

**social me:**

social media literacy for middle school classrooms

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## **University of Washington**

### **Abstract**

#### **social me:**

social media literacy for middle school classrooms

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Middle school is a time of drastic physical, cognitive, and social change for students. Many kids post their first messages on social media at this age, and their developmental changes are magnified and affected by their experiences online. 'social me' uses a media literacy framework to help kids become critical producers and consumers of photos on social media. Designed for use in schools, it combines lesson plans for teachers and a tablet app for students. Through challenges, discussions, and reflections, 'social me' brings kids' everyday photo-sharing experiences into the classroom.

# social me



**Social media literacy for middle school classrooms**

**Joseph Sparano**

Master of Design Thesis  
University of Washington  
2016

# Introduction

# Preface

I love being in classrooms and working with students. Over the last five years, I've taught a number of undergraduate classes in concept development and graphic design, plus a few design and problem-solving workshops for younger students (elementary, middle school, and high school).

As a grad student at UW, I've focused on studying and designing-around education. I think there's a lot of potential for design process in classrooms — teaching design skills, but also designing things to help teachers and students.

I've really enjoyed working with middle school classes, and last year, I took an elective in Education on early adolescent

development: *Life and Learning in The Middle School EDUC 480*. It spelled out why this age group is such a complex and interesting time in our lives. And why middle school classrooms, in particular, are full of opportunities for innovative, engaging, developmentally-responsive ways to learn.

# Relevance

Early Adolescence (ages 10–14) is a distinct life stage situated between childhood and the later teenage years. In the U.S., it corresponds to middle school (grades 6–8).

In retrospect, it's a fascinating age. But in the midst of these years, it's a time of dramatic physical, cognitive, and social change. It's the age when we start to feel like adults: in our physical features, in new abstract ways of thinking, and through more complex interactions with larger social groups. It's a time when our decisions begin to have long-term implications. And as a transition to adulthood, it's the age when we first begin to recognize ourselves as individuals, facing new pressure to define and defend a nascent identity.

## **It's complicated, and these changes are intensified by social media.**

Kids in middle school today have grown up with social media. They were born between 2001–2003 and have spent most of their lives in a world with Facebook (which launched in 2004).

Not surprisingly, social media is an important part of their lives, and middle school is the age when many kids share their first messages online. The percent of American kids who use social media every day changes significantly between tween years (8- to 12-year-olds) and teen (13- to 18-year-olds) — from 15% to 58% COMMON SENSE CENSUS.

Social media has both positive and negative social-emotional effects for people of all ages. But middle schoolers' developmental changes make their experiences online unique:

- Early adolescents tend to be egocentric, which can “lead to painful self-consciousness and harsh self-criticism” CONKLIN.
- This self-absorption leads kids “to focus on conformity and the importance of appearances” WHAT'S APPROPRIATE.
- Compared to any other age, their behaviors and emotions are particularly susceptible to influence from peers FULIGNI, ET AL.
- Popularity becomes a central concern, and kids develop a sense of their place in their social hierarchy WHAT'S APPROPRIATE.
- They're also gaining the ability to think idealistically, and “the gap between a teen's ‘ideal self’ and what they perceive to be their actual self can be a the source of a lot of angst” CONKLIN.
- Although these kids have an intense sense of likes and dislikes, they often fail to think critically about those choices IBID.
- And although “teens are technologically savvy,” they're “not emotionally mature, so their skills outpace their judgment” WHAT'S APPROPRIATE.

For kids who participate in social media, their offline and online experiences are interconnected and influence each other. Their development — physically, cognitively and socially — impacts their actions online. And their actions online, in turn, affect their lives offline DAVIS.

# Research

# Secondary research

## Research questions

- 1 How are kids learning about social media now?
- 2 How are they using social media, and how do they feel about it?

## Media Literacy Education

In researching how schools are already teaching students about social media, I quickly discovered that the principles are grounded in a much larger body of research and practice of Media Literacy Education (MLE).

The goal of MLE is teaching kids to ask critical questions about the media messages that saturate their lives. Good and bad, fun and serious, as author and audience, MLE gives students tools to be active participants in media (instead of passive consumers).

MLE strategies were originally developed around traditional media (e.g. advertising, TV, movies, music, music videos, video games, magazines, etc.).

The overriding tenet of media literacy education is that “all media messages are constructed” JOLLS + THOMAN. Media producers are “intentionally using the frame to show some things, but leave others out” HOBBS. Every media message is the result of a series of decisions, and these decisions are influenced by the perspective and goals of the people constructing them.

Media literacy lessons work in two ways: (1) by viewing and analyzing examples of existing media messages

(“deconstruction”), and then (2) asking kids to make their own (“construction”) DE ABREU. “When analysis is combined with creative production, theory unites with application, thereby allowing students to discover and express their learning in an interconnected and natural process” JOLLS + THOMAN. And for both making and viewing, “the more real world the project is, the better” IBID.

MLE serves students by building their “critical autonomy” — learning to ask their own questions about media KELLNER. The goal of MLE is “not to constrain students, but to give them a framework, a forum, and practice so they can thrive and expand their own horizons” DE ABREU.

Although MLE was developed around traditional media, the methods work for social media, too (e.g. Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Yik Yak, AfterSchool, etc.).

In fact, MLE lessons are particularly relevant to social media. Because unlike TV, movies, music, etc. (where kids are only consumers) kids are often consumers *and* creators on social media. Because MLE lessons combine viewing (consumption) and making (production), the value of these lessons has never been more relevant.

## CML's Core Concepts

In *Literacy for the 21st Century*, The Center for Media Literacy (CML) outlines a conceptual framework for teaching media literacy lessons. Collectively, these five *Core Concepts* provide a range of perspectives for analyzing media messages. Although CML developed the original framework, the concepts have been widely adopted in MLE as a whole.

### **(#1) "All media messages are constructed." (Authorship)**

*"Media texts are built just as surely as buildings and highways are built... [W]hatever is 'constructed' by just a few people then becomes 'normalized' for the rest of us..., it gets taken for granted and usually goes unquestioned. The goal... is not to make us cynical but simply to expose the complexities of media's 'constructedness' and thus create the critical distance we need to be able to ask other important questions."*

### **(#2) "Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules." (Format)**

*"Each form of communication... has its own creative language.... Understanding the grammar, syntax and metaphor system of media language, especially the language of sounds and visuals which can reach beyond the rational to our deepest emotional core, increases our appreciation and enjoyment of media experiences as well as helps us to be less susceptible to manipulation."*

### **(#3) "Different people experience the same media message differently." (Audience)**

*"Audiences play a role in interpreting media texts because each audience member brings to the media text a unique set of*

*life experiences (age, gender, education, cultural upbringing, etc.) which, when applied to the text – or combined with the text – create unique interpretations."*

### **(#4) "Media have embedded values and points of view." (Content)**

*"Media, because they are constructed, carry a subtext of who and what is important.... It is important to learn how to 'read' all kinds of media messages in order to discover the points of view that are embedded in them and how to assess them as part of the text rather than merely accepting them as 'natural.' Only then can we judge whether to accept or reject a message. Being able to recognize and name missing perspectives is also a critical skill."*

### **(#5) "Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power." (Purpose)**

*"What many people do not know is that what's really being sold through commercial media is not just the advertised products to the audience-but also the audience to the advertisers! But the issue of message motivation has changed dramatically since the Internet became an international platform through which groups and organizations – even individuals – can attempt to persuade others to a particular point of view."*

## Instagram

Early in the project, I made the decision to focus specifically on social media photos and chose Instagram as the model.

Half of all American kids ages 13–17 use Instagram (a group that includes many middle schoolers). And for those kids, Instagram is second only to Facebook in popularity LENHART. Conveniently, since Instagram is a visual medium, it's also full of opportunities to discuss, interpret, and reflect on decision-making around framing, editing, and visual language. In other words: clear opportunities to incorporate MLE strategies around making and viewing.

As of early 2016, Instagram's API (application programming interface) allowed 3rd-party apps to access Instagram's content. Relevant to this project, the API would allow these apps to: (1) log in with their Instagram credentials to view their own posts (if their account isn't publicly viewable), and (2) search and view public Instagram posts INSTAGRAM. In both cases, using actual posts would provide an opportunity to bring students' everyday social media experiences into the classroom.

## Self-Presentation and Idealization

In early adolescence, "a critical developmental task... is the construction of multiple selves that will undoubtedly vary across different roles and relationships" HARTER.

Within the context of social media, "construction" manifests as "self-presentation": "the use of behavior to present information about the self to others" MICHIKIAN, ET AL. It's normal for adolescents to experiment with their identities, which is true off- and online. But the distance between kids and their audience on social media provides more flexibility in how kids can present themselves to others MANAGO, ET AL.

Because kids' "offline and online worlds are psychologically connected" IBID., social media construction and identity

construction are linked. "The notion of 'representation' is the central concept of media literacy. Because it is how we are represented and how we represent ourselves, or re-present ourselves." VOICES OF MEDIA LITERACY. Social media photos, as documents of self-presentation, are a particularly useful opportunity for kids to consider what a photo's construction might communicate about its author.

There are a variety of ways that people self-present, but when those choices reflects "aspirations, hopes, wishes," that presentation is considered *idealized*. Specifically for photos shared online, these photos have been "enhanced" in some way MICHIKIAN, ET AL.

## Lesson plan review

To understand how MLE lessons work, I reviewed a variety of existing lessons. My goals with this exercise were to:

- 1 Understand the common vocabulary, organization, and visual layout of lesson plans. (Although I've been teaching for a few years, I don't have experience in writing formal lesson plans – especially for other teachers.)
- 2 Understand how media literacy concepts are already being applied effectively.
- 3 Find opportunities for teaching social media literacy lessons in new ways.
- 4 Find patterns of teaching strategies that I could apply to social media photos.

### MLE LESSON STRATEGIES

- ask preliminary questions that reveal students' existing understanding and opinions
- define relevant vocabulary words early and use them in the lesson
- show examples that illustrate the topic
- compare examples to reveal patterns/conventions
- after identifying patterns/conventions, ask if they're true for students themselves
- compare extreme examples and subtle examples of construction to highlight differences
- show process videos to illustrate a typical message being constructed
- describe a model that applies the concept in context
- ask questions that explore both positive and negative aspects of the concept
- ask specific questions about the motives of the message's author to guide students in deconstructing the message
- ask questions about process to reveal decisions that kids make uncritically
- ask questions that don't have correct answers, but specifically open up the complexity of the issue
- invite students to share personal experiences
- model discussion by showing video of kids outside the classroom discussing the topic
- make a game of identifying constructions
- deliberately confuse two sides of bias by splitting the connections and making a matching game
- make lists of patterns/conventions discovered in the examples
- apply the discoveries to a new situation
- apply a model (discussed earlier) to new examples
- show students something knowingly constructed and vote on the reality of it
- use worksheets that visualize the deconstruction
- ask students to construct messages and make notes on their process
- combine several examples from different categories and ask students to sort the examples back out
- ask reflection questions that summarize what students have learned and how they might apply the lesson to their own lives

**See *Bibliography* for lessons reviewed.**

# Interviews

I interviewed eight middle school students: five girls, three boys; six living in Seattle, and two from outside Washington state. I intentionally interviewed a mix of boys and girls, anticipating (from secondary research reading) that boys' and girls' social media experiences might vary.

