choice, word patterns, and sentence structure, and analyze how each element helps create meaning and is appropriate for the text form and genre.	I can identify the advantages and disadvantages of different mediums and articulate how the medium can influence the way I perceive a message.

Curriculum Expectation - C2. Comprehension Strategies

Apply comprehension strategies before, during, or after reading, listening to, and viewing a variety of texts, including digital and media texts by creators with diverse identities, perspectives, and experience, in order to understand and clarify the meaning of texts.

Learning Goal

I can suggest alternative content (e.g. images, graphics, visual design) creators could have used, and explain how those changes might change the message and how the audience understands the message.

I can identify different types of bias in content and understand the role of personal, political, and commercial interests in the creation and sharing of content.

Specific Curriculum Expectation	Success Criteria
C2.2 - Identify a variety of purposes for engaging with texts, select texts from diverse creators that are suitable for the purposes, and explain why the selections are appropriate.	I can articulate what I think the purpose of an author's message is (e.g. to persuade, to inform, to describe, to distract). I can understand the advantages and disadvantages between types of media, and how the content medium can influence the way I may perceive a message. I can identify differences in how information is presented across various mediums and explain how these differences might shape an audience's perspective.

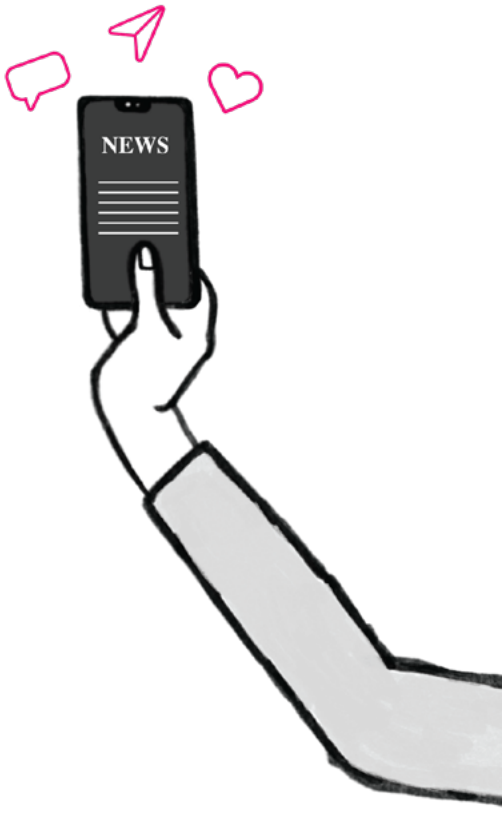
Curriculum Expectation - D2. Creating Texts

Apply knowledge and understanding of various text forms and genres to create, revise, edit, and proofread their own texts, using a variety of media, tools, and strategies, and reflect critically on created texts.

Learning Goal

I can explain how I would use practical tips to evaluate texts online, as I read or view a text for the first time.

Specific Curriculum Expectation	Success Criteria
D2.4 - Explain the explicit and implicit points of view, perspectives, and bias conveyed in their texts, evaluate how various audiences might respond, and suggest ways to acknowledge other perspectives.	I can understand the advantages and disadvantages of different mediums, and can explain how the content medium can influence the way I may perceive a message. I can identify different types of media, explain what bias is, and determine different approaches social media content creators use to appeal to my emotions.



Materials Needed

- Slides
- Whiteboard or chalkboard
- Chart paper
- Smartboard or projector (and speaker) for showing video/audio clips
- Classroom digital devices (optional)
- The Medium is the Message handout (one per student)
  - Discussion Guide
- Understanding Bias - Option 2 Examples
- Lined paper

Classroom Setup

- Classroom setup should be conducive to discussions in pairs, and as a whole class.
- The slides should be set up for the "Media Reflection" activity, with links pre-loaded based on the chosen topic.
- "Media Reflection" printed worksheets are to be given to each student.
- Digital devices to access news websites should be available for groups of students, or several print copies of a range of newspapers should be available;
- OR Multiple printed copies of the "Understanding Bias - Option 2" sheet should be passed to each group during the activity.

Key Definitions

Misinformation
False information that is shared without the intent to cause harm. (Canadian Centre for Cyber Security)

Disinformation
False information that is intended to manipulate, cause damage and guide people, organizations, and countries in the wrong direction. (Canadian Centre for Cyber Security)

News
A printed or broadcast report of information about important events in the world, the country, or the local area. (Cambridge Dictionary)

Examples can include newspaper and magazine articles, TV or radio broadcasts, podcasts and streamed video content.

