Lesson Plan

Teaching Procedure

Lesson Topic	***The complex relationship between social media, personal freedom, and public discourse***
Phenomenon	Social media platforms have become the new public square, offering unprecedented opportunities for free expression, connection, and social mobilization. At the same time, the very nature of these platforms creates new challenges to freedom. Algorithms designed to maximize engagement can trap users in "filter bubbles" (where they only see content that aligns with their past preferences) and "echo chambers" (where their beliefs are reinforced by a like-minded community), limiting exposure to diverse viewpoints. This environment is fertile ground for the rapid spread of misinformation and disinformation, which can manipulate public opinion and undermine democratic processes. Furthermore, the line between content moderation and censorship is often blurry. Platforms make decisions about what content is acceptable, while governments may use these tools to suppress dissent. Users themselves can experience a chilling effect on their freedom of speech, practicing self-censorship to avoid online harassment, cancel culture, or professional repercussions. Understanding this duality is crucial for navigating the digital world. It requires us to see social media not just as a neutral tool, but as a powerful, designed environment that shapes our information, our opinions, and our ability to engage freely and responsibly as citizens.
Grade Level	Students aged 13-18
Learning Objectives	• Understand that social media can both enhance and restrict freedom of expression. • Identify and define key concepts such as algorithms, filter bubbles, echo chambers and disinformation. • Reflect critically on their own information consumption habits and sources they trust. • Stimulate an active and conscious attitude towards digital citizenship and media literacy. • Develop skills to critically evaluate online content and engage in respectful online discourse.
Learning Outcomes	By the end of the lesson, students will be able to: • Define filter bubble, echo chamber, and algorithm. • Recognize manipulative/unreliable content. • Explain how platform design and personalization shape information and foster polarization. • Assess impacts on individuals (e.g., anxiety, radicalization) and society (e.g., trust, debate). • Critically analyze their social media feeds and detect biases. • Apply basic fact-checking strategies. • Express opinions clearly and respectfully. • Suggest ways to build a healthier information diet. • Acknowledge cognitive biases and take responsibility for shared content. • Strengthen motivation to be informed, resilient, and active digital citizens.

Subjects Integrated	• <u>Civics and Law</u>: Freedom of speech, censorship, digital rights, the role of media in democracy. • <u>Technology/Computer Science</u>: Basic principles of algorithms, data privacy, platform architecture. • <u>Language Arts</u>: Analysis of online rhetoric, identifying bias in texts, creating persuasive and responsible content. • <u>History</u>: Propaganda, historical forms of communication and public squares, social movements. • <u>Psychology</u>: Cognitive bias (e.g. Confirmation bias), group dynamics, persuasion techniques.
Materials	**Printed materials:** • Worksheets with guiding questions for "filter bubble" analysis; • Glossary of key terms (algorithm, echo chamber, disinformation, etc.); • Post-its, flipchart paper, and markers for brainstorming; • Printed examples of different social media feeds covering the same news event; **Digital materials:** • Introductory slides defining social media's dual role; • Short video explaining how a recommendation algorithm works (e.g., from a source like Common Sense Media or a technology journalist); • Access to a classroom-safe social media simulator or pre-selected public posts; • Tools for creating digital content (Canva, Padlet, basic video editor); **Physical materials:** • Flipchart and markers for group work; • Markers, scissors, glue, magazines to cut out (for creative elaborations or collages); • Display boards to set up an exhibition or visual campaign in the classroom or corridors. **Technology:** • Projector, audio speakers and computer connected to the internet; • Tablets or smartphones for students (if available and school policy allows); • Possible microphone or media for audio/video recording. **Reference materials:** • Glossary with key terms; • Graphic templates for creating posters and infographics. All materials must be prepared in advance and adapted to the number of students and groups envisaged.
Prerequisite Skills	A general familiarity with using at least one social media platform. Basic experience with collaborative group work is beneficial.
Seating Arrangements	• **Introduction**: Students arranged in a semicircle for a shared viewing and initial discussion. • **Workshop phase**: Students organized in small groups around tables or workstations. • **Return phase**: Groups present from the front of the classroom to facilitate sharing and discussion.
Time	60-80 minutes
Assessment	• Exit ticket: Students answer the question: "What is one action you will take to diversify your information sources?"; • Mini quiz: 2-3 questions defining key terms like "filter bubble" or "echo chamber."; • Peer review: Comments on the clarity and persuasiveness of another group's awareness campaign.

Lesson Steps

Introduction
15 Minutes

"The lesson begins with a "Whose Feed Is It?" activity. The teacher projects two starkly different, pre-prepared social media feeds about the same neutral event (e.g., a new technology release, a movie premiere). One feed is filled with positive, excited posts, while the other is highly critical and negative.

The teacher asks the students:
- Are these feeds showing the same event?
- What kind of person do you think sees Feed A? What about Feed B?
- Why would two people see such different information about the same thing?

This introduction immediately illustrates the concept of algorithmic curation and "filter bubbles" in a visual and relatable way, activating students' curiosity about the invisible forces shaping their online experience.