Each interview was 45-60 minutes over the phone. In most cases, Annabelle contacted friends who were parents of middle schoolers and introduced us over email. All of the interviewees were selected because they were already Instagram users.

In the follow-up email to parents, I described the project and my goals with the interview. As part of the interview, I planned to ask questions about existing Instagram posts, so I asked permission from the parents to view the accounts. Several of the interviewees had private accounts, so on the calls, I asked the permission to follow them temporarily and then unfollowed them immediately after the call. Importantly, I made sure to frame the interview request as a choice for *both* parents and kids. Even if I knew the parents were interested in the project, I wanted acknowledge that the kids may not feel comfortable participating.

In each case, I started the calls with the parents, clarifying the details of the project and thanking them for scheduling time for the interview. After each call, I sent an Amazon gift card to the interviewees: \$25 if I gave them a photo challenge (see *Prototyping*), and \$15 for interview-only.

Based on my initial research questions, my goal was to understand how middle schoolers are using Instagram, how they feel about it, and how they're learning about social media already.

The interviews were conducted from January to April, 2016. I developed a list of questions for the initial call based on the media literacy readings, advice from Tad Hirsch on interviewing, and podcast interviews with kids (see *Bibliography*). The list of questions evolved over time as I discovered better questions in each conversation. After the list of questions, students talked through approximately 10–15 photos, and I asked additional questions about those photos.

## Interview questions

### BACKGROUND

- What grade are you in?
- Do you have your own phone?
- How do you like having a smartphone?
- What are your favorite apps?

### INSTAGRAM BASICS

- What do you like about Instagram?
- Do you follow any famous people, athletes, musicians?
- When you open Instagram, what do you usually do?
- What kinds of things do you normally post?
- How do you decide when to post a photo?
- How do you choose the captions?
- How do you decide what to write in your profile description?
- Are bios/profiles important?

### LIKES AND COMMENTS

- Are there unspoken rules about commenting?
- How do you learn those rules?
- Are likes important to you?
- Do you get as many likes as you expect to get?
- Do people in your family follow you?

### EDITING

- Do you use the Instagram's editing tools before you post your photos?
- How much time do you spend editing photos normally?
- Have you ever deleted any photos?

### MISCELLANEOUS

- Have you had conversations with your parents about social media?
- How do your parents feel about social media?
- Did you have to talk your parents into starting an Instagram account?
- At school, have your teachers taught you any lessons about social media?
- How has your life changed now that you're on Instagram?
- Do you think your social media photos represent your 'real life'?
- Do your friends' photos represent their real lives?
- Anything else I should know?

### CURRENT POSTS

*On four of the interviews, I also asked about idealization (see Prototyping)*

- Why did you post this photo?
- Did you edit or use filters?

## Sample responses from Interviewee 1

### Do you follow any famous people, athletes, musicians?

*"No, [it can sometimes be] people pretending to be them.... Everyone I follow I know. I follow teammates from water polo, swim team, cross country, basketball, and skiing."*

### Do you use the Instagram editing tools before you post your photos?

*"I don't have any photo where I don't use them. If the photo is dark, I'll try to make it stand out more. It makes greens brighter.... I don't normally crop. But I will if there's a person in the way, or to crop out the car [if taken out the car window]."*

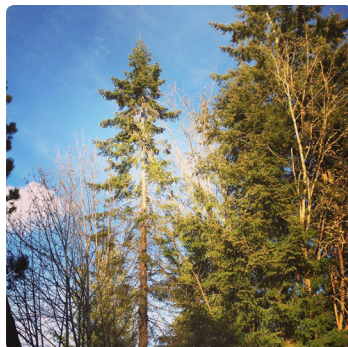
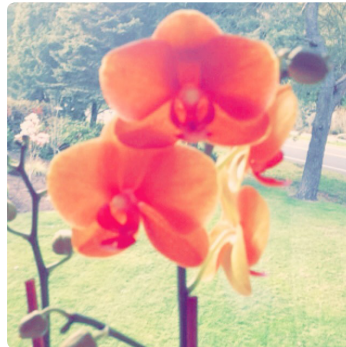
### How do you choose the captions?

*"I try to make them clever or short. But I'm not that clever."*

### Are likes important to you?

*"At the beginning, I was kind of obsessed. Now I'm better with that.... My little brother got really obsessed with how many likes I got, so [I saw how silly it was]."*

Instagram posts by Interviewee 1.



## Sample responses from Interviewee 2

### Tell me about how you use Instagram.

*"I don't use it to keep up with my friends. I use it to keep up with producers and DJs.... Most of my friends use it to keep up with each other, but I use iMessage and Snapchat for that."*

### How do you decide when you'd like to post a photo?

*"I don't have any standards, whenever I feel like it. When a big thing that happens."*

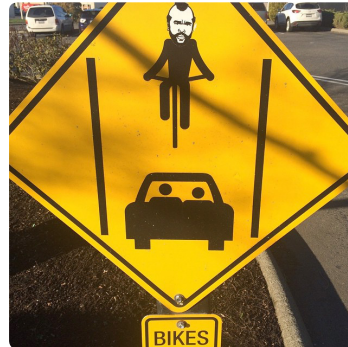
### How do you feel about filters?

*"On certain photos they look cool, but they're unnecessary on others. They can look weird on a selfie. When the quality of the photos are bad, they can be helpful."*

### Have you ever deleted a photo?

*"Twice. I don't know why. They were dumb photos. When I first got a phone, I was taking pictures of everything, but [some of them were] not Instagram-worthy."*

Instagram posts by Interviewee 2.



## Sample responses from Interviewee 3

### Tell me about how you use Instagram.

*"I scroll through Home and like all of the pictures."*

### What kinds of things do you normally post?

*"I don't post very often. I mostly post art. If I'm proud of the art, I'll probably post it."*

### How do you choose the captions?

*"I barely write nothing. When I do write something, I don't have a theme for that."*

### Have you ever deleted any photos?

*"I have. It was old artwork that I didn't want up there anymore. I change art styles. I improve a lot. I kinda wanted to delete other photos."*

Instagram posts by Interviewee 3.



## Sample responses from Interviewee 4

### How do you decide when you'd like to post a photo?

*"When I do something I think is cool or funny."*

### How do you choose the captions?

*"I try to write a funny caption."*

### What's your philosophy on filters?

*"I don't really use filters. At first [I thought]: 'this is cool,' but now it doesn't make that big of a difference."*

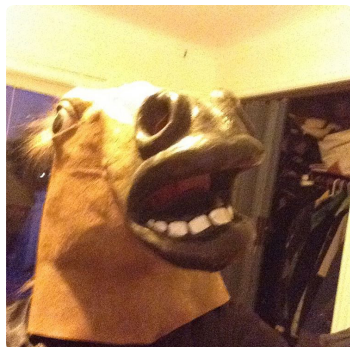
### When you see photos on Instagram, do you ever compare yourself to other people?

*"Yeah, probably. Not often, but sometimes I'll think 'oh yeah, I wish that was something I could do.'"*

### Can you remember a time when that happened?

*"One guy who used to go to my school got new shoes."*

Instagram posts by Interviewee 4.



## Sample responses from Interviewee 5

### What do you like about Instagram?

*"It's a way for me to see what my friends are up to, and for my friends to see what I'm up to."*

### When you open Instagram, what do you usually do?

*"I got to all my recent posts. I check to see what my friends like.... I comment sometimes. I tag my friends often. I like a lot of [photos]. I usually like my friends posts. I like a lot of piano posts."*

### Are there unspoken rules about commenting?

*"If somebody tags you, you usually comment something back. You don't comment that much.... Maybe it makes you seem like you're on Instagram 24/7 if you comment too much."*

### How has your life changed now that you're on Instagram?

*"I don't think a lot. I think it's useful. I can see what my friends are doing. I don't think it's changed much.... I don't think it's corrupted me. I like having it more than not having it."*

Instagram posts by Interviewee 5.



# Insights from Research

## Secondary research

- 1 MLE is a useful way to dissect complex issues in a way kids understand and enjoy.
- 2 MLE lessons combine (1) viewing examples of media and (2) asking kids to make their own media.
- 3 MLE strategies apply to social media too – and they're particularly applicable because kids are *already* both consumers and producers of social media.
- 4 CML's Core Concepts provide a framework for teaching lessons around all kinds of media
- 5 Using real-world content in MLE lessons is preferred.
- 6 There are a variety of engaging ways that media literacy strategies can be integrated into classroom lessons
- 7 In addition to making and viewing, most media literacy lessons also include a reflection step that concludes the lesson.
- 8 MLE lesson plans often put complex ideas (like construction) in context by using a model or anchor that's specific to the lesson.
- 9 Instagram is a popular platform with adolescents.
- 10 Since Instagram is a visual medium, it provides opportunities for making and viewing.

## Interviews

- 1 Kids consume Instagram in a variety of ways. The boys interviewed use Instagram primarily for entertainment. But for the girls, Instagram is a mixture of entertainment and communicating with friends.
- 2 Kids post to Instagram in different ways. The boys tend to post things that are more spontaneous or intentionally humorous. The girls' posts tend to be more considered. Some of the kids post a few times a week, while some post only a few times a month (or less). Some kids post photos of themselves or friends. One of her own artwork.
- 3 Instagram is an important part of these kids' social lives. Even if they don't post often, they used Instagram several times a week to view other people's posts.
- 4 Middle schoolers enjoy talking about why and how they post photos. In the last section of the interview (looking at Instagram posts), kids were especially engaged and ready to offer details.
- 5 The interviewees were generally knowledgeable and comfortable talking about Instagram norms around editing, sharing, commenting, liking, and tagging friends.
- 6 Of the kids interviewed, none could recall a dedicated lesson about social media at school.

# Solution

## Opportunity/Goals

- 1 Apply MLE strategies (making and viewing media) to a classroom lesson around social media photos.
- 2 Use CML's Core Concepts as the critical framework, customized to social media photos.
- 3 Integrate Instagram ("real-world") content to connect classroom concepts to kids' everyday social media experiences.

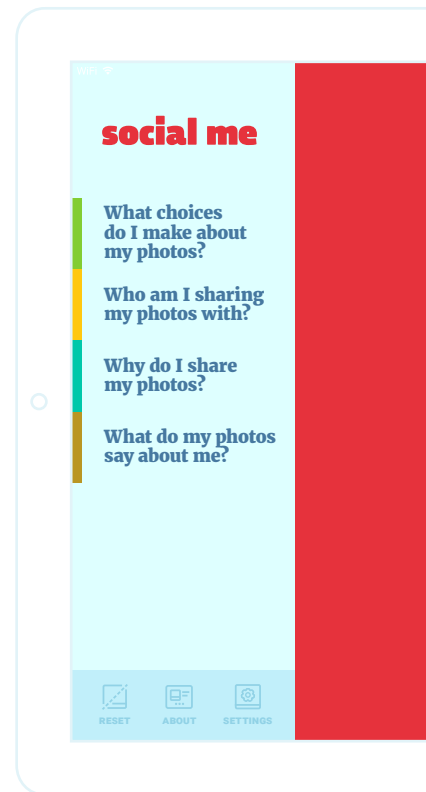
## Summary

**social me** is a social media literacy intervention for middle school classrooms. It combines lesson plans for teachers and a companion tablet app for students.

The lesson plans and app are dependent on each other. Teachers use the lessons to introduce concepts and facilitate discussions. In between, students use the app to complete photo tasks that then feed back into group discussions and individual reflections.