Media bias
When content spread by media reflects the interests of that company or its ownership; when journalists or news organizations allow their own opinions to affect the news that they report and the way that they report it. (The Canadian Encyclopedia; MCC Neb)

Lesson Plan

Approx. Duration		💡 Tips 🧠 Assessment ✍️ Curriculum Connections 🤝 Guidance on Inclusion
Minds On		
10 mins	**Introduction/Brainstorm Activity** **Think-Pair-Share** Take 5 minutes to ask students to recall and write down the last piece of news they encountered, the source of the content, and why they stopped to read/watch it. Then have them share their answers with a partner, before having a full class discussion. In the full class discussion, ask: why is it important to be informed? Why is it important to consume the news? Ideas you might highlight: • A more accurate understanding of the world. • Deeper understanding of other peoples' lives and experiences. • Having information about decisions or events that might affect you or your community. • Building a solid basis for your own decisions and opinions.	💡 **Tip:** When discussing the importance of the news, encourage students to share their own reasons for consuming/avoiding the news—and be open to hearing how different students may relate to the news. 🤝 **D.I. Approach:** Instead of a partner discussion, this can also be done digitally, with tools like Slido for students to see ideas shared by the class. *Prior to introducing new technology into your classroom, consult your board's policies and procedures around educational technology and digital resources.

Approx. Duration	Action	💡 Tips 🧠 Assessment ✍️ Curriculum Connections 🤝 Guidance on Inclusion
25 mins	**Content and Class Activity: Media Reflection** **Share the following with your students:** Historically, major news sources like daily newspapers, televised news, and radio broadcasts provided similar coverage, followed similar formats, and adhered to the same journalistic standards. Today, news is available in diverse formats across a variety of platforms, each governed by different standards. This shift makes navigating the news today more complicated. To be responsible news consumers, it is important to be aware of the characteristics of different formats and platforms. 🎯 *Objective:* Students will identify the advantages and disadvantages between types of media, and how the type of media can influence the way a message is perceived. Resource: Slides Choose one of the linked media in the slides to walk through as a class, and follow the questions provided in the discussion guide to preface the following independent activity. After this initial teacher-led discussion: • Pass the following handout to each student, and provide the opportunity to work independently through a media reflection exercise. • Give students time to engage with the specified piece of media, then, give them 2 minutes to fill out the associated row of their worksheet. If students need additional guidance, analyze the piece of media you had used earlier to fill in the first row with the class.	✍️**Curriculum connection:** A2.4 -> Evaluate the use of the various forms, conventions, and techniques of digital and media texts, consider the impact on the audience, and apply this understanding when analyzing and creating texts. A2.5 -> Demonstrate an understanding of the interrelationships between the form, message, and context of the intended and unintended audience, and the purpose for production. C2.2 -> Identify a variety of purposes for engaging with texts, select texts from diverse creators that are suitable for the purposes, and explain why the selections are appropriate. D2.4 -> Explain the explicit and implicit points of view, perspectives, and bias conveyed in their texts, evaluate how various audiences might respond, and suggest ways to acknowledge other perspectives. 🧠**Assessment FOR Learning:** Success Criteria: ☐ Met ☐ Not yet met

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	Students will engage with five different types of media on the same topic, and reflect on how each type of media made them feel, how much they trusted the content, and what they retained from it. For each medium, the content will be similar, so the emphasis will be on how the form (the medium) affects students. Find content suggestions in the slides. The teacher may also choose a different topic and subset of media. After they fill out the worksheet, ask a couple of students to share their reflections, and to walk through the questions in the **discussion guide** for their chosen piece of media. *The questions in the discussion guide are meant to act as a framework to help students think critically about the content they are consuming.* You can write out the questions in the discussion guide on chart paper, to keep up in the classroom for retention. There are several key concepts laid out in the discussion guide to build student's understanding of the types of information that are posted and shared on social media. 1. Different formats (mediums) are suited to different types of engagement, so the information or content you see will vary across platforms. 2. Different platforms draw users of different demographics. 3. Online content often aims to elicit an emotional response. *If you have more time...* The teacher can encourage students to think about how emotional appeals might impact how they understand an issue/idea (and by extension, how different mediums impact how they understand ideas/ information).	Students can: Identify important elements of digital/media texts and explain how content creators use various elements to convey a message to an intended audience. Evaluate various elements of digital/media texts, and explain how content creators use various elements to (implicitly and explicitly) convey a message to an intended audience. Suggest alternative content creators could have used and explain it might change the message and how the audience understands the message. Articulate a list of practical tips that they and their peers should keep in mind when reading and viewing a specific text **🤝 D.I. Approach:** Instead of using the handout, you can set up the document as a shared Google doc for students to work collaboratively in pairs/groups for each piece of media. *Assessment Mode:* Written

