

Digital Citizenship

Lesson Title: Obsessed with Fame

High School



Essential Question:

Are American teens addicted to fame? Explain.

Materials

- Quick Fame worksheet
- Copies of article: "No Stardom Until After Homework," by Alex Hawgood, *New York Times*, July 15, 2011
- Access to the following video on YouTube: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsvaQR9hKDI&app=desktop>

Note:

No video accompanies this lesson.

Procedure:

Introduction:

1. Post the following 1968 quotation by pop-artist Andy Warhol: "In the future, everyone will be world-famous for 15 minutes." Ask students to discuss this quotation using any/all of the following questions:
 - Do you think this is true today? Why or why not?
 - Why the 15 minutes? Is it a true 15 minutes or a symbolic 15 minutes? Explain.
 - How do people become world-famous?
 - What do you need to be able to do to be famous? Why?
 - Has it become a goal of people to become world-famous? Explain your answer.
 - What is the difference between being famous and being respected?
2. Share another quotation by Ryan Seacrest, who became a media personality and well-known host of *American Idol*: "This is America, where everyone has the right to life, love and the pursuit of fame." Explain that in today's session, students will work on a plan for fame using social media.
3. Break the class into groups of three or four people and distribute one Quick Fame worksheet to each group.

4. Read the challenge:

Three friends have challenged each other to see who can become famous quickly. The only problem is, they don't seem to have any particular, stand out talents. They don't sing or dance particularly well, they are not big sports stars, and they are not rich enough to buy fame. **But that's not going to stop them!**

The friends agree that each person must provide measurable evidence of their fame, and they need to show a social media presence and it must be accomplished in one week's time.

5. Have groups brainstorm plans for each of the three people in the challenge. This should take them approximately 15-20 minutes.
6. Gather back as a group to share their plans. What do the plans have in common? How do they differ?
7. Ask if anyone stopped to think about the possible repercussions of fame using social media. What could be the downside of fame? Is this ever a consideration when one is driven to seek fame? Why or why not?
8. Distribute copies of the New York Times article "No Stardom Till After Homework" and ask students to compare and contrast the story to their Quick Fame plans. Does the article reveal any information they should have considered in their plans? Did any of their plans include parental involvement? Why or why not? Did any of their plans take negative responses into consideration? Why or why not?

Conclusion

Close with a discussion, asking the following question: Is fame more important than a sense of community or being part of a group in today's world? Are we Americans addicted to fame?

As an extension, show the video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HsvaQR9hKDI&app=desktop>

Discuss how this video exemplifies America's addiction to fame.

Additional Resources

Fame, Facebook, and Twitter: How Attitudes About Fame Predict Frequency and Nature of Social Media Use <https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/features/ppm-0000013.pdf>

Kids Want Fame More Than Anything Else www.huffingtonpost.com/...t.../kids-want-fame_b_1201935.html

Quick Fame Worksheet

Group Names:

Friend/Description	What should he/she do to gain fame?	What is the social media plan?
<p>Aja</p> <p>5'1"; long, dark hair that she likes to keep natural; big, brown eyes; always dresses well but does not spend a lot of money; has a lot of friends; snorts when she laughs; works really hard for good grades</p>		
<p>Daron</p> <p>6'4", shaved head; hazel eyes; usually wears jeans and T-shirt; plays pick-up basketball games in his neighborhood; can imitate famous rappers; gets good grades</p>		
<p>Claudine</p> <p>5'6", blonde highlights in chin-length hair; light blue eyes; five piercings in left ear and a nose-ring; orange belt in taekwondo; cannot wait to get out of school; knows the city bus system by heart</p>		

No Stardom Until After Homework

New York Times

By ALEX HAWGOOD JULY 15, 2011

It was a Monday when Benni Cinkle, a 14-year-old high school student from Anaheim Hills, Calif., received a text message from her classmate Rebecca Black saying that an unofficial fan page devoted to Ms. Cinkle had popped up on Facebook.

This was just a week after the amateur video for Ms. Black's now-infamous song, "Friday," in which Ms. Cinkle had a blink-and-you'll-miss-it cameo, began its viral Internet ascent.