The solution builds directly from MLE's strategies. Throughout the lessons, students take new photos and import existing Instagram posts – making and viewing media. Although the app uses Instagram as a platform for importing content, the ideas from the lessons are relevant to any situation when students might share photos (Snapchat, Twitter, Facebook, Vine, kik, texting, etc.).

Tablet app menu



# Lesson plans for teachers

The lessons (and corresponding tasks in the app) are divided into four units using CML's Core Concepts. Each unit is matched to a single concept. (Authorship is the first and most important concept, and it's addressed in all four units.)

The lesson plans include step-by-step instructions for teaching the four units. Each unit contains 4–5 lessons: 1–2 lessons that introduce the unit's concepts, and 3 lessons that use the app to explore the concepts further.

Although the lessons use CML's framework, the questions and activities are written exclusively for **social me**, applying the general media literacy concepts to social media photos specifically.

## **UNIT I: What choices do I make about my photos?**

Questions about creative techniques: the content captured by the camera and effects applied after a photo is shot. Based on CML Concept #2 (Format).

## **UNIT II: Who am I sharing my photos with?**

Questions about likes and comments, and how audience affects the content of photos. Based on CML Concept #3 (Audience).

## **UNIT III: Why do I share my photos?**

Questions about the reasons people choose to share photos, and the techniques used to communicate that purpose. Based on CML Concept #5 (Purpose)

## **UNIT IV: What do my photos say about me?**

Questions about how students' values and goals might be reflected in their photos. Based on CML Concept #4 (Content).

*I chose to swap the order of Concepts #4 and #5 because UNIT IV is written as a concluding lesson that asks students to consider all three previous units.*

**See complete lesson plans in *Appendix*.**

**Lesson plan unit overview page**

*UNIT 1: What choices do I make about my photos?*

See complete lesson plans in *Appendix*.

**UNIT 1**

- Discovery
- Introduction
- 1 Challenge**
- 2 Discussion**
- 3 Reflection**

## What choices do I make about my photos?

**This unit explores the 'language' of photos on social media.**

A photo communicates visually, through the content captured by the camera and the effects applied after it's taken.

When students take photos, they make choices about **who and what to capture** in the frame (and what to leave out). Plus, they choose **how, when, and where to capture it**. After the photo is taken, smartphone apps give them additional choices for editing the content. Instagram popularized the use of filters, but it includes lots of additional editing tools (cropping, brightness, contrast, saturation, color, sharpness, and more).

All together, **kids make dozens of decisions about photos**. They're communicating through a creative, meaningful, and complex language that's worth taking a closer look at.

**Students will...**

- identify the choices they make when editing and sharing photos.
- consider the differences between idealized and not idealized photos.
- explore the relationship between photos and 'real life'.

**Vocabulary**

- **social media**: apps and websites used to share words and photos with other people (texting, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, YiKYaK, AfterSchool etc.).
- **idealized photo**: captures a moment in the best possible way.
- **frame**: a photo's edges.
- **crop**: showing only part of a photo.

**CML Core Concepts**

- **format**: Messages are constructed using a creative language.
- **authorship**: All media messages are constructed.

**Preparation**

- 1** verify that each student will have access to a tablet with the **social me** app installed.
  - 2** familiarize yourself with the tasks the students will perform within the app for this unit.
  - 3** prepare to show the idealized and not idealized photo examples [provided].
- (optional) prepare a tablet-to-display adapter if you plan to show student lessons on screen.

**Lesson plan  
lesson page**

UNIT 1: What  
choices do I make  
about my photos?

Lesson 1

See complete lesson  
plans in Appendix.

UNIT 1

– Introduction

- 1 Challenge
- 2 Discussion
- 3 Reflection

## Comparing idealized photos

### Part A

- 1 **Instruct** students to use the app (**1: Challenge**) for the next steps.

**The app asks** students to take a two photos (one idealized, one not idealized) of a randomly-generated classroom topic (e.g. "a clock", "a chair", "a computer", "a phone", "homework", etc.).

**The app allows** students to take these photos, crop them, use filters, and label them as either 'idealized' or 'not idealized'.

Since topics are randomly-generated (from a list) most students will be taking pictures of different topics.

- 2 **Instruct** students where they're allowed to take photos (as many locations as is practical and appropriate for your class).

More locations (classroom, hallway, outside) should lead to a better variety of photos (and a more meaningful discussion later).

- 3 **Give** them a few minutes to take photos.

### Part B

- 4 **Ask** students to show the photos they've taken — either one student to the full class (if showing on a display), or in small groups.

**The app displays** the student's topic and the two photos they've taken, to help students make comparisons.

- 5 **Ask** the student showing the photos:  
*What choices did you make about what to include in the photo?  
What editing techniques did you use?*

- 6 **Ask** the class or group:  
*What differences do you see between the 'idealized' and 'not idealized' photos?  
Have the editing techniques changed the way the topic feels?  
Which of the two photos do you like more? Why?*

- 7 **Repeat** for as many examples as you have time for.

# Tablet app for students

Students use the app during class to participate in the lessons. Each unit has three distinct activities that utilize the app:

## Challenges

Students take new photos to apply the CML Concept in context. Challenges fulfill the MLE strategy of **making media**.

## Discussions

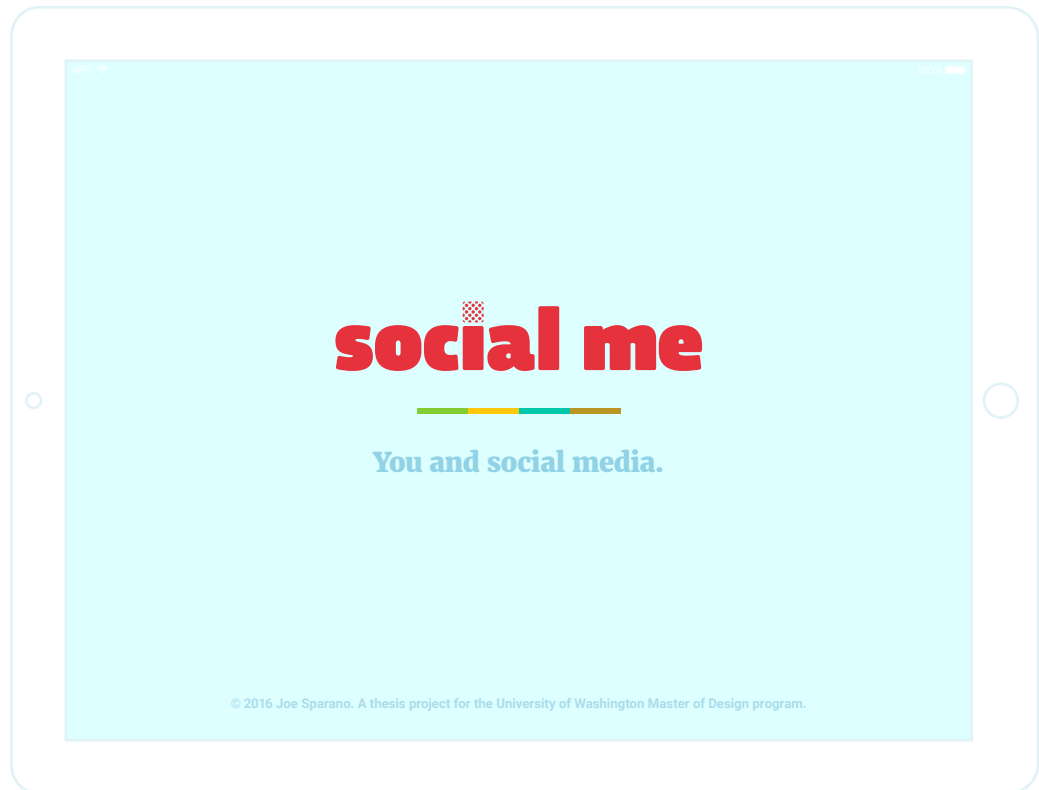
Students explore the concept with the class using photos already shared on Instagram. Discussions fulfill the MLE strategy of **viewing examples of media**.

## Reflections

Individually, students answer questions about the concept. Reflections fulfill two goals: a method for teachers to **assess students' learning**, plus an opportunity for students to **consider the concepts more personally**.

For some questions, students can optionally attach photos (from lessons or imported from Instagram) to reflect on specific choices around those photos.

Tablet app splash screen

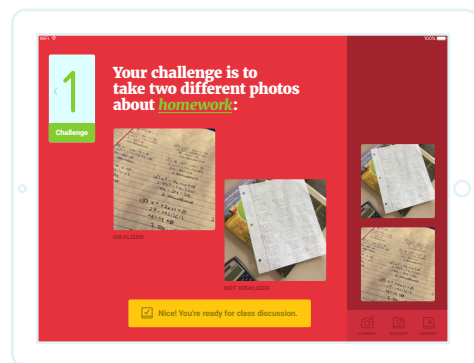
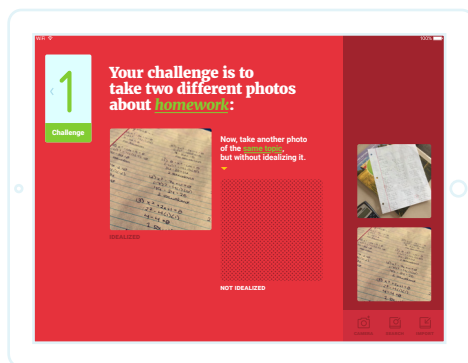
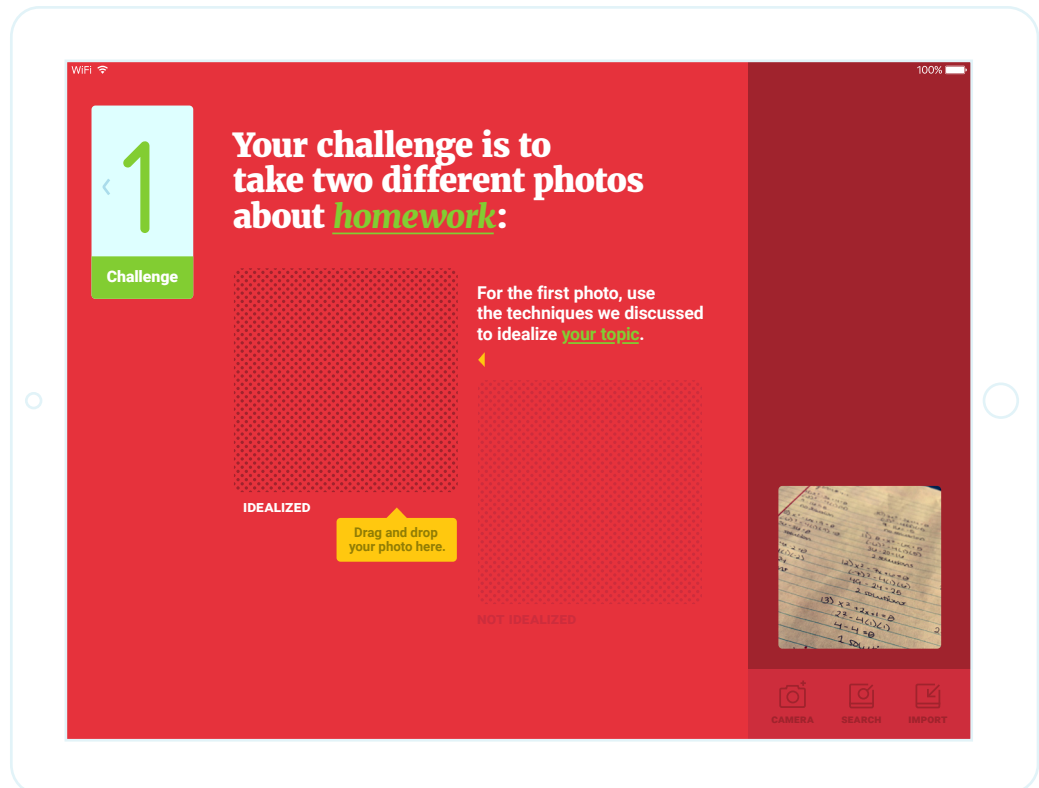
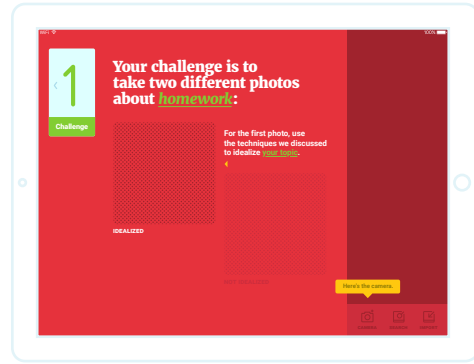
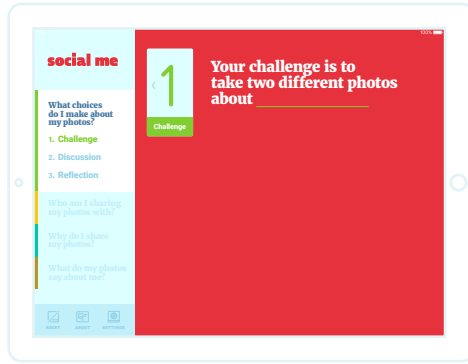


