

# THE CHANGE AGENT

Adult Education for  
Social Justice: News,  
Issues, and Ideas

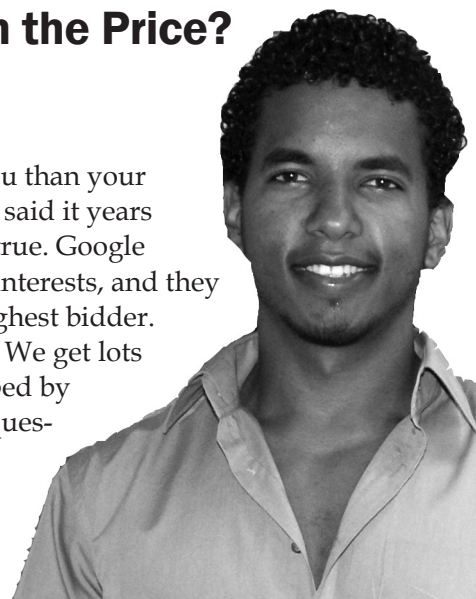
## TECHNOLOGY

- You Are the Product: 1
- Expensive Technology: 3
- Where Would I Be without My Phone: 4
- I ♥ iPad: 5
- Technology Mania: 6
- Telephone Technology: 7
- “You Made It; You Deal with It”: 8
- How “Green” Is the Internet: 10
- Disconnection by Internet: 12
- Real Feelings in Real Time: 13
- Notes from an Internet Addict: 14
- Technology is My Lifeline: 16
- Technology Connects & Disconnects: 17
- Is Technology Changing Your Brain: 18
- Driving with High-Tech Tools: 20
- Bled to Death: 21
- Finding Felix: 22
- It Hurt. I was Furious: 24
- Social Media: 25
- Digital Footprints: 26
- The Computer is My Family’s Tool: 28
- Using Technology for Education: 29
- The Flipped Classroom: 30
- Savvy Consumers: Beware of Free: 31
- Films that Start Conversations: 32
- Education on the Go at TV411.org: 33
- Using Technology to Solve Problems: 34
- Dragon Naturally Speaking: 36
- How Times Have Changed: 37
- Technology in the Care of Others: 38
- Restaurants and Technology: 39
- How Can You Use QR Codes: 40
- Closing the Digital Divide: 41
- Using Technology to Make Music: 42
- Should We Regulate the Internet: 45
- Tweeting for a Cause: 46
- Internet for All. Really?: 48
- A World of Conflict in Your Phone: 50
- Digital Disconnect: 52
- Latest Technology: 54

## You Are the Product! Google Sells You to the Highest Bidder; Is It Worth the Price?

*Romenigue dos Santos*

Google knows more about you than your own mother does. Somebody said it years ago, and today we know it’s true. Google knows most of our likes and interests, and they sell this information to the highest bidder. What do we get in exchange? We get lots of great applications, developed by them, totally for free. So the question is: is it worth it?



### Can’t Eat These Cookies

Google uses a technology known as cookies to learn about what you do and what you search for on their Web pages. (Cookies are small programs placed in your computer that collect information about you and give it to Google.) For example, when you use Google to search for something like “gyms,” Google knows you are interested in working out and probably other healthy things.

Moreover, Google doesn’t use cookies just on their Web pages. They also use it on several thousands of other Web pages. Consequently, they know much more about you than you could imagine. Every day they get complete reports of the Web pages you visited, purchases you made, content you read and shared, music you listened to, videos you watched, and ads you clicked on.

*Continued on p. 44*

*The Change Agent* is the biannual publication of The New England Literacy Resource Center. Each issue of the paper helps teachers incorporate social justice content into their curriculum. The paper is designed for intermediate-level ESOL, ABE, GED, and adult diploma classes. Each issue focuses on a different topic that is relevant to learners' lives.

In New England, *The Change Agent* is available free of charge in limited quantities through NELRC's affiliated state literacy resource centers (SABES, CREC, Vermont Department of Education, Literacy Resources/RI and RI PD Center, New Hampshire Department of Education, and Maine Adult Education). Contact these centers to learn how to receive your free copies. PDF versions of *The Change Agent* can be downloaded from our Website.

**Submissions. Our next issue is on immigration.** See the "Call for Articles" on the back cover. We welcome submissions from teachers and students as well as activists and thinkers from outside the field. For submission guidelines visit <[www.nelrc.org/changeagent](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent)> or contact us at 617-482-9485 or [changeagent@worlded.org](mailto:changeagent@worlded.org).

**Subscriptions**  
Individual, bulk, and electronic subscriptions to *The Change Agent* are available. See the back cover and/or our website for details.

*Editor:* Cynthia Peters

*Proofreading and editing help from:* Sydney Breteler, Araceli Mendez, Andy Nash, Leah Peterson, Carey Reid, and Lou Wollrab.

*The Change Agent* is published by the New England Literacy Resource Center/World Education  
44 Farnsworth Street  
Boston, MA 02210  
(617) 482-9485  
[www.nelrc.org/changeagent](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent)

No information in this magazine is intended to reflect an endorsement for, or opposition to, any candidate or political party.



## From the Editor

When we decided to focus on theme of technology, I wondered if people would have much to say. But it turns out, when you invite students to write about a topic that matters to them, they do so passionately and critically. And so this issue is full of first person stories, critical analyses, and moving reflections on the ways technology is affecting everyday life, our communities, our democracy, our environment, our families, and our education. For learners working on their basic skills, these articles provide an accessible, engaging context that is both relevant and educational. Whether you have embraced smart phones and social media in the classroom or have dodged the "wired" revolution altogether, you'll find a great deal of compelling content and learning opportunities here.

And if you're hearing a lot about **COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS (CCR)** standards based on the **COMMON CORE**, and you're wondering how to integrate these into your classroom, *The Change Agent* is a great resource. See <[www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras)> for information about which articles and activities in this issue are aligned with which CCR standards.

## Look out for—Article Leveling and a FREE WEBINAR

If you are a teacher, be on the lookout in September for a free webinar on how to use this issue of *The Change Agent* in the classroom. To aid in your teaching, visit our website and download a Table of Contents that lists the reading level of each of the articles.

## Some Articles are Available in Audio

Researchers say that listening to articles read out loud while you follow along with the text is a great strategy for improving reading comprehension. To access our online materials—including all back issues and audio—please subscribe by visiting <[www.nelrc.org/changeagent](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent)>.



## Meet the Editorial Board

*From left to right: Karisa Tashjian, RI Family Literacy Initiative; Romenigüe dos Santos, ESL student, Pawtucket, RI; Akira Kamiya, ALRI; Andy Nash, NELRC; Erik Jacobson, author of ABE in the Age of New Literacies; Tina Fang, Family Literacy Initiative in Providence, RI; Cynthia Peters, editor of The Change Agent; Priyanka Sharma, National College Transition Network; David Rosen, Newsome Assoc. Not pictured: Bob McIntire, ME Office of Adult Educ. and Family Literacy.*

# Expensive Technology

## Saying No to My Daughter (and the Phone Companies)!

*Leonardo Espinoza*

Technology is so expensive. It creates problems for families who don't have the money to buy all the latest devices. How do other families afford them? In my case, I have a big problem with my 13-year-old daughter. She wants me to buy her an iPhone that costs \$400 to \$600. I say, "No, it's too expensive."

**Now my feelings are hurt because my little girl is mad at me.**

Do you want these types of things for your kids? Don't spoil them like that; give them love instead. I completely disagree

with buying expensive phones for little kids. I understand that you want to check whether your sons or daughters are okay, but why must we use expensive phones for that? Now my feelings are hurt because my little girl is mad at me. I love her a lot, but what can I do? It is what it is.

My question is: why do phone companies introduce new phones so often? They should stop thinking only about their pockets and think more about poor families that don't have anything to eat. Please have some care for others! When you die, you might wish to take your money with you, but, too bad, you can't.



*Leonardo Espinoza, pictured above with his 13-year-old daughter, is a student at the Elk River Learning Lab in Elk River, MN. He is from Ecuador. He is working on his basic skills so he can get a better job. He has three children.*

### Extension Activities

**Leonardo poses several questions in his essay.** Go back through the article and identify the questions. Share your responses.

**To improve your spelling and vocabulary,** make a list of words in this article that *sound* exactly like other words but have different meanings—for example, “so” and “buy.” Next to the word, write down another word (not necessarily from the article) that sounds the same but means something different. For example, “sew” and “by.” How many can you find?

*Hint: There are at least 12.*



# Where Would I Be Without My Smart Phone?

*Marie Andrieux*

Technology is always with me on my path through daily life. My day begins and ends with technology. Where would I be without my smart phone?

## Morning

I wake to the alarm of my smart phone. From then on, I'm attached to it. On my way to work, if I am late, I use my phone to call my job. I look up what time the subway will come and find out if there are delays. Sometimes, I text my son to make sure that he is awake for school. My smart phone is very important to me. I stick to it throughout my day, but at work I have to put it on vibrate so I can focus on my job.

## Noon

I use the Internet for my job as a nursing assistant at a hospital. I take a computer cart around to my patients so I can enter their vital signs. I put in weight, height, blood pressure, temperature, and pulse. This information is immediately available on the patient's computerized chart. I contact my coworkers who are at the other end of the floor on my smart phone to avoid shouting and disturbing the people on the floor. This also saves us time while keeping information confidential. With technology, everything is possible.

## Afternoon

After a busy day at work, I turn to my smart phone again. I check on my children and my husband. I look to see if I have any emails or text messages; I respond to them. I make a few phone calls. I chat online. I use the calendar to plan the rest of



my week. I schedule appointments and create "to do" lists.

My smart phone is also my emergency device. We live in a world of emergencies. When you have family, you always have an emergency. Some are real emergencies and some are "kid" emergencies. They are all important to me though.

## And Night

At the end of the day, I am glad I have a smart phone. My smart phone helps me get home. It alerts me to transportation delays. It helps me find a different way to get home if necessary.

When I get home, I try to give my smart phone a rest and spend real time with my family. Before computers and smart phones, this is what we did, and I make sure we continue to spend real time together daily.

---

*Marie Andrieux is a student at the Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center. Marie works in a NYC hospital taking care of geriatric patients. She is the proud mother of two children, Jeff (a college graduate) and Emmanuel (a high school student).*



# I ♥ iPad

*Sheila Dawn Prag*

## An App That Vocalizes for Me

My life has been changed in so many wonderful ways now that I have my iPad. I can let people know what I'm thinking and how I'm feeling. My cerebral palsy hinders me from moving and speaking the way I would like. My fingers work well enough to type. I have an app that I use that helps me communicate. It is called Assistive Express and it is designed for people who have difficulty with their speech. I type what I want to say and it can even predict words for me to shorten my typing time. Then a natural sounding voice vocalizes my words for me.

## Surfing from My Chair

I love my iPad because it allows me to reach out to my sister anytime that I want to chat with her. I can use Skype, Facebook, and all the social media that is out there connecting us to each other. I can surf the Web, and my iPad can take me to places that I will never get out of this chair to see.

## Hit "Talk" and Add My Two Cents

Getting my education has taken on a whole new slant. I can work on math or language problems on my iPad. When there is a discussion going on in class, I start to type my thoughts. I hit the "Talk"

### There's an App for That!

**What is "app" short for? What does it mean?**

**What apps do you use? Share your favorite apps with your classmates.**

**Use your imagination. Dream up some new apps that could help you at work, at school, at home, or in your community.**



button and I get to put my two cents in! Lots of times, I make people laugh. (I have been told I have a great sense of humor.) I feel good because what I think matters to the people who are in class with me.

## Participating Helps Me Feel Like I Belong

I love to go to the movies, and my teacher always asks me to share my "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" reviews. I used my iPad to make my own pie chart last week, and the rest of the class liked it so much, they wanted to make one, too. I guess what I'm trying to say is that this wonderful technology helps me to feel like I *belong*.

Here's the thing. My body may be disabled, but my mind is sharp. I like to think I am funny and I have a lot to offer. The iPad is the vehicle that lets me keep pace with all that is going on around me. It is truly a gift and a blessing. I am ever so grateful.

---

*Sheila Dawn Prag is a student at the Adult Learning Center in New Brunswick, NJ. She is revered by her classmates who admire her quick wit and desire to succeed.*

# Technology Mania

Mariama Diallo

Why are people willing to stand on line for hours to get the newest product? When a new version of the iPhone comes out, I notice that people are already talking about the next one. They believe the

## Why are people willing to stand on line for hours to get the newest product?

hype that the next one will somehow be better than the new one they have in their hand.

Is it necessary to always have the latest gadget on

the market? Do you really need to upgrade your technology or do you just want to be in style or show off your cool new toy?

Technology is a big part of our daily life. We use technology to learn at school, to pay our bills, to communicate with friends and family, and so much more. People need technology in order not to be left behind. But sometimes, instead of being thoughtful about what products we need, we fall into what I call *technology mania*.

I think the problem is not with technology, but with the way we crave it. We are constantly bombarded with messages that these new products will solve all our problems, make us feel like we are connected to others, and bring us hap-

piness. The companies bombard us with these messages to make money, lots of money. I wonder why we can't resist their messages. I guess some people have a need to brag about what they have, some have a need to feel better about themselves, and some just follow the trends.

**The companies bombard us with these messages to make money, lots of money. I wonder why we can't resist their messages.**

We need to resist these constant messages. After all, there will always be newer, bigger, better products on the market. Technology is not a fashion statement but it is a necessity to get on in our world.

Mariama Diallo is a GED student at the Mid-Manhattan Adult Learning Center in New York City. She is from Senegal and has lived in the U.S. for the past eleven years. She aspires to be a social worker after she earns her college degree. She is a proud mother of Fatoumata, a fifth grader.



## What Do You Think?

**Do you like to have the latest gadget?** Why or why not? (Maybe you're wondering what all the various gadgets are and what they can do. If so, see p. 54 for more information.)

**Why do you think** there is often a new and slightly improved gadget on the market?

**Look at the phones on the next page.** Which ones do you think got fixed when they broke? Which ones get thrown away?

**Share what you know** about the production cycle of electronic gadgets. Then read the articles on pp. 8-9 and 50-51.

# Telephone Technology

*Peggy Newbern*



Technology has helped Americans in many ways over the years. For example, the first telephone that I remember was the one my grandmother had in the mid-1950s. It was the kind that had a crank handle on the side of the phone, and she didn't like to use it very much. You had to crank the handle quickly to charge the battery in the phone. An operator

would answer and connect you to the person you were calling.

The *new* telephone technology was called the rotary phone. It was called a rotary phone because the front of the phone had a circle dialer that was operated entirely by the caller. No more cranking the handle or even speaking to an operator. Also, back then a person just had a four-digit telephone number.



Another new development was the public telephone booth. It seemed like there was one on every corner in town. People could stop and make calls whenever they needed, and it only cost a dime! I remember using pay phones to call my mother to let her know what time I would be home.



As the years went by, telephone technology changed once again, and rotary phones and public pay telephones have become a rare sight. Many of the phones today are wireless

or mobile. They have many more features than the old rotary phones. You can now send pictures and text messages, and you can even command your household lights to turn on. It is amazing what you can do by pressing a few buttons on a phone.



I use a mobile phone mostly for emergencies. But I also receive pictures and texts. This feature is especially nice because it helps me keep up with my granddaughter and great-grandson who live nearly 1,500 miles away in Colorado. How about that for helpful technology?

The telephone is a good example of how far technology has come in my lifetime. I didn't use the crank-handle telephone much because I was so young at the time, but I remember seeing it at my grandmother's house. The rotary phones, push-button phones, and public telephone booths I have used quite a bit and was very comfortable using them.

As for the new mobile phone technology, there are so many features that just making a simple phone call can be confusing. However, thanks to my grandchildren, I now have that technology down pat as well. I just wonder how much telephone technology will change in ten or so years from now.