Ms. Cinkle, who agreed to appear in the video with the expectation that no one would actually see it, was shocked by the news. By her own admission, she was just "that girl in pink who sits behind Rebecca in the car for four seconds and was a terrible dancer."

When she first checked out her fan page that morning in March, there were already 2,000 followers. By the time she came home from school, there were 10 times as many. By Friday, the total had reached 75,000.

So Ms. Cinkle did what our current age of social media requires of those swept up in the viral undertow: she jumped into the fray with haste.

First, she set up an official Tumblr page to keep track of the rapid proliferation of animated GIFS (graphic files that display a simple loop of images) that had sprung up showcasing her all-thumbs dance moves. Two days later, she established a "Benni Cinkle (Girl Dancing Awkwardly —Official Page)" on Facebook. Next came her own YouTube channel, where she posted a video blog F.A.Q. addressing a range of popular inquiries from her new fans, including the gossipy ("Are you still friends with Rebecca Black?" No.) and the inane ("How long is your driveway?" 128 feet.)

After that, she posted a clip of a flash-mob dance set to "Friday" that she organized at the local mall (a vehicle, she said, to generate money and attention for earthquake relief for Japan); created an official Web page, thatgirlinpink.com; rebranded her Twitter account; and even began offering her own Internet Survival Guide, free to download after submitting your e-mail address. In less than a month, Benni Cinkle had gone from an anonymous high school student to micro-celebrity.

"Everything happened so fast, I just made sure to keep up," she said.

Ms. Cinkle is not unique. Online fame is becoming just another aspect of teenage life for a generation raised on reality television and the perpetual flurry of status updates that ping across their smartphones, tablets and computer screens.

Not only have sites like YouTube made it possible for numerous unknown adolescents to be discovered — Greyson Chance, a 13-year-old from Oklahoma, got a record deal after Ellen DeGeneres mentioned his YouTube piano version of Lady Gaga's "Paparazzi" on her talk show, for instance — but youngsters with no special talent, like Ms. Cinkle, are drawing mass followings as well. (The publicity wave that fueled Ms. Cinkle's popularity was, in fact, driven overwhelmingly by viewers who hated the video she was performing in, routinely calling it "the worst song ever" even as they watched and forwarded it en masse.)

Trevor Michaels, 12, better known as iTr3vor, has received more than 5.5 million views on his YouTube channel for hyperactive dance moves he performs at various Apple stores when his mother takes him shopping at the mall. (He uploads videos of the dances on the spot.)

Then there are the legions of girls who post "haul" videos, short clips of themselves chattering about their most recent fashion and makeup purchases. The spots are unwatchable to most any adult, but they draw

in hundreds of thousands of girls in their teens or younger who are eager to duplicate the shopping habits of their peers.

YouTube, the global video-sharing site, estimates that 10 percent of its most-subscribed users are 19 or younger and that, as a whole, more than one-third of the most successful participants in its revenue-sharing Partner Program are under 25. "It's fascinating to see how many of the kids who have huge followings are almost going under the radar of most adults," said Annie Baxter, who works in the partner program and recently helped oversee how-to courses for nascent YouTube stars at Google's Manhattan offices.

For every success story, there are thousands of other teenagers poised and eager to seize their own moment, should it come. "Every teenager is already creating unique content for a multitude of social media accounts," said Valerie Veatch, a filmmaker who is directing, with the artist Chris Moukarbel, a coming YouTube documentary, "Me At the Zoo," which takes its title from the very first clip uploaded to the video-sharing site in 2005. "And in a way, constant social networking serves as training in the event that your content blows up on the Web. You're prepared to engage the expectations of fans."

But managing the teenage celebrity industrial complex, on and offline, calls for a strategy that young people, parents and schools are grappling to figure out. "What happens to kids when they start organizing their lives around the logic of the brand?" asked Sarah Banet-Weiser, an associate professor at the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Southern California, whose book "Authentic™: The Politics of Ambivalence in a Brand Culture" will be published next year. "Social media is centered around the discourse of becoming a star," she said. "We are witnessing young people build a career of life-casting before they are even done with high school."