### Tablet app Challenge

UNIT 1: What choices do I make about my photos?

#### Lesson 1

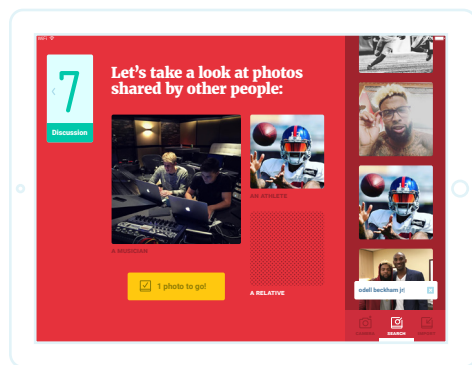
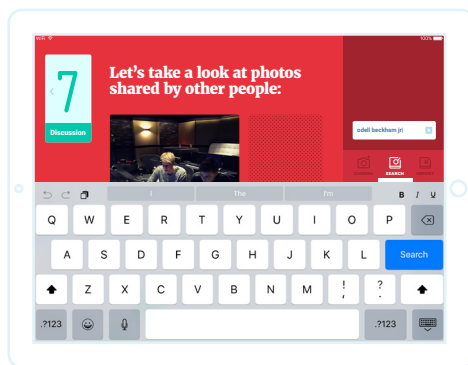
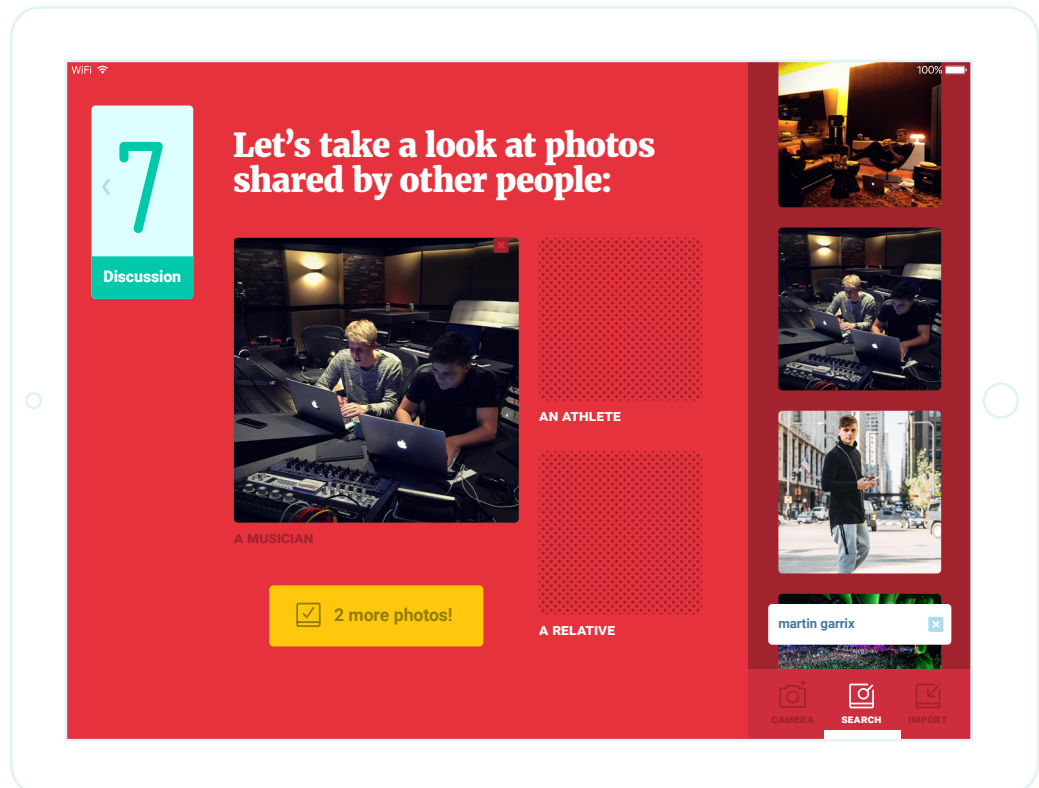
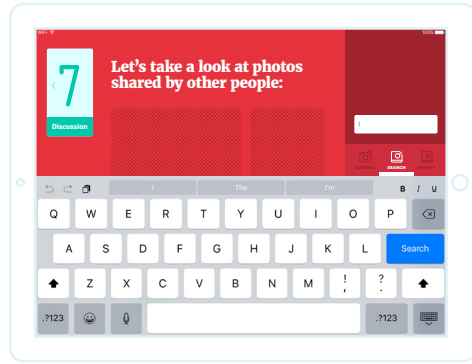
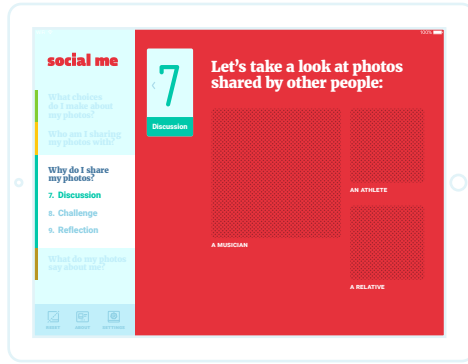
The app asks students to take a two photos of a randomly-generated classroom topic and allows students to take these photos, crop them, use filters, and label them as either *idealized* or not *idealized*.



**Tablet app**  
**Discussion**

UNIT III: Why do I share my photos?  
Lesson 7

The app asks students import three photos from Instagram shared by different authors in three categories.

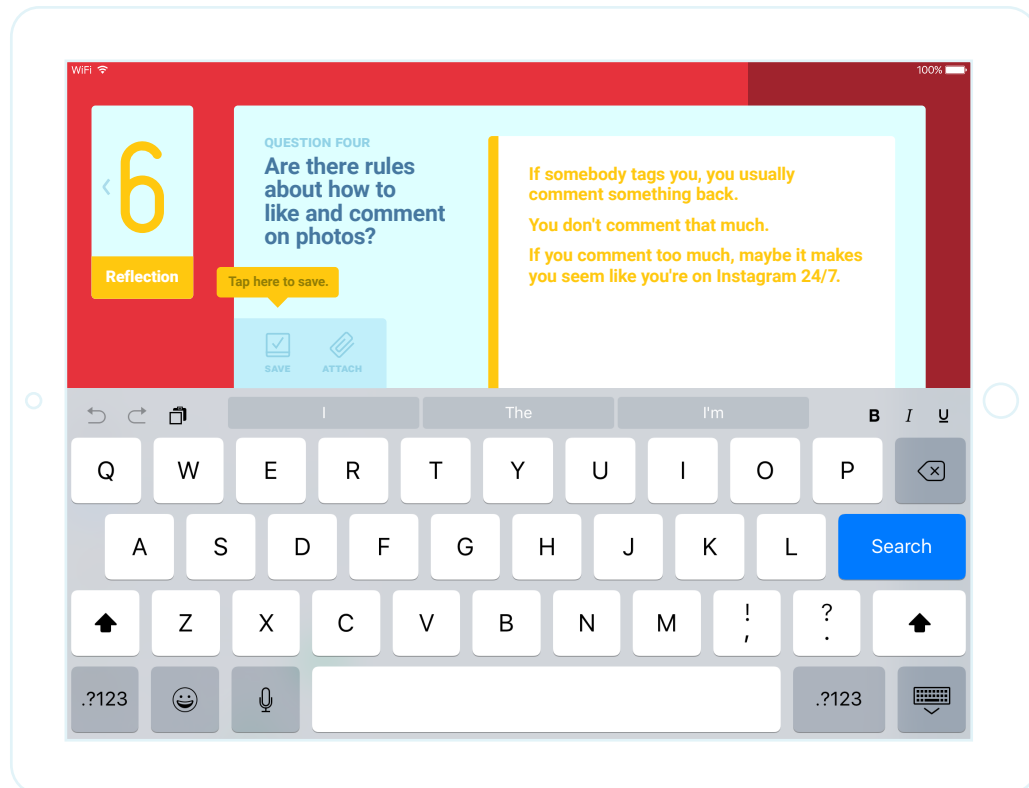
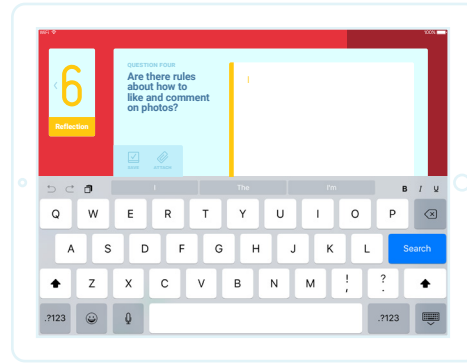


**Tablet app  
Reflection**

UNIT II: Who am I sharing my photos with?

Lesson 6

The app asks students to write reflections about audience.



# How the solution responds to research

- 1** **social me** is designed for tablets because many schools have tablets available for classrooms, and although many students may have their own phone or tablet, relying on the school's devices means every student has an equal opportunity to participate.
- 2** Making use of Instagram's API integrates "real-world" content, which CML recommends.
- 3** Based on my review of existing media literacy lessons, the **social me** lesson plans are designed to be printed — using letter-sized sheets and without any text or images that bleed off the edge.
- 4** All of the content in the app screens (shown above) comes from interviews and prototype sessions for this project.
- 5** The questions in the lesson plans are based on the template questions in the CML book *Literacy for the 21st Century* — but they're customized specifically for social media photos.
- 6** Additional questions in the lesson plans are from questions I asked during the interviews, which was a good opportunity to test and refine their effectiveness.
- 7** Although 50% of American teens use Instagram, that's 50% who don't. So, even though the lessons use Instagram as a content platform, **social me** doesn't require kids to have Instagram accounts or have even used photo-sharing apps before.
- 8** Since Reflections allow students to optionally import their own Instagram posts, but there may be students in class without Instagram accounts: there are two sets of Instagram questions (for students with and without accounts).
- 9** In the lesson plan analysis, I found that MLE lessons often put complex ideas (like construction) in context by using a model or anchor that's specific to the lesson. During the secondary research phase (see *Self-Presentation and Idealization*), I discovered that idealized photos might be a good anchor for contextualizing how photos are constructed.