---

*Peggy Newbern is a student at West Georgia Technical College (WGTC). She is also a grandmother of four and great-grandmother of two. She takes GED classes at WGTC alongside her grandson.*



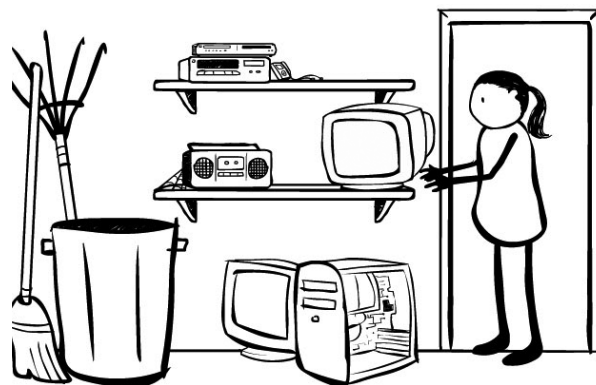


# “You Made It; You Deal with It”

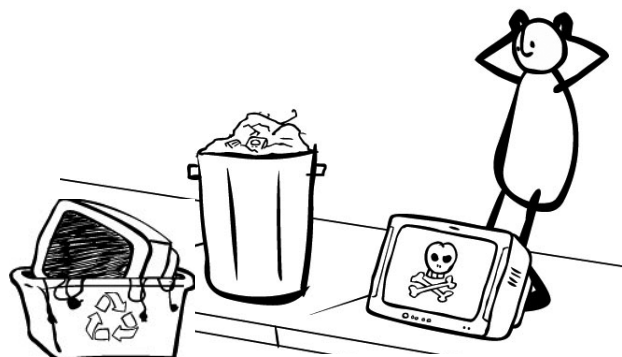
Annie Leonard – “The Story of Electronics”



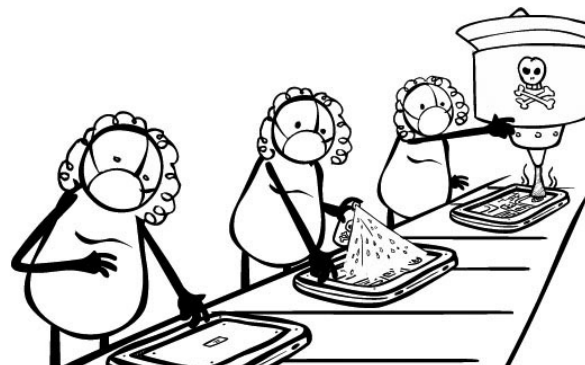
1. Have you ever noticed how often you have to buy a new phone or new computer? Why do they break so easily and get out-of-date so quickly?



2. We used to be able to fix things when they broke, but these days it's cheaper to throw it away (or recycle it) and buy a new one. Why aren't products made to last?



3. What happens when you throw away or recycle your electronics? Who pays for that?



4. Who pays for the health of the workers who make the product?



5. Workers in China or Nigeria break open recycled electronics to remove valuable metals; then they burn the rest.



6. What effects does that have on the people, air, and water? Who absorbs that “cost”?



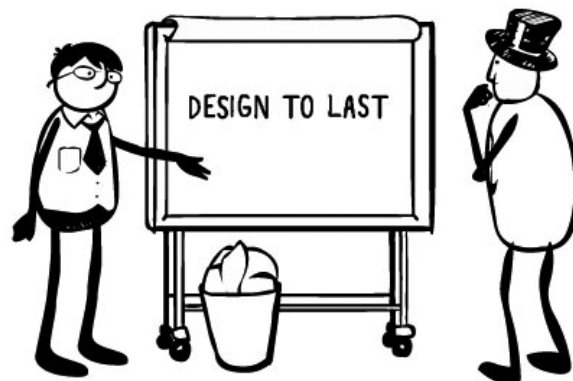
**7.** Corporations want to “externalize” as many costs as possible. In other words, they don’t want to have to take responsibility for the hidden costs of their products. They leave those costs for other people (including future generations) to pay.



**8.** Because corporations want to make as much money as possible, they make products that have to be replaced every year or two. Their profits keep increasing partly because they don’t have to take responsibility for the pollution and health problems that their products cause.



**9.** In some countries, people have fought for “Take Back” laws. They say to the corporation, “You made it; you deal with it.” This provides an incentive for the corporation to make the products that last longer, are less toxic, and are easier to dispose of.



**10.** Some consumer advocates are pushing corporations to make products that are designed to last – instead of designed for the dump.

### Extension Activities

**What is the main idea** of this cartoon? Write a one-sentence summary.

**Discuss the idea of** “planned obsolescence.” (This is when manufacturers design things purposely *not* to last.) How does planned obsolescence affect you?

**Who do you think** should take responsibility for the hidden costs of electronic products being made today?

**Research the** “Take Back” laws in your state, in the U.S., and around the world. Share what you learn.

**Source:** Images reprinted under the Creative Commons license. See <[www.storyofstuff.org/movies-all/story-of-electronics](http://www.storyofstuff.org/movies-all/story-of-electronics)> to watch a short video and to find other materials on this topic.

# How “Green” Is the Internet?

Cynthia Peters

Sending an email instead of a letter saves resources. You don’t use paper, and no gas-guzzling mail trucks are needed to get your letter from point A to point B. Instead, when you use email, you compose the letter on your screen and hit “send.” Your letter travels through the Internet and arrives

---

**If the Internet were a country, it would be in fifth place for using energy and producing greenhouse gas.**

---

on the screen of your friend – having used no energy. Right? Wrong. Although “greener” than using paper, the Internet uses tons of energy!

When you store your email in your inbox, watch a Youtube video, post your pictures on Face-

book, or save a document on Google docs, where do those pieces actually “live”? The answer: on “server farms” located across the U.S. and all over the world. A server farm is a collection of tens of thousands of servers that hold data.

All those servers generate a lot of heat and they have to be cooled. So server farms use a lot of energy. How much, exactly? According to CNN, more than the entire auto industry does in



According to current estimates, Google runs more than 1.5 million computers housed in server farms all over the world (above right). Server farms are so vast, engineers use bicycles to get around more efficiently. Photos by Connie Zhou from <[www.dailywhatnot.com](http://www.dailywhatnot.com)>.



In 1999, Google founders created an inexpensive system of interconnected PCs to process thousands of search requests per second. This production server (above), which is now in the Computer History Museum in California, was one of about 30 racks in the first Google data center. Visit <[www.computer-history.org](http://www.computer-history.org)> to learn more.

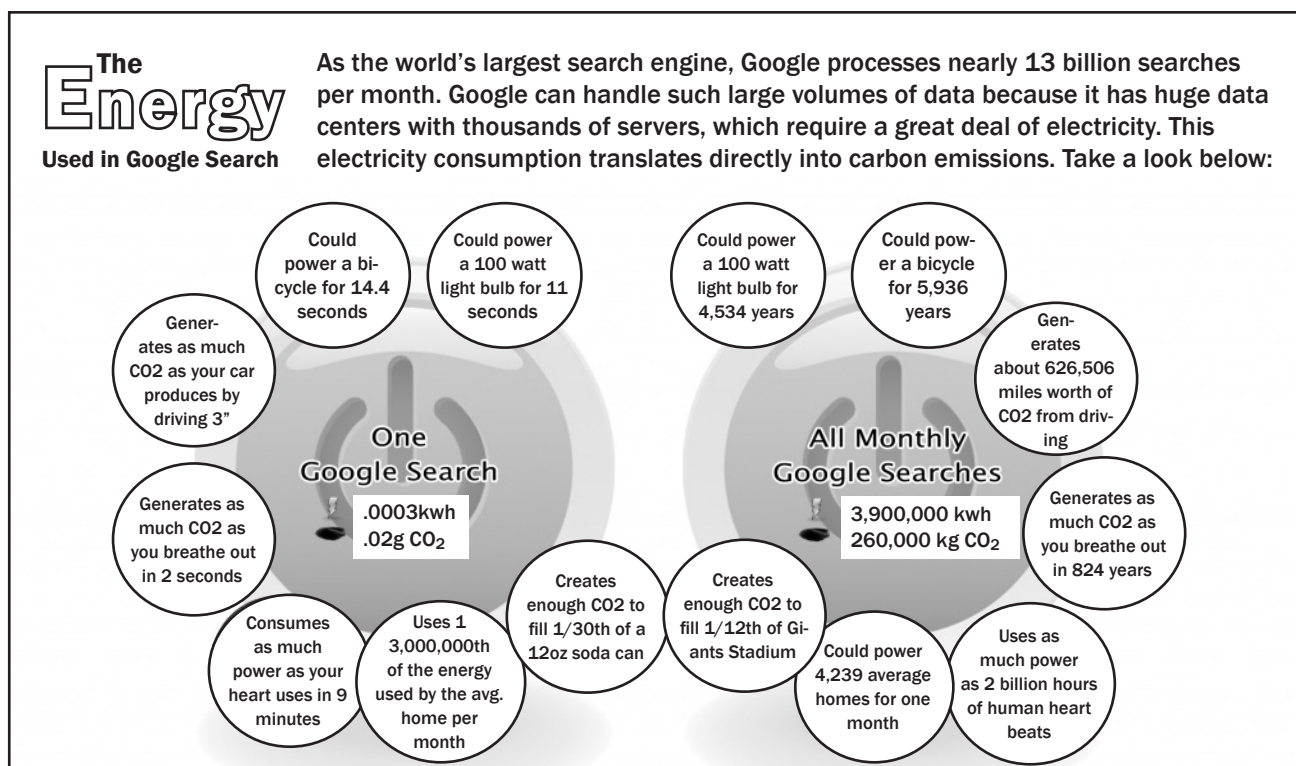
producing cars and trucks. If the Internet were a country, it would be in fifth place for using energy and producing greenhouse gas. According to Greenpeace, the Internet consumes more power than Russia.

**Sources:** <[planetsave.com/2011/10/27/how-much-energy-does-the-internet-consume/](http://planetsave.com/2011/10/27/how-much-energy-does-the-internet-consume/)>, <[www.mnn.com/green-tech/computers/blogs/running-big-draw-server-farms-on-fuel-cells-solar-and-wind](http://www.mnn.com/green-tech/computers/blogs/running-big-draw-server-farms-on-fuel-cells-solar-and-wind)>, <[www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/publications/climate/2011/Cool%20IT/dirty-data-report-greenpeace.pdf](http://www.greenpeace.org/international/Global/international/publications/climate/2011/Cool%20IT/dirty-data-report-greenpeace.pdf)>.

---

Cynthia Peters is the editor of *The Change Agent*.





Source: [www.wellhome.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Infographic\\_Final3-1024x606.png](http://www.wellhome.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Infographic_Final3-1024x606.png)

## Try This!

**Test yourself!** Watch this short video [vimeo.com/danilic/howgreen](http://vimeo.com/danilic/howgreen) and then see how you do on this short quiz:

- When you watch an online video, how much carbon gets released into the atmosphere?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- What are the two "brownest" Internet companies?  
\_\_\_\_\_
- The Internet contributes what percent of the world's emissions?  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Do some math.** Make up some math problems based on the graphic above. Share them and solve them.

**Explore these** cool interactive graphics:

- How the Internet is growing worldwide: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8552410.stm>
- How the Internet works: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/technology/8552415.stm>

**Learn more** about carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) and how it affects our environment. See the Climate Change issue of *The Change Agent* (Issue #27).

# Disconnection by Internet

Cheikh Dia

My mother is a wonderful housewife. She always takes care of the family. Almost every day she cooks and we eat dinner together and everybody can tell what they did during the day. In the past, it was my favorite moment in the day because you could see the connection of our family. My mom was very happy and sometimes she gave us some advice about life.

---

**She said, “The Internet is like your new mother.”**

---

But now sometimes in the house we lose that harmony, and it’s all because of the computer, Internet, and those smart phones we use every day. Those new technologies are supposed to help us and make life easier, but sometimes

they have disadvantages.

One day when I came into my house I saw my mom lying on the bed. She looked sad, and I asked her, “What’s going on here?” She explained to me how sad and alone she felt sometimes because her family is always on Facebook or watching movies online. She doesn’t feel close to the family anymore. She said, “The Internet is like your new mother.” Since that day, I realize how the Internet can disconnect a family if you don’t use it with moderation.

---

*Cheikh Dia is from Senegal. He studies English as a Second Language through the Adult Learning Center of New York City College of Technology (CUNY).*



## Focus on Language

**The author’s mother uses a simile** when she says, “The Internet is like your new mother.” What do you think she meant by that? Make up your own similes to describe the Internet.

**Define “harmony”** (used in the second paragraph of the essay). What does the author mean by harmony in this context? What are some other ways you might use the word?

**There is a note of irony** in the author’s title. Explain.

# Real Feelings in Real Time?

*Cynthia Chiquez*

I was 18 years old when I got my first cellphone. Before my mom and dad decided to give me my first phone, I had to do a lot of things. I had to take care of my little sister, and I had to get good grades in school.

**Sometimes we are together, but we are not really together.**

My sister got her first cellphone when she was 13 years old. She didn't have to do anything to get it. She just said, "Mom and Dad, I need a cellphone because almost all my friends have one."

We use our phones in lots of ways – to make calls and to check Facebook and Twitter. But it feels like communication in our family is almost broken. We can't find time to talk because someone's phone rings and interrupts us. Sometimes we are together at lunch, but we are not really together because either my brother or sister is using the computer. It is hard to have a conversation because the cellphone and computer are between us. My brother and sister don't pay attention when I talk.

I don't want to imagine if one day cellphones replace face-to-face communication. People are beginning to be addicted to their technology. We are forgetting how to express our real feelings in real time.



*Cynthia Chiquez studies ESL at the Center for Immigrant Education and Training at LaGuardia Community College in Queens, NY.*

## What about You?

**At what age** should parents get cell phones for their children? Why? Explain your answer.

**How often do you check?** Think about your own habits around technology. Do you check your devices frequently? Why or why not?

**Do you agree** that people are beginning to be addicted to their technology? Why or why not? Explore further by reading the story on pp. 14-15, "Notes from an Internet Addict."



# Notes from an Internet Addict

*Viola You*

“Darling, go do your homework!” my mom called. “Just a minute,” I answered. I was watching a TV show on my computer. A few minutes later, my mother came in and made me turn off my computer. “Go do your homework, now!” she said. I walked back to my study slowly and reluctantly.

## From Reliance to Addiction

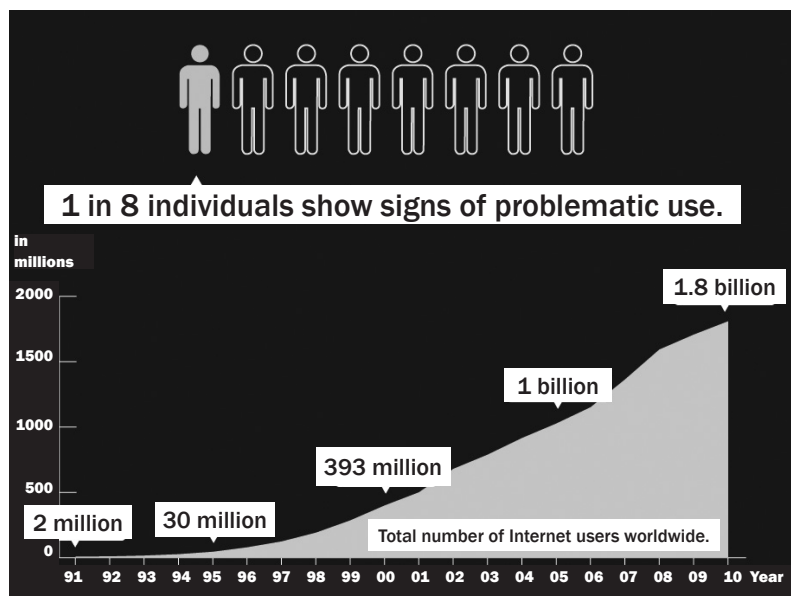
I don’t remember how many times this kind of situation happened when I was in high school. I used to spend a lot of time on the Internet – watching dramas or movies, chatting with friends, browsing some websites or forums. I missed a lot of schoolwork and I didn’t do my homework well. I cared about nothing but using the computer. Naturally, I didn’t get good grades. My academic performance was totally awful.



I did use the computer to look up information for school. I just “Googled” it and found what I needed. But it was almost too easy. I didn’t value the information I found, and I didn’t really remember it. Because the information was so easy to find, I guess it didn’t make a deep impression on my brain.

The most terrible part was that I was getting lazy about things. I didn’t even want to think for myself. I totally relied on technology. For example, I always needed to use online apps to do something. When I came across a new word that I didn’t know, I always used the Google translator. I didn’t have a good vocabulary because I didn’t actually try to memorize new words.

I was becoming an Internet addict. I couldn’t control my desire to always be on the computer. I remember one summer when I spent every moment I could on the computer. My parents



*While the American Medical Association has yet to officially classify Internet addiction as a recognized mental health disorder, statistics show that it is a serious issue with potentially serious side effects. Studies show that between 5 and 10% of Web surfers suffer from some form of dependency. Source: <[www.flowtown.com](http://www.flowtown.com)>.*

noticed, and they banned me from using the TV and Internet at home. To keep me away from it, they locked the study where my computer was.

Despite the ban, I found ways to sneak on to the computer. I went to my parents' bedroom and found the key to the study. After my parents went

---

**I froze and my heart stopped. I felt like a thief in my own house.**

---

to sleep, I would tiptoe into the study to get on the computer. At first, I was excited that I could still use the Internet, but soon I felt tired about sneaking around. I was always worried that my parents would find out. When I heard any sounds

from my parents' bedroom, I froze and my heart stopped. I felt like a thief in my own house.

