

Breaking Down Hate Speech

Essential Question

How can you create a community culture in which hate speech is unacceptable, both online and offline?

Lesson Overview

Students learn the definition of hate speech and understand how it affects individuals, groups, and communities. They learn to recognize hate speech by reading an article or by analyzing a brief video. They then explore school-wide solutions for addressing hate speech by role-playing a student mediation committee and creating guidelines for online and offline communities.

Learning Objectives

Students will be able to ...

- recognize hate speech and its impact on individuals, groups, and communities, both online and offline.
- analyze situations to determine if they constitute hate speech.
- create a set of community guidelines for dealing with online and offline hate speech at school.

Materials and Preparation

- Copy the “**Hate Speech Corrodes Online Games**” article excerpt, one for each student (Teach 1: Option A).
-  Preview the video “**Library**” from MTV’s “A Thin Line” campaign (www.athinline.org/videos/61-library) and prepare to show it to students. (Teach 1: Option B).

Note: We recommend that you preview the article and video to determine which is most appropriate for your students, and then choose Option A or Option B for Teach 1 accordingly. Additionally, if you feel that you need to build trust in your classroom before discussing these sensitive issues, you may warm up with activities from the following websites:

- **Facing History and Ourselves:** www.facinghistory.org
- **Teaching Tolerance:** www.tolerance.org
- **Anti-Defamation League Curriculum Connections:** www.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections
- Review the article “Confronting Hate Speech Online” from the Anti-Defamation League for useful background about addressing hate speech (www.adl.org/main_internet/hatespeechonline2008.htm).

Family Resources

- Send home the **Cyberbullying Family Tip Sheet (Middle & High School)**.

Estimated time: 45 minutes

Standards Alignment

Common Core: RL.9-12.1-2, RL.9-12.4, RL.9-12.7-8, RL.9-12.10, RI.9-12.1-2, RI.9-12.4, RI.9-12.10, W.9-12.2a-f, W.9-12.3a-e, W.9-12.4-6, W.9-12.8-10, SL.9-12.1a-d, SL.9-12.2-5, L.9-12.4a, L.9-12.6

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

Key Vocabulary

hate speech: making cruel, hostile, or negative statements about someone based on their race, religion, national origin, disability, age, gender, or sexual orientation

stereotype: a simplified and often negative assumption about a particular group of people

derogatory: intentionally hurtful and harmful, designed to insult or degrade

mediation: efforts by someone who is not part of a situation to settle disputes

introduction

Warm-up (10 minutes)

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary terms **hate speech**, **stereotype**, and **derogatory**.

EXPLAIN to students that they will learn to recognize hate speech online and offline. They will hear examples of hate speech and explore how it affects individuals, groups, and communities both online and offline. Explain that discussing these matters does not mean anyone approves of the statements.

ENGAGE students in writing short journal entries describing an incident in which they or someone they know has been the target of hate speech of any kind. If they cannot think of one, they can describe an incident in literature, on television, or in the movies. Arrange students in pairs and have them share their journal entries with their partners. Invite volunteers to share their journal entries with the class. Use the following questions to connect students' experiences to common ways that hate speech can manifest online and offline.

ASK:

What are some general ways that hate speech can be used in the offline world?

Sample responses:

- Calling people names based on their race, religion, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or any other type of group that is disenfranchised in our society
- Saying things about people that are based on social identity stereotypes

What are some general ways that hate speech might be used online?

Sample responses:

- Sending an email or a text to someone that insults their religion, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, etc.
- Saying derogatory things about people in a chat room, on Facebook, or Twitter, about these groups

SELECT either **option A** (article excerpt) or **option B** (video) before continuing onto Teach 1.

SHARE with students your plans to read a news story or watch a video from MTV.

teach 1 (option A)

Recognize Hate Speech (15 minutes)

INSTRUCT students to read the following excerpt on their own or have a volunteer read it aloud. The excerpt comes from the story "Hate Speech Corrodes Online Games" by Associated Press writer Nicholas K. Geraniols (www.msnbc.msn.com/id/36572021/ns/technology_and_science-games).

