



# Breaking Down Hate Speech

## Essential Question

*How can you create a community culture in which hate speech is unacceptable, both online and offline?*

## Lesson Overview

Students learn the definition of hate speech and understand how it affects individuals, groups, and communities. They learn to recognize hate speech by reading an article or by analyzing a brief video. They then explore schoolwide solutions for addressing hate speech by role-playing a student mediation committee and creating guidelines for online and offline communities.

## Learning Objectives

*Students will be able to ...*

- recognize hate speech and its impact on individuals, groups, and communities, both online and offline.
- analyze situations to determine if they constitute hate speech.
- create a set of community guidelines for dealing with online and offline hate speech at school.

## Materials and Preparation

- Download the video “**Library**” from MTV’s “A Thin Line” campaign ([www.athinline.org/videos/61-library](http://www.athinline.org/videos/61-library)) and prepare to show it to students. This can be downloaded from the AG Video File Folder following the same directions from the email.

**Note:** If you feel that you need to build trust in your classroom before discussing these sensitive issues, you may warm up with activities from the following websites:

- **Facing History and Ourselves:** [www.facinghistory.org](http://www.facinghistory.org)
- **Teaching Tolerance:** [www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)
- **Anti-Defamation League Curriculum Connections:** [www.adl.org/education/curriculum\\_connections](http://www.adl.org/education/curriculum_connections)
- Review the article “Confronting Hate Speech Online” from the Anti-Defamation League for useful background about addressing hate speech ([www.adl.org/main\\_internet/hatespeechonline2008.htm](http://www.adl.org/main_internet/hatespeechonline2008.htm)).

Estimated time: 45 minutes

## Standards Alignment

### Common Core:

**grades 9-10:** RI.1-4, RI.8, RI.10, W.2a-f, W.3a-e, W.4, W.5, W.6, W.8, W.10, SL.1a-d, SL.3, SL.4, SL.5, L.4a, L.6

**grades 11-12:** RL.1, RL.2, RL.4, RL.7, RL.8, RL.10, RI.1, RI.2, RI.4, RI.10, W.2a-f, W.3a-e, W.4, W.5, W.6, W.8, W.9, W.10, SL.1a-d, SL.2-5, L.4a, L.6

**NETS•S:** 1a-c, 2a, 2b, 2d, 3b, 3d, 4a-d, 5a-d

## Key Vocabulary

**hate speech:** making cruel, hostile, or negative statements about someone based on their race, religion, national origin, ability, age, gender, or sexual orientation

**stereotype:** a simplified and often negative assumption about a particular group of people

**derogatory:** intentionally hurtful and harmful, designed to insult or degrade

**mediation:** efforts by someone who is not part of a situation to settle disputes



## introduction

### Warm-up (10 minutes)

**DEFINE** the Key Vocabulary terms **hate speech**, **stereotype**, and **derogatory**.

**EXPLAIN** to students that they will learn to recognize hate speech online and offline. They will hear examples of hate speech and explore how it affects individuals, groups, and communities both online and offline. Explain that discussing these matters does not mean anyone approves of the statements.

**ENGAGE** students in writing short journal entries describing an incident in which they or someone they know has been the target of hate speech of any kind. If they cannot think of one, they can describe an incident in literature, on television, or in the movies. Arrange students in pairs and have them share their journal entries with their partners. Invite volunteers to share their journal entries with the class. Use the following questions to connect students' experiences to common ways that hate speech can manifest online and offline.

#### ASK:

*What are some general ways that hate speech can be used in the offline world?*

Sample responses:

- Calling people names based on their race, religion, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, or any other type of group that is disenfranchised in our society
- Saying things about people that are based on social identity stereotypes

*What are some general ways that hate speech might be used online?*

Sample responses:

- Sending an email or a text to someone that insults their religion, national origin, disability, gender, sexual orientation, etc.
- Saying derogatory things about people in a chat room, on Facebook, or Twitter, about these groups

### Recognize Hate Speech (10 minutes)

**PREPARE** students for the video “Library” ([www.athinline.org/videos/61-library](http://www.athinline.org/videos/61-library)) by explaining that what they are about to see may be harsh, but it illustrates the effects of hate speech. They should jot down any examples of hate speech they hear.