As a result of using the computer in the middle of the night, I didn't sleep enough. I couldn't concentrate and I always felt sleepy in class. Unfortunately, my school work was getting tougher, and that was making me get exhausted. At the end of that semester I got a score that was even lower than usual.

**I Needed to Make a Change**

I realized that I couldn't stand this situation any more. I decided to tell my parents about the secret activity I was doing behind their backs. We made an agreement that I would change the way I used the Internet. They helped me to change this bad habit by being supportive instead of authoritarian. Instead of playing games or watching soap operas, I used the Internet to read the news and learn some skills.

Despite the distractions of the Internet, the problem isn't technology itself. As people know, technology can be very useful and can make life easier. The point is how we use it. If we use it wisely, it can benefit us; if not, it can seriously disrupt life. I know! I'm a recovering Internet addict!

---

*Viola You lives in New York and is a student at the Borough of Manhattan Community College in the ESOL Bridge Class.*

## Do You Have an iDisorder?

Dr. Larry Rosen, author of *iDisorder: Understanding Our Obsession with Technology and Overcoming Its Hold on Us* explains how technology is interfering with teenagers' sleep: "One of the biggest disrupters of sleep is what you do with your phone when you go to bed. If you leave it on, which about 40 percent of kids do, or if you leave it on vibrate, which is what about another 30-40 percent of kids do, you're going to be constantly checking it. That's going to disrupt your sleep cycle."

**Source:** Excerpted from "Is Technology Making Students Sick?" by David Cutler, <www.spinedu.com>, April 3, 2013.

**What are some of the signs that a person might be developing an addiction with technology? List them here:**

---



---



---



---



---



---



---



---

**Compare this story with the one on the next page by someone who talks about being addicted—in a good way—to the Internet and to technology.**

# Technology is My Lifeline

Lina Shkilko

## Saved by My iPhone

Imagine you are on the subway platform. You see rats on the rails. You hear the loud thunder of metal wheels. Trains, with different color circles and letters, are going to unknown destinations. You can't ask anybody, because you are alone in this station. Scared human being, your skin is covered with goose bumps, and... Eureka! You put your

---

**You can use “Hop Stop” to calculate the time to your destination. You can use Skype to see your best friend—even though she lives on the other side of the planet. And this technology is free!**

---

hand in your pocket and squeeze your smart phone. Technology! Thank God! You take out your iPhone and smile. The small brown application “Subway Map” is looking at you through the smart phone’s screen and helps you find the shortest way home.

Despite the fact that I have lived in New York for 14 months, sometimes I can be baffled by all these stations and different trains. Today, as usual, I used my phone to look up the best transfer station. My little helper, “Subway Map,” always gives me the right advice. As a result, I got to my English class on time!

## Pigeons and Postmen

When I think about ancient people, I feel sympathy for how they lived. No planes, no Internet, and no smart phones. Their ability and resources were so limited. They had only a carriage with horses for traveling, and maybe pigeons or a postman to deliver letters. Our ancestors needed ages to communicate long distance. In the 13th century, it took



Marco Polo 15 years to reach Indonesia from Asia across Persia and China. But now you can do that in several hours by plane.

## Multi-tasking and Connecting with Family

These days, you can check the weather forecast in the morning and reply to emails at the same time. You can use “Hop Stop” to calculate the time to your destination. You can use Skype to see your best friend—even though she lives on the other side of the planet. And this technology is free! This is a huge benefit, especially if you are a new immigrant. I love being able to talk with my parents, who live in the Ukraine. I can see them and hear their voices whenever I want, ignoring the huge distance between us. It warms my heart and gives me more spiritual energy.

## Addicted—In a Good Way!

Now almost all people are addicted—in a good way—to the Internet and to smart phones. I think it is a very positive trend, which is improving lives and opening up more possibilities for our health, work, emotions, and communication.

---

*Lina Shkilko lives in New York. She is a new immigrant and a student at the Borough of Manhattan Community College English language program.*

# Technology Connects & Disconnects

*Marleny Salguero*

For me, technology can make our lives easier by bringing us closer to each other. And it also can become a weapon that hurts our family life.

## Face Time with My Mom

For example, Skype helps connect people. Let me tell you, I love Skype because it allows me to talk with my relatives in Guatemala. I can even get “face time” with them. Every Sunday night I use this program to see my family. It is amazing! It makes me feel closer to them. The first time my mom and I saw each other on Skype, we couldn’t stop crying. It was the first time we had seen each other in 10 years! I am so happy I can see other family members too. I have two nieces in Guatemala, ages 11 and 8. I get to see them grow up.

## No Time with My Own Kids

Yet, technology also disconnects me from my family. I have constant debates with my children and husband about how much they use their tablets and the new Xbox. My husband is paying every month for Xbox Live. When he’s not working, all he does is play. I call it “The Plague.”

What can I say about my children? They are

either using the tablet or the Xbox. I spend all day yelling, “Please stop playing.” My children don’t get fresh air or play outside. They don’t play with friends very much. I used to play games with them, but now they don’t want to play with me.



## Strategies for My Family

To get my sons to put down their technology, I make sure they sign up for sports and other activities. One of my sons plays soccer. My other son is a member of the Boy Scouts. We go to church every Sunday morning. I do not allow them to bring their technology to the dinner table. That means we get a chance to talk as a family. But they eat very fast, and then they run back to Xbox.

---

*Marleny Salguero is an ABE student at Bristol Community College in Fall River, MA. Originally from Guatemala, she has been living in the U.S. for 12 years. She has two sons, ages 12 and 8. She plans to get her GED and go to college.*

## Strategies for Connecting

**What does Marleny do to counteract the disconnecting effects of technology?**

**Interview your classmates.** Find out what strategies they use to keep family members connected and to limit children’s use of technology. Find out what works and what doesn’t work. Write down some of the ideas here. Make a powerpoint and present it to the class.

---



---



---



# Is Technology Changing Your Brain?

Stephanie Levin



## BEFORE YOU READ.

- Discuss multi-tasking. Are you a multi-tasker? If so, how does it affect you?
- Consider the meaning of these words and phrases: constant connectivity, distracted generation, attention span, cognitive ability, contemplate, and reflect.

## How Effective is Multi-tasking?

There's no question that technology has brought many benefits to our lives, our jobs, and our communication. But studies continue to show that multi-tasking and constant connectivity is creating a distracted generation with a short attention span. Studies out of Stanford, MIT, and UCSD find

**While multi-taskers think they are accomplishing more, studies show the opposite to be true.**

growing evidence that multi-tasking frazzles the brain, making it less productive. Heavy multi-taskers have trouble paying attention and filtering out irrelevant information. The failure to filter suggests that they're slowed down by that irrelevant information, ac-

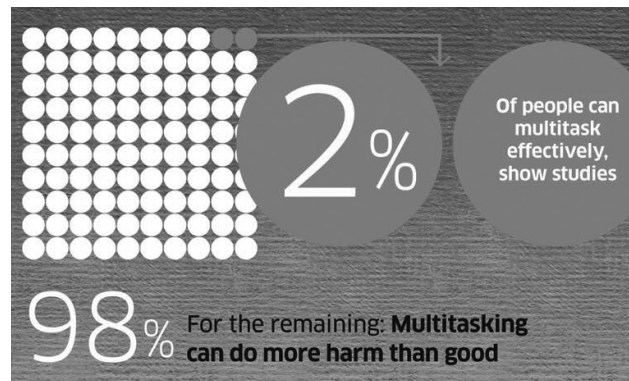
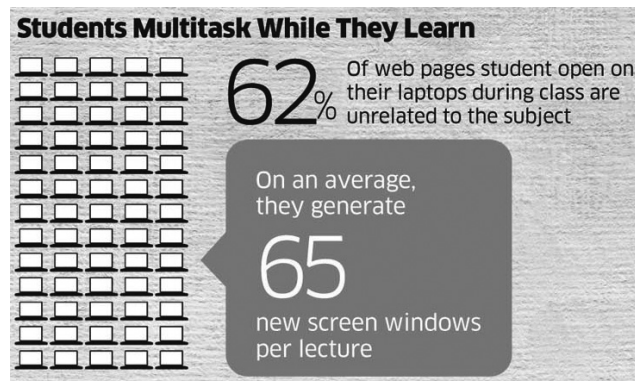
ording to a 2009 study from Stanford. In other words their cognitive ability is impaired. While multi-taskers think they are accomplishing more, studies show the opposite to be true. Their performance suffers, greatly. The brain is not wired to multi-task efficiently and effectively.

## Do We Read Differently Online?

In his book *The Shallows*, Nicolas Carr poses the question: is Google making us stupid? Carr suggests that the printed page focuses our attention and promotes creative thought, while the Internet encourages rapid sampling of small bits of information from numerous sources. The brain reads differently online and offline. The online brain scans and gleans information, often taking in small bits of information. The offline brain scans less, tends to *read* rather than scan, underlines and stops to contemplate and reflect more than online.

## Are We More Alone?

Today, many of us are constantly connected, and we rely on social networking to stay in touch. Yet, MIT professor Sherry Turkle and author of *Alone*



Graphics excerpted from "The Perils of Multi-tasking" at <visual.ly/multitasking>.

Together, notes, "Technology is the architect of our intimacies, and the relentless connection to it has led to a new solitude."

If you spend a lot of time multi-tasking, reading online, and communicating online, how do you think it affects your brain?

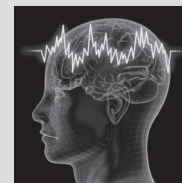
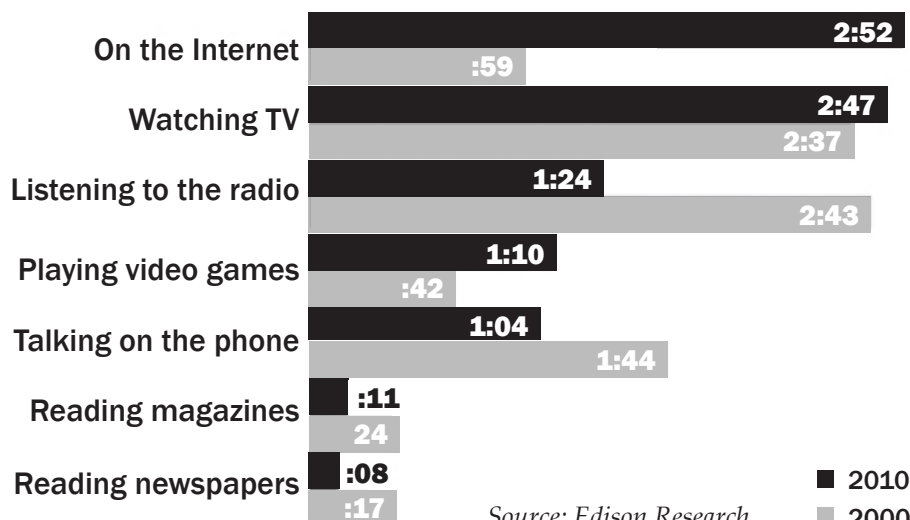
**Sources:** Pashler, H. "Attentional limitations in doing two tasks at the same time," *Current Directions in Psychological Science*, 1992; Ophira, E. Nass, C. Wagner, A. "Cognitive control in media multitaskers," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, Vol. 106 No. 33, August 25, 2009; <news.stanford.edu/news/2009/august24/multitask-research-study-082409.html>.



Stephanie Levin has been an ESL instructor for many years. She currently teaches at City College San Francisco. Her interest in the brain and education began when she noticed how differently both she and her students read online and offline. This article was adapted by Cynthia Peters. It originally appeared on KQED's "ESL Insights" in April 2013 at <education.kqed.org/edspace/2013/04/23/is-technology-changing-your-brain>.

## Time Spent with Media Reported Change from 2000 to 2010

Ages 12-24; in hours and minutes



### Investigate.

What does the author think about technology and the brain? How do you know she thinks that? Why do you think she cares? Base your opinion on specific information from the article and bio.

**Gather evidence.** List two specific findings from the studies about multi-tasking. Write three true statements based on the chart above.

# Driving With High-Tech Tools

*Hala Abou Seka*

Using your smart phone in the car can sometimes make sense. For example, if you want to know how the traffic is, all you need to do is to check your phone. You can also use your phone as a navigation system, which cuts down on your need for other gadgets such as a GPS.

However, it is unsafe to be looking at your phone while you are trying to drive. You might get distracted and cause accidents. Some teenagers like to text while driving, but it's very dangerous to do so. Do you know that texting takes your eyes off the road for 4.6 seconds? At 55 miles per hour, that's like driving an entire football field while blindfolded!

When people talk on the phone while driving they think it's less dangerous than texting. But what they don't realize is that even with their eyes on the road, their mind is not on driving. According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, in 2010, driver distraction was the cause of 18% of all fatal crashes in the United States.

It's discouraging that this generation has grown up with these tools, but they don't always understand when it's inappropriate or risky to use them. I am afraid that without rules or common



sense, constant use of so-called “smart” phones will endanger the community and cause terrible problems for future generations.

I agree with states whose laws ban cell phones while driving. If a person needs to text or make a call, they should pull over to a safe place. That way, they can save their own life as well as their passengers' lives. This is especially important if you are transporting children. Adults will teach their kids a valuable lesson because children learn from their parents' behavior.

*Hala Abou Seka is the mother of three children. She came to the U.S. from Syria in 2012. She is a student at the Dr. Shirley Forrest Callan Methuen Adult Learning Center in Methuen, MA, and is planning to pursue a business degree in the future.*



### Say What You Think

**First, a little grammar practice.** Add the correct punctuation to the sign above.

**Now...make up your own sign.** Or write a Tweet, a Facebook post, a blog entry, or a phrase you might see on a bumper sticker. Be persuasive. Try to convince people of *your* opinion about driving with high-tech tools.

**Collect/share** comments and responses.

# Bled to Death

*Nusaiba Mohamed*

On a quiet night in a beautiful, green city near the Blue Nile where I lived when I was child, we heard a loud scream from our neighbor's house. We ran to see what was going on. We were shocked. All the children and their mother were on the ground near their father's body. Friends had carried his body to his house. He had been

**If he had had a phone he might have been able to call for help.**

shot in his store by a robber, and he had bled to death because he didn't have a phone and nobody saw him.

If he had had a phone he might have been able to call for help.

He might have lived. The detectives tried to do their best. But without witnesses, clues, or security cameras, they couldn't find the robber.

Nowadays, cameras are everywhere. If you want to do something bad, you'd better think twice. Many eyes are watching. Also, most people have their own phone so they can get help any



time they need. Technology can play an important role in protecting people.

*Nusaiba Mohamed is from Sudan. She studies ESL at the Adult Learning Center of the New York City College of Technology (CUNY), and she plans to go to college. She is grateful for all her teachers, and she is especially thankful to her teacher Jay Klokker for encouraging her to submit an essay to The Change Agent.*

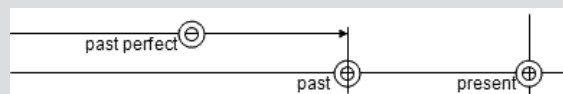
## Take It Further

**Discuss the article.** Has technology made you feel safer? What are the advantages and disadvantages of depending on technology for protection?

**Focus on grammar.** We use the past perfect (had + the past participle of a verb) when we are telling a story that happened in the past, and then we want to describe something that happened *even further* in the past than the story we are telling. For example, *I studied English last year. Before that, I had never been to an English class.*

**Underline instances** of verbs in the *past perfect tense* in this story. Circle instances of verbs in the *simple past tense*. Note the strange (but correct!) use of "had had."

**Tell a story from your own life** that includes the simple past and the past perfect.







# Finding Felix

## How Facebook Helped Us Find Our Little Brother

Makeda Laurent

### A Bittersweet Story

This essay is about how my older brother and I found our little brother Felix through Facebook. This is a story that is very touching to me; it makes me cry every time I tell it. In fact, I am crying now. This story is what I call “bittersweet.” As you read, you will see why.

When I was six, my father went to jail. I didn’t see him again until I was about 12 and my mother took my older brother and me to visit him in a North Carolina prison. Before my father got incarcerated, he was very promiscuous. One of his relationships led to the birth of my little brother

Felix Laurent.

My older brother and I didn’t know about Felix until I was about ten. He wasn’t my mother’s son, but

---

**All that mattered was I had a little brother. I wanted to meet him right away!**

---

I didn’t care. All that mattered was I had a little brother. I wanted to meet him right away! But we lived far apart from each other, so I never got to meet Felix in person.