It's not just cyberbullets that are exchanged during firefights on the Xbox Live version of "Call of Duty." Many gamers also exchange hate speech over their headsets as they stalk each other across the virtual battlefields. Players trade racist, homophobic and anti-Semitic insults so frequently that game makers are taking steps to tone down the rhetoric. The comments would shock parents who may not realize their children are constantly exposed to language that might make a sailor blush. Most parental concerns have focused on violence, not language. One gamer told an opponent he presumed to be Jewish that he wished Hitler

had succeeded in his mission. Many exchanges involve talk of rape or exult over the atomic bombing of Japan. There are frequent slurs on homosexuals, Asians, Hispanics and women. Such comments can be heard on all online video gaming systems, including PlayStation Network, Blizzard Entertainment (World of Warcraft) and others.

ASK:

What are some examples of hate speech that were described in the article?

Students should understand that the comment about Hitler is hate speech against Jewish people, comments about rape are hate speech against women and girls, and references to the bombing of Japan are hate speech against Japanese people, or Asians in general. In all three cases, the offenders wish their opponents serious harm based on their presumed membership in a particular group.

teach 1 (option B)

Recognize Hate Speech (15 minutes)

PREPARE students for the video “Library” (www.athinline.org/videos/61-library) by explaining that what they are about to see may be harsh, but it illustrates the effects of hate speech. They should jot down any examples of hate speech they hear.

 **SHOW** the “**Library**” video to the class.

ASK:

What are some examples of hate speech from the video?

Students should understand that when calling someone “Princess” or threatening to tell their father “how gay they are” are examples of hate speech.

(RESUME TEACH 1 HERE AFTER EITHER OPTION A OR OPTION B)

ASK:

How do you think you might feel if you were the recipient of derogatory messages?

Guide students to identify feelings such as: humiliated, trapped, angry, intimidated, attacked, alienated, and scared.

Why do you think people make derogatory remarks? What might their motives be?

Sample responses:

- They are ignorant or have been taught to be racist
- They dislike people who are not exactly like them
- They think it is cool or intimidating to use language like this

How are these kinds of attacks similar to or different from calling your opponent a “loser”?

Sample responses:

Similarities

- Both types of statements are cruel and hurtful
- Both types of statements are publicly humiliating

Differences

- The statements are based on fixed identity traits, not behavior

- The statements are derogatory and threatening towards everyone in the group
- The statements imply that all members of the group deserve to be treated differently (badly)

INVITE students to think about why so much hate speech takes place online. Students should be aware that with online hate speech, the offenders often remain anonymous. They may find it easier to make derogatory or prejudiced statements or spread negative stereotypes because they are not face-to-face with the people they affect.

teach 2

Target School Hate Speech (20 minutes)

ENCOURAGE students to think about how hate speech can affect more than just the target. Students should understand that hate speech can create an environment in which it is difficult to learn or work, and in which members of the targeted groups may be placed at a disadvantage.

ASK:

How might hate speech damage an online community?

Guide students to understand that hate speech online can quickly reach many people because information spreads rapidly to vast audiences online. Hate speech can make targeted members of an online community feel that they are not welcome. Members who are bystanders may also feel scared, trapped, or intimidated.

DEFINE the Key Vocabulary term **mediation**.

ARRANGE students in groups of five to six. Explain that each group will be acting as a Mediation Committee, which has the job of deciding what to do when students behave in an unacceptable way online or offline. Instruct groups to conduct mock Mediation Committee meetings to deal with the offenders in “Library.” (Note: If you read the excerpt instead of watching “Library,” have students pretend to deal with a student who has written letters filled with hate speech to the named groups.)

GUIDE the committees to brainstorm ways to deal with hate speech when it happens online. (Possible responses include flagging videos or comments, making counterpoint comments, linking to educational resources, or using social networks to reach out to large bodies of people. Encourage groups to think of positive approaches, such as rewarding students who stand up against hate speech or who educate others about hate speech.)

ASK:

- Which of the methods you discussed for addressing online hate speech do you feel is most effective? Why?
- Is any one method a “complete” method, or are there drawbacks with each?
- Do the methods you have chosen help prevent hate speech or address it after it happens?
- How might you incorporate some of the methods you have developed into a set of guidelines for your school? (Guidelines might include a class policy on hate speech or a school-wide education program that includes posters or information that can be shared with classmates through listservs.)

Note: You may wish to have students write and post their guidelines, or take steps to implement a school-wide education program that includes both online and offline activities.

Wrap-up (5 minutes)

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives. You may want to ask students to reflect in writing on one of the questions, using a journal or an online blog/wiki.

ASK:

How would you describe hate speech to another student who might not know the term?

Students should understand that hate speech includes any cruel, hostile, or negative statements directed toward someone based on their race, religion, national origin, disability, age, gender, or sexual orientation. It includes name calling, spreading stereotypes, and making derogatory comments, either in person or online.