Approx. Duration		💡 Tips 🧠 Assessment ✍️ Curriculum Connections 🤝 Guidance on Inclusion
20 mins	**Class Activity and Content:** Understanding Bias Given the importance of being informed, we want to prioritize accessing trustworthy news. Deciding where you get your news from is important. An important concept to keep in mind as you make this decision is **media bias**. The teacher can provide the definition above to introduce this concept to the class. The teacher can explain that bias is everywhere. Everyone has their own biases, which impacts the content they see online, and what they decide to post and share. But there's a difference between bias and mis/disinformation. Introduce the mis/disinformation definitions provided in the "Key Definitions" section. To preface the following activity, ask the class if anyone can name some journalistic standards. Here are a few for your reference: • Multiple credible sources (citing people who are in a position to know relevant facts and details). • Verification (process of checking and confirming all facts and details). • Balance (representing multiple sides of the issue, event or controversy—without giving undue weight or legitimacy to one side). (Source: News Literacy Project) Traditional journalistic standards and conventions acted as a safeguard to ensure rigorous approaches to gathering news and prevent the reporting of false or unverified information. (Although this doesn't stop some news outlets from framing an issue differently). However, these journalistic safeguards are not in place with many new sources of digital news content. For instance, there are many examples of health advice shared on Tik Tok or Instagram that reflect bias or outright false or misleading information. The bar to publishing and posting is much lower.	💡 **Tip:** For an analog version of this activity, you can bring in physical copies of newspapers. You can have each group look at the same set of newspapers/homepages (e.g.: Globe and Mail, National Post, Toronto Star, Financial Post). You can also have each group choose a different country and compare those news sources. You can find a list of major news sources for each country here: https://www.newspapersland.com/ ✍️ **Curriculum connection:** A2.5 -> Demonstrate an understanding of the interrelationships between the form, message, and context of the intended and unintended audience, and the purpose for production. D2.4 -> Explain the explicit and implicit points of view, perspectives, and bias conveyed in their texts. Evaluate how various audiences might respond, and suggest ways to acknowledge other perspectives.

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🎯 *Objective:* Students will identify the presence and consequences of bias.

There are two activity options.

Option 1
In groups of 2-3, or as a class, have students look at the home pages of newspapers with different ideological leanings:

Ask students to write down:

1. The top stories on each homepage.
    a. What stories are highlighted?
    b. Why do you think these specific stories are highlighted?
2. Examples of the same story, reported differently.
    a. How do they manage to tell a different story? (selection/mission, image selection, word choice/ labeling).

Class discussion:
Have each group share what they noticed, what surprised them, and how they felt.

- Consider why an event/piece of news might be presented differently across news outlets.

Option 2
Resource: "Understanding Bias - Option 2"

Split the class into groups of 4, and assign an example from the top 3 provided, per group as provided in the accompanying document. Have each group review their assigned example.

Allow students to discuss the question amongst their peers for 2 minutes: What are the differences in intention between these two pieces of media?

Approx. Duration		💡 Tips 🧠 Assessment ✍️ Curriculum Connections 🤝 Guidance on Inclusion
	Bring the class back together, and have one student from each group present key points from their group's reflections. Then, explore Example 4 (from the "Understanding Bias" resource) together as a class. After reviewing the text, discuss as a class: • Is there a difference in intention between these two examples? What are they? • What might set an influencer's post about microplastic consumption apart from a news article on the same topic? What are some key features you notice immediately? *If you have extra time...* Point out that in addition to bias in the content they consume, there are also forms of internal bias that are important to be aware of [1:51 video]. The objective of this video is to allow students an opportunity to reflect on their personal biases.	

Approx. Duration		💡 Tips 🧠 Assessment ✍️ Curriculum Connections 🤝 Guidance on Inclusion
Consolidation		
10 mins	**Check Yourself: Helpful Questions to Ask** Based on what they have learned about the form and content of different sources of news, have students independently generate a list of 3 useful questions to ask when they look at news content. Emphasize questions both about: • The news medium (TikTok video vs. newspaper article); and • the substance of the news (based on the interests/ agendas a source might have). After students have listed three questions, have them share their answers with the class. Some examples include: • What are the standards for publication on this platform? • WROTS (**W**ho, **R**eason for posting, **O**ther **T**rustworthy **S**ources). • How does the length and style of the content affect my understanding of the information?	💡 **Tip:** Write a list of the generated questions on chart paper, and post it up in the classroom.