# Prototyping

## Overview

I used the interviews as an opportunity to test two aspects of the project:

- 1 Through the interview questions, I was able to test kids' interest in answering questions around Instagram photos (see *Interviews*).
- 2 Through photo challenges, I was able to test kids' ability to apply the concept of 'idealization'.

As we talked through their Instagram posts, I asked the interviewees to indicate whether they considered each of their posts to be idealized or not. At the end of

three interviews, I asked the kids if they could help by taking alternate versions of 4–6 of their existing Instagram posts. If they indicated that an existing photo was ideal, they should take a version that wasn't idealized, and vice versa. I also prototyped the challenge in *Lesson 1*.

To introduce what an idealized photo might look like, I showed examples I had collected (next page) and defined an ideal photo as: "the best possible version of a moment from your life."

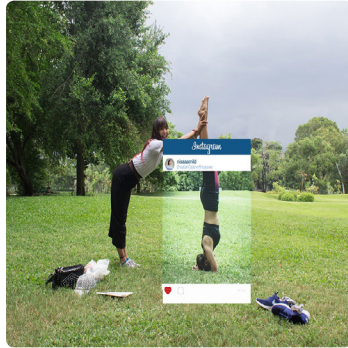
## Insights from prototyping

- 1 Generally, the interviewees had no trouble understanding the concept of idealization and were already familiar with a distinction between idealized and less idealized photos (although not necessarily the vocabulary).
- 2 The interviewees didn't seem to mind calling their own photos idealized
- 3 They seemed to enjoy the challenge of taking new photos based on an existing photo and talking about their process.

## Example *idealized* photos shown to interviewees

**Described as  
"cropped something out"**

Champoo, Baritone.  
"Photographer Shows The Reality Behind Instagram Photos In Eye-Opening Series." The Huffington Post UK, September 19, 2015. [http://huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/09/19/chompoo-baritone-instagram\\_n\\_8162652.html](http://huffingtonpost.co.uk/2015/09/19/chompoo-baritone-instagram_n_8162652.html)



**Described as  
"taken at the perfect time"**

Dalls, Dirk (@dirka).  
Instagram. Photograph.



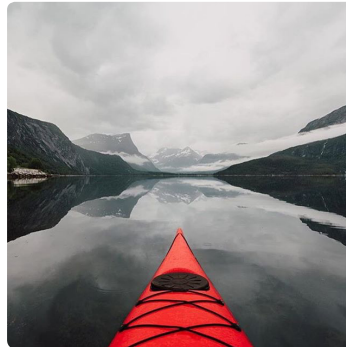
**Described as  
"didn't happen naturally"**

Boni, Flaviana (@flavianaboni).  
Instagram. Photograph.



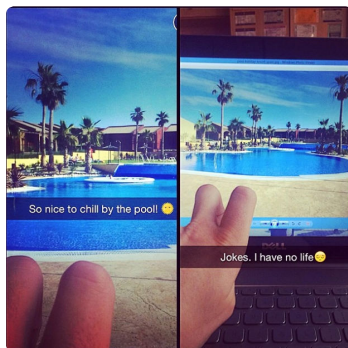
**Described as  
"perfectly aligned"**

Taipale, Daniel (@dansmoe).  
Instagram. Photograph.



**Described as  
"looks real, but isn't"**

Oshry, Claudia (@girlwithnojob).  
Instagram. Photograph.



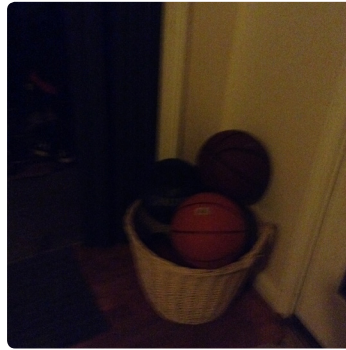
I took some liberties with these examples. Photos were selected based on (1) the definition of idealized photos as "enhanced" in some way (see *Self-Presentation and Idealization*) and (2) clear evidence of construction (framing and editing).

**Sample *idealized + not idealized* photo pairs**  
*original from Instagram*

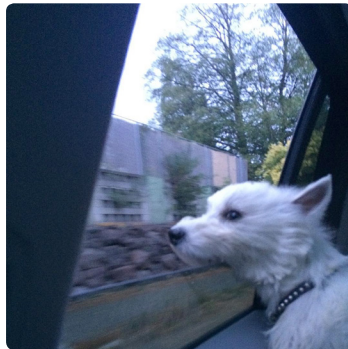
***Idealized (left) and not idealized photos by Interviewee 2.***  
*Original was idealized.*



***Idealized (left) and not idealized photos by Interviewee 4.***  
*Original was idealized.*

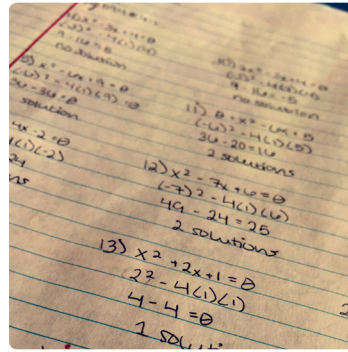
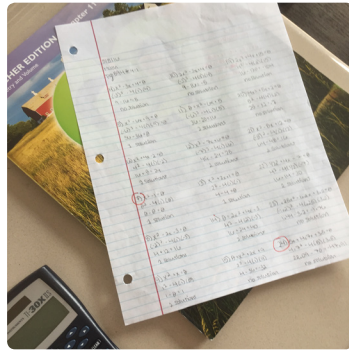


***Not idealized (left) and idealized photos by Interviewee 6.***  
*Original was not idealized.*

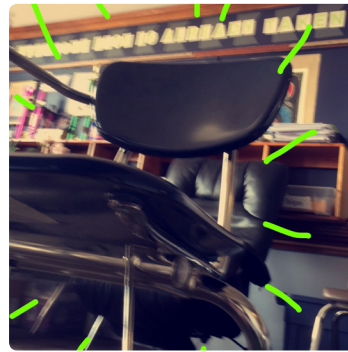


**Sample idealized + not idealized photo pairs**  
 both taken as a prototype of Lesson 1

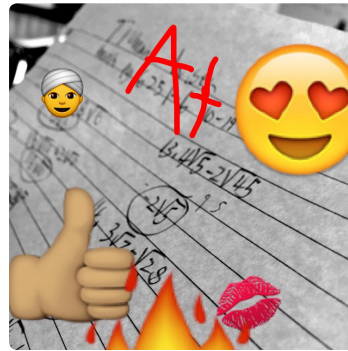
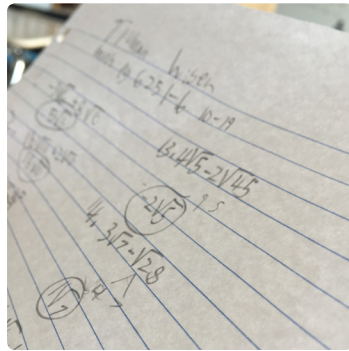
Not idealized (left) and idealized photos of "homework" by Interviewee 2.



Not idealized (left) and idealized photos of "a chair" by Interviewee 2.



Not idealized (left) and idealized photos of "homework" by Interviewee 4.



# Conclusion

There's a legitimate opportunity to bring students' everyday social media experiences into the classroom, and this was a fun challenge. I wanted **social me** to mirror the experience of taking and viewing photos — as authentically as possible. But, I also wanted to provide a safe space for students to explore the concepts of the lessons.

In other words, **social me** serves as an important intermediary between the potential of the classroom and the complexity of being an early adolescent online and offline. My hope is that this solution provides kids the opportunity to be honest about their thoughts and feelings around social media — and a deeper understanding of the media messages that saturate their lives.

## Next steps

Moving forward with the project, I'd develop an interactive version of the app (based on the screens shown) and test it in a few middle school classrooms. Recruiting middle school teachers to actually teach from the lessons would provide a complete test of the project — both the lesson plans and the app.

The lesson plans are complete and ready to teach. But as it's designed now, the app is missing key features needed for classroom use:

- 1 Lesson 2–5 and 8–12 (these screens need to be built, although they share the basic interactions of Lessons 1, 6, and 7)
- 2 the search results in Lesson 7 should allow students to select a user's account first (based on the search), then show the photos posted by that user.
- 3 an interface to reset the app (erasing photos and reflections), since students may not be using the same device from one lesson to the next
- 4 an interface for attaching a photo to a Reflection
- 5 an editing interface that mimics Instagram's tools more closely (filters and effects). The tablet's built-in photo software will likely have many of these features, but ideally, **social me's** tools would match an interface that students are familiar with.
- 6 an interface to log into Instagram if student's choose to import photos from their own private accounts.
- 7 (optionally) a simple PIN/password system that would allow students privacy in their Reflections, but would still allow teachers to access those Reflections for assessment.
- 8 As shown, the app screens are built in Adobe Illustrator and animated with Adobe After Effects. To be used as designed, the app would need to be developed (on iOS and Android platforms) — and the entire project would need a method for distribution to schools. Both felt outside the scope of thesis.

# Reflection

- 1 I purchased an iPad for this project. Every step of the way, I tested typography, colors, icons, etc. on the iPad, and it was really helpful in decision making. It was difficult to gauge the success of those choices until I saw them in context.
- 2 Designing for kids added a level of complication that I hadn't anticipated. Parents are busy, but kids are, too. Scheduling calls meant finding a time that both were free. It helped that my schedule was so flexible, and I was available at essentially any time that worked for them. Rightfully, there are barriers in place to protect kids from strangers asking semi-personal questions about their social media lives, and I was careful to treat that situation with the sensitivity it deserved. For each interview, I talked to parents first and then asked them to communicate the details of the project (and the request for the interview) to their kids. It was helpful to have Annabelle's help in finding families, connecting me with parents who I knew were interested in being a part of the project.
- 3 I really enjoyed the interviews. The conversations were fun, interesting, and full of insights about growing up and how social media fits into that process. There's an incredible amount of depth to this topic, and these interviews are only a small slice of it. Admittedly, it's an odd thing for kids to be talking to a stranger/grad-student about the decision-making behind their Instagram posts. But they seemed to enjoy the conversations and were eager to talk about their social media experiences.
- 4 Throughout the project, I was careful to protect the identities of the interviewees. For the app, the exhibit, and this documentation, I have used the interviewees' real Instagram posts. But I've intentionally selected example photos without names or faces.
- 5 An undercurrent of MLE is helping kids see that many versions of 'real life' that are presented to them have been edited. This is especially applicable to social media, where kids are often experiencing the edited lives of their peers. I started the project thinking that idealized photos on social media were probably harmful to kids, since it establishes a manipulated baseline for what life is like offline. But after reading about idealization, I'm interested in the positive dimensions of what idealizing a particular photo can mean. UNIT IV touches on this briefly, but there's potential to build a collection of lessons just around what a students' idealized photos represent — what changes they want to see in the world and goals they might set for themselves. As a design student, I've been particularly interested in the importance of goals in the design process, and I'm curious how idealized photos could translate to helping kids' design their lives.

