Novel Connections

Using *True Shoes* as a teaching tool on cyberbullying and digital citizenship

"We need to recognize that, by far, the most common risk to children stems from their own actions and those of their peers and that many of these risks are not new. It is the delivery mechanisms which are. While technology can be used to amplify or facilitate bullying, for example, it is not the cause of the problem. In addition to sending a message that bullying and harassment will not be tolerated, work needs to be done ... on 'digital citizenship' – or rather a renewed effort to teach citizenship online and offline – encouraging children to respect themselves and others."
Youth Safety on a Living Internet: Report of the Online Safety and Technology Working Group
National Telecommunications and Information Administration, 2010

> *"So don't you see it? In school," he said, "everyone knows those girls will spread a rumor about anyone. If you say, 'Hey, this is really warped,' you're putting yourself at risk. You could be next."*
> *"Exactly."*
> *"But that rumor today, and what happened — this is big time," Elliot said. "If something like this happens and nobody fights back, then that group has total power, and everyone knows it. Then Parkland is Darkland all the way."*
> from **True Shoes**

A dynamic learning resource.
The YA novel *True Shoes* is a sequel to *The Revealers*, which over 1,000 middle schools have used to address bullying while also meeting curriculum standards for language arts and social studies. This project builds on that model, informed and inspired by the creativity so many schools have brought to working with *The Revealers*.

Powerful paths to learning open up when a reading-and-discussion project raises issues that are already present and pressing for students. Teachers can then focus on shaping and guiding the discussion, while also helping to make exchanges on challenging issues safe. Working with a realistic young-adult novel can do much to create that safety: it gives students the chance to talk about situations and characters they can relate to, without having to reveal more of themselves than they want to or feel secure in doing.

This curriculum resource uses pieces of *True Shoes* — together with leading questions, supplemental readings, suggested multimedia projects, and resources for learning more — to help classroom teachers, guidance counselors and students explore issues and questions the novel raises about how young people are choosing, and can choose, to use today's powerful networked technology.

The materials in this package are linked to curriculum standards developed by national professional organizations in Language Arts, Social Studies and Technology Education.

This package also aligns readily with the Common Core, which affirms the value of reading and discussion projects that address multiple standards:

"Often, several standards can be addressed by a single rich task. For example ... When drawing evidence from literary and informational texts per Writing standard 9, students are also demonstrating their comprehension skill in relation to specific standards in Reading. When discussing something they have read or written, students are also demonstrating their speaking and listening skills."
Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/ Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects
Common Core State Standards Initiative
True Shoes is a realistic novel for grades 7-9, with a **Lexile® measure of 690L.**

This resource has two linked units:

A. Connected Choices
B. Connected Selves

Each unit features:

• Video clips of the author reading key "Focal Points" from the novel,
• Additional, brief *True Shoes* readings,
• Discussion questions,
• Resources for learning more, and
• A multimedia project to extend students' learning.

A. Connected Choices

Story Link: The characters in *True Shoes* struggle with the choices they and their classmates are making, as their lives combine today's powerful tools for networking and communication with the intense social pressures of eighth grade.

Focal Point 1: *Pranking the Queen*
Author Clip 1: Two friends of Russell, the eighth-grade narrator, play a lunchroom prank that embarrasses the most popular girl in school — and they film what

happens. Doug Wilhelm describes the prank and reads from pp. 47-48, where Russell watches the video after it's been posted on YouTube.

Individual Reading: Pages 6-14, "The Out Crowd" and "The Stain."

Connecting Questions
1. Russell describes Lauren Paine as the ruler of the Parkland School eighth grade — the one who, with her friend Serena, decides "who in our grade would be the next chosen target for rumor and ridicule." If Lauren treats less popular kids this badly, are Turner and Cam justified in playing their prank on her? If they are justified, why? If not, why not?

2. The boys could have just played their prank, without putting their video on YouTube. How does posting the video change the impact of the prank? In your opinion, how does it change whether the prank was, or was not, justified payback to Lauren for how she treats other kids?

3. Watching the video, Russell is surprised to see what looks like fear in Lauren's eyes. How much do you think fear motivates the struggle for popularity? In your observation, which group of middle schoolers tends to be more fearful — those considered popular, or those who are less so? Why?

Focal Point 2: *Every1 Knows*
Author Clip 2: Lauren and Serena take revenge for the prank by texting out a made-up rumor that the two boys who posted the video have been seen kissing each other. This is totally untrue and the girls know it, but the text message spreads fast — and next morning there's a violent response. Doug reads what happens, from pages 50-52.

Individual Reading: First part of "In the Cave," pages 62-64.

Connecting Questions
1. How is spreading a rumor by text message different from spreading it in person? Name as many reasons as you can.
a. What's the difference in how the rumor spreads? In how it can spread?
b. How is spreading a rumor by text different in the impact it can have on the subject of the rumor?

2. In this situation, who is most at fault — the boys who started all this with their prank video, the girls who retaliated by spreading a lie, or the boy who responded with a violent attack? Organize an informal debate, selecting students or teams to argue for each choice. (This can be done in debate format, where each team researches all three sides beforehand, then draws lots to find out which position they must argue.)

3. Is it more hurtful to spread a lie about someone's private life, or to reveal something true, but very personal, that someone wants to keep private? Why?