### “I found Felix!”

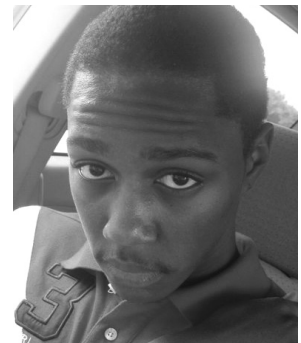
Many years passed. Suddenly one day I heard yelling in my house. Then there was a loud knocking on my door. It was my older brother. He was so excited it looked like his eyes were about to pop out his head. He was jumping up and down saying, “I found Felix! I found Felix!” (They had found each other on Facebook.) I got excited too. I started jumping up and down with him.

We made arrangements for Felix to visit us in New York that weekend. When he arrived, he finally got the chance to meet his paternal side of the family. Getting to know Felix was one of the best times of my life. He was tall and hand-

---

**From the very first moment I met him, my heart was bursting with love for my baby brother**

---



*Felix (above) and with his son (top).*

some, intelligent and funny. He was a wonderful person.

From the very first moment I met him, my heart was bursting with love for my baby brother. I couldn't stop staring at him; he was the spitting

---

**But I am stubborn. I didn't pick up any of his calls or reply to any of his texts, and I unfriended him on Facebook.**

---

image of my older brother and father. It was so crazy to me. We were so happy to finally have Felix so close to us; we took him everywhere and showed him off to everyone. The feeling was amazing.

For some strange reason I had a feeling of completion. I felt whole.

After Felix's first visit, he continued to come to New York about twice a month. I spoke to him about everything, and he didn't mind me talking his ears off about girly stuff. I loved him so much.

### A Falling Out

In 2012, Felix didn't visit as much because he was going through issues back home. One day, he posted a status on Facebook about being shot at. Right away, I got furious and commented on the status in an angry manner. A friend of his responded to my comment, and we started arguing.

This argument led to me not speaking to my younger brother for a couple months. There wasn't a week that passed that my brother didn't try to reach out to me. But I am stubborn. I didn't pick up any of his calls or reply to any of his texts, and I unfriended him on Facebook.

---

**I found out through Facebook that [Felix] was gone.**

---

A few months later, I read a post on my aunt's Facebook page that said, "Rest in peace to my nephew Felix." I found out through Facebook that my little brother, my heart, one of the main reasons I smiled, was gone.

He had been stabbed in his back and released from the hospital earlier than he should have. Because of health insurance issues, he did not get all the right treatment. Felix was found eight hours later in his bed, deceased.

---

*Makeda Laurent (right) attends Brooklyn Adult Learning Center in the Bed-Stuy area of Brooklyn. She is 23 years old, a single mother of three, and currently trying to obtain her GED so she can find a good enough job to make ends meet so her children can live good lives.*



### Take it Further

**What stood out to you** about this story? Discuss why the author uses the term "bittersweet" to describe it.

**Describe the various ways that Facebook** had an impact on the family in this story.

**Use these writing prompts** to do some free-writing. When you free-write, try to silence your inner critic. Don't worry about handwriting, spelling, or grammar. Just get your thoughts down on paper. Share them with others. Or not. The idea is to express yourself!

1. Write about the word "bittersweet" or share a bittersweet experience that you had.
2. Look at the picture of Felix and his son. Describe what you see.
3. Write about what makes you feel complete or whole.

# It Hurt. I Was Furious. Deceived through Social Media

*Sterlin Reaves*

The best thing about social media is that it allows you to be connected to the world beyond your immediate surroundings, *and that's also the worst thing about it.*

Once, I received a letter from somebody who got my information off of Facebook. Because a lot

---

**This person was able to convince me that we went to high school together.**

---

of my personal information was visible to anyone, this person was able to convince me that we went to high school together. And so for a few months we com-

municated with each other. The relationship grew to the point where I started sending books and magazines to this person. I put my family in touch with this person so that they could offer help since I can't do much from inside prison.

Then, mysteriously, I stopped hearing from this person. No letters, my collect calls weren't being accepted, and I was confused. I wasn't sure if something had happened to this person or if I had said or done something.

Finally, I got a letter from my cousin who told me that they had given this person some money. It was a lot of money, mind you, and this person suddenly disappeared. After months of trying to search for this person, I eventually had to accept that I had gotten lied to and manipulated. It hurt.



I was furious. I couldn't do anything about it, and my family works too hard to just be losing money like that.

But I learned a lesson. I know that I need to be more suspicious when people suddenly appear in my life. So, hopefully my story will open people's eyes to the potential dangers of meeting people through social media.

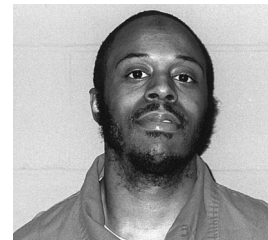
---

**I eventually had to accept that I had gotten lied to and manipulated.**

---

---

*Sterlin Reaves is a 35-year-old former marine who ended up in prison due to drug abuse and poor decision-making. He is using writing to rehabilitate himself and be a better person. He is serving time at SCI Greene in Waynesburg, PA.*



## Research, Write, Present!

**Look up information** on the theme of social media and deception. Take notes.

**Organize your notes.** Write a thesis. Draft an essay that makes an argument and cites information from various sources. Use quotes from the text to support your thesis.

**Re-write.** Get feedback and revise again. Present your final essay to the class.

# Social Media

## Charting the Benefits and Challenges

Betty Garcia



This table shows my ideas about the benefits and challenges of certain aspects of social media. It reflects my personal experience and what I observe in society. I would like to challenge you to fill in some of the missing pieces. Can you add a challenge in row 3? And a benefit on row 4? Also, can you think of two more aspects of social media – and add a benefit and a challenge for each?

Betty Garcia is from Colombia. She has been attending the ESOL program of Leon County Schools Adult & Community Education in Tallahassee, FL, since September 2012. She wants to thank her teacher, Sofia Castro, who motivates her.

Aspect of Social Media	Benefit	Challenge
1. Communication	Eases communication, especially with your family or friends who live in other countries.	Decreases the communication between parent and child.
2. Networking	Provides links to others, which might help you find work, increase your income.	Gives criminals or bullies access to children (and adults).
3. Learning more about people	Employers can look up potential employees and see what their attitudes are and see if they are a good match for the company.	
4. Sharing news about yourself		Puts you at risk because criminals might contact you, learn your habits, know when you're out of town, etc.
5.		
6.		

### Discussion Questions

**How do you know** if your child is part of a social media network? If your child does participate in social media, how do you monitor it?

**How does social media affect** the way your family communicates?

**Share the ways you** have used social media for work, for a job search, or to raise money.



# Digital Footprints

## Your trail on the Web may come back to haunt you!

Akira Kamiya

### I Googled a Job Applicant

A few years ago we were conducting a job search for an open position at our office. I had a stack of resumes to look over to see who might make a good match. I was curious to know more about the applicants, so I decided to try a Google search on the names of the job applicants.

What I found was somewhat surprising. I was amazed to see how much information was just out there for anyone to see! One person's Twitter and Facebook accounts were largely public and fully revealed her personal side. Nothing in these posts was too out of the ordinary. She just liked to have fun, and she liked to talk about it.

But since the side of herself that she showed in her resume was so different from the side she showed in social media, it was hard to reconcile the two views of her. Despite my trying very hard to be objective about it, I admit it was now hard to get myself to see only what was revealed in her resume! As it turned out, she was not really a potential candidate. But if she had been a good

---

**She was not helping her case by making public so much private information.**

---

candidate, she was not helping her case by making public so much private information. I bring up this story because it might be the case that you are looking for a job or trying to rent an apartment. While it is true that anti-discrimination laws protect your rights in some ways, you don't want to make it hard for



yourself by creating a digital footprint that allows potential employers or landlords to invade your privacy! Others may not be as open minded about what you say in a forum that you think is private.

### Even the IRS Might be Looking You Up

Recently it was reported in the news that even the IRS has assigned people to the job of trolling the Internet for information about potential tax evaders. They are looking for bits and pieces of data that might reveal people who are trying to hide wealth so they can avoid paying taxes.

Be careful what you say on the Internet. You may never get to live it down. Posting online is different than speaking during a conversation. At least during a conversation, even if you are in a fairly public space, your words only enter the ears of those around you. Your words live only as memories. With an online post, however, someone can copy and paste it to their computer, and then share it, and you will have no control over it.

---

**Be careful what you say on the Internet. You may never get to live it down.**

---

### Protect Your Privacy

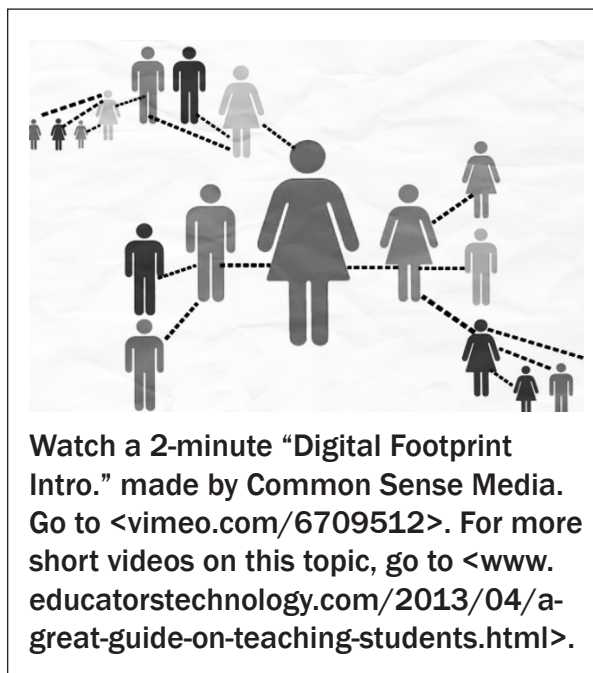
Don't think that what you are posting is just between you and your small circle of friends! One way to test this out is to Google your full name, or your email address. If you see anything that comes up that you wouldn't want a potential boss,

work mate, room mate, or landlord to see, then either make it private or delete it! Also search for your self on Facebook and see how much of your account is public. You may be surprised to see how many posts and photos of yourself are visible to the world!

### **You may be surprised to see how many posts and photos of yourself are visible to the world!**

Another way to protect yourself is not to create social networking accounts under your full and real name. If your name is unique, it is quite easy

for someone with bad intentions to track you down. For instance, my name is rather unique in the Boston area. I once wrote a letter to the *Boston Herald* expressing opposition to the mounting U.S. attack on Iraq in 2003. I signed my name and my home town. Well, someone using the White Pages looked me up and wrote me back a threatening letter. The threat was not serious, but it was unnerving to think the writer knew where I lived. Now I am careful to make sure my digital



Watch a 2-minute “Digital Footprint Intro.” made by Common Sense Media. Go to [vimeo.com/6709512](http://vimeo.com/6709512). For more short videos on this topic, go to [www.educatorstechnology.com/2013/04/a-great-guide-on-teaching-students.html](http://www.educatorstechnology.com/2013/04/a-great-guide-on-teaching-students.html).

footprint is not so easily traceable to my physical location.

*Akira Kamiya is the Educational Technology Specialist at the Adult Literacy Resource Institute, Greater Boston SABES Center. He assists Adult Education teachers with integrating technology in the classroom.*

### **Review Your Privacy Settings on Facebook**

- 1.** Go to “Timeline Settings” to see what your Timeline looks like from the perspective of others. Go to your own Timeline by clicking your own name, and then click the Gear Icon near your Activity Log.
- 2.** Under “Review what other people see on your timeline,” click “View As.” It will show you what it looks like to the general public and also to the eyes of specific friends.
- 3.** If you find that “The Public” can see more than you want, go to your Privacy Settings. (Click on the Gear Icon in the Top Blue Menu Bar.) There you can limit “Who can see your future posts” and also “Who can see your past posts.” At a minimum, this should be set to “Friends.”
- 4.** You can also create subsets of Friends, such as “Close Friends” or work- or school-related friends. (Do this from your own account page, under the Friends Link along the top. You have to do it individually—friend by friend—by clicking their Friends Button and Selecting “+ New List.”)
- 5.** When you create a new post, you can select which List of Friends this post will be available to.

# The Computer is My Family's Tool for Education and Connecting with the World

Tina Fang

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Discuss the graphic. What are the ways you and/or your children use technology as a tool?

When my children do their homework, they use the Internet. I saw my eight-year-old daughter do a school research project on animals. She found a picture of a river otter and then she was able to draw it herself and write down facts about it. She learned a lot of information about the animal that I could not have learned when I was her age.

I encourage my three daughters, 8, 9, and 10 to use the computer to learn many things. For example, they use My Skills Tutor to practice reading, grammar, and math for an hour each day on the weekend. (I have an account with My Skills Tutor from my adult education program.)

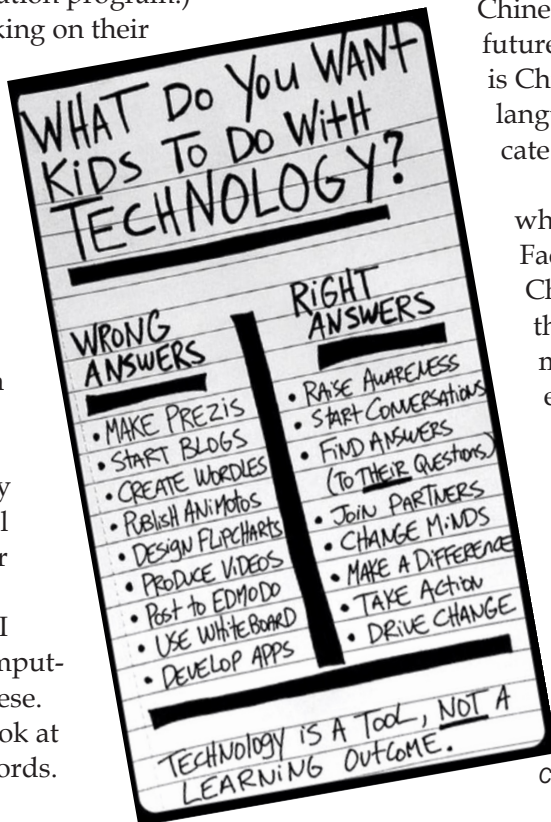
After they finish working on their academic skills, they can play computer games or practice typing. They enjoy <[www.mathplayground.com](http://www.mathplayground.com)>, <[www.sumdog.com](http://www.sumdog.com)>, and <[www.pbskids.com](http://www.pbskids.com)>. On the weekends, they are allowed to go to these websites for one hour each day if they have studied one hour first. Sometimes they ask why they can only visit educational sites. I tell them, "The computer is for studying not playing."

Since they were four, I have had them use the computer to learn Mandarin Chinese. We use the computer to look at the meaning of Chinese words.



Sometimes they don't want to practice, but I tell them that China is growing quickly, and knowing Chinese will help them find a job in the future. I also tell them that our family is Chinese and they should know the language so that they can communicate with their relatives.

Also, we use <[www.qq.com](http://www.qq.com)>, which is like a Chinese version of Facebook, to talk with my family in China and with my friends around the world. My sister has never met my daughters, but on the computer they can see each other. Using the computer is very enjoyable. It supports my children's education, and it makes the world smaller.



Tina Fang (pictured above with her three children) is a student at the Rhode Island Family Literacy Initiative in Providence, RI, where she is enrolled in a National External Diploma Program class. She is a native of China and has lived in the U.S. for 15 years.

# Using Technology for Education

Irma G. Laboy

## Pronunciation, Vocabulary, and Grammar

For me, technology is a powerful tool for learning. For example, I am studying English, and my school gave me different programs to use on the computer such as Rosetta Stone, Lexia, and Spark 3000. These programs help me to improve my comprehension and pronunciation. In Spark 3000,

**I need a lot of practice to learn English, and these programs make it possible for me to keep learning after school.**

I read different articles and then answer questions about the article. Lexia helps me hear the differences between long and short vowels. With another program called Rosetta Stone, I can practice vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, listening, and reading. I have an excellent teacher. She is always looking for different ways to teach English.

I need a lot of practice to learn English, and these programs make it possible for me to keep learning after school. At home, I use interactive games to practice my English. For example, I like to study vocabulary words by playing Hangman and Word Scramble. I also do crossword puzzles. These games make it fun to learn the spelling and meaning of words. You can find a wide variety of websites that teach English on the computer. My favorite websites are <[www.manythings.org](http://www.manythings.org)> and <[www.usalearns.org](http://www.usalearns.org)>.

## Advanced Studies

Finally, technology has created enormous opportunities for education. Today it is possible to take online classes on almost any topic. This is a great opportunity for people who want to get a career but have limited time. My sister got her degree in Business Administration by taking online classes.

She is married, has children, and has a job, so taking online classes was a good solution for her. Now she works as an executive secretary at a high school during the day and gives computer classes in the afternoon.

Technology is changing the world by giving people opportunities to improve their education. For me and my sister, technology has helped us improve our skills and pursue our dreams. How do you use technology for your education?

