

Unit 2: Free Speech vs. Social Media
8th Grade Honors Language Arts
20 Class Meetings

Updated January 2026

Essential Questions

- How does a writer craft an informative/explanatory text that examines a topic and conveys ideas and information clearly?

- What strategies can readers apply to understand complex informational texts?

Enduring Understandings with Unit Goals

EU 1: Readers use various strategies to construct meaning from text and choose different strategies depending on the type of text they are reading.

- Compare and contrast texts for structure, purpose, and viewpoint to determine how differing structure contributes to meaning and style.
- Examine how authors make connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events to develop and refine a concept.
- Analyze and track the central idea and key details of an informational text and recognize and assess the author’s point of view by analyzing how the author presents information.

EU 2: Strong text analysis requires relevant evidence that is thoroughly explained.

- Engage in the writing process to write an engaging informative/explanatory text that examines a student-selected topic and conveys ideas and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

EU 3: Public speaking and communication skills are critical for intellectual development, career trajectory, and civic engagement.

- Actively participate in multiple discussions and debates using relevant text evidence and Accountable talk to deliver a well-supported message confidently and effectively.

EU 4: Routinely practiced independent reading builds habitual readers with conscious reading identities, increases reading comprehension skills, and develops vocabulary.

- Engage in consistent independent reading of student-chosen books.
- Actively participate in a supportive reading community that introduces students to a wide range of characters and experiences.

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Standards

Common Core State Standards:

- **RI.8.1:** Cite the textual evidence that most strongly supports an analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- **RI.8.2:** Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.
- **RI.8.3:** Analyze how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events (e.g., through comparisons, analogies, or categories)
- **RI.8.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.
- **RI.8.5:** Analyze in detail the structure of a specific paragraph in the text, including the role of particular sentences in developing and refining a key concept.
- **RI.8.6:** Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.
- **RI.8.7:** Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print, or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.
- **W.8.1:** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
 - **W.8.1.A:** Introduce claim(s), acknowledge and distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and organize the reasons and evidence logically.
 - **W.8.1.B:** Support claim(s) with logical reasoning and relevant evidence, using accurate credible, sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.
 - **W.8.1.C:** Use words, phrases, and clauses to create cohesion and clarify the relationships among claim(s), counterclaims, reasons, and evidence.
 - **W.8.1.D:** Establish and maintain a formal style.
 - **W.8.1.E:** Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.
- **W.8.4:** Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
- **W.8.9:** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.
- **SL.8.1:** Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade 8 topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

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- **SL.8.1.A:** Come to discussions prepared, having read or researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence on the topic, text, or issue to probe and reflect on ideas under discussion.
- **SL.8.1.B:** Follow rules for collegial discussions and decision-making, track progress toward specific goals and deadlines, and define individual roles as needed.
- **SL.8.1.C:** Pose questions that connect the ideas of several speakers and respond to others' questions and comments with relevant evidence, observations, and ideas.
- **SL.8.1.D:** Acknowledge new information expressed by others, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views in light of the evidence presented.
- **SL.8.4:** Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence, sound valid reasoning, and well-chosen details; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.
- **L.8.1:** Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.
- **L.8.3:** Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.
- **L.8.4:** Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words or phrases based on *grade 8 reading and content*, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.
- **L.8.5:** Demonstrate understanding of figurative language, word relationships, and nuances in word meanings.
- **L.8.6:** Acquire and use accurate grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases; gather vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression

ISAAC Vision of the Graduate Competencies

Competency 1: Write effectively for a variety of purposes.

Competency 2: Speak to diverse audiences in an accountable manner.

Competency 3: Develop the behaviors needed to interact and contribute with others on a team.

Competency 4: Analyze and solve problems independently and collaboratively.

Competency 5: Be responsible, creative, and empathetic members of the community.

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Unit Content Overview

- **Reading Informational Texts**
 - **Key Terms:** informational text, key detail, central idea, comparisons, support, evidence, claim, inference, author’s point of view, author’s intent, author’s message, author’s purpose, conclusion, conclusion drawn, context, summarize, suggest
 - **Vocabulary:** abridge, concur, constitute, contend, discern, dissent, infringe, precedent, prohibit, redress

Interdisciplinary Connection:

- Social Studies: History, Civics, Government
- Science and Technology
- Digital Arts

Daily Learning Objectives with *TWPS*

Students will be able to...