Activity 1
20 Minutes

Mapping the Bubble - Information Diet Analysis
Objective: To help students visualize and critically assess their personal sources of information.
- The class is divided into small, diverse groups. Each group gets a large sheet of paper.
- Students are asked to individually list their main sources of information (e.g., specific social media apps, family members, news websites, influencers they follow). They then combine their lists onto the group sheet, creating a "map" of their collective information ecosystem.
- The teacher then gives them a guiding question: *"Where would you go on this map to find reliable information about [insert relevant, school-appropriate topic, e.g., climate change, a local election]?"*
- Groups discuss the potential blind spots and biases in their collective map. What perspectives are missing? Are all sources equally reliable?

Activity 2
25 Minutes

"Break the Bubble" campaign design
- **Objective:** To creatively apply their understanding by designing a campaign to promote media literacy and diverse information consumption.
- Each group designs a mini-campaign aimed at their peers. They can choose from formats like:
  - An infographic showing "5 Tips to Spot Fake News."
  - A short tutorial video on "How to Follow People You Disagree With Respectfully."
  - A design for a school-wide "Healthy Feed Challenge."
  - A podcast script where they interview each other about their filter bubbles.
- The teacher circulates, encouraging groups to focus on practical, actionable advice. The "observer" role can be assigned to one student per group to note how the group negotiates differing opinions during the task.

Observations can be shared during the concluding phase, in order to encourage informed reflection not only on the content, but also on the way in which peers work and interact.

Activity 3
20 Minutes

Campaign Showcase and Discussion
- **Objective:** To share creative solutions and build a collective toolkit of strategies.
- Each group presents its campaign to the class, explaining their key message and why they chose their format.
- After each presentation, the floor is opened for brief questions and constructive feedback. If observers were used, they share one key observation about their group's collaboration process.

Closing
10 Minutes

Becoming an Active Digital Citizen
- **Objective:** To consolidate learning and empower students to apply it in their daily lives.
- The teacher summarizes the main concepts: that freedom on social media is not automatic but requires active effort. It involves being aware of algorithms, consciously seeking out different views, and taking responsibility for the information we consume and share.
- The teacher connects this back to the pillar of democratic citizenship, emphasizing that a healthy democracy depends on informed citizens who can think critically and engage respectfully.

An **exit ticket** is used for final formative assessment: *"What is one concrete step you can take this week to step outside your filter bubble?"*

Follow-up Project: Propose a collaborative project where students launch a school-wide **"Digital Citizenship Campaign."** Over several weeks, they can work in groups with specific roles (e.g., researchers, graphic designers, content creators, event planners) to produce materials that inform and engage the school community. Outputs could include: videos explaining filter bubbles, posters with tips for spotting misinformation, a podcast series interviewing students about their online experiences, or articles for the school website on responsible social media use.

Alternatively, students could undertake a historical research project on **"How Technology Has Shaped Public Opinion,"** comparing the impact of the printing press, radio, and television to the impact of modern social media. The results could be presented as a digital museum or a documentary-style video.

Real-World Application: Encourage students to reflect on professions related to digital information and freedom, such as: **journalists, data scientists, digital forensics analysts, UX/UI designers (creating ethical platforms), content moderators, digital rights lawyers, and social media managers.**

Propose a daily observation activity: for one week, students can keep a **"digital diary."** They can document (with screenshots or notes) instances where they encounter their filter bubble (e.g., seeing the same opinion repeatedly), see potential misinformation, or witness examples of both toxic and constructive online debates.

Teacher Tips

Activities to Propose:

- Structured Class Debate: Organize a formal debate on a controversial topic related to the theme. For example: "Should social media platforms be legally treated as publishers, responsible for all content?" or "Is 'cancel culture' a form of free speech or a form of censorship?" This activity promotes critical thinking, argumentation based on evidence, and respectful disagreement.
- "Digital Detox" Challenge: Challenge students to abstain from or significantly reduce social media use for a weekend. They can then write a short reflection or discuss in class: What did they notice? What did they do with their time? How did it feel?
- Inclusive Language Lab (Digital Edition): Propose an activity where students analyze comment sections on news articles or YouTube videos. They can identify examples of toxic language versus constructive criticism and then work together to rewrite aggressive comments into respectful and effective arguments.
- Interview a "Digital Witness": Students can prepare and conduct mock interviews with imaginary characters who have experienced the extremes of social media. For example: an activist whose movement was amplified by social media, a journalist targeted by an online harassment campaign, or a former content moderator. These can be recorded as podcasts or performed as monologues.
- Critical Meme Analysis: Use a popular internet meme as a primary source. Guide students to analyze its origin, how its meaning has evolved, and how it can be used to spread ideas (both harmless and harmful) incredibly quickly. This can culminate in students creating their own "positive propaganda" meme to promote digital well-being.

School-Wide "Information Literacy Day": Organize a thematic day where each subject tackles the theme from its own angle (e.g., Math analyzes statistics from a viral news story, History compares it to past propaganda, Language analyzes the rhetoric of the post, and Civics discusses the societal impact). This creates a powerful, immersive, and interdisciplinary learning experience.

Appendix

Include all material that the students will have to interact with (e.g. worksheets)