*Irma Laboy, originally from Mexico, is a student at The Adult Education Center in Hartford, CT. Her hobbies are reading, walking in the park, and spending time with her husband. In the future, she would like to work in a day care center with preschool children.*



## You Try It!

**Go to the websites** Irma mentions in this article. Pick an activity you especially like, and share it with your classmates.

**Explore the Web.** See p. 31 and note the list of additional free websites. Search for free apps for learning English and try some out. Share them with others.

**Plan your time.** When can you fit in some extra moments of study? (See “Education on the Go...” on p. 33 for more ideas.)

**Teachers!** Get more ideas at <[www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras)>. Read:

1. “Technology in the Classroom” by Dylan Emerick-Brown
2. “Weebly Comes to CT” by Aileen Halloran.



# The Flipped Classroom



Karisa Tashjian

Imagine doing your homework in school and receiving your instruction through videos and websites at home. This is called a “flipped” classroom, and it is becoming more and more popular in all types of schools. It is also known as a reverse teaching model.

In this model, students watch short videos of concepts at home, complete short online quizzes, and come to school the next day with questions and ready to share what they have learned. Teachers can make their own videos and use websites and web tools such as TED-Ed, Khan Academy, Sophia, iTunesU, Weebly, and Edmodo. During school time, teachers work with students, often one-on-one, to make sure they understand the content. Students ask questions and work on problems with the help of their teachers and fellow students.

*Karisa Tashjian is the literacy coordinator at the Rhode Island Family Literacy Initiative.*

## What Do You Think?

**Would you like to learn in a flipped classroom? Why or why not?**

**What are the benefits and challenges of a flipped classroom for students? For teachers?**

**What subjects do you think would work well for a flipped classroom and why?**

**Be a good digital citizen.** Learn more here <[www.educatorstechnology.com/2013/05/10-excellent-digital-citizenship-tips.html](http://www.educatorstechnology.com/2013/05/10-excellent-digital-citizenship-tips.html)>.

**Want to learn more?** Visit <[www.flippedlearningorg](http://www.flippedlearningorg)>.

## Fun Quiz

**How many Internet acronyms do you know? Write the answer in the space provided.**

BFF: \_\_\_\_\_

GL: \_\_\_\_\_

BRB: \_\_\_\_\_

IMO: \_\_\_\_\_

BYOD: \_\_\_\_\_

LOL: \_\_\_\_\_

F2F: \_\_\_\_\_

TTYL: \_\_\_\_\_

FFCL: \_\_\_\_\_

WRU: \_\_\_\_\_

*Answers: Best friend forever, Be right back, Bring your own device, Face to face, Falling from chair laughing, Good luck, In my opinion, Laugh out loud, Talk to you later, Where are you.*

# Savvy Consumers: Beware of



*Ed Latham*

What happens when you join “free” with “premium”? You get “freemium” – a popular business model from the online world. How does it work? You sign up for free anti-virus software, for example, and then get prompted to buy the premium version. Or you start playing a free game online and then get enticed to make small purchases to advance your game. Another business model that allows companies to give products away for free is they include advertising. In this model, the free content provides a forum in which you, the consumer, is “sold” to the advertiser. “Free” products are becoming more and more common in education. Teachers and students are learning to take advantage of these resources, but it’s a good idea to beware of the get-something-for-nothing model.

## Watch Out for Freemiums

Using the freemium model, companies are offering teachers many “free” educational tools. The hope is that the teacher finds the tool or resource effective and will then buy the other parts available for small fees. This is very clever as it relies on individual teachers throwing \$2, \$5 or even \$10 into a tool she can use to help her learners find success.

## How to Handle those Ads?

One strategy for navigating free content is to train yourself to ignore the commercial interruptions. Many students are experienced gamers and users of online sites, so they may already be adept at ignoring ads. For others, a Web page cluttered with advertising may be very distracting. In this case, there are helpful online tools, such as <[www.readability.com](http://www.readability.com)>, which strip the ads from the Web page and present only the text.

Ebook sites have many inappropriate banners or even content categories. In this case, you can simply download the book to a device or PDF file so that you are not reading it within the site.

## Be a Savvy Consumer

All the “free” online content requires us to be more savvy as we navigate the Web. You can find good content on the sites that use the “freemium” model, but it can take a lot of time and effort to navigate around the micro purchases that you will be prompted to buy. When the business model is to make money via advertising, you have to ask how that affects the content on the site. Consciously or unconsciously, the content developers will want the site to be a “friendly” environment for the ads, so the content they offer may be narrower than it should. Still, if we learn the safe ways to consume advertising-based content, we will find many opportunities to take advantage of useful educational tools and resources.

*Ed Latham works with [tutor.com](http://tutor.com) and is a consultant at the Maine Adult Education Department.*

## More on Free

**Some Websites are free because they are funded by grants or by tax dollars:**

- Annenberg Learner: [www.learner.org](http://www.learner.org)
- ESL Literacy Network: [www.esl-literacy.com](http://www.esl-literacy.com)
- Independent Television Service: [itvs.org](http://itvs.org)
- Language Resource Centers: [www.nflrc.org](http://www.nflrc.org)
- Library of Congress: [www.loc.gov/teachers/](http://www.loc.gov/teachers/)
- Literacy Information and Communication System: [lincs.ed.gov](http://lincs.ed.gov)
- National Endowment for the Humanities: [edsitement.neh.gov](http://edsitement.neh.gov)
- Teaching Tolerance: [www.tolerance.org](http://www.tolerance.org)
- Zinn Education Project: [zinnedproject.org](http://zinnedproject.org)

**What are some ways you should be savvy about grant- or tax-dollar-funded sites such as these?**

# Films that Start Conversations

## A Review of “The Tale of Timmy Two Chins” and “Speechless”

Joshua Dennis

*Scenarios USA films are written by young people for young people. Each one is 15-20 minutes long, was made by a professional director, and includes a discussion guide, lesson plans, and ideas about how to take action in your community on the topic. See more at: <[www.scenariosusa.org](http://www.scenariosusa.org)>.*

*“Timmy Two Chins” was written by Luis Hernandez when he was a junior at the Brooklyn High School for Collaborative Studies in Brooklyn, NY, and directed by Nancy Savoca. “Speechless” was written by Roxanne Lasker-Hall when she was a junior at the Cleveland School of the Arts, in Cleveland, OH, and directed by Karyn Kusama.*

### Talking About Bullying

I can remember being picked on at school. One kid would say to me, “That’s so gay.” This really offended me. I have gay parents, and I don’t like people making fun of gay people. People would gossip about a girl in our group because she had a girlfriend.

Another kid would say racist things to me, and the other kids wouldn’t know what to say. They couldn’t stand up against the bully. But then once he was gone, they would all talk about him.

“Timmy Two Chins” is about a guy who is overweight. When he is unhappy, he eats. He gets treated badly, and he treats himself badly. He treats other people badly as well. You can see how bullying is a bad cycle that just keeps going.

This is a good film to show in schools and adult education programs. Almost everyone has an experience with bullying. You might be the one who got bullied or the one who did the bullying or the one who stood by while it happened. If you create an opportunity for people to talk about it, maybe they will be able to make different choices next time it happens.



Writer Luis Hernandez, right, and the actor who portrayed his leading character, Timmy Two Chins, Armani Del Rio.

### Finding Your Voice

“Speechless” is about a young man who is sexually assaulted by another young man. He is so ashamed, he can’t talk about it. This film will help people who have had this experience. It will help them speak up. Kids who haven’t had this experience will have their eyes opened. They might be able to step up and support somebody who has been through the same thing.

I could imagine both of these films opening up a lot of conversations for students and teachers. They both tell the story of someone who had to find their voice. No matter what issue you are facing, finding your voice is an important first step.

To me, it is meaningful that the films are written by young people. When a story comes right out of someone’s experience, you can tell. It has a different feeling to it.

---

Joshua Dennis recently received his high school diploma through the External Diploma Program in Annapolis, MD. He plays bass guitar with a rock group called Tayman Avenue.



# Education on the Go at TV411.org

Lora Myers

“I never get enough time for myself,” students in adult education classes often say. “So I have trouble finding time to study.”

Sound familiar? It’s true that carving out a time each day for reading, studying math, or doing homework is hard for busy adults. New types of technology can help. They’re ubiquitous – that is, everywhere around us – and right at hand when we can snatch a few minutes to, say, read a poem, think through a math problem, or refresh our knowledge of science.

## Use Little Chunks of Time

The producers at the nonprofit Education Development Center had those little chunks of time in mind when they created a free educational website for adult learners, TV411.org. They noticed that more and more people were buying devices that could connect to the Internet via cellular technology or WiFi “hotspots.” Why, thought the TV411 team, couldn’t adult education students use their devices to connect to TV411.org while riding the bus or taking a coffee break?

Instead of playing Angry Birds or checking out Facebook, learners could visit TV411.org to watch short and entertaining videos that help them expand their vocabulary, get the point of view in a news article, learn about healthful bacteria in yogurt, or brush up on percents, decimals, and fractions. The site includes 135 free, entertaining, and educational videos on reading, writing, math, and science, as well as 75 interactive web lessons and 31 printable activity sheets.

## What’s Your Strategy?

**How would the learn-as-you-go strategy work for you? How do you make time to study and learn?**

## Find Out What’s Cooking

An exciting new feature, *TV411 What’s Cooking?*, is a real cooking show starring a real chef, Jamika Pessoa, who blends math and science into the preparation of simple, tasty, and nutritious recipes.

For example, in the *Bacteria* video, Chef Jamika explores the benefits and dangers of bacteria, while whipping up a tangy yogurt dip to complement skewers of lemony chicken.



*Jamika Pessoa teaches math and science in her cooking show on TV411.org.*

## Learn as You Go

So how do we imagine learners on-the-go can use TV411.org? Let’s count the ways:

- On the bus to work, watch a 10-minute video about bacteria and learn the benefits and dangers of these microscopic organisms and the conditions under which they multiply.
- For 15 minutes at lunch, check out the companion science and math web lessons to the *Bacteria* video on a tablet or laptop.
- For 30 minutes after dinner, log on and discuss how “good” bacteria are essential for pickling. Share pickling recipes with other users.

That’s 55 enjoyable minutes of extra learning time in your day!

*Lora Myers works at the Education Development Center. For another article about teaching science with TV411, see <[www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent/extras)>.*



# Using Technology to Solve Problems



Steve Quann

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Talk about a problem you had and the steps you took to deal with it.

## Using Technology to Fix My Hot Water Heater

It is the middle of winter. I have a **problem**. My water heater is broken. But that is not the real problem. I know how to fix the water heater.

The real problem is that I need to replace a part. Right now, my **goal** is to show that part to the salesperson at the hardware store. Then I can replace the broken part with the new one. Since I can't bring the old part with me, I need to think of possible **solutions**. The person at the hardware store can't come to my house to see the problem. If I try to draw the part, I don't think it will help. The person at the store will not recognize the part and probably just laugh.



Photo from <[www.wiki-how.com/Repair-an-Electric-Water-Heater](http://www.wiki-how.com/Repair-an-Electric-Water-Heater)>.

Then I realize I have a camera in my pocket...my cellphone! I decide to take a picture of the part and bring it to the store. What were the **results**? I found the new part, my problem is fixed and my family can take showers again. My wife is happy about that.

## Educational Uses for Your Camera

What are some other ways you might be able to use your camera?

A teacher told me how a student used technology to improve how he studied vocabulary. The teacher wrote

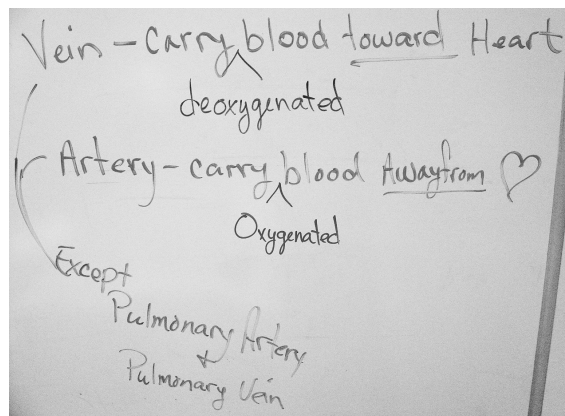
the meaning of a number of vocabulary words on the board and asked students to write them in their notebook. After class, a student came to the board to take a photo of the words and the definitions. His problem was that he didn't want to carry his notebook with him everywhere. Now, he studies the words on his phone.

## Fix it with YouTube

How about using the Internet for problem solving? Everyone knows they can find *information* on the Web, but do you use it to *discover solutions to problems*? Do you know where I learned to fix the water heater (and other plumbing and mechanical problems)? You probably guessed it: YouTube! I also use YouTube for problems at work and study. How about you? Maybe you need help writing a topic sentence. YouTube has almost 2000 videos teaching you how to write topic sentences.

## Searching for Solutions

And of course, speaking of technology, I am often asked at work how to solve technology problems.



A photo of notes from a classroom's white board. Do you take notes in class? Would this be a helpful way to capture information that the teacher shares so that you can study it later?

Many times I do not *know the solution*, but I know where to *find the solution*. Most times, if you have a problem, someone else is talking about that same problem on a discussion board or forum. Try searching for an answer to your problem—whether it is an issue with technology or a grammar question—by going to [google.com](http://google.com) and clicking on groups. As always when you use the Web, read and evaluate carefully. And don't forget to take these steps to solving a problem:

Step 1: Identify and understand the problem

Step 2: Think of possible solutions

Step 3: Select the best solution

Step 4: Evaluate the results

---

Steve Quann works at World Education where he helps others use technology in instruction. He is also writes for the blog <[techtipsforteachers.weebly.com](http://techtipsforteachers.weebly.com)>.

## Use Technology to Fix It!



1 Not sure you will remember where you parked your car? Take a picture of the row number or other identifying marker.



2 Can't remember the comma rules? Wondering if you should use "who" or "whom"? There's a grammar app for that!



3 Looking for the lowest price? The highest quality? Find websites or apps that help you comparison shop.



4 Loaning a book to a friend? Take a picture of him or her with the book, so you can remember who has it.



5 Taking something apart in an effort to fix it? Take pictures as you go so you can remember how to put it back together.

## Extension Activities

**Identify the steps.** Look back on p. 33. List the steps Steve went through to deal with his broken hot water heater:

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

**Solve a problem** using technology. Share it with us on *The Change Agent* Facebook page.

**Share your solutions!** Identify a problem and write out the steps for solving it. Gather helpful graphics from the Internet. Search for ideas about giving presentations. Use <[slideshow.com](http://slideshow.com)> to create a presentation. And then share it.

**Learn something new.** Try going to <[www.wikihow.com](http://www.wikihow.com)> to learn about how to do something. Look for other how-to sites on the Internet and share them.

**Teachers: try these lesson plans** on problem solving: <[www.cls.utk.edu/pdf/ls/Week3\\_Lesson21.pdf](http://www.cls.utk.edu/pdf/ls/Week3_Lesson21.pdf)>.

# Dragon Naturally Speaking

## Notes from a One-Fingered Typist

Bernice Sicely



### The Old Days

When I was growing up in the 1940s, all we had was a radio and some books. My mother had 13 children, and when she got upset with us, she sent us outside. We played hide-and-seek, kickball, and other outside games.

### These Days

Nowadays, parents send their kids to their rooms, and the kids play on computers or Xbox. They text their friends and listen to music. With all the technology today, families don't spend as much time together; they don't talk as much. All they do is text.

### I Write by Talking

Technology does have some good points. I am a one-fingered typist, and sometimes I can't read my own writing. I am writing this with a computer software program called Dragon Naturally Speaking. I talk into a microphone and the program writes for me.

Dragon Naturally Speaking is a great program, but it doesn't know where to put punctuation, and sometimes it gets words confused such as there, their, and they're. Also, if I talk too fast it doesn't understand what I'm saying so I have to speak very slowly, which is kind of funny. Another funny thing about Dragon Naturally Speaking

is that you have to tell it to "wake up" to start and "go to sleep" when I'm done.

### Helps and Hurts

Technology helps us in many ways. It helped me write this article! But it hurts us, too. Sometimes, it gets in the way of families being close to each other, and that's the sad part.



Bernice Sicely (middle, with her teachers, Randy Cole and Janet Baker) is a student at Vermont Adult Learning in Rutland, VT. She is working on her reading and math skills so she can someday pursue her GED. After she found out her article was accepted for publication, she bought a new laptop. She is hoping to put this new technology to use because her kickball-playing days are long over, and she needs something new to play with.

# How Times Have Changed

*Robert Berroa*

I was born in the Dominican Republic and came to the United States at a young age. The only technology I was brought up with was a wall phone, a phonograph that had to be cranked, and a black and white television that had three channels. Oh, how times have changed! Now I have a smart phone, a CD player, and a flat screen TV that offers over 75 channels. Technology has made my life more pleasant.