# Acknowledgments

## **I'd like to thank the following people who helped support this project:**

My committee: Annabelle Gould, Jo Langford, and Tad Hirsch for tons of valuable feedback.

The interviewees: Alyssa, Ava, Ben, Eleanor, Ella, Mason, Olivia, and Truman for being willing to share — and their parents for finding the time and making space in their schedules for this project.

Fellow students: Geoff Gray, Chad Hall, Jaewon Hwang, Josh Klekamp, Catherine Lim, Erin Wilson for even more feedback.

Linda Norlen, others teachers and UW faculty who provided additional guidance along the way.

And animator/generous human being Bryan Findell for bringing the app to life.

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# Appendix

# social me



Social media literacy for middle school classrooms

## LESSON PLANS

# Introduction

## The Common Sense Census: Media Use by Tweens and Teens.

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**Conklin, Tom.** Social & Emotional Learning: Essential Lessons for Student Success. Scholastic, 2014.

## Fuligni, Andrew, Jacquelynne Eccles, Bonnie Barber, and Peggy Clements.

"Early Adolescent Peer Orientation and Adjustment during High School." *Developmental Psychology* 37, no. 1 (2001): 28-36.

These lessons are intended for middle school classrooms (6th–8th graders, kids ages 10–14). It's an important time for students, developmentally – full of physical, psychological, and social change. It's the age when kids start to feel like adults: in their physical features, in new abstract ways of thinking, and through more complex interactions with larger social groups. It's a time when their decisions begin to have long-term implications. And as a transition to adulthood, it's the age when they begin to recognize themselves as individuals.

## It's complicated, and these changes are intensified by social media.

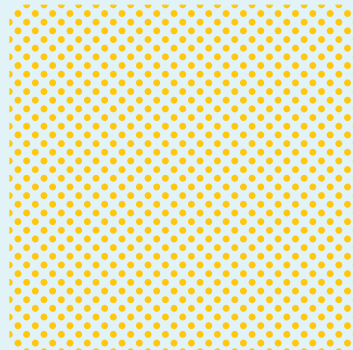
Kids in middle school today have grown up with social media. They were born between 2001–2003 and have spent most of their lives in a world with Facebook (which launched in 2004).

Not surprisingly, social media is an important part of their lives, and middle school is the age when many kids share their first messages online. The percent of American kids who use social media every day changes significantly between tween

years (8- to 12-year-olds) and teen (13- to 18-year-olds) – from 15% to 58% COMMON SENSE CENSUS.

Research shows that social media has both positive and negative social-emotional effects for people of all ages. **But middle schoolers' developmental changes make their experiences online unique:**

- Early adolescents tend to be egocentric, which can "lead to painful self-consciousness and harsh self-criticism" CONKLIN.
- Compared to any other age, their behaviors and emotions are particularly susceptible to influence from peers FULIGNI, ET AL.
- They're also gaining the ability to think idealistically, and "the gap between a teen's 'ideal self' and what they perceive to be their actual self can be a the source of a lot of angst" CONKLIN.
- And although these kids have an intense sense of likes and dislikes, they often fail to think critically about those choices IBID.



# The framework

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## Media literacy education

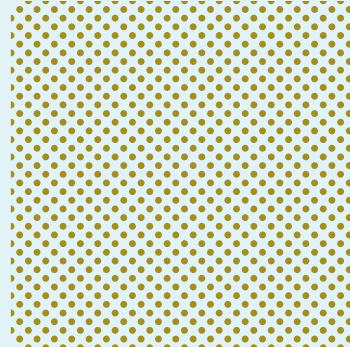
Media literacy education (MLE) is a set of strategies for teaching kids how to ask **critical questions about the media messages that saturate their lives.**

The strategies were originally developed around traditional media (e.g. advertising, TV, movies, music, music videos, video games, magazines, etc.), but the methods work for social media, too (e.g. Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, Tumblr, Yik Yak, AfterSchool, etc.). With traditional media, kids are consumers. But with social media, **kids are both consumers and creators** — compounding the importance of media literacy lessons in schools.

The overriding tenet of media literacy education is that **"all media messages are constructed"**

JOLLS + THOMAN. Every media message is the result of a series of decisions, and these decisions are influenced by the perspective and goals of the people constructing them.

MLE is a useful way to dissect these complex ideas in a way kids understand and enjoy. Media literacy lessons work in two ways: by viewing examples of existing media messages, and then asking kids to construct their own. And it's through this hands-on construction that kids learn to deconstruct the messages around them.



## Idealized photos

Within the context of social media, construction often means self-presentation — the ways people choose to "present information about the self to others" MICHIKYAN, ET AL.

It's normal for adolescents to experiment with their identities, which is true off- and online. But the distance between kids and their audience on social media provides more flexibility in how kids can present themselves MANAGO, ET AL.

When kids self-present in a way that reflects "aspirations, hopes, wishes," that presentation is considered "idealized." MICHIKYAN, ET AL.

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# How social me works

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2015.” Pew Research  
Center, April 2015.

Because the foundation of media literacy education is a combination of making media and viewing examples of media from others, a social media literacy intervention would allow kids to take photos and view real Instagram posts.

**social me** builds directly from these two strategies. Throughout the lessons, students take their own photos and import existing Instagram posts, helping connect classroom concepts to kids’ everyday social media experiences.

These lessons focus on Instagram. Half of all American kids ages 13–17 use Instagram (a group that includes many middle schoolers). And for those kids, Instagram is second only to Facebook in popularity  
LENHART. Conveniently, since Instagram is a visual platform, it’s also full of opportunities to discuss, interpret, and reflect on decision-making around framing, editing, and visual language.

Even though these lessons focus on Instagram, the concepts will generally translate to any situation where students are sharing photos: other social sharing apps (like Snapchat), messaging apps (like kik), or texting.

**social me** requires active participation from students. So, in addition to the lesson plans for teachers (which you’re holding in your hand), students use a companion tablet app in class during the lessons. Using the app, students take and import photos for class discussion and individual reflections.

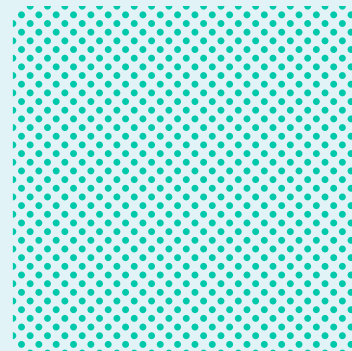
The lessons are divided into four units. Each unit is matched to a **Core Concept from the Center for Media Literacy: format, audience, purpose, and content**. (Authorship is the first and most important Concept, and it’s addressed in all four units.)

Each of the units includes three lessons using the app:

**Challenges:** students take new photos to apply the concept in context.

**Discussions:** students explore the concept with the class using photos already shared on Instagram.

**Reflections:** individually, students answer questions about the concept.



## UNIT I

- Discovery
- Introduction
- 1 Challenge
- 2 Discussion
- 3 Reflection

# What choices do I make about my photos?

## This unit explores the ‘language’ of photos on social media.

A photo communicates visually, through the content captured by the camera and the effects applied after it’s taken.

When students take photos, they make choices about **who and what to capture** in the frame (and what to leave out). Plus, they choose **how, when, and where to capture it**. After the photo is taken, smartphone apps give them additional choices for editing the content. Instagram popularized the use of filters, but it includes lots of additional editing tools (cropping, brightness, contrast, saturation, color, sharpness, and more).

All together, **kids make dozens of decisions about photos**.

They’re communicating through a creative, meaningful, and complex language that’s worth taking a closer look at.

### Students will...

- identify the choices they make when editing and sharing photos.
- consider the differences between idealized and not idealized photos.
- explore the relationship between photos and ‘real life’.

### Vocabulary

- **social media**: apps and websites used to share words and photos with other people (texting, Instagram, Snapchat, Facebook, Twitter, YikYak, AfterSchool etc.).
- **idealized photo**: captures a moment in the best possible way.
- **frame**: a photo’s edges.
- **crop**: showing only part of a photo.

### CML Core Concepts

- **format**: Messages are constructed using a creative language.
- **authorship**: All media messages are constructed.

### Preparation

- 1 verify that each student will have access to a tablet with the **social me** app installed.
  - 2 familiarize yourself with the tasks the students will perform within the app for this unit.
  - 3 prepare to show the idealized and not idealized photo examples [provided].
- (optional) prepare a tablet-to-display adapter if you plan to show student lessons on screen.

# Defining idealized photos

## – Introduction

- 1 Challenge
- 2 Discussion
- 3 Reflection

### Part A

- 1 **Define** the vocabulary term **social media**.
- 2 **Ask:** What kinds of moments from your life do you share on social media?

#### EXAMPLES

*“doing something fun”  
“an exciting thing happens”  
“something I like”*

*Make a list of these moments/criteria on the board.*

*Save this list for use in UNIT III.*

- 3 **Ask:** After you’ve taken a photo, what choices do you make about it before sharing them?

#### EXAMPLES

*“cropping” “using filters”  
“rotating” “caption”*

*Make a list of these choices on the board.*

- 4 **Ask:** Do social media photos capture ‘real life’?

*The goal of this question is not to come to a consensus about social media’s authenticity, just to open students up to thinking about the relationship between moments in their lives and the shared photos of those moments.*

- 5 **Tell the class:** Today, we’re going to explore the relationship between moments in your life and the photos of those moments on social media.

### Part B

- 6 **Define** the vocabulary term **idealized photo**.

*During the following discussion, avoid suggesting that (1) idealized photos are inferior or (2) that idealized photos aren’t ‘real’.*

*Even though ‘ideal’ generally carries a negative bias and ‘real’ a positive bias, students may interpret them in different ways.*

*We’ll discuss another dimension of idealized photos in UNIT IV.*

- 7 **Ask** students to identify which photos have been idealized.
- 8 **Ask** students how they’re deciding making their decisions.

**Make** a list of their criteria on the board.

#### IDEALIZED EXAMPLES

*“cropped something out”  
“used a filter”  
“waited until just the right moment”  
“didn’t happen naturally”  
“perfectly aligned”  
“didn’t actually happen,  
“but you wish it did”  
“taken multiple times”*

#### NOT IDEALIZED EXAMPLES

*“nothing important cropped out”  
“no filter used”  
“snapped spontaneously”  
“happened naturally”  
“not worried about alignment”  
“actually happened”  
“taken just once”*

# Comparing idealized photos

## – Introduction

- 1 Challenge
- 2 Discussion
- 3 Reflection

### Part A

- 1 **Instruct** students to use the app (**1: Challenge**) for the next steps.

*The app asks students to take a two photos (one idealized, one not idealized) of a randomly-generated classroom topic (e.g. “a clock”, “a chair”, “a computer”, “a phone”, “homework”, etc.).*

*The app allows students to take these photos, crop them, use filters, and label them as either ‘idealized’ or ‘not idealized’.*

*Since topics are randomly-generated (from a list) most students will be taking pictures of different topics.*

- 2 **Instruct** students where they’re allowed to take photos (as many locations as is practical and appropriate for your class).  
*More locations (classroom, hallway, outside) should lead to a better variety of photos (and a more meaningful discussion later).*
- 3 **Give** them a few minutes to take photos.