In real life (IRL as it is commonly referred to by the tween set), balancing your social life, schoolwork and the 7.5 minutes of Internet micro-celebrity is a tall order. Ms. Cinkle says her life is "definitely different now" since the "Friday" music video went viral.

For one thing, her relationship with Rebecca Black has soured. "Dynamics change," said her mother, Pati Cinkle, who owns an employment agency. After the video exploded online, she said, there were differences of opinion on how to handle all the attention.

While Ms. Black has appeared on Jay Leno, co-starred in the music video for Katy Perry's current single "Last Friday Night (T.G.I.F.)," and will take a stab at full-fledged celebrity by premiering her follow-up single "My Moment" on her YouTube channel on Monday, Benni Cinkle considers her online fame more of an after-school activity.

"I first do my homework and then I go online and respond to everyone," she said. When Ms. Cinkle's mother found her asleep in front of her computer, she knew it was time to step in. "I told her she can't answer all of the questions" by herself. Now, she helps her daughter sift through all the daily messages, of which there can be hundreds, and discusses over the dinner table issues like mailing autographs to Facebook followers who donated \$10 to the Cystic Fibrosis Walk, the current charity the younger Ms. Cinkle is promoting.

Not all the attention is positive. With the Internet's contempt-inducing anonymity, the bigger one's digital profile, the more susceptible one is to negative attention. "My first instinct was, is there any way to protect against attacks like this?" Pati Cinkle said. But for her daughter's generation, the anxiety and fear over trolling is increasingly old hat. "There were many people saying mean things, but there were also thousands supporting me," the younger Ms. Cinkle said. "I decided to focus on the good things, and make the whole dancing thing a joke."

For Megan Parken, a 15-year-old video blogger from Austin, Tex., the ramifications of fame have been more radical. Ms. Parken, who has almost 300,000 subscribers to her YouTube channel

meganheartsmakeup, began uploading makeup tutorials, shopping hauls and “life-advice stuff,” as she puts it, to YouTube during the summer before she entered eighth grade. When the videos caught fire, she started treating them like an extracurricular activity. She quit cheerleading “so I had enough time to devote to my channel,” she said.

At first, she tried to keep her life on YouTube a secret from her classmates. But with an average of 100,000 views per video, it was the worst-kept secret in school. Several of her classmates, whom Ms. Parken calls “the mean girls,” would tease her about her enormous online audience because it consisted largely of younger girls. They even went so far as to pull up in the middle of class a satirical video they created making fun one of one of Megan’s online makeup tutorials.

Soon she was quitting more than cheerleading. The money-making opportunities from participating in YouTube’s partner program and from the companies whose brands she mentioned were so great (and her discomfort at school growing so much) that she decided to quit high school entirely after ninth grade and enroll in online courses at the University of Texas, with the full support of her parents.

“The financial opportunity is incredible,” said her mother, Susan Parken. “She has saved enough money to buy her first car” and has put away money for college.

Some teachers weren’t horrified, either. “The confidence she has in her videos is not the way she was in school,” said Yasemin Florey, Ms. Parken’s yearbook teacher during eighth grade. “YouTube brought out the real Megan. She gets more out of her viewers than dealing with the drama back at school.”

Susan Parken said that her daughter “gets about 500 girls a day asking her how to do it — get online — but they may have missed the opportunity now.”

A new study conducted at U.C.L.A. by the Children’s Digital Media Center@LA underscores the increasing cultural importance of fame among young people. The study examined the values conveyed in popular pre-teenage television shows in the four decades from 1967 through 2007.

The study found fame to be the No. 1 value communicated by shows in 2007. In each of the previous years — 1997, 1987, 1977 and 1967 — it ranked near the bottom of a list of 16 values. Community feeling, or being part of a group, ranked No. 1 or 2 in those years.

Benni Cinkle, who is in the application process for YouTube’s partner program, said she would jump at the opportunity to enroll in classes at YouTube boot camp. “I think it would be really cool,” she said. “But if this all of this dies down, it’s not like I am going to end. I mean, Justin Bieber has 9 million followers on Twitter. I only have 5,000.

“That helps me stay humble.”