Counting Characters

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We have been living in a media world driven by sound bites for many years now, but Twitter has taken that trend to a whole new level. A sound bite is a quick clip or phrase that media outlets use to (supposedly) sum up a whole story or issue in one quick simple statement. A sound bite is essentially an audio version of a tweet. Like a sound bite, when we are communicating with tweets of 140-280 characters, we are not necessarily getting or telling the full story since the message lacks context. This is a problem. But, given that millions of tweets are sent each day it behooves us to train students to use the platform in a positive way.

*Have your students generate a tweet as a community service message.*

**AHA!** Different formats impact my message and creativity!

**Grade:** 8-12

This is a production activity. The following Key Questions are aimed at the producer of the message. To see Key Questions for consumers, please go to our website www.medialit.com.

**Key Question #1:** What am I authoring?
**Core Concept #1:** All media messages are constructed.

**Key Question #2:** Does my message reflect understanding in format, creativity, technology?
**Core Concept #2:** Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

**Key Question #3:** Is my message engaging and compelling for my audience?
**Core Concept #3:** Different people experience the same message differently.

**Key Question #4:** Have I clearly and consistently framed values, lifestyles and points of view?
**Core Concept #4:** Media have embedded values and points of view.

**Key Question #5:** Have I communicated my purpose?
**Core Concept #5:** Most media messages are sent to gain profit and/or power (influence).

**Materials:** School twitter feed (#) for this project. Smartphones and projection screen.
Activity: In pairs, ask students to decide on a community service message they want to share with their classmates. Examples might be: reminder about a clothes drive for disaster victims, register to vote, driver safety, recycling... and have them create a tweet (only one tweet) to get the message out. Display the twitter feed on a large screen and discuss as the tweets come in.

Ask students: Was this difficult? Do they wish they could tell a fuller story? Or offer more details? How did they decide what to include or omit? Why did they choose this particular issue for their classmates (audience)? Is there enough information in a tweet to ensure understanding? Do they like this mode of communication for important subjects or would they prefer a different way to share the information? Is the character limit a plus or minus? Use the Key Questions to analyze the tweets.

Additional resources: Article from NPR teaching students to use social media the right way.

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