Extension Activities:

Share the following sites students can use as supporting tools to check whether news is fake or true. Explain that these should not be used as a sole tool to blindly trust, but can be used in addition to searching around to verify if news is credible. If students are interested, the teacher can also guide students to explore who funds the tools below, and how this may impact the process of fact-checking.

- Politifact (The Pointer Institute): politifact.com
- Snopes: snopes.com
- Reuters Fact Check: www.reuters.com/fact-check
- Checking to see if a news source is credible: search the name or web address, or Wikipedia with that site name (source: MediaSmarts)

Background on these lesson

Big Idea
Beyond the Surface: Navigating news content on different types of media.

Inquiry Questions
- How can I access accurate news?
- Which platforms are best-suited to learn about the news?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of getting my news on social media?

An Increase in Social Media for News
Canadians are increasingly turning to online sources from traditional media sources to consume their news. Prior to Bill C-18 (the Online News Act), an annual survey conducted by Kaiser & Partners, Inc. found that 85% of Gen Z respondents said they would use social media channels first, whereas 83% of Baby Boomers report relying on traditional channels to get their news. With the shift in go-to news sources, it's important to remember that news delivery through social media platforms differ from traditional news distribution due to its algorithmic nature.

Is Social Media a Good News Source?
While social media platforms expose people to a wide range of news outlets, the range of news topics encountered tends to be narrower than a traditional news website. Beyond algorithmically-driven content, there are also concerns around accuracy, quality, and bias, as well as the use of emotional appeal to boost credibility and virality for social media news content. The use of clickbait and satire in online content can also challenge users' perception and understanding of the true meaning behind content.

Beyond the control of platforms, people may also share fake news for a variety of reasons—from the excitement that might come from other users engaging with their shared posts, to a lack of information verification skills, leading to the circulation of inaccurate information on social media platforms. A survey done in March 2020 found that those who use private messaging apps as a news source report seeing false information more frequently, with a majority of Telegram and WeChat users receiving false information at least weekly.

Noting the state of news content circulating on social media platforms, this lesson equips students with a critical perspective as they encounter different types of media, including content they see on social media platforms. The class activities are designed to guide students to think about the credibility of and purposes for a piece of media, and consider characteristics that make a strong news source. After engaging in the hands-on activities, students will be able to reflect on the importance behind consuming accurate news, and potential impacts at an individual-level, at the community-level, and globally.

Intentions behind the activities

Media Reflection: This activity provides an opportunity for students to think about the effects of different types of media, considering the credibility and intentions of users sharing information, and the credibility of the content itself.[1] The resulting class discussion allows students to think about the use of emotional appeals in different types of media, and their respective advantages and disadvantages. Students will be equipped to question media they encounter in the future, using the WROTS (Who, Reason for posting, Other Trustworthy Sources) inquiry process.

Understanding Bias: The two activity options provide an opportunity for students to explore how bias might appear in everyday content and news sources. By reflecting on how stories are told across different news outlets, or reflecting on the intentions behind various pieces of social media text, students are introduced to the concepts of media bias and individual biases, and the role they have in shaping the content they see.

Wrap up: The consolidation discussion acts as a final reflection piece to have students consider what types of questions should be asked when looking at news content. Considerations will be made in relation to the form of news (TikTok vs. newspaper), and about the substance of the news (based on the biases/agendas a source might have). These discussions act as an opportunity to continue this conversation in another lesson, as the questions will be posted up in the classroom for reference.

Supports for Assessment

Prior Learning: What prior experiences, knowledge and skills do the learners bring with them to this learning experience?

- Students likely have personal experience using a social media platform, and may have encountered news content while using it.
- Students may have their own predispositions and knowledge of what bias looks like in different types of content and texts.
- Students may have interacted with the concept of emotional appeals used in other forms of media, such as movies and books.
- Students may have prior learning considering accuracy, credibility, bias, and perspectives, with a focus on misinformation, disinformation, and curated information.
- Students may have prior learning of the characteristics of various text forms, and how they help communicate meaning.