 **SHOW** the “Library” video to the class. Downloaded from the AG Video File by clicking on the link sent out in email.

#### ASK:

*What are some examples of hate speech from the video?*

Students should understand that when calling someone “Princess” or threatening to tell their father “how gay they are” are examples of hate speech.

#### ASK:

*How do you think you might feel if you were the recipient of derogatory messages?*

Guide students to identify feelings such as: humiliated, trapped, angry, intimidated, attacked, alienated, and scared.

*Why do you think people make derogatory remarks? What might their motives be?*

Sample responses:

- They are ignorant or have been taught to be racist
- They dislike people who are not exactly like them
- They think it is cool or intimidating to use language like this

*How are these kinds of attacks similar to or different from calling your opponent a “loser”?*

Sample responses:

*Similarities*

- Both types of statements are cruel and hurtful
- Both types of statements are publicly humiliating

*Differences*

- The statements are based on fixed identity traits, not behavior
- The statements are derogatory and threatening towards everyone in the group
- The statements imply that all members of the group deserve to be treated differently (badly)

**INVITE** students to think about why so much hate speech takes place online. Students should be aware that with online hate speech, the offenders often remain anonymous. They may find it easier to make derogatory or prejudiced statements or spread negative stereotypes because they are not face-to-face with the people they affect.

## Target School Hate Speech (20 minutes)

**ENCOURAGE** students to think about how hate speech can affect more than just the target. Students should understand that hate speech can create an environment in which it is difficult to learn or work, and in which members of the targeted groups may be placed at a disadvantage.

### ASK:

*How might hate speech damage an online community?*

Guide students to understand that hate speech online can quickly reach many people because information spreads rapidly to vast audiences online. Hate speech can make targeted members of an online community feel that they are not welcome. Members who are bystanders may also feel scared, trapped, or intimidated.

**DEFINE** the Key Vocabulary term **mediation**.

**ARRANGE** students in groups of five to six. Explain that each group will be acting as a Mediation Committee, which has the job of deciding what to do when students behave in an unacceptable way online or offline. Instruct groups to conduct mock Mediation Committee meetings to deal with the offenders in “Library

**GUIDE** the committees to brainstorm ways to deal with hate speech when it happens online. (Possible responses include flagging videos or comments, making counterpoint comments, linking to educational resources, or using social networks to reach out to large bodies of people. Encourage groups to think of positive approaches, such as rewarding students who stand up against hate speech or who educate others about hate speech.)

### ASK:

- *Which of the methods you discussed for addressing online hate speech do you feel is most effective? Why?*
- *Is any one method a “complete” method, or are there drawbacks with each?*
- *Do the methods you have chosen help prevent hate speech or address it after it happens?*
- *How might you incorporate some of the methods you have developed into a set of guidelines for your school? (Guidelines might include a class policy on hate speech or a schoolwide education program that includes posters or information that can be shared with classmates through listserves.)*

**Note:** You may wish to have students write and post their guidelines, or take steps to implement a schoolwide education program that includes both online and offline activities.

## closing

### Wrap-up (5 minutes)

You can use these questions to assess your students' understanding of the lesson objectives. You may want to ask students to reflect in writing on one of the questions, using a journal or an online blog/wiki.

#### ASK:

*How would you describe hate speech to another student who might not know the term?*

Students should understand that hate speech includes any cruel, hostile, or negative statements directed toward someone based on their race, religion, national origin, disability, age, gender, or sexual orientation. It includes name calling, spreading stereotypes, and making derogatory comments, either in person or online.

*How would you describe the impact of hate speech on individuals? On targeted groups? On communities?*

Students should recognize that hate speech can make an individual target feel scared, angry, and humiliated. It can affect members of the targeted group and create a community climate of hatred, mistrust, and inequality.)

*Why do you think it is important to talk about hate speech? Why might it be important to have guidelines for preventing or dealing with hate speech online and offline, and what might those guidelines be?*

Students should recognize that understanding the impact of hate speech and having clear school guidelines could create a safer school environment and discourage prejudice and discrimination.