## Technology Tracks Inventory

One of the earliest jobs I had was working in a grocery store. At that time we had to write all orders by hand. This was difficult and time-consuming for me due to my limited knowledge of English. Now, you merely scan a product's bar code, and you will immediately know if it needs to be re-ordered. This technology has made it easier for stores to keep track of their inventory.

## Computers Speed Manufacturing

Another job that I had was being in charge of a machine that twisted thread. This machine used an antiquated and time-consuming process. While

---

**I was fortunate to witness this change in production, and I was trained to work on a computer program that operated different machines.**

---

to work on a computer program that operated different machines. The time it took to finish this product went from four hours to half an hour, resulting in a better and more durable product.

I was at this job, it was sold to another company. This new company brought in new machinists along with new technology. I was fortunate to witness this change in production, and I was trained

I have witnessed first hand how manufacturing has changed, and I know I must continue to adapt to this change.

## Education Helps Me Keep Pace with Changes

At this stage in my life, I am working towards my GED. I am also enrolled in a pre-manufacturing course at a local community college. This course has given me an opportunity to read blueprints, take accurate measurements, learn computer applications in manufacturing, safety in the workplace, math skills, and new concepts in the field of manufacturing.

By training workers in the science of new manufacturing technology, the United States will be better able to compete with European and Asian countries which at the present are ahead of the United States. It is about time for our country to make more goods that are stamped MADE IN AMERICA.

---

*Robert Berroa is a student at Northwestern Connecticut Community College in Winsted, CT, in the Project Crossroads Program, and he is working towards a certificate in the pre-manufacturing course offered through the initiative of the Connecticut Manufacturing, Energy, and Transportation Grant.*

## More about Work

**Read on!** The articles on pp. 37-39 focus on similar themes: technology and work.

**Looking for a good job?** Check out the "Good Jobs..." issue (#36) of *The Change Agent* on our website.





# Technology in the Care of Others

*Eva Ramos*

A typical day at my job as a certified nurse's assistant (CNA) is very busy. I start my shift by looking over my schedule and reviewing reports of my patient's activities from the previous day. In this way, I can better assist my patients' needs and anticipate any problems that might arise.

## Improved Prosthetic Devices

Just last week, I was preparing for my shift when I happened to hear one of my patients sobbing. I went to see what the problem was. Through tears, she informed me that her doctors had told her that she needed to have one leg amputated. I told her about another patient of mine who had been in a lot of pain and experiencing complications due to high blood pressure. He was told that his health would improve if his leg was amputated.

Although this was a difficult decision for him, he decided to go ahead with the operation. Today with the help of physical therapy and the technology used in creating a pro-

sthesis, his health is better and he is a happier individual. I thought that it would benefit my patient to meet this individual, so she could have some perspective on how her life might improve. She has not made a decision about her surgery yet, but her demeanor has greatly improved.

## Improved Communication Means Better Patient Care

Not only has technology advanced to create better prostheses for people, but technology has changed



my workplace so that now I have more time to spend talking with and caring for my patients. For example, we now enter assisted daily living (ADL) activities for each patient on the computer. ADL activities are: walking safely, dressing, and taking care of personal hygiene. Being able to read my patients' ADL activities on the computer gives me up-to-date information about what my patients' needs are so that I can better support them.

Technology has helped improve the accuracy of taking vital functions, such as temperature, pulse rate, and blood pressure. Once the vitals and the ADLs are entered on a computer, this information helps other personnel at the facility do their job. Also, this information, which is stored in the data base, provides hospitals with pertinent information concerning the individual.

Technological advances have become a necessary and an integral part of my job at the rehabilitation center. Thanks to technology I can do my job more efficiently and most importantly be an emotional support for my patients.

---

*Eva A Ramos is a student at Northwestern Connecticut Community College in Winsted, CT. She is working on her GED in order to pursue a career in the medical profession.*

# Restaurants and Technology

*Steve Anastasopoulos*

## No Accent in Email

In the 1980s, I was the chef and the owner of an Italian restaurant. Back then, the only technology was a wall phone. I ordered all my supplies for the restaurant by using this instrument. Often the supplier did not understand what I was saying, due to my Greek accent, and many orders came in incorrectly. Now thirty years later, I place all my orders by email. Thanks to email, my accent doesn't get in the way. My orders are more accurate, which saves time and reduces stress.

## Using Software to Take Care of Business

When I started my career in the restaurant business the cash register was my only means of keeping track of receipts. Now there are computer programs that do not allow for mistakes in adding receipts, making change, and keeping track of inventory, bills, payroll, and sales.

With these advances in technology all records of business transactions are there at my fingertips. This helps me with my future projections for my business, allows less waste of food, and keeps the IRS happy.

At the present, I have the time and the desire to get my GED. After completion of this degree I plan to enroll in a culinary program at a local community college next fall. I am sure that I will become acquainted with the many new technologies that are offered in the world of cooking along with the restaurant business. For example, preparing, warming, and preserving foods.

## Still...Restaurants Need a Human Touch

My only concern is where will this technology take us in the next 30 years? Will we be completely dependent on computers, smart phones, and tablets? Although technology is readily available and growing at an ever increasing speed, it is not the



answer to everything. There needs to be a person behind this technology, a person with a warm smile to greet you at a restaurant, and a waiter or a waitress that will see to your every need and do it with a pleasant smile. More importantly, technology can't take the place of a boss who appreciates his employees and his customers.

Without the human element of kindness, any business, no matter how technology-oriented it is, will not be able to stay afloat in today's world.

---

**There needs to be a person behind this technology, a person with a warm smile**

---

*Steve Anastasopoulos is a student in the Project Crossroads program at Northwestern Connecticut Community College in Winsted, CT. After receiving his degree he plans to enter a culinary program at another community college.*

## Technology at Work

**Read the essays on pp. 37-39. Write a 5-paragraph essay about technology and work. Use quotes from these articles.**

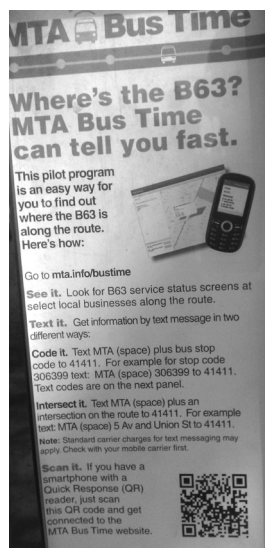
**Research what technology you will need to use in your career choice.**

# How Can You Use QR Codes?

Nell Eckersley

## What is a QR Code?

In 1994, when Toyota was looking for a better way to track vehicles during the manufacturing process, they invented QR Codes. QR stands for Quick Response, and each code can contain 100 times more information than a typical barcode. QR Codes have become popular in the last couple of years as more and more people have mobile devices like smart phones and tablets that use apps to scan QR Codes.



Top image: NY uses QR codes to update passengers. Bottom: scanning a QR code at a museum.

## Where have you seen them?

The most common use of QR Codes is to tell your mobile device to open a certain website. This means that usually you have to have access to the Internet to use a QR Code. A lot of ads contain QR Codes that take you to the product website. Another common use for QR Codes is on business cards. When you scan this type of QR Code, it tells your device to open up your address book and add to it the contact information contained in the QR Code.

You also see QR codes at bus stops; they will tell you when to expect your bus. Museums use them to direct you to more information about the exhibit. And

cities use them to give you more information about historic landmarks. Airlines and trains use them for ticketing as well.

## How do you make them?

There are many different ways to make your own QR Code but here is one of the easiest ways:

1. Open your browser (Chrome, Internet Explorer, Firefox etc.) and find the website you want the QR Code to take people to.
2. Copy the URL to the website.
3. Open up <bitly.com> and paste your long link into the box at the top right corner of the screen and then click on the shorten button.
4. Copy the new short URL. It should look something like this: <bit.ly/12gN5Jt>
5. Paste the short URL in the browser address bar and type .qr right after the end of the link, and then hit the enter key.
6. Up comes the QR Code for the website you started off with. You can now copy that QR Code image by right clicking on it and selecting copy image from the drop down screen.

Watch a video on how to make your own QR code here: <[www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjJC4e2q4Ds](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tjJC4e2q4Ds)>.



Use your phone or tablet to read this QR code. Where does it take you?

Nell Eckersley is the director of the New York City Regional Adult Education Network. She works at the Literacy Assistance Center where she focuses on integrating social media into adult education. You can follow her on Twitter at @LACNYCNell.

# Closing the Digital Divide

## Digital Literacy is a Social Justice Issue

David J. Rosen

**BEFORE YOU READ:** Discuss the idea of digital literacy. What does it mean? What tools and resources do people need to be digitally literate?

### A New Necessity

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, access to computers, phones, and the Internet is critical to daily life, work, and education. If you don't know how to use technology or if you do not have access to it, you are missing out on a critical form of communication. Most people agree that your education level can have a big impact on your ability to reach your goals. These days, digital literacy needs to be part of that education. If it is not, you may have a hard time pursuing your education, training for jobs and careers, and even keeping up with some aspects of daily life.

Here are some of the things you can do more easily with a computer and access to the Internet:

- Apply for or renew your driver's license.
- Access public services, such as health care, housing, and other resources.
- Research schools for your child; receive emails from your child's teacher or school.

### What Can You Do?

**Search on the Web** for "WiFi" and the name of your city or town. Find out what free resources are available.

**Use your public library.** Find out what technology your library has available for you to borrow and/or use for free.

**Advocate for more funding** for adult education, so your program can acquire more computers and more instructors.



- Search for jobs and fill out online applications.
- Apply for college and file for financial aid.
- Learn online. Take advantage of free or inexpensive online classes, videos, and other educational resources.
- Use Skype or social media to keep up with family and friends, to network with others, find work, etc.

### Close the Digital Divide

People who have the money, education, and resources to use technology in their daily life, have a clear advantage over those who do not. The gap between the technology "haves" and "have nots" has been described as the digital divide. Many who are concerned about this divide see closing it as a social justice issue, an issue in a free society of fairness.

What can we do to narrow or close the digital divide?

- Cities, towns, and companies such as Internet service providers can provide free WiFi hotspots (Internet access points), especially in low-income communities.
- Federal and state government can provide better rural Internet access.
- Communities can increase access at libraries that have technology available for public use.
- Libraries, community computing centers, and adult education programs can teach adults digital literacy skills.

*David Rosen is the president of Newsome Associates. He maintains the Media Library of Teaching Skills <mlots.org>. Follow his blog at <davidrosen.wordpress.com>.*



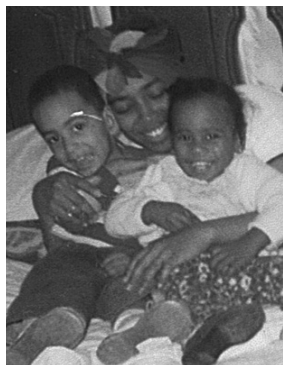
# Using Technology to Make Music and Share a Message

*A Conversation with Antonio Ennis*

Antonio Ennis is an organizer with City Life/Vida Urbana ([www.clvu.org](http://www.clvu.org)) and a rap artist. Performing under the name "Twice Thou," his music video "The Bank Attack" is available at [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and his album, which just won the New England Urban Music Award "Best Conscious CD," is available at [www.cdbaby.com](http://www.cdbaby.com). A short documentary about his work with 4Peace is available at [vimeo.com/3394399](http://vimeo.com/3394399). He was interviewed by The Change Agent in May 2013.

## How did you become a rap artist?

My mother. She's an artist. I loved art when I was younger, but now I "paint" with my words. Words are colorful. You can create pictures with them. I used to read everything. I grew up bilingual, so I had a lot of words. At a young age, I was listening to R&B, George Clinton, etc. We made drum sets out of Tupperware bowls. We made our own guitars.



Antonio (left) with his mother and sister.

We built a band. We played records over and over again, and started doing our own routines. We performed on our porch, and people gave us coins and dollar bills. That's the porch on the house I live in now – the house I've lived in my whole life – the house that is in foreclosure and that I am currently fighting for.

## What do you do to fight for your home?

Some volunteers from a housing organization in Boston, City Life/Vida Urbana, were canvassing in my neighborhood. I found out about their weekly

meetings, and I decided to go. Now I'm an activist in the anti-foreclosure movement, and it has opened my eyes.

## Did you ever imagine that you would be an activist?

Absolutely not. I used to ride by people doing pickets or protests, and I thought they were crazy. It looked comical to me. What were they doing wasting time? But now I see that protesting is a way we try to weaken a system that's working against us. At City Life, we protest the banks that are foreclosing on homeowners and tenants – people who are victims of the economic crisis. It's not our fault that the banks created this crisis, but we are paying the price.

## Does City Life use technology and social media in its organizing?

Yes. We send out emails and text alerts. We have a Facebook page, a YouTube channel, and a Twitter account. But the way I heard about City Life was the old fashioned way – a face-to-face conversation



Antonio (right) with his siblings in front of the house they grew up in – the same house he is currently fighting for.

with a neighbor who had met some City Life organizers who were out knocking on doors.

### **What made you decide to create the *Bank Attack* album?**

I was at my first eviction blockade, and I was watching a family get kicked out of their home. It brought tears to my eyes. I asked myself, “What can I do?” I decided I could use my music to let people know what the banks are doing. When I got home from that eviction blockade, I turned on my studio, and I started laying down tracks (beats, rhymes, melodies, and hooks). There was so much I wanted to communicate; I ended up making a whole album.

### **How has recording changed over the years?**

You used to need a lot of equipment and a whole studio to be able to record a song. Now it’s all digital. You just need a computer and software, like Pro-Tools.

There are a lot fewer major labels because everyone puts out their own music. That’s good and bad news. I like that more people can access their talent, but the field is so overpopulated now, and everyone is trying to sound alike.



### **What is your favorite song on the album?**

“Catch a Banker” is my favorite song. In it, I call out the names of the bankers who got us into this mess. I felt that it was necessary to name the bankers. These people are criminals.

### **What’s next for the anti-foreclosure movement?**

We will keep building. We will keep bringing in new leadership. We will keep up the pressure against the banks. We’ll keep being creative about how to go after our targets. Every day I ask God to give me the strength to be in this struggle. We are building a movement.

### **Tell me what this movement looks like.**

Well, it’s a diverse movement. It’s a big melting pot full of genuine people. I was at a political event recently, and someone said to me, “I never saw an activist wear a watch like that. Don’t you know activists aren’t supposed to wear so much jewelry?” And I said, “Really? Show me the manual.” She thought I looked like a thug, but I told her, “Nah, this is the look of the modern day organizer.”

## **Take it Further**

**Antonio describes how he changed over time. What are some of those changes? Describe some of your own personal transformations.**

**What are the technological as well as “old fashioned” methods City Life uses to do organizing? What do you think works best to bring people together around an issue?**

**Make your own music studio.** Look at <[www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Cheap-Recording-Studio](http://www.wikihow.com/Make-a-Cheap-Recording-Studio)> and search other sites for information on how to get started.

Continued from cover

With all of this information about millions of people, including you, Google can provide a very accurate ad service for its customers. Do you

---

**Your personal information is the price you pay for these services. In a way, you are the product.**

---

remember the search about “gyms” that we talked about earlier? Probably, after you make that search, you will see ads on your screen featuring— you guessed it!— gyms! And I can assure you that it is not a coincidence.

This is Google selling your personal information to companies so they can pitch their products and services.

**Your Privacy in Exchange for Great Google Products**

Maybe this article seems scary to you, but let’s look at it another way. Google is probably one of the most creative companies in the whole world. Typically, when you want to use the best products, you have to pay for them, and they’re generally not cheap. In this case, every year Google invests millions of dollars, does research, and develops great products that everyone can use for free.

Think of all the amazing applications that Google provides. Google Maps allows you to know how to go to anywhere by car or walking. Google Earth will take you to virtually any place on Earth and even out of Earth— to the moon and to Mars. Other great Google services include

email and translation. The Google search engine is an awesome service that lets you know almost anything about any topic. How much does it cost? That’s right. Nothing.

Google also offers special services for students and organizations. There’s a set of Web applications that lets you study or work together with whomever you want regardless of time or place. That means you can share emails, calendars, or any kind of documents with your partners, and it will be accessible for all of you anywhere and anytime by any mobile device such as laptop, tablet, or even smartphone. How much does it cost? Right again. Zero.

As far as Google is concerned, your personal information is the price you pay for these services. In a way, *you* are the product. You— your history, your habits, your interests, etc.— are being sold to companies that want to sell you things. Is this a benefit for you? On the one hand, you can use all of those amazing Google services and pay nothing. On the other hand, Google will collect your information and sell it to the highest bidder. The point of Google, after all, is to make a profit for itself. Google may know more about us than our mothers do. But Google lets us know almost everything about any topic. What do you think? Does it sound like a fair deal?