Students' learning will be demonstrated by:

- Reflecting on different types of media, and considering their emotions, levels of trust, and key messages they were able to take away from it.
- Participating in class discussions on biases embedded in different types of content, and forming questions regarding news mediums (TikTok vs. newspaper article), and substance of the news (interests, biases).
- Reflecting with peers on why it's important to consume accurate news, and its impact individually and globally.

[1] A2. Digital Media Literacy. https://www.dcp.edu.gov.on.ca/en/curriculum/secondary-english/courses/enl1w/a/a2.

Assessment Tool

Media Reflection Worksheet Rubric
Assessment Mode: Written
Curriculum Connection: A2.4, A2.5, C2.2

Success Criteria Checklist
Look for the following, and provide descriptive feedback:
☐ Students are able to identify important elements of digital/media texts and explain how content creators use various elements to convey a message to an intended audience.

☐ Students are able to evaluate various elements of digital/media texts, and explain how content creators use various elements to (implicitly and explicitly) convey a message to an intended audience.

☐ Students are able to suggest alternative content that creators could have used and explain how those changes might change the message and how the audience understands the message.

☐ Students are able to articulate a list of practical tips that they and their peers should keep in mind when reading and viewing a specific text.

Guidance on Inclusion

Differentiated Instruction Approaches

Introduction/Brainstorm Activity:

- For a digital option, the teacher can set up a digital tool that allows responses to be displayed in the form of a word cloud. For example, Slido can be used to visually display students' ideas.

"Media Reflection" Activity:

- Go through the first type of media with the class, and fill in the first row to visually demonstrate the sequence of steps in completing the chart.
- The chart can also be filled out digitally, should students have access to a classroom digital device. Instead of using the handout, you can set up the document as a shared Google doc for students to work collaboratively in pairs/groups for each piece of media.
- Provide clear time checkpoints for each piece of media to be analyzed, to keep the class together and to keep students focused.
- Go through the success criteria checklist with the class after going through the instructions.
- Students can be put into pairs or small groups to fill out the chart.

Content Section (Discussion Guide):

- Instead of using the slides to walk through the concepts with your class, ask students the following questions to make it a dynamic, inquiry-based discussion:
  - Different platforms draw users of different demographics: What platforms do you use the most? Are these different from your family? Your friends?
  - Different formats are suited to different types of engagement, so the information or content you see will vary across platforms: Do you act differently on different platforms? What do you tend to do on your most used platform?
  - Online content often aims to elicit an emotional response: Have you ever seen something that shocked you on social media? Made you sad? Happy? Have you ever considered how that content may be created with the intentions to make you feel this way?

Understanding Bias Activities:

- Activity option 2 may be an easier option to begin with, and can likely be done quicker than Activity option 1.
- Option 1:
  - Instead of providing text-based news articles, you can opt to provide video-based or audio-based options.

Wrap-up:

- Instead of coming up with questions for two categories: news form (medium), and substance of the news, ask students to simply reflect on questions to ask when they see news content, to test its validity and trustworthiness.

IEP program implications

Accommodations

Introduction/Brainstorm Activity:

- Students can verbally share about the last piece of news they encountered, instead of writing it out.
- Provide a deeper verbal analysis of the graph you will be showing on the slides. This will provide a clearer understanding of the image to those who may need more support.

"Media Reflection" Activity:

- Arrange seating for students who need closer supervision accordingly to work through the different types of media at an appropriate pace.
- Fill in the first row for students, to use as reference as they fill in the other rows.
- Allow students additional time to complete the "Media Reflection" activity.
- For the text-based pieces, use text-to-speech software for students to listen to the content instead of reading it.

Understanding Bias Activities:

- For the text-based pieces, use text-to-speech software for students to listen to the content instead of reading it.
- The teacher can opt to find image-based/video examples, instead of relying on the text-based examples provided.

Wrap up:

- Allow students to take extra time to discuss their thoughts with you, instead of their peers if this is more appropriate. These reflections can also be written.

Modifications

"Media Reflection" Activity:

- Instead of going through all five types of media, you can choose to only go through two to three pieces for students who need more time to work through each.
- Rather than filling out the worksheet, you can arrange for a small group or whole class discussion on the media reflections.
- The discussion guide can be a bigger focus of a separate lesson, if you choose to take more time to focus on the concepts included.

Understanding Bias Activities:

- If students need more support, go through one example with the whole class first. Then, assign the remaining two examples to the groups for group discussion.
- Choose two different newspapers for students to review, instead of multiple.