- Build background knowledge about the ideas, texts, skills, and vocabulary in this unit.
 - *Describe what you think “freedom of speech” means.*
- Assess the text structure to explain the impact of the author’s choices on development of ideas and overall meaning.
 - *How does understanding a text’s structure help us better understand the text overall? Provide at least one example.*
- Prove how the information in a text conveys the author’s point of view and/or purpose.
 - *How do authors convey their point of view in a text?*
- Evaluate the strength of evidence in an informational text
 - *What are context clues and how can you use them to help you find the meaning of a word you do not know?*
- Engage with videos, the Bill of Rights, and hypothetical scenarios to build background knowledge about the creation of the First Amendment, which rights it guarantees, and its limitations.
 - *Should there be limitations to free speech? Is it more important to protect free speech or to protect people’s feelings?*
- Analyze the development of a central idea over the course of the text and provide an objective summary of the text.**

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- *How do you track the development of a central idea over the course of a text?*
 - *Why does a reader need to identify the central idea of a text?*
- Discuss a provided prompt using relevant text evidence and Accountable Talk.
 - *Describe what does freedom of speech looks like in a school. Do you really have it?*
- Assess how a text makes connections among and distinctions between individuals, ideas, or events.**
 - *How does an author develop or illustrate their ideas in a text ?*
 - *Why is it important for a reader to identify connections between individuals, ideas, or events?*
- Engage with videos and data sets to build knowledge about schools’ right to regulate students’ online speech.
 - *When, if ever, should there be limitations to the guarantee of free speech?*
- Debate and express their ideas clearly and persuasively using relevant text evidence and Accountable Talk.
 - *How will you prepare best for the discussion and how will you be an active participant?*
- Create a multi-paragraph outline of a literary essay.
 - *How will you approach this outline differently than your Unit 1 essay outline? What barriers or roadblocks did you face last time? Explain your new approach.*
- Draft an argumentative essay that introduces a claim and organizes evidence logically.
 - *Why is it necessary to acknowledge a counterclaim in an argumentative essay?*
- Evaluate peer essays and provide specific, actionable feedback.
 - *How do strong writers use transition words that are varied and keep the reader engaged? Brainstorm three transition words you want to add to your speech.*
- Develop and strengthen writing by revising, editing, and rewriting, focusing on how well purpose and audience have been addressed.
 - *Which area of your essay will you be revising the most?*

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Instructional Strategies/Differentiated Instruction

- Whole group instruction
- Guided notes
- Paragraph frames and sentence starters
- Student-led instruction
- Teacher modeling
- Written feedback
- Think-pair-share and small-group discussions
- Graphic organizers
- Cornell notes
- Accountable talk
- Homework
- Word walls with visuals
- Anchor charts
- Small group instruction
- Conferencing
- Text and video chunking with guiding questions
- Close reading with text-dependent questions

EL Differentiated Instruction:

- Prompting, questioning, elaborating, facilitate higher level thinking skills
- Explicit modeling
- Guided and independent practice
- Small group instruction
- Strategic grouping
- Key vocabulary
- Graphic organizers
- Venn diagrams
- Sequence writing
- Reinforcing contextual definition
- Glossaries
- Sentence starters

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Assessments

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENTS:

- TWPS
- Exit Slips
- Accountable Talk Discussions
- Completed notes
- Completed graphic organizers
- Homework
- Text dependent question responses
- Close reading notes and text annotations
- In-Class work and collaborative slides
- Verbal Check-Ins
- Vocabulary Checks
- Grammar and Usage Checks
- Class Discussion (EU 3)
- Unit Task- Free Speech vs. Social Media Essay
 - Teacher Created Essay Scoring Guide

SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS:

- Quiz 1 (EU 1)
- Quiz 2 (EU 1)
- Unit Task- Free Speech vs. Social Media Essay (Essay Scoring Guide) (EU 2)
- Unit 2 Test (IAB: Read Informational Texts)

Unit Task

Unit Task Name: Free Speech vs. Social Media Essay

Description: In this task, students will write an essay answering the prompt: Should schools be allowed to punish students for what they write on social media? Students will use a sophisticated blend of argumentative and informative writing to convey a clear message well-supported by relevant evidence and researched facts. After peer and self-review, students will revise their writing, demonstrating their ability to effectively incorporate feedback to improve their writing. (EU 2). Students will participate in a class debate (EU3).

Evaluation: Teacher Created Essay Scoring Guide

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Unit Resources

- “Tinker vs. Des Moines: Freedom of Speech for Students” by Law for Kids
- “Free Speech in High School” by the Foundation for Individual Rights in Education
- “A Cheerleader’s Vulgar Message Prompts a First Amendment Showdown” by Adam Liptak
- “High School Junior Sues School District for Free Speech Infringement, Wins Settlement” by the Free Speech Project
- “Social Media: What’s Not to Like?” Alison Pearce Stevens
- “College students support free speech—unless it offends them” by Jeffrey J. Selingo
- Commonlit 360 Curriculum
- SBAC Prep Online
- IAB Resources Online
- Pear Assessment