---

*Romenigüe dos Santos is 25 years old. Born in Angola, he moved to Cape Verde when he was 6. When he was 18, he went to Portugal where he got his Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Computer Science. He knew that to be a better engineer, he had to improve his English, so he came to the U.S. and studied ESL in Pawtucket, RI.*

**Take it Further**

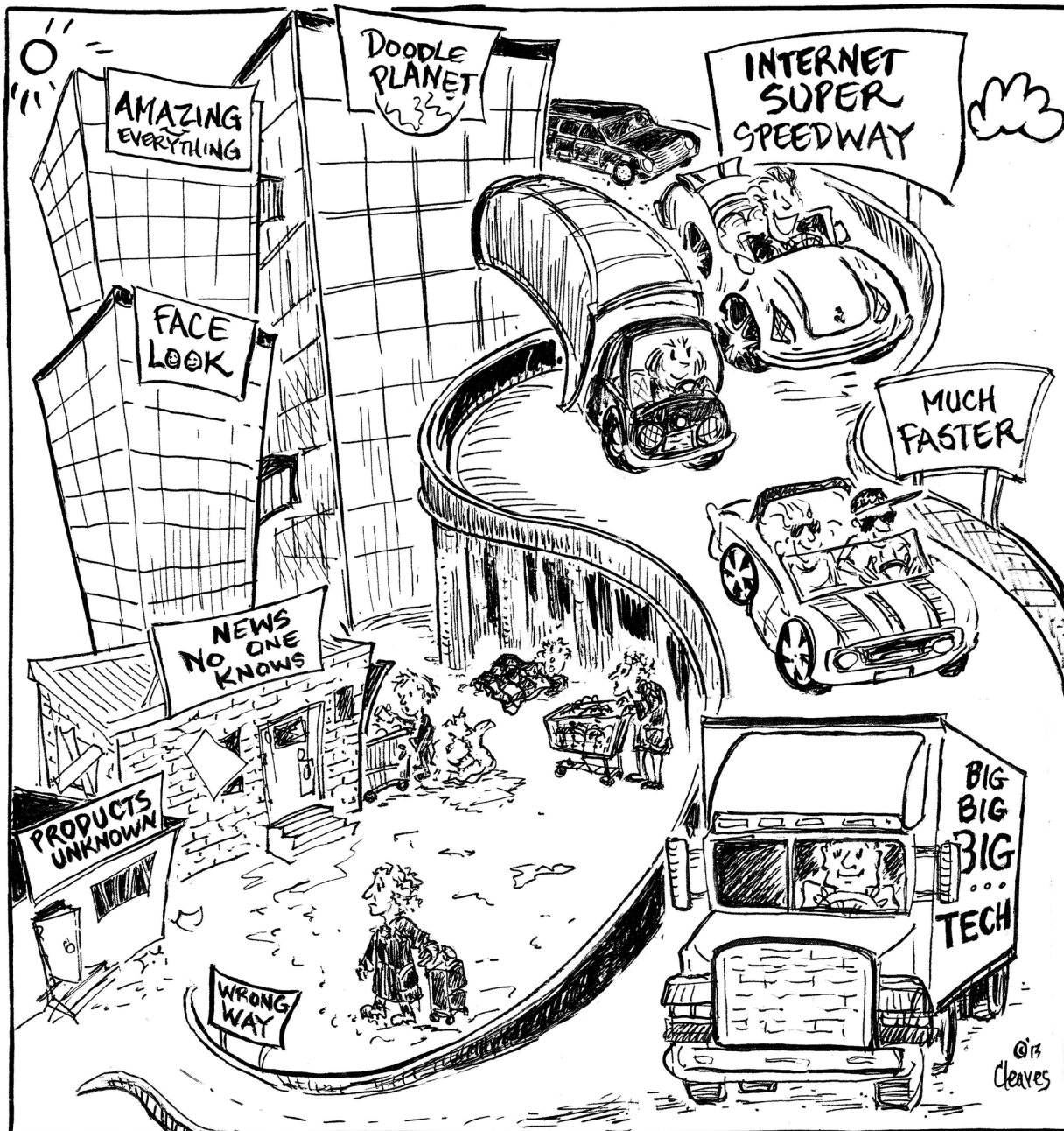
**Put it in your own words.** Explain what the author means when he says, “You are the product.”

**Debate it.** What are the advantages and disadvantages of the Google model? What is your answer to the author’s final question: “Does it sound like a fair deal?”

**Deepen your understanding.** Look at the cartoon on the next page. What would it mean if the wealthiest Internet companies could pay to have their content delivered to you faster?



# Should We Regulate the Internet?



Cartoonist: Ann Cleaves. Source for info. in caption: <[www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/net/neutrality.html](http://www.pbs.org/moyers/moyersonamerica/net/neutrality.html)>.

In this cartoon, the artist portrays an unregulated Internet. Without regulation, Internet providers could charge Web-based companies for faster speeds. An analogy: "For those companies that pay the fee, their content would breeze through the fast-pass lane at the toll bridge, reaching users more quickly; those who don't pay will be stuck in the crowded, slow-moving line, and users will have to wait longer for their content to load." What do you think? Should we allow that? Or should we ask the FCC to continue regulating the Internet so that we have "net neutrality" and all Web-based companies have access to the same Internet speeds?



# Tweeting for a Cause

## How one adult learner uses Twitter in her activism

Erik Jacobson interviews Kathryn Ssedoga

Twitter is an online social network that allows people to share messages with a large number of people at the same time. These messages, called tweets, are limited to 140 characters each. When you “follow” somebody on Twitter, you receive the tweets that they send out.

Some people think Twitter is a waste of time, because many people tweet about little things, like what they had for lunch. Other people think Twitter is important, because it allows people to connect. For example, people tweeting important information was crucial during the recent revolution in Egypt. In this way, tweeting can be used for political activism.

Kathryn Ssedoga is someone who sees Twitter as a valuable resource for her own activism. She describes herself as “a justice seeking hell raiser who howls at the moon every chance she gets.” She tweets about First Nations (Native Canadian) issues and Restorative Justice. She has been tweeting for two years, and now has over 183,000 followers (which she noted was more people than live in her town). Go to <twitter.com> to explore Twitter. You can follow Kathryn at @ssedoga.



### Try Twitter!

#### Kathryn recommends:

- Restorative Circles @RestoraCircles
- Writer about race and restorative justice, Mikhail Lyubansky @mikhail
- Psychologists for Social Responsibility @PsySR\_org
- Grassroots group opposing unilateral & colonial legislation @ldlenomore4
- Native TrailBlazers @VinceSchilling
- Aboriginal People’s TV Network @APT
- @LastReallIndians
- @indiancountry
- Native artist and wonderful on Twitter: @aaronpaquette

#### Why are you interested in Twitter?

First, it is an awesome newsfeed. About two years ago I started using Twitter seriously. At that time, there was a military action in Brazil and there was a lot of chaos. It was interesting to get tweets coming from there, even when they were in Portuguese. I figured out how to use Google Translate, and I could translate these tweets. The mainstream media wasn’t really covering the story, but I could hear about what was happening from people who were right there.

Another strong point about Twitter is that you can actually dialogue with people. It builds relationships. For me, Restorative Justice is my passion, and it is about dialogue and relationships. What is truly transformational is when people are heard in the way they need to be heard. People may think that you can’t really engage in deep listening online. It’s true that it can be difficult, but I don’t think that is a good reason not to try.

#### Can you give me an example of a time when tweeting turned into dialogue?

Once I tweeted about a petition to close the Guan-

## #TwitterTerms

People in the “twitosphere” create “hashtags” to organize their updates for Twitter search engines. “Twitterers,” aka “Tweeters,” prefix a message with a community-driven hashtag (#) so that others can find their posts. “IDK” if you would like to “cr8” your own hashtags. If you would, visit <www.twitter.com> and give it a try. For more Twitter terms and abbreviations visit the Twitter dictionary.

**Source:** Learn more Twitter terms and abbreviations at: <www.webopedia.com/quick\_ref/Twitter\_Dictionary\_Guide.asp>

tanamo Bay prison camp. Somebody responded, “Why should we close it? Isn’t that the best place for terrorists?” The first thing I tweeted back to this person was a 140-character version of what President Obama said about America not needing the camp to be safe and that detaining people indefinitely without charging them is not what America is about. I also gave him an article and a link to something from Psychologists for Social Responsibility about torture. And the man said, “Wow – thank you. I didn’t know.”

### Why is dialogue so important to you?

One of the things that I’ve taken on is really trying to hear people. I have many people following me, and I do have some people who would be identified as “trolls” (people who leave comments that are purposefully offensive). I really try to dialogue



Protesters in front of the White House make their demand. Share what you know about Guantanamo. Research to learn more. What do you think the President should do?

with them. I say, “Is this what you want me to understand?” I don’t just parrot back their words, but I try to put it in my own words and say, “Is this what is important to you? I hear this is really important to you. Is that what you want understood?” It is exciting sometimes when I get to see a shift occur in somebody who came across as wanting to fight with me. When they have been heard about what their values are and what is important to them, you can actually have a conversation with them. I think if I’m communicating with somebody, I like to remember that they have feelings, and they’re a person, and they have value.

### How do you choose Twitter accounts to follow?

I find people to follow by looking at who follows accounts I like (such as @injusticefacts). Many people are looking for people to be on their side. They judge, “Are you with me, or are you against me?” They only want to follow people that are on their side. But I also follow people who do not believe what I believe. I follow people who think very differently from me because I ultimately believe in world peace. If I can only talk to people who believe the same things I do, that is not going to lead me in the direction I want the world to go.

### How has being an adult learner affected your Twitter experience?

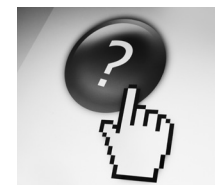
Different people at different times assumed that I have much more education than I do. I don’t put down what my education is, but there are people who have thought that I’m a professor of social work. But you know what? Adult learners may not have advanced degrees, but we are thoughtful and have a great deal of lived experience. We are intelligent and have strong opinions. With Twitter, people are labeling me up, rather than down.

---

*Erik Jacobson is active in adult literacy in the United States and Japan as a teacher and researcher. He also likes to do professional development around the use of technology. Kathryn Ssedoga is of the Mi’kmaq First Nation. She is a learner and lives in Southern Ontario Canada. She brings passion to everything she does and lives out her values with integrity and honor.*

# Internet for All. Really?

Akira Kamiya



## VOCABULARY:

**distributed system:** coordinated computers that share resources, so that users perceive the system as a single, integrated computing facility

**flaming:** also known as bashing, is hostile and insulting interaction between Internet users

**go viral:** when an image, video, or link spreads rapidly because it is shared frequently

**Internet backbone:** large interconnected networks hosted by commercial, government, academic, and other high-capacity network centers

**net neutrality:** the idea that the Internet speeds should be the same for all content providers (For more on this topic, see p. 45.)

**WiFi:** the name of a popular wireless networking technology that uses radio waves to provide wireless high-speed Internet and network connections

## In the Old Days: No Commercial Activities

Back in 1992, I worked for a technology start-up company that was making computer networking equipment for Macintosh computers. It was just the beginning of the Internet revolution, and companies were just starting to get involved in Internet networking. But nobody could have known what it all was about to become!

In those early days, the Internet was just a collection of maybe a few hundred military and higher education computers networked together to help with research and communication. It was all part of a big experiment to test a “**distributed system**” where information flowed across many lines instead of one.

One notable feature of this communication was that almost none of it was commercial. I remember one time someone posted on a forum that he wanted a particular computer part, and someone else responded that he had one that he wanted

to sell. Well, this was just not allowed! And the **flaming** response was heavy and quick. Back in those days there was even an official document stating the rules for using the Internet. Guideline #7 said, “Use for commercial activities by for-profit institutions is generally not acceptable.” Can you imagine that now?

## These Days: It’s All About Shopping

Currently, over \$1.25 trillion of business flows over the Internet through online purchases! Over 2.5 billion people use the Internet, worldwide. They are doing things like research, collaborating, watching video, getting in discussions, looking for work, shopping, and oh, more shopping! The rate of growth has been extraordinary as technology has gotten faster and cheaper year after year. Now millions of people are able to communicate one-to-one. And more importantly, we can also communicate one-to-many and many-to-many, without anyone filtering the information.

## Could the Internet Be The Great Leveler?

The Internet has also broken down the traditional barriers between the producers and the consumers that the Television industry was built on. No longer is it only the rich and corporate making the programming content! Nowadays, any teenager with some know-how, imagination, and a message can make a video, post it on YouTube, have it “**go viral**” and reach millions of viewers! In this way, the Internet has the potential to level the playing field. Anybody with a Twitter account can publish his or her ideas, organize for change, and mobilize others to join in.

Unfortunately, the story of the Internet has not turned out to be a happy one where the rising tide lifts all boats. A couple of things have happened along the way that have made universal access still just a dream. The National Science

Foundation, which had responsibility for coordinating administration of the **Internet’s backbone**, was forced by circumstances to amend the Acceptable Use Policy as it became clear that rapid growth was overwhelming the existing wires of

**Unfortunately, the story of the Internet has not turned out to be a happy one where the rising tide lifts all boats.**

the Internet, and they needed a way to make quick money to fund more rapid development of it.

First in 1994, the U.S. government gave control of the backbone to a handful of private companies.

Many “**net neutrality**” advocates criticized this move. They wanted the resource to be auctioned off, so that the money could be used to improve access and equity.

Once the access points to the backbone were in private ownership, it wasn’t long before they figured out that selling access to high speed backbone was going to be a profitable venture! So if there is money to be made, which do you wire up first? The poor neighborhoods in Springfield and Roxbury? Or do you go to the affluent areas of Brookline and Boston? Now 30 years into this initiative to bring high speed internet access to the country we can see that many areas and groups of people have been left out. The United States now ranks 15th in broadband users per inhabitants.

Many rural locations and areas with predominantly low income people are still underserved.

And there is no real Federal initiative to fix this.

**What Can Be Done?**

The public could put pressure on Federal Communications Commission (FCC). We could demand that the FCC champion the cause of Universal Internet Access. We could also support private initiatives for this cause. For instance, in Boston “FreeBostonWiFi,” a program to offer free Internet access at street pay phones is currently rolling out on a trial basis. This group of companies is working with Boston officials to offer over 400 “hotspots” by the end of next summer! They are also considering adding service in low-income areas of Boston where some people cannot afford their own Internet access. One official said, “We really want to make sure this is not just clustered in one spot.” The initial roll-out will mostly include the downtown business districts and hotel areas. Its priorities are skewed, but it’s a start!

Also on a national level, ten advocacy groups recently launched the Open Wireless Movement to promote the use of free, open WiFi networks. These groups argue that widespread wireless Internet access would benefit users and lead to new technological innovations. Organized pressure from citizens can help open up the Internet for all, but it’s going to take constant steady work!

**Sources:** OECD Broadband Statistics, December 2011; <[www.bostonfreewifi.org](http://www.bostonfreewifi.org)>.

*Akira Kamiya is a Computer Field Technologist at the Adult Literacy Resource Institute in Boston, MA.*

**Fact vs. Opinion**

List some facts from this article in the left column and the author’s opinions on the right.

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____



# A World of Conflict in Your Phone

Cynthia Peters

**BEFORE YOU READ**, try these reading comprehension strategies:

- 1) Skim the pages. Notice the graphics, the title, and the headings. What do you think this article is going to be about?
- 2) Turn the headings into questions. As you read, see if your question gets answered.
- 3) Summarize the main idea of each section.

## Starting with a Mine in the Congo

Have you ever removed the sim card from your phone, perhaps to transfer it to a different phone? If so, then chances are you were holding a little piece of the Congo in the palm of your hand. A common mineral used in our small electronics is called *coltan*, and about 64% of the whole world's supply of coltan is located in the Congo.

Because the Congo has so many natural resources, it should be a very rich country. But the people there are very poor. People live in abject conditions. In the Congo, the life expectancy for women is 50 and for men is 47. Instead of bringing wealth, the Congo's resources have brought war.

Since 1998, more than 5.4 million people have died in the Congo due to ongoing "resource wars." Militias from neighboring countries such as Rwanda and Uganda fight for control of the mines. The wealth from the mines does not go to the workers or the people of the Congo. It goes to the

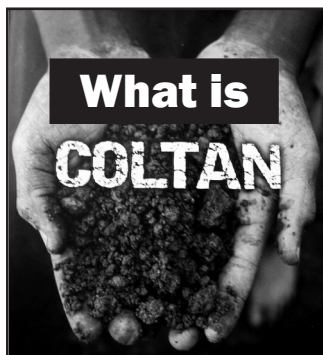


Photo from [www.publicenemyafrica.com/blood-coltan](http://www.publicenemyafrica.com/blood-coltan)

warlords and militia leaders who use the money to buy more weapons so that they can go back to the Congo and fight for control of more mines. In addition to killing, militias use rape and slavery to control the local population.

