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These Summer Movies Will Change How You Think About Social Media and the Internet



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There's a deep truth about social media: Internet culture is so fast-paced, so insatiable, and so fickle that you can never quite pin down what it is or what it all means. Even for the "extremely online," it's nearly impossible to keep up with all of the memes, trends, and viral posts.

This is what makes internet culture a tough topic to cover in classrooms—especially for anyone teaching digital citizenship. How can lessons about social media ever hope to reflect students' lived experiences without feeling hopelessly out of touch?

But this is where *movies* can actually help. They offer us, and our students, a window into a different part of our world. And the best movies also help us more fully see others. Sure, movies will always be out of date to some degree, but often they also show us how little things change. In the end, it's the humanity behind the stories that's timeless and relevant.

I've collected some movies below that have helped me learn more and think critically about the internet and social media. Of course, not all of these are going to be appropriate for classrooms—that's not the point here. My hope is these movies can be a way for **you** to sneak in a little painless professional development this summer. I hope you'll find them as enjoyable and interesting as I did. And who knows, some might even inspire lessons or discussions for next school year.

Pop some popcorn and enjoy!

Tanner

WALL-E (age 5+)

This is a modern classic for good reason, and even if you've seen it before, it's worth revisiting. It unfortunately remains as accurate as ever.

The Mitchells vs. the Machines (8+)

This is one of the few movies I can think of that focuses on the topic of media balance and digital well-being. You'll find a wealth of perfect clips that could set the stage for deeper discussions and lessons.

Ron's Gone Wrong (age 8+)

This is a movie bursting at the seams with digital citizenship lesson potential. It covers topics ranging from the power of friendship and the importance of family bonds to the influence of tech in kids' lives and the way corporations seek to commercialize childhood.

The Social Dilemma (13+)

This documentary relies on interviews with former Silicon Valley designers, engineers, and entrepreneurs to critique the ways social media vies for, and monetizes, our attention. It provides a great on-ramp to classroom discussions about tech "addiction," algorithms, and media platforms.

Eighth Grade (age 14+)

This movie is probably one of the most authentic depictions of semi-modern middle school life. We created a discussion guide to accompany the movie to help students connect their lives with those of the characters.

Bo Burnham: Inside (age 15+)

A defining creative work of the COVID-19 pandemic, Bo Burnham's one-man show is bursting with creativity and features several catchy, smart songs that diagnose our weird, social media-influenced culture.

Feels Good Man (age 15+)

We hear from a lot of educators and families that they want to learn more about memes, and discuss them with kids: what they are, what they mean, and how they influence us. This movie is a great starting point, tracking the birth and evolution of one of the most popular and misunderstood memes on the internet.

Ingrid Goes West (age 15+)

This dark comedy about an influencer-obsessed woman is criminally underappreciated. While it shouldn't be screened in classrooms, it'll definitely get you thinking about the strange ways in which social media warps our realities and relationships.

Jawline (age 15+)

A beautiful, understated, and touching documentary about a teen's quest to become an influencer. While it feels a bit like an artifact of an earlier time, the themes remain just as relevant.

We're All Going to the World's Fair (age 15+)

Fair warning: This isn't for everyone. But it might just be the best representation of YouTube in a movie. I haven't stopped thinking about it since I saw it. While it's weird and will make you uncomfortable, I think it's brilliant.

The People's Republic of Desire (age 16+)

Want a global perspective on the internet and social media? Look no further. This documentary examines the strange and yet familiar world of livestreamers in China. A great point of comparison to something like Twitch.

Black Mirror: Nosedive (age 17+)

OK, so this one's technically not a movie. This episode of the Black Mirror TV series was written by Michael Schur and Rashida Jones of The Office and Parks and Recreation. They offer some levity in a dystopian story where an app-based social rating system fuels every interaction and thought.

Did you enjoy this email?

Here's what else we've got for you this week:



Teachers' Essential Guide to Showing Movies in the Classroom

Help students learn to think critically about different types of media -- including movies and videos.

FAMILY ENGAGEMENT RESOURCES

Kids' Books About Social Media and Digital Life

Share this list of terrific kids books to help families commemorate and learn about these Muslim holidays centered around family, community, and acts of charity.

Tweens, Teens, Tech, and Mental Health

On July 27 at 12 p.m. Pacific, join us to learn what the research says about tweens' and teens' mental health, and what you can do to support them.



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