



Social Media - Thinking Critically about Disability Lesson Plan



Lesson title: Social Media - Thinking Critically about Disability

Subject and topic:

digital citizenship, ELA, art, social studies

Grade level:

9th-12th

Duration:

25 minutes

Lesson summary:

Stephen Hawking passed away last year and many artists processed the loss through art. Their art depicts disability from multiple perspectives. In this activity students will explore 2 contrasting images. Take note of the details and how the images depict Stephen Hawking and his physical disability. Both of the images are from Twitter and chances are students have already seen both of the images just scrolling through their phones. Students will explore elements of art, social studies and psychology in this lesson. The focus of the discussion is up to individual educators.

Standards:

- **CC.1.5.9-10.A** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grades level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.
- **CC.1.5.11-12.A** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Objectives:

SWBAT

- Engage in courageous conversations surrounding disability
- Share and understand varying perspectives
- Utilize social media to create change and share lived experiences



Essential Questions:

- EQ1: Describe the historical context of these images.
- EQ2: What is the artist portraying in these images and what modes do they use?

Vocabulary:

- Stephen Hawking

Lesson procedures

1. Provide students a brief introduction about Stephen Hawking. **(2 minutes)**
2. Split the class into groups and give half of the groups a handout of the first image and half of the groups the second image. Ask students in their small groups to write down everything they notice about the image. Who do you think is the artist? What messages are they trying to send about Stephen? **(6 minutes)**
3. Display images side by side and hold whole group discussion **(10 minutes)**

Related materials:

- Computer and projector
- 3-4 handouts of each image
- 1 copy of reflection sheet

Evaluation:

Students will be evaluated based on engagement in conversation and the reflection sheet below.

Ask your students this question related to this lesson to gauge how much they learned. **Did this lesson help you understand that disabled people can be portrayed both positively and negatively?**

Thank you for bringing the conversation about disability into your classroom.



Help us evaluate this lesson plan by visiting [our evaluation page to assess this lesson](#). You will find an evaluation both for you and your students to complete there.

Discussion Points:

The first piece of art is a black and white cartoon of what appears to be space and Hawking is standing away from his wheelchair. This picture denotes that Hawking is now free from his chair, which is a potentially damaging perspective on disability because it assumes that being in a chair isn't already freedom. The black and white color relates to how many people perceive disability. For instance: A wheelchair is a medical device (to be pitied) and not a tool for everyday life or people who use wheelchairs can't walk or that disability is visible. The second image shows Hawking floating above the Earth in a whimsical cartoon. He sits in his wheelchair as he did in life. An interpretation could be that even in death he will still pursue the mysteries of the universe as the person he was, wheelchair and all. Disability is not necessarily a bad thing. People can live very fulfilling and happy lives in a wheelchair, or with other disabilities. We can't judge people based on their appearances.





Image by Mitchell Toy <https://i.redd.it/os0f96hutql01.jpg>





Image by Chris Simpson

<https://i.pinimg.com/736x/ac/36/38/ac3638edbc43e9bdaa5062fc09e418d8.jpg>



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Anonymous Reflection Sheet:
Thinking Critically About Disability Images from Social Media

Complete the sentence:

Wheelchairs are

What did you learn from this lesson?

Did you find anything difficult or surprising?

What does disability mean to you?

