Who Are You Online?

Watch the Video "Abbas' Story"

Think about a time in the future when you are applying for a job or applying for college. It is becoming more common for employers and colleges to not only look at your application materials, but also to check your "online life" to get a better picture of what you might be like.

If someone does a search of your name online, what kinds of search results would you want to pop up? You might want things like:

• News about achievements or talent areas (e.g., music, sports, computers)
• Praise about your work
• Personal milestones you want to share with everyone
• Activities you take part in that make the world a better place

What types of search results might reflect poorly on someone? Here are some examples:

• A record of someone breaking the law
• Rude or nasty comments about or to others in a public online forum
• Photos of the person drinking and partying

Do you think you should judge someone solely based on what you find about them online? Someone's online presence might include things that were intended to be private, or inaccurate information posted by someone else. It could even include information about another person with the same name. Therefore, it may not give a complete or balanced picture of the person. Although more employers and colleges are checking online information about applicants, most still use this information as only part of their information, not all of it.

However, if there is a lot of competition for a job or placement in a college, the online information could be the deciding factor between applicants who are very close.

Information you post today could affect yourself and others in the future – for better and for worse. Consider that you have the ability to shape your online profile so that it presents an image you can be proud of.

DIGITAL FOOTPRINT: All of the information about a person that can be found online

Information in a digital footprint becomes public by being copied and passed on so that it can be searched and viewed by a large, invisible audience. Information in a digital footprint is often permanently online, because it is archived in a variety of ways and passed on by others.

REPRESENT: To depict yourself to others as being a certain way or having particular characteristics
PERSONA: An image and personality that you show to others

Think about how you represent yourself when you are online.

Does the way you represent yourself online differ from the way you represent yourself offline? What is similar and what is different about your online and offline selves?

The Internet gives people the chance to express different parts of themselves and even try on different personas. You will explore how you represent yourself online, and all the possibilities, risks, and benefits involved in experimenting with your online self.

Exploring Avatars

AVATAR: A graphic image that represents a person online

You are going to be looking at some pictures in the link called "Avatar Slideshow by the New York Times". This slideshow, made by photographer Robbie Cooper shows how people represent themselves online. He took photographs of people and of the avatars they use in a variety of online worlds.

Watch the slideshow silently, and respond in writing to each slide as you see it, on paper. Note the similarities and differences between the real people and their avatars. Think about characteristics beyond physical looks – you should avoid passing judgment or making fun of anyone's avatar. Instead, try to guess why the people in the photos might have created these avatars. You cannot be certain of these people's intentions without talking to them – you can draw conclusions based only on the information available in the photos. Also remember that in creating their avatars, people may make choices based on what kind of online world the avatars will inhabit.

Being "Real" or "Fake" Online

What do you think it means to be "real" or "fake"?

Do you think it's easier for people to be "fake" online than in real life? Why or why not?

You will be watching a video in which a group of teens explores these questions.

Watch the video "Ramon's Story".

ANONYMOUS: Without a name or other information that identifies who you are
INHIBITED: Careful or restrained about your actions or impulses

People may feel less inhibited when they are online. This is especially true if they are anonymous or are interacting with people who don't know them offline. (Even when they know the people, it's easy for people to feel anonymous when they are

online, because they are alone with their computer or phone.) People might feel free to invent new personas online, or they might change particular parts of themselves.

It may be possible to "stay real," even when you are representing yourself in different ways online, by staying true to who you are and to how you would treat yourself and others in the offline world.

Following are suggestions for some ways you can stay real online:

1. Present yourself in a way that's positive and not harmful to you.
2. Treat people the way you would treat them in person.
3. Don't say or do things that harm other people, or betray their trust.
4. Never get into a relationship that is not safe.
5. Avoid getting involved in a community that is not appropriate.