### Part B

- 4 **Ask** students to show the photos they’ve taken — either one student to the full class (if showing on a display), or in small groups.

*The app displays the student’s topic and the two photos they’ve taken, to help students make comparisons.*

- 5 **Ask** the student showing the photos:  
*What choices did you make about what to include in the photo?  
What editing techniques did you use?*
- 6 **Ask** the class or group:  
*What differences do you see between the ‘idealized’ and ‘not idealized’ photos?  
Have the editing techniques changed the way the topic feels?  
Which of the two photos do you like more? Why?*
- 7 **Repeat** for as many examples as you have time for.

## UNIT I

# Taking idealized photos

### – Introduction

- 1 Challenge
- 2 Discussion
- 3 Reflection

### Part A

- 1 **Define** the vocabulary terms **frame** and **crop**.
- 2 **Instruct** students to use the app (**2: Discussion**) for the next steps.  
*The app asks students to import two photos from Instagram that feel like 'real life' and two that don't.*  
*Students can import photos from any public account. They can also browse Instagram's Explore page to view the current top posts.*
- 3 **Give** them a few minutes to take photos.

### Part B

- 4 **Ask** students to show one photo at a time they've imported — either one student to the full class (if showing on a display), or in small groups.  
*The app displays the student's four photos. Double-tapping a photo magnifies and isolates that photo.*
- 5 **Ask** the class or group:  
*What about this photo makes it seem like 'real life' (or not like 'real life')?*  
*Where is the camera and who is holding it?*  
*What's inside the frame of the photo?*  
*What can't you see in this photo?*  
*What might be outside the frame?*  
*What editing techniques might have been used? How do you know?*  
*Is this photo 'idealized' or 'not idealized'? Why?*
- 6 **Repeat** for as many examples as you have time for.

## UNIT I

# Reflecting on format

### – Introduction

### 1 Challenge

### 2 Discussion

### 3 Reflection

**Instruct** students to use the app (**3: Reflection**) for the next steps.

**The app asks** the student to import a photo they've posted to Instagram themselves that feels like 'real life'. Or, if students don't use Instagram, they can search for a photo from friend's account.

**The app asks** if the photo is their own or someone else's (to frame the questions accurately.)

#### **IF THE STUDENT IMPORTED THEIR OWN PHOTO:**

*What about this photo seems like 'real life'?*

*Where is the camera and who is holding it?*

*What did you choose to keep inside the frame of the photo?*

*What can't you see in this photo?  
What might be outside the frame?*

*What editing techniques did you use?*

*What did you want people to notice about the photo?*

*Is this photo 'idealized' or 'not idealized'? Why?*

#### **IF THE STUDENT IMPORTED SOMEONE ELSE'S PHOTO:**

*What about this photo seems like 'real life'?*

*Where is the camera and who is holding it?*

*What is in inside the frame of the photo?*

*What might be outside the frame? have you edited out of the photo?*

*What editing techniques might have been used? How do you know?*

*Is this photo 'idealized' or 'not idealized'? Why?*

**The app asks** the student to import a photo from Instagram (posted by anyone, including themselves) that doesn't feel like 'real life' and answer the same set of questions.

**The app asks:** *Do you think your photos on social media capture your 'real life'? (Or, if you don't use social media yourself, do you think it captures 'real life' for the people that use it?)*

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## UNIT II

– Introduction

4 Challenge

5 Discussion

6 Reflection

# Who am I sharing my photos with?

The interactivity of Instagram (the audience’s participation through likes and comments) is the ‘social’ in ‘social media’. **This unit addresses several dimensions of audience: who the audience is, their interpretations, and their responses.**

The true audience of a photo shared online is impossible to know. Instagram offers privacy options, so kids can limit the audience of their photos. But as with anything digital, **even one person who can view a photo can also share it with any audience they choose.** Additionally, each person who sees a photo **interprets it uniquely**, dependent on their own unique experiences. This unpredictability makes the audience’s response to each photo difficult to predict **(and interesting to explore).**

And finally, kid’s creative choices about their photos might be affected by the audience itself — **before the photo is shared** — in anticipation of (or in an effort to encourage) a particular response.

### Students will...

- identify who their social media audience might be.
- recognize how the decisions about their photos might be affected by the photo’s audience.
- consider how people might interpret photos differently.
- consider how likes and comments are participation.

### Vocabulary

- **audience:** the people who see a photo you’ve shared on social media.

### CML Core Concepts

- **audience:** Different people experience the same media message differently.
- **authorship:** All media messages are constructed.

### Preparation

- 1 verify that each student will have access to a tablet with the **social me** app installed.
  - 2 familiarize yourself with the tasks the students will perform within the app for this unit.
- (optional) prepare a tablet-to-display adapter if you plan to show student lessons on screen.

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## UNIT II

# Defining audience

### – Introduction

#### 4 Challenge

#### 5 Discussion

#### 6 Reflection

- 1 Ask:** Who are all of the people who could see your social media photos?
- 2 Make** a list of the responses on the board.

#### EXAMPLES

"friends"

"mom & dad"

"grandparents"

"teachers"

"other students"

*Answers will depend on students' privacy settings, but ask students to be more specific than "my followers".*

*Continue until the list feels diverse and thorough.*

- 3 Ask:** It is possible for someone to see your photos if they aren't following you?

*If students don't mention them, include "friends of friends" (if the photo has been downloaded by a friend and shared in some other way).*

- 4 Define** the vocabulary term **audience**.
- 5 Refer** to the list to show how large and complex the audience of their photos could be.
- 6 Tell the class:** Today, we're going to explore the audience of your social media photos and consider how that audience affects the content of the photos themselves.

# Taking photos for audiences

## – Introduction

### 4 Challenge

### 5 Discussion

### 6 Reflection

#### Part A

- Instruct** students to use the app (**4: Challenge**) for the next steps.

*The app asks students to take three photos – all about the same topic, but for different audiences.*

*The topics are randomly-generated from a list (something I love, something that makes me angry, etc.).*

*The audiences for all topics are this class, grandparent, a stranger.*

*Since topics are randomly-generated (from a list), students will be taking pictures of different topics.*

*The app allows students to take these photos, crop them, use filters, and mark them as either ‘idealized’ or ‘not idealized’.*

- Instruct** students where they’re allowed to take photos (as many locations as is practical and appropriate for your class).  
*More locations (classroom, hallway, outside) should lead to a better variety of photos (and a more meaningful discussion later).*
- Give** them a few minutes to take photos.

#### Part B

- Ask** students to show the photos they’ve taken – either one student to the full class (if showing on a display), or in small groups.

*The app displays the student’s photos. Double-tapping a photo magnifies and isolates that photo.*

- Ask** the group:

*If the photos have visible differences: How are these four photos different from each other?*

*Help students identify variations in: the people and objects shown and the creative techniques used.*

*If the photos are the same or very similar: How would the audiences ‘see’ similar photos in different ways?*

*Some students may not have changed the photo much or at all. This is still an opportunity to discuss how audiences may interpret the same photos in different ways.*

- Ask** the student: Did the challenges (audience or context) affect how you thought about each photo? In what ways?
- Repeat** for as many examples as you have time for.

# Interpreting as the audience

## – Introduction

### 4 Challenge

### 5 Discussion

### 6 Reflection

#### Part A

- 1 **Instruct** students to use the app (**5: Discussion**) for the next steps.

*The app asks students to import a photo from Instagram that they think is interesting.*

*Students can import photos from any public account. They can also browse Instagram’s Explore page to view the current top posts.*

*The app displays the photo, next to a text field that allows students to take notes (in Part B).*

#### Part B

- 2 **Instruct** students to partner with another student. One at a time, the students take turns showing the photo they’ve imported, and asking:

*What do you think is happening in this photo?*

*What did you notice first?*

*Do you like this photo? Why?*

*Would you consider this photo idealized? Why?*

- 3 **Write** these questions on the board.  
*The app allows students to type notes about their partner’s response.*
- 4 **Repeat** for as many student pairings as you have time for.

#### Part C

- 5 **Invite** a few volunteers to show photo they’ve imported – either one student to the full class (if showing on a display), or in small groups.

*The app displays the student’s photo. Double-tapping a photo magnifies and isolates it.*

- 6 For each example, ask each volunteer:

*Why did you choose this photo?*

*How did your partner respond to the questions?*

*Did any of your partner’s answers surprise you?*

- 7 **Ask** the class (for each example):  
*Would your answers to any of the questions have been different?*

- 8 **Repeat** for as many examples as many as you have time for.

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## UNIT II

# Reflecting on audience

– Introduction

4 Challenge

5 Discussion

6 Reflection

**Instruct** students to use the app (**6: Reflection**) for the next steps.

**The app asks** if students use Instagram (to frame the questions accurately.)

### **IF THE STUDENT USES INSTAGRAM**

*How important are likes and comments to you? Why?*

*The app asks the student to import a favorite photo they've posted recently and answer: How might your choices about this photo be different if no one could like or comment on it?*

*Have you ever posted a photo that received a comment or reaction that surprised you? (Optionally, students can import a photo as an example.)*

*Are there unspoken rules about how to like and comment on photos?*

### **IF NOT**

*Do you share photos with other social media apps? If so, how important are likes and comments to you? Why?*

*In 4: Challenge, did the audience or location change the photos you took? If so, how did they change? If not, why did you choose to use the same photos?*

*In 5: Discussion, do you think you were the intended audience for the photo you chose? How do you know?*

*In 5: Discussion, were you surprised by what your partner said about the photo you selected? Why?*

## UNIT III

- Introduction
- 7 Discussion
- 8 Challenge
- 9 Reflection

# Why do I share my photos?

**This unit addresses the question of why people choose to share photos online.** Social media gives anyone with an account a platform for communicating their own messages and persuading people of ideas – just like more powerful traditional media messages do (advertising, TV, movies, music, music videos, video games, magazines, etc.).

When students consider that **photos shared with others have intent behind them**, it's clear how choices and techniques (UNIT I) and audience (UNIT II) fit together. And considering the purpose of other people's photos is a key step in understanding CML's Core Concept #1 (which underlies all four units in **social me**): that **"all media messages are constructed"**. Photos are taken, edited, and shared (the processes of 'construction' on Instagram) because the authors have a purpose. Positive or negative, all photos shared with other people have one. Only the author can really know what the purpose was, **but it's fun to try to figure it out.**

### Students will...

- consider the purpose of other people's social media photos.
- consider the decisions and techniques made in order for a photo to communicate its purpose.
- identify the purpose of their own social media photos.

### Vocabulary

- **purpose:** the reason someone chooses to share a photo on social media.
- **author:** the person who takes and shares a photo.

### CML Core Concepts

- **purpose:** Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.
- **authorship:** All media messages are constructed.

### Preparation

- 1 verify that each student will have access to a tablet with the **social me** app installed.
  - 2 familiarize yourself with the tasks the students will perform within the app for this unit.
- (optional) prepare a tablet-to-display adapter if you plan to show student lessons on screen.

# Defining purpose

## – Introduction

### 7 Discussion

### 8 Challenge

### 9 Reflection

- 1 **Re-write** the student's answers from UNIT I: "What kinds of moments from your life do you share on social media?"

