

Social Media Scrub Out – Lesson Plan

Grade Level: 9

Suggested Duration: 3 hours or 3 class periods

Target Audience: Students whose social media posts may harm their college or career prospects

Video: “How I Got Here: Dianey”

§113.43. World Geography Studies, Grade 9

(c) Knowledge and skills.

(16) Culture. The student understands how the components of culture affect the way people live and shape the characteristics of regions. The student is expected to:

(B) describe elements of culture, including language, religion, beliefs and customs, institutions, and technologies

(20) Science, technology, and society. The student understands how current technology affects human interaction. The student is expected to:

(A) describe the impact of new information technologies such as the Internet, Global Positioning System (GPS), or Geographic Information Systems (GIS)

§110.31. English Language Arts and Reading, English I

(b) Knowledge and skills.

(16) Writing/Persuasive Texts. Students write persuasive texts to influence the attitudes or actions of a specific audience on specific issues. Students are expected to write an argumentative essay to the appropriate audience that includes:

(A) a clear thesis or position based on logical reasons supported by precise and relevant evidence

(C) counter-arguments based on evidence to anticipate and address objections

(D) an organizing structure appropriate to the purpose, audience, and context

(E) an analysis of the relative value of specific data, facts, and ideas

Dianey received a full scholarship to attend St. Edward’s University—which was the only way she could have afforded going to college. As part of the admissions routine, many colleges and

scholarship programs research students' social media presence, and they sometimes reject otherwise qualified students if the teens have posted objectionable materials online. In this lesson, students analyze the importance of having a clean social media presence, and take related action steps with regards to their own social media personas.

Student Objective: Students will write a persuasive letter in response to an incident in 2017 in which ten Harvard-bound students got their acceptances rescinded because of those students' offensive social media posts.

Lesson Preparation: While preparing for this lesson with your students, make sure to watch the "How I Got Here: Dianey" video first. The video will provide guidance on how to navigate the lesson with your students and highlight the key messages for them to take away. **Educators are also strongly encouraged to read the news articles referred to in this lesson beforehand, as they may contain language that some educators, families, or students might find offensive. You may choose to print out the articles and use a marker to redact potentially offensive words before distributing to students.**

Educator Direction: (10 min) Play the "How I Got Here: Dianey" video for your class. After watching the video, ask students to recall why Dianey was able to go to college. (Elicit the response that Dianey's hard work earned her a full scholarship to St. Edward's University.)

Next, ask students what they think would have happened to Dianey if, *hypothetically speaking*, the St. Edward's admissions office found pictures of her drinking underage or saw that she had posted racially offensive memes. Students may respond with things like:

- "It wouldn't matter."
- "They might not give her the scholarship."
- "They might make her take those posts down."

Explain to students that social media is a relatively new concept in the admissions world, and any of their responses could be correct, as many universities and scholarship committees do not have strict policies with regards to offensive social media posts by prospective students. But then explain that it is always better to be safe than sorry, as demonstrated in a recent incident. (You may also wish to share with students that inappropriate social media posts could impact not only college admissions, but also future career prospects, internships, and scholarships.)

(30 min) Next, explain that an incident occurred recently in which ten students who were admitted to Harvard ended up getting rejected because of their offensive posts in a closed chat group. Have students read a National Public Radio article describing the incident at <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/06/06/531591202/harvard-rescinds-admission-of-10-students-over-obscene-facebook-messages>.

Next, ask students to orally summarize the article. Ask if they have other examples from their lives or their friends' lives showing the unintended consequences of inappropriate social media posts.

Then do a think-pair-share* around this question:

Does the current social media culture excuse the behavior of the students that had their Harvard admissions revoked? Why or why not?

(*In a think-pair-share, students ponder the question individually, pair up with another student to discuss each other's thoughts, then share their partners' reflections with the rest of the class.)

Students will likely have a range of opinions.

Then, to build on the think-pair-share activity, ask students to vote on the following questions. Record votes on the board.

	Yes	No	Unsure
Should those students have their admissions rescinded?	(record votes in cells)		
Should freedom of speech protect those students from getting their acceptances rescinded?			
Would you report someone to Harvard (or any college administration) if you were on that college's Facebook group and witnessed someone posting objectionable comments?			
Do you feel you or your friends might have some posts on your social media that an admissions committee might find objectionable?			
Do you know what to do to scrub your social media persona?			

The voting will likely raise some discussion, which will serve as additional pre-work for the writing assignment that students are to do next.

(45 min) Tell students they are to write a letter to the Harvard admissions committee either a) condoning or b) criticizing the decision to rescind the students' admissions. The educator will

not actually send the letters to the Harvard admissions committee, though students may do so if they wish.

Students may use some of these online resources to aid in their letter writing.

Educators are strongly encouraged to review these articles beforehand, as they may contain objectionable language in describing the Harvard admittees' offensive posts. Educators may choose to print out the articles and use a marker to redact potentially offensive words before distributing to students.

- National Public Radio article describing the incident: <http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/06/06/531591202/harvard-rescinds-admission-of-10-students-over-obscene-facebook-messages>
- *Harvard Crimson* university newspaper describing the incident: www.thecrimson.com/article/2017/6/5/2021-offers-rescinded-memes/
- Kaplan Test Prep study on admissions officers' visits to students' social networking pages: <http://press.kaptest.com/press-releases/kaplan-test-prep-survey-percentage-of-college-admissions-officers-who-visit-applicants-social-networking-pages-continues-to-grow-but-most-students-shrug>
- AmericanHonors article with tips on scrubbing one's social media persona for college admissions: <https://americanhonors.org/blog/article/applying-college-clean-your-social-media>

Tell students that their letters will be graded using the rubric at the end of this lesson. (Note: Educators are free to alter this rubric as desired.)

Next, have students write an outline for their letter.

(40 min) Next, ask students to write a draft of their letter. Give them time in class to peer review each other's letters using the rubric on the last page of this lesson.

(20 min) Next, have students revise their letters individually, based on the peer feedback they received. Ask students to refer to the rubric to help guide their revisions.

(15 min) Close the lesson by asking students to discuss what actions they might take to ensure their social media trail doesn't get them into trouble for college admissions or scholarship awards. Encourage them to refer to the AmericanHonors article cited earlier: <https://americanhonors.org/blog/article/applying-college-clean-your-social-media>