Wrap up:

- Rather than coming up with questions to ask when looking at news content, students can come up with 3 tips to consider when looking at news content, based on acquired knowledge from the lesson.

Additional Resources & Cross-curricular Opportunities

Potential cross-curricular connections

Where in the lesson plan?	Cross-curricular connection
"Media Reflection" activity	Science • **A2.2:** Describe how scientific innovations and emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence systems, impact society and careers. Technological Education • **B2.1:** Identify short-term and long-term impacts of various technological innovations on individuals and societies, including the impact on everyday life. Beyond reflecting on prompts in the worksheet, students can also be prompted to describe how social bias in AI (one of the suggested topics in the slides) impacts society and careers, and identify short- and long-term impacts on individuals and societies.

The Dais is a public policy and leadership think tank at Toronto Metropolitan University, working at the intersection of technology, education, and democracy to build shared prosperity and citizenship for Canada.

Contact us

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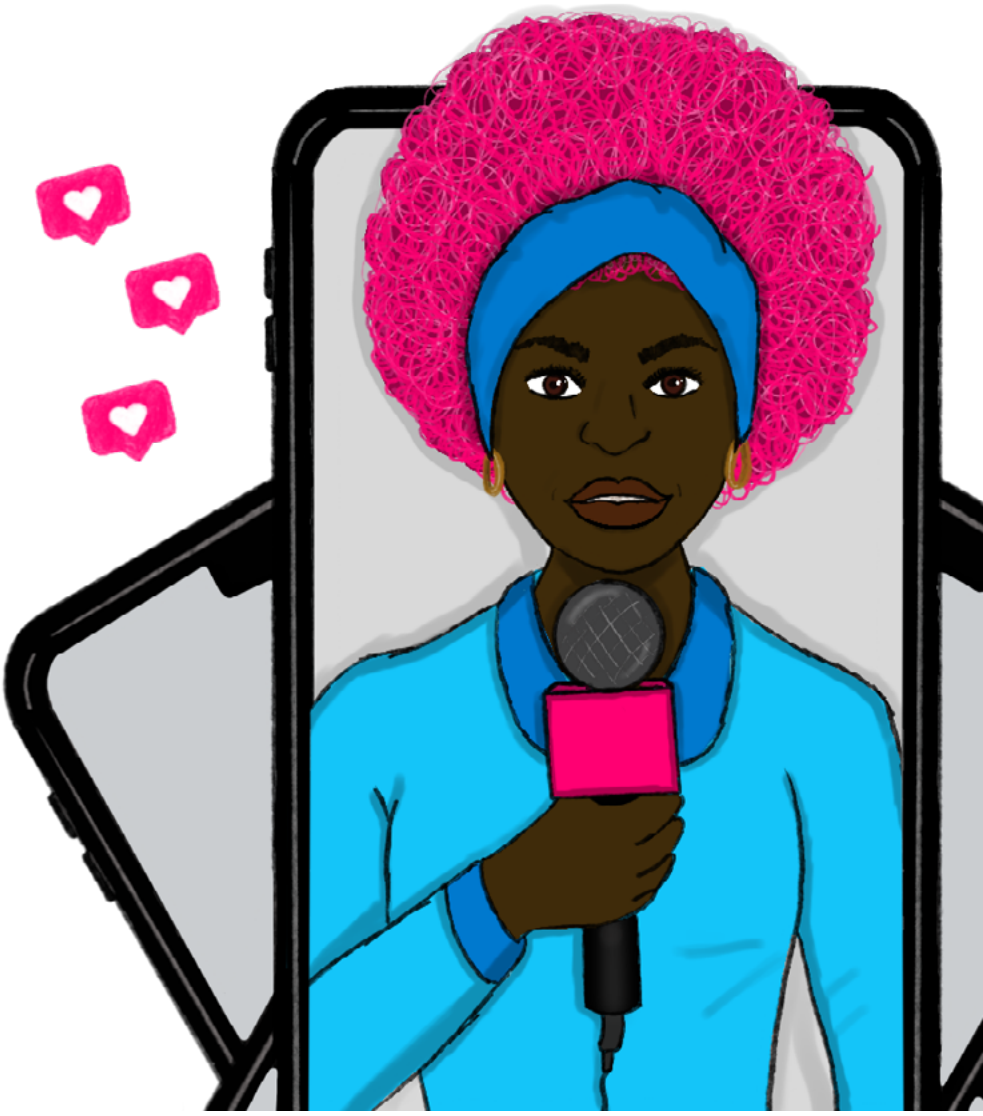
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