*This list is as a starting-point for understanding the underlying purposes of social media photos.*

- 2 **Tell** the class: you said that these are the kinds of moments you choose to share on social media.
- 3 **Ask:** Why do you decide to share these moments with other people?
- 4 **Write** their responses on the board

#### EXAMPLE RESPONSES

"so my friends will know what's happening with me"

"to be funny"

"to get opinions on a question"

*Students may interpret this question and the UNIT I question as the same, but they're different. If they need help, underscore the importance of 'share' and 'other people' in today's question.*

- 5 **Define** the vocabulary terms **purpose** and **author**.

- 6 **Refer** to the list on the board as examples purpose of social media photos.

- 7 **Ask:** When other people share photos, do you think they have the same purposes as you?

*This question opens students to the idea that their own purposes may be the same as many other people.*

- 8 **Clarify** that only the author of a photo could know its purpose. But, by understanding the purpose of our photos, we can have a better understanding of others' purposes, too.

- 9 **Tell** the class: Today, we're going to consider the purpose of social media photos and the techniques we use to communicate that purpose.

# Considering others' purpose

## – Introduction

### 7 Discussion

### 8 Challenge

### 9 Reflection

#### Part A

- Instruct** students to use the app (**7: Discussion**) for the next steps.

**The app asks** students import three photos from Instagram shared by different authors in three categories.

*The categories are randomly-assigned from a list: “a celebrity,” “a musician,” “an artist,” “a company,” “an athlete,” and “a relative”.*

*Students will receive three categories randomly, but as a class, all of the categories should be represented.*

*Students can import photos from any public account. They can also browse Instagram’s Explore page to view the current top posts.*

#### Part B

- Draw** a grid on the board with three columns (using the headers *think*, *feel*, and *do*) and six rows (one for each category listed above).
- Ask** students to show the photos they’ve taken — either one student to the full class (if showing on a display), or in small groups.

**The app displays** the student’s photos. *Double-tapping a photo magnifies and isolates it.*

- Ask** the class (for each photo):

*What do you guess the author wants their audience to think, feel, or do after seeing this photo? How do you know?*

*Who is the audience?  
How do you know?*

- Repeat** the list for as many photos as you have time for.

#### Part C

- Refer** to the students’ list of purposes (from this lesson’s Introduction).
- Ask** the class to label each of the purposes they originally listed as think, feel, or do (or a combination).

#### EXAMPLES

“so my friends will know what’s happening with me” = **think**

“to be funny” = **think** or **feel**

“to get opinions on a question” = **do**

*It’s not important that students label these exactly as shown — only that they apply the think-feel-do model to their own purposes.*

# Taking photos with purpose

## – Introduction

### 7 Discussion

### 8 Challenge

### 9 Reflection

#### Part A

1 **Instruct** students to use the app (**8: Challenge**) for the next steps.

2 **Instruct** each student to generate a purpose (in the app), and to **keep it a secret**.

*The app assigns a purpose randomly (“Get your audience to think that yellow is a fashionable color,” “Get your audience to feel happy for you,” “Get your audience to think your read a lot of books,” “Get your audience to leave you a positive comment about your hair”).*

*The app allows students to take these photos, crop them, and apply filters.*

3 **Instruct** students where they’re allowed to take photos (as many locations as is practical and appropriate for your class).

*More locations (classroom, hallway, outside) should lead to a better variety of photos (and a more meaningful discussion later).*

4 **Give** them a few minutes to take photos.

#### Part B

5 **Ask** students to show the photos they’ve taken — either one student to the full class (if showing on a display), or in small groups.

*Students sharing should double-tap the photo to isolate it, which also hides the purpose text (and keeps it a secret).*

6 **Ask** the group:

*What do you think the purpose of this photo is (using the words ‘think’, ‘feel’, or ‘do’)?*

7 **Ask** the author:

*What was the purpose?*

*If the class guessed correctly:  
What about the photo convinced you of that purpose?*

*If the class guessed incorrectly:  
What could the author have done differently to communicate the purpose more clearly?*

*What choices did you make or editing techniques did you use to communicate the purpose?*

8 **Repeat** for as many examples as you have time for.

## UNIT III

# Reflecting on purpose

- Introduction
- 7 Discussion
- 8 Challenge
- 9 Reflection

**Instruct** students to use the app (**9: Reflection**) for the next steps.

**The app asks** if students use Instagram (to frame the questions accurately.)

**IF THE STUDENT USES INSTAGRAM:**

*Which purpose do you use most often in your photos: think, feel, or do? Why?*

*The app asks the student to import a photo they've posted where they had a clear purpose in mind: What was your purpose with this photo? What choices did you make and editing techniques did you use to communicate the purpose?*

*The app asks the student to import a photo they've posted recently that received comments: What was your purpose with this photo? Did your audience respond to that purpose in the way you expected?*

*Do you ever compare your life to other people's lives based on their social media photos? Can you think of a specific photo?*

*(Optionally, they can import and attach it.) What do you think the purpose of this photo was?*

**IF NOT**

*Do you share photos with other social media apps? If so, which purpose do you use most often in your photos: think, feel, or do? Why?*

*The app asks the student to re-import any of the photos they imported for 7: Discussion: What do you guess is author's purpose with this photo? How do you know?*

*The app asks the student to re-import another photo they imported for 7: Discussion: What do you guess is the author's purpose with this photo? Are you convinced of the purpose? If so, why? If not, what would you change to be more convincing?*

*Thinking back to 8: Challenge, Do you think your photo was effective in convincing your audience of the purpose? If so, why was it effective? If not, what would you have changed about the photo?*

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## UNIT IV

### 10 Discussion

### 11 Challenge

#### – Review

### 12 Reflection

# What do my photos say about me?

**This unit explores how the content of social media photos can reflect students' values and goals.** Every photo is a unique construction from the student who shared it. It's a combination of framing and editing (UNIT I), who it's shared with (UNIT II), and the reason it's being shared (UNIT III).

Each of those factors changes with the author. And cumulatively, those factors determine **the ideas and images contained (or not contained) in the photo – the photo's content**. Over time, patterns of content in a student's photos reveal values and goals. **Or, at least, appear to.** This lesson explores both sides of that issue: what a photo's content reveals to the audience, and how the interpretation may not align with the students' real values.

This unit also touches on the connection between the changes that students make in 'idealized' photos, and **how those changes might signify goals they have for themselves.**

### Students will...

- consider how the content of a photo may reflect the values of the author.
- consider how edits to a photo might represent a personal goal.

### Vocabulary

- **value:** something that's important to you.
- **goal:** a hope or wish you have for the future.

### CML Core Concepts

- **content:** Media have embedded values and points of view.
- **authorship:** All media messages are constructed.

### Preparation

- 1 verify that each student will have access to a tablet with the **social me** app installed.
  - 2 familiarize yourself with the tasks the students will perform within the app for this unit.
- (optional) prepare a tablet-to-display adapter if you plan to show student lessons on screen.

# Looking at values in photos

## 10 Discussion

## 11 Challenge

## – Review

## 12 Reflection

## Part A

- 1 **Instruct** students to use the app (**10: Discussion**) for the next steps.

*The app asks students to take four photos of anything they want to share from school (any people, places, and things).*

*Alternately, students who use Instagram can import photos they've already posted and use those for the discussion.*

*This challenge is intentionally open-ended. Students own goals and values are more likely to be captured in their photos by allowing them more freedom to choose the topics and settings of the photos.*

- 2 **Instruct** students where they're allowed to take photos (as many locations as is practical and appropriate for your class).
- More locations (classroom, hallway, outside) should lead to a better variety of photos (and a more meaningful discussion later).*
- 3 **Give** them time to take photos.

## Part B

- 4 **Ask** students to show the photos they've taken — either one student to the full class (if showing on a display), or in small groups.

*The app displays the student's four photos. Double-tapping a photo magnifies and isolates it.*

- 5 **Ask** the group:
- What are these photos about?*
- What's similar about these photos?*
- What appears to be important to the author?*
- Are there any ideas left out? (What haven't they taken photos of?)*
- 6 **Ask** the author:
- Did the group's interpretations match your actual values?*
- How did you choose what to take your photos of?*
- Did you crop anything out of your photos?*
- 7 **Repeat** for as many examples as you have time for.

## UNIT IV

# Idealizing photos again

### 10 Discussion

### 11 Challenge

#### – Review

### 12 Reflection

## Part A

- 1 **Instruct** students to use the app (**11: Challenge**) for the next steps.

**The app asks** students to choose a photos from previous activity (10: Discussion) and assign it as either 'idealized' or 'not idealized'.

**The app asks** the student to take an alternate photo based on the same topics of the original, but taking a 'not idealized' version (if the original was 'idealized'), and vice versa.

**The app allows** students to take the photo, crop it, use filters, and pair them with the original photo.

- 2 **Instruct** students where they're allowed to take photos (as many locations as is practical and appropriate).

*A larger set of possible locations (classroom, hallway, outside) should lead to a better variety of photos (and a more meaningful discussion later).*

- 3 **Give** them time to take photos.

## Part B

- 4 **Ask** students to show the photos they've taken — either one student to the full class (if showing on a display), or in small groups.

**The app displays** the student's photo pairing (labeled as 'idealized' and 'not idealized'). Double-tapping a photo magnifies and isolates it.

- 5 **Ask** the group:

*What are these photos about?*

*What differences do you notice between the 'idealized' and 'not idealized' photos?*

*Do you notice differences between the two in what's inside and outside the frame?*

*What editing techniques might have been used? How do you know?*

- 6 **Ask** the student:

*Why did you choose these photos to share?*

*Have you cropped anything out of these photos? What was it?*

- 7 **Repeat** for as many examples as you have time for.

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## UNIT IV

# Defining content

### 10 Discussion

### 11 Challenge

### – Review

### 12 Reflection

For this unit, this Review replaces the Introduction. Moving these definitions after the Discussion and Challenge gives students the opportunity to take photos without knowing that the group will be interpret the content later.

Since students' values and goals may be too personal to discuss with the class, many of the questions have been reserved for the Reflection.

**1 Define** the vocabulary terms **value** and **goal**.

**2 Tell** the class: In this unit, we looked at social media photos to see what they tell us about the values and goals of the people who shared them.

**3 Ask** the class:

Do you think you can tell what's important to a person based on the photos they share?

What differences did you notice about what students chose to take photos of?

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## UNIT IV

# Reflecting on content

10 Discussion

11 Challenge

– Review

12 Reflection

**Instruct** students to use the app (**12: Reflection**) for the next steps.

**The app asks** if students use Instagram (to frame the questions accurately.)

(Optionally, for each question, students can import a photo and attach it to the question.)

**IF THE STUDENT USES INSTAGRAM:**

*On Instagram, what kinds of people, places, and things do you normally post photos about?*

*On Instagram, how do you usually choose when a photo is worth sharing?*

*In 10: Discussion, did the group's interpretations match your actual values? How were they same or different?*

*In 11: Challenge, how were your 'idealized' and 'not idealized' photos different? Do those changes reflect something you'd like to change about the world? Or a goal you have for yourself?*

**IF NOT**

*In 10: Discussion, what kinds of people, places, and things did you take photos of?*

*In 10: Discussion, how did you choose the topics to take photos of?*

*In 10: Discussion, did the group's interpretations match your actual values? How were they same or different?*

*In 11: Challenge, how were your 'idealized' and 'not idealized' photos different? Do those changes reflect something you'd like to change about the world? Or a goal you have for yourself?*

**social me**

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