Creating safety for discussing sensitive issues: Talking in class about any type

of bullying, including the spreading of hurtful rumors, can be challenging — especially for students who may feel vulnerable to humiliation or retaliation. Some ideas for helping make the discussion safe:

• Have each student write his/her thoughts on the topic, without using names. Collect the writings and read them aloud, keeping the anonymity. If it feels comfortable to do this, let the discussion begin from that point.
• Some students may feel safer in small groups — but first, create ground rules for the groups.
• If possible, shift the location of one or more discussions to a setting outside the classroom, perhaps the library, auditorium, or computer lab. Changing the location can also shift and open up the classroom dynamics.
• In any discussion, give equal attention and weight to all students' comments. Don't let certain students dominate.
• Try the powerful Chalk Talk approach. Download this briefing.

Learning More
Read Megan Meier's story, about one consequence of online deceit.

Ryan Halligan was an eighth grader targeted online by a classmate who spread the rumor that Ryan was gay. Read what happened in Ryan's story.

Displaying the results of teen polls, graphs by the Cyberbullying Research Center show that cell phones are teens' most-used technology, and show how often teens report being cyberbullying in various ways.

Cell Phone Safety: Top Ten Tips for Teens

Cyberbully411.org, a site for teens hosted by Internet Solutions for Kids, has age-appropriate, research-backed information and advice.

Our Voices
For one day, assign each student to keep a log of every single time they use technology to communicate — texting, cell calls, email, Facebook, etc. Ask them to note the time of each use and, briefly, how and what they communicated. (Ex.: "2:15. Texted Justin about meeting after school.") Then ask each to write a personal essay, reflecting on this one-day log of your networking life.

Prompts:

• "The reason I use _____ the most is ..."
• "When I look at my log, I think about ..."
• "I didn't realize that ..."

B. Connected Selves

Story Link: Choices that characters in *True Shoes* make about how to use networked technology — cell phones, Facebook, YouTube — have personal impacts on other students. Sometimes those impacts are intended, sometimes they're not. Here's an example of each.

Focal Point 3: *Don't Worry 2 Much*
Author Clip 3: All year, Russell and Catalina have been keeping their friendship — and Russell's intense crush on "Cat," as he calls her — a secret. Doug tells why, then reads from pp. 49-50, where Russell gets a forwarded text telling everyone about his crush and mocking him for it.

Individual Reading: Pages 47-52, "The Pull of the Stars" and "Every1 Knows."

Connecting Questions
1. Have you ever been part of spreading a rumor via text? Have you ever been the target of a rumor spread by text? How does that feel — or how do you think it would feel?

2. Reading the message, Russell feels personally invaded — "shaky and naked." If this happened to you, do you think you'd feel that way, or more angry? How would you feel?

3. If you were Russell, would you try to respond in some way? How? Once a rumor starts spreading like this, what can you do?

Focal Point 4: *Did You SEE That?*
Author Clip 4: On pp. 140-141, Russell is watching a creative and powerful video his friends have made, about on a one-on-one basketball game in which the two boys who were involved in the violent incident, from Focal Point 2, get together and work things out. Doug reads the description of how the video concludes, then Russell's inspired reaction.

Individual Reading: "Losing Yourself," pp. 89-96, and the portion of "Soundtrack" on pp. 137-141.

Connecting Questions
1. The Internet gives everyone a global window for expressing ourselves — for sharing our creativity, as Russell's friends do with this video. How have you, or people you know, used connected technology to express yourselves?

2. How is YouTube changing the world?

3. In this video, Turner and Bethany share with the world a personal tragedy that their new classmate Cam had been keeping private — his soldier father's recent death in Afghanistan. How do you think Cam will feel when he sees this scene on YouTube?

4. Clearly, Russell's friends made a powerful film about two guys working out their differences — but did that give them the right to expose one boy's private

heartache? Challenge students to research and debate both sides of this statement: Telling the truth online is more important than personal privacy. (If students are unfamiliar with the debating format, this resource from Education World provides useful guidance.")

5. To many teenage boys, the idea of being captured in an online video showing emotion — as Cam does, when he appears to well up with tears — is horrifying. Why? And why do boys at this stage of life taunt each other for showing feelings?

Learning More
"Five Ways YouTube Has Changed the World Forever"

Playing with Media. Digital-learning consultant Wesley Freyer created this site to help teachers guide students in the process of creating and sharing digital media.
    Playing with Media's site for safe sharing of student-created media

A student-created video about bullying via Twitter and Facebook

An article about how one group of students created informational videos about global issues

A Student's Guide to Personal Publishing

Resources on digital citizenship plus "Let's Fight It Together," a short, dramatic film about cyberbullying, at Digizen.org

Our Voices
Using "Let's Fight It Together" as a model, brainstorm, script, cast, and film a short video that portrays a rumor spread by text. Make sure that the video shows the personal impact of the rumor on its target — and shows how kids might choose to respond in ways that are positive, that seek to right the wrong.

Help us grow this resource!
If you develop new questions for discussion, or find new resources for learning more — or if you have other suggestions or feedback on this resource — please let us know. Email Doug at doug@dougwilhelm.com.

Note to teachers: *True Shoes* also deals with other complex social issues — multiple cultural identities, racial stereotyping and controlling/abusive dating relationships — and we are developing two additional study units that will offer resources to teachers in guiding discussions and working through these issues in class. If you are interested in receiving these additional resources, please email Doug at doug@dougwilhelm.com.