How would you describe the impact of hate speech on individuals? On targeted groups? On communities?

Students should recognize that hate speech can make an individual target feel scared, angry, and humiliated. It can affect members of the targeted group and create a community climate of hatred, mistrust, and inequality.)

Why do you think it is important to talk about hate speech? Why might it be important to have guidelines for preventing or dealing with hate speech online and offline, and what might those guidelines be?

Students should recognize that understanding the impact of hate speech and having clear school guidelines could create a safer school environment and discourage prejudice and discrimination.

Extension Activity

Have students create a survey about hate speech at their school. Instruct them to begin by creating a definition of hate speech. Instruct students to find the following information about their classmates' experiences of hate speech: what kind, how much, and when and where it happens. Have students explore an online survey application such as Quiz Snack (www.quizsnack.com), which will tally up their responses automatically. Alternatively, they can use a Google Docs poll or "Form" (<https://docs.google.com>) and employ their math skills to tally up results and convert them into percentages. Have volunteers present the results and identify the most important issues for discussion.

At-home Activity

Have students identify someone in their life who has been discriminated against because of their race, religion, national origin, gender, or sexual orientation. Students should conduct an interview about that person's experience with hate speech and discrimination and the emotional impact it had on the subject's life. They can either tape the interview or take notes and write up the main points. Have students share these recordings in class, without revealing the subjects' names if they wish to remain anonymous. You may then choose to have students use the program VoiceThread (www.voicethread.com) to create an interactive presentation on the impact of hate speech and prejudice.

Breaking Down Hate Speech

1. Vinny and Katie are lab partners. After school, Katie sees that Vinny posted the following message on his friend's social network profile: "So my lab results with KT are a mess. Dumb blonde. Don't girls know they suck at science?"

This type of negative comment is an example of _____. The comment is based on _____ about girls.

- a) a compliment / an assumption
- b) hate speech / a stereotype
- c) hate speech / a compliment
- d) mediation / a stereotype

2. Read the following sentence. Then answer the question below:

Rachel directs negative comments at Jorge online in a chat room that many would consider hate speech.

True or false: Jorge is the only person affected by Rachel's comments.

- a) True. Jorge is the only person affected by Rachel's comments because the other people in the chat room know the comment was meant for Jorge only.
- b) True. Jorge is the only person affected by Rachel's comments because Rachel only chats with Jorge.
- c) False. Jorge and other people in the chat room who are like him are affected by Rachel's comments.
- d) False. Everyone in the chat room is affected by Rachel's comments.

3. The following chart lists several places online where you might encounter hate speech. Using the answers below, write the actions you might take if you encountered You can write a letter more than once.

Online chat forum	
YouTube	
Twitter	
Facebook	

- a) Post a link to educational resources
- b) Flag inappropriate videos
- c) Make a comment that reaches out to large bodies of people
- d) Make counterpoint comments

Breaking Down Hate Speech

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This type of negative comment is an example of _____. The comment is based on _____ about girls.

- a) a compliment / an assumption
- b) hate speech / a stereotype**
- c) hate speech / a compliment
- d) mediation / a stereotype

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **b**. This type of negative comment is an example of **hate speech**. The comment is based on **a stereotype** about girls.

2. Read the following sentence. Then answer the question below:

Rachel directs negative comments at Jorge online in a chat room that many would consider hate speech.

True or false: Jorge is the only person affected by Rachel’s comments.

- a) True. Jorge is the only person affected by Rachel’s comments because the other people in the chat room know the comment was meant for Jorge only.
- b) True. Jorge is the only person affected by Rachel’s comments because Rachel only chats with Jorge.
- c) False. Jorge and other people in the chat room who are like him are affected by Rachel’s comments.
- d) False. Everyone in the chat room is affected by Rachel’s comments.**

Answer feedback

The correct answer is **d**. Everyone in the chat room is affected by Rachel’s comments. Hate speech changes the way people feel. It can make people who aren’t part of the conversation feel scared, trapped, or threatened.

Gender and Digital Life

3. The following chart lists several places online where you might encounter hate speech. Using the answers below, write the actions you might take if you encountered hate speech in these places.

You can write a letter more than once.

Online chat forum	a, c, d
YouTube	a, b, c
Twitter	a, c, d
Facebook	a, b, c, d

- a) Post a link to educational resources
- b) Flag inappropriate videos
- c) Make a comment that reaches out to large bodies of people
- d) Make counterpoint comments