## To a Factory in China

After multinational corporations buy the coltan from the militias, they ship it to countries (like China) where it is used to manufacture small electronics. Labor is cheap in these countries, which helps keep the cost of our gadgets low. But the conditions for the workers in the big electronics



**Coltan is short for Columbite-tantalite—a black tar-like mineral found in major quantities in the Congo. Coltan can hold a high electric charge. It is vital for creating capacitors\*, which are used in many small electronic devices, especially in mobile phones and laptop computers. The coltan mined by rebels and neighboring countries is sold to multi-national corporations. The United Nations said that these companies serve as “the engine of the conflict in the DRC.”**

*\* Capacitors are electronic components that store energy.*

factories are not good and would be illegal in the U.S. Investigators have found children working in these plants; people are exposed to toxins and severe physical stress; they work 14-16 hour days and live in cramped rooms.

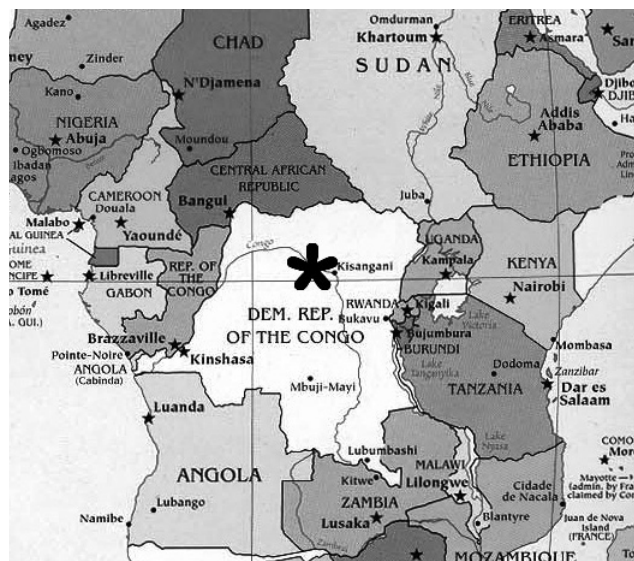
### And Then A Big Box Store in the States

After your phone (or other small electronic device) is made, it is shipped to a store in the United States where workers stack it on the shelves and ring it up at the cash register. Most retail workers in the U.S. don't earn a living wage, nor do they receive benefits like affordable health care or paid sick days.

Your phone has traveled a long way at this point, but its life's journey still has one more stop: the trash.

### And Finally, Back to Africa and China

What about when your phone "dies," which they seem to do every year or so? You might throw it away. But, as we know, there is no such thing as "away." The phone has to go somewhere. In the case of small electronics, it may go back to China to some huge recycling plant or to an African country – where the valuable metals might be salvaged and the rest of the parts burned.



*This map shows the Democratic Republic of the Congo (marked with a star) and surrounding countries.*

**Sources:** <[www.rescue.org/special-reports/special-report-congo-y](http://www.rescue.org/special-reports/special-report-congo-y)>, <[www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/02/congo-women-face-slavery-mines](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/sep/02/congo-women-face-slavery-mines)>, <<http://data.un.org/CountryProfile.aspx?crName=Democratic%20Republic%20of%20the%20Congo>>, <[www.friendsofthecongo.org/pdf/coltan\\_facts.pdf](http://www.friendsofthecongo.org/pdf/coltan_facts.pdf)>, <[www.warchild.org.uk/issues/congo-conflict-minerals](http://www.warchild.org.uk/issues/congo-conflict-minerals)>, <[www.ign.com/articles/2013/01/25/apple-cuts-ties-with-supplier-after-audit-uncovers-child-labor](http://www.ign.com/articles/2013/01/25/apple-cuts-ties-with-supplier-after-audit-uncovers-child-labor)>.

*Cynthia Peters is the editor of The Change Agent.*

### Take it Further

**Reflect on the reading comprehension strategies.** How did they affect your understanding of this article?

**Try writing a one-sentence summary** of the article. Use your own words. Tweet it or post it as a Facebook update.

**Watch this!** "Crisis in the Congo," a 26-minute documentary made by Friends of the Congo. You can find it here: <[congojustice.org](http://congojustice.org)>.

**Take action!** Visit <[congojustice.org/take-action](http://congojustice.org/take-action)> for some ideas on what you can do or search the Internet for other options.

**Shop responsibly.** Visit <[www.raisehopeforcongo.org/content/conflict-minerals-company-rankings](http://www.raisehopeforcongo.org/content/conflict-minerals-company-rankings)> to see whether companies are investigating their supply chains to ensure that they are not using conflict minerals.

# Digital Disconnect

A review by Cynthia Peters

In his book, *Digital Disconnect: How Capitalism is Turning the Internet Against Democracy*, Robert McChesney argues that we need to understand the Internet in the context of our economic system – that is, capitalism. He starts by describing those who celebrate the Internet revolution and those who are more skeptical of it. He then goes on to describe how the pressures of capitalism are “turning the Internet against democracy.” This article is a summary of his ideas.

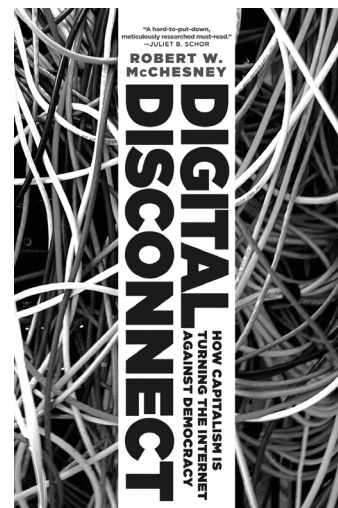
## Celebrants Love the Internet

Some people say that the digital revolution and the Internet are unequivocal forces for good. Various writers refer to the idea that new technologies will create a “cognitive surplus” or “collective intelligence” – which will allow people to collaborate on projects, share knowledge, and solve some of the key challenges we face today, including “poverty, malnutrition, child mortality, and the myriad social ills that blight our planet.” Another writer, Jeff Jarvis, wrote in his book, *Public Parts*, that the “publicness” of the Internet will disrupt powerful institutions. “Dictators, and politicians, media moguls and marketers try to tell us what to think and say. But now, in a truly public society, they must listen to what we say, whether we’re using Twitter to complain about a product or Facebook to organize a protest.”

## Skeptics Aren’t So Sure

Other commentators are more skeptical. Jaron Lanier argues, for example, that if millions of people contribute bits of knowledge to, say, a physics wiki, they are not likely to “replicate the achievements of even one mediocre physicist, much less a great one.” Eli Pariser worries that because of the way Google and other Internet sites track our preferences, we are not really challenged to reconsider our beliefs. Instead, we are unknowingly being held in a “filter bubble,” which keeps send-

ing us to sites and surrounding us with information that reinforce what we already believe. Meanwhile, psychologists and others note that social media might be leading us to more loneliness, fewer deep relationships, and changes in how our thought processes work.



## Understanding the Context

Robert McChesney, in his book *Digital Disconnect*, says that both the celebrants and skeptics are ignoring the “elephant in the room,” and that “elephant” is capitalism. He claims we cannot evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of the Internet without taking into account the political economic context that it functions in. Capitalism, as it currently exists in the United States, puts many pressures on how the Internet gets used, who has access to it, and what is available through it. Here are some examples of how capitalism affects our experience of the Internet.

### Too Much Power for Too Few Corporations

Capitalism tends to reduce competition by concentrating power in a few large corporations (p. 36). For example, currently Google holds nearly 70% of the search engine market; the Microsoft Windows operating system is used on 90% of all computers; Amazon sells more than 70% of regular books and e-books sold online; and eBay and Facebook hold virtual monopolies in their areas (p. 131). The richer these companies get, the faster they buy up smaller companies that may compete with them (p. 138). With little or no competition, these companies have total “pricing power” – meaning they can set and raise prices without worrying that



a competitor will underbid them. When a small group of mammoth corporations control so many aspects of how the Internet is used, they exercise a lot of power over our everyday choices.

### Extreme Inequality

Another feature of 21<sup>st</sup> century capitalism in the U.S. is that it is marked by extreme inequality. Today, the richest fifth of the population owns 84% of the wealth. The poorest fifth of the population has just 0.1% of the wealth (p. 36). This extreme inequality leaves some people unable to use the Internet and other digital resources that are necessary for almost everything today – from education, to work, to leisure.

Furthermore, when wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, those few have disproportionate power over government. How could this be true even in a democracy like the United States? The reason is that elections are often decided by who gets the biggest campaign contributions. Thus, the wealthy few can ensure that people are elected who will represent the interests of the wealthy few. Six out of the top ten most profitable corporations in the United States are in the business of technology; their power is drastically over-represented in the halls of congress and in the committees that regulate their businesses.

### Advertising

Early in its history, the Internet was not used for commercial purposes. In fact, the media used to refer to the Internet as “the information super-highway.” People thought of it as a way to exchange information in an environment that was free of sales pitches. This was upsetting news for people in the marketing business. In 1993, *Adver-*

*tising Age* magazine lamented the fact the culture of the Internet hated advertising (p. 102). But a key way that capitalism works is it needs people to buy things. And when we’ve bought everything we need, capitalism wants to convince us to buy things we *don’t* need. For that, advertising is very important, and the Internet has become a key way for marketers to reach potential customers – so much so that almost every site you visit is saturated with advertising.

And advertisers are going to extremes to figure out the best way to sell to you. For example, they track your habits and draw conclusions about your interests and change their ads to appeal especially to your “type” or your demographic. They can even deduce your mood (based on your Facebook posts, for example) and deliver an ad to your screen that will be especially meaningful to you at that moment. Say, you’re hungry or planning a trip or just changed jobs – advertisers can take this information and deliver an ad that would be more appealing. Another person might receive a completely different ad based on their profile at that particular moment.

Maybe you’re a very focused person and can ignore these ads and just focus on the content, but the problem is that more and more content is *driven* by advertising. In other words, web sites create content that will attract more advertisers. They shun content that is not advertising-friendly. This limits the range of content available. It’s not outright censorship, but it has a censoring effect.

### Conclusion

This is an important book because McChesney reminds us that the Internet exists in the context of a specific economic system – capitalism. Whether we celebrate all the potential of the Internet or remain skeptical of its offerings, we should consider the pressures put on it by a system that is based on profit, tends to concentrate wealth at the top, and perhaps unintentionally has a censoring effect on the content we get to see.

*Cynthia Peters is the editor of The Change Agent*

## Explain the Key Ideas

**How does capitalism affect the Internet?**  
Cite specific details from the article.

**Are you a skeptic or a celebrant? Or something in between? Explain.**



# Latest Technology

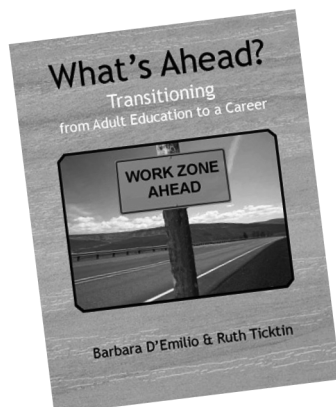
## What It's Good For and What It's Not

*Nell Eckersley*



	Cell phone	Smart phone	Tablet	Lap Top	Desk Top
<b>Calls and texting</b>	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
<b>Taking and sharing photos</b>	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
<b>Email</b>	◆	◆	◆	◆	◆
<b>Making and sharing videos</b>		◆	◆	◆	◆
<b>Accessing the Internet</b>		◆	◆	◆	◆
<b>Watching movies</b>		◆	◆	◆	◆
<b>Playing games</b>		◆	◆	◆	◆
<b>Using apps</b>		◆	◆		
<b>Scanning QR codes</b>		◆	◆		
<b>Skyping</b>		◆	◆	◆	◆
<b>Uses cellular connection</b>		◆	◆		
<b>Uses Wifi</b>		◆	◆	◆	◆
<b>Easy to print from</b>				◆	◆
<b>Easily to share with others</b>				◆	◆
<b>Expense (approximate)</b>	<\$200 + calling fees	<\$500 + calling fees + data plan	<\$500 + cell phone plan or Internet access	>\$800 + Internet access	>\$1000 + Internet access

*Nell Eckersley is the director of the New York City Regional Adult Education Network. She works at the Literacy Assistance Center where she focuses on integrating social media into adult education. You can follow her on Twitter at @LACNYCNell.*



## What's Ahead?

Transitioning  
from Adult  
Education  
to a Career

**\$17.55**

(normally \$19.50)  
use order code CA913

English language learners or GED students explore six careers where job growth is expected in the 21st Century:

- ◆ Health ◆ Day Care and Education ◆
- ◆ Skilled Trades ◆ Hospitality and Food Service ◆ Computer Technology ◆
- ◆ Your Own Business ◆

For a full explanation, sample lessons, and more information, or to order, please visit [ProLinguaAssociates.com](http://ProLinguaAssociates.com).

While you are at our webstore, check out these other books on workplace, newcomers, and literacy:

- ◆ Trials and Errors ◆ People at Work
- ◆ Basic Dictations ◆ Superphonic Bingo
- ◆ From Sound to Sentence ◆ Read 50
- ◆ A to Z Picture Activities: Phonics and Vocabulary for Emerging Readers
- ◆ My Thoughts, A Freewriting Journal

Use order code CA913 for a 10% discount until 2/28/14

### Pro Lingua Associates

PO Box 1348, Brattleboro, Vermont 05302  
[www.ProLinguaAssociates.com](http://www.ProLinguaAssociates.com) ◆ 800-366-4775



### Hollywood-quality films Written by young people On topics of sexual health and social justice

Preview and purchase our 24 films online: [www.scenariosusa.org/films](http://www.scenariosusa.org/films)  
Each film includes a lesson plan, a behind-the-scenes documentary and the shooting script.

To celebrate our upcoming 15th year, use this code to receive 15% off of a film or curriculum purchase: **CHANGE15**



**November  
13-25, 2013  
Providence,**

*The 7th annual conference focuses on promising practices for career pathways and ESOL programs, preparing students for college-level reading, writing, and math, building student self-efficacy, and more.*

Email us at [nctn@worlded.org](mailto:nctn@worlded.org) or look for more information at our website:

**[www.collegetransition.org](http://www.collegetransition.org)**

# Change Agent CALL FOR ARTICLES

**THEME:** The next issue of *The Change Agent* explores immigration, and we want to feature your voice as an adult learner. Whether you are an immigrant yourself, have experience with immigration, or have an opinion to share, we want to hear from you. Please share your story!

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Write about your own immigration experience. Why did you come to the United States? What was it like once you got here?
- If your parents or grandparents or other ancestors immigrated, tell their story. What do you think of their decision and its repercussions for you?
- Share stories about your work experience as an immigrant in the U.S.
- What advice do you have for new immigrants?
- Describe the community you live in, the restaurants, the music, the culture, etc. – and describe how it has been influenced by immigrants.
- Whether you are an immigrant or not, what helps you feel a part of your community?
- Describe an effect that immigration has had on your family. If you are an immigrant with children, what are some of the benefits and challenges of raising your children in a new country?
- If you are an immigrant, in what ways do you feel bi-cultural?
- If you are not an immigrant, describe some ways that immigration affects you.
- What do you think of the country's immigration policies? What do you think the U.S.'s immigration policies should be?
- Are there U.S. economic policies or foreign policy decisions (such as free trade agreements or armed conflicts) that affected your decision to become an immigrant? If so, please describe.

**DEADLINE FOR SUBMISSIONS:** Nov. 4, 2013. Make sure to include contact information. Send your submissions to: [cpeters@worlded.org](mailto:cpeters@worlded.org). Please submit illustrations, cartoons, and graphics on this theme too! The complete "call for articles" is at [www.nelrc.org/changeagent](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent).



## YES, I want to subscribe!

### Sign me up and bill me.

I'd like to receive a 1-year online + paper subscription (2 issues) to *The Change Agent* for \$20.

I'd like to receive a 2-year online + paper subscription (4 issues) to *The Change Agent* for \$38.

I'd like to receive a 1-year bulk subscription (set of 25 copies) + online access for \$85 (two years \$170).

*For more subscription options, visit our website.*

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

City \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip \_\_\_\_\_

Tel. \_\_\_\_\_

Email \_\_\_\_\_

Send your check and order form to:

Change Agent Subscriptions, World Education, 44 Farnsworth Street, Boston, MA 02210.

Or order by phone 617-482-9485 or online: [www.nelrc.org/changeagent/subscribe.htm](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent/subscribe.htm).