

# MEDIA AND SOCIAL JUSTICE



## ESSENTIAL QUESTION

- How can media be used to advance social justice?
- How can we connect our learning from the entire unit?



## OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Analyze the main points of texts to determine a central idea and its development throughout a text.
- Present, as a group, an objective summary of texts.
- Utilize their agency as creators of digital content related to themes of social justice activism.
- Analyze and evaluate how hashtags can be a tool for social justice work.
- Create a class hashtag to bring awareness to and open dialogue about an issue that is important to students. (The hashtag will go live at the end of the lesson. Teachers will need to choose which platform is appropriate for students.)



## LEARNING STANDARDS

See the [standards alignment chart](#) to learn how this lesson supports New Jersey State Standards.



## TIME NEEDED

75–90 minutes



## MATERIALS

- Teacher Edition—Vocabulary Planning and Definitions
- How Black Lives Matter became a U.S. protest cry Note Catcher
- Article: “How ‘Black Lives Matter became a U.S. protest cry’”
- Article: Activism through social media creates bigger buzz



## VOCABULARY

### CONTENT

Movement	Campaign	Collaborate	
Grassroots	Organizer	ACADEMIC	Conduct
Hashtag	Momentum	Analyze	
Digital	Pound Sign	Determine	

## PART 1

## Introduction (15 min): Knowledge Building

- 1 Say: *During social justice movements in the past, teams of people conducted grassroots campaigns or a movement that used the people in the community to bring awareness to an issue. People would walk door to door, speak in churches, put up posters, and pass out pamphlets in highly visited areas (grocery stores, subways, bus stations, etc.). This still happens, but if you want to spread your message far and wide, many organizers (people who coordinate demonstrations, movements, etc.) have taken to social media to move a message. In this way, movements and messages become worldwide, not just neighborhood to neighborhood. One way to ground the message when using social media is by creating a catchy hashtag (#). A hashtag is a word or phrase that is preceded by the pound or number sign, which helps identify your content digitally on a specific topic. How have you used hashtags? (Allow students to respond.)*
  
- 2 Say: *We will build our knowledge on a popular movement that started to grow via social media, which is the Black Lives Matter Movement. I want you to pay attention to how the movement started, and what conditions were needed for this movement to thrive. Please take the next 10 minutes to read the article “How ‘Black Lives Matter’ became a U.S. protest cry,” and focus on the following questions:*
  - *How did the BLM movement gain momentum, and who led this movement?*
  - *What was the role of the hashtag in promoting or bringing awareness to the BLM movement?*
  - *In the last paragraph, opposition to the BLM was included. Why do you think the author chose to include this information?*
  
- 3 Allow students to work independently or in pairs. They should capture the answers to those questions on their note catcher. Students may need to revisit this article a few times to answer the questions and be prepared for discussion.

- 4 When students have read the article and answered the questions independently or in groups, allow the class to discuss the answers to the questions for 2–3 minutes, then transition to the content analysis section of the lesson.

## PART 2

### Content Analysis (40 min)

- 5 *Say: Over the course of this unit, you were able to read the Dred Scott court case summary, watch videos, view images, and discuss the role media had in the conviction of innocent Black and brown boys through the Exonerated Five case. The purpose of this was to allow you all to think critically about the criminal legal system and ask yourself questions such as: Who is given the benefit of doubt? Why is that? How does race determine your outcomes with the criminal legal system? No system is perfect, and no system is completely bad, but as changemakers in this society, we must be able to examine these problems and find solutions or bring attention to them.*
- 6 *Based on the work we have done, what issue do we need to bring attention to, or what are you passionate about that hasn't received enough attention? How can we begin to create a dialogue around the issue, and with whom do we want to have the dialogue?*
- 7 Give students 5 minutes of quiet writing time to respond to these questions.
- 8 Students should then discuss these questions with their peers and capture responses on their Note Catcher for 5 minutes. The idea is for them to develop a sense of urgency around an issue that they wish to bring awareness to. You should also emphasize that creating a hashtag is the first step. The hallmark of a good hashtag is that it be catchy enough to grab the attention of the viewer, but you also want to proceed with actions using the popularity of the hashtag to sustain the movement.
- 9 *Say: I want to expand your knowledge with another article that we will be reading as a jigsaw activity. The article references the buzz, or creation of excitement of a topic, that occurs when social activism is generated through social media. There are 3 major sections of the article, so we will create 3 groups to read 1 section each. Once in your groups, read the passage independently and then work together to summarize your section of the article for your classmates. Finally, choose a person to present the answer to the following questions to the class:*
- What are the main points of this section of the text?
  - Why is this important to activism through social media?

- 10 Say: *Each group will have 2–3 minutes to present. As one group presents, please take notes on your note catcher to capture any important points you wish to remember, specifically information that connects to your ideas.*
- 11 Allow students to read the text **“Activism through social media creates bigger buzz”**, taking notes and discussing responses within their groups.
- 12 After students have presented their section of the text to their peers, begin to collect ideas from students about what they are interested in bringing attention to. Write the ideas down on chart paper and begin to explain the connection (if any) between the issues they chose as a focus.

### PART 3

#### Writing/Content Development (30 min)

- 13 If there is a class or school social media page, you will need to ensure that all media usage permissions are approved by your principal/school district. The idea is for students to bring attention to a solid issue and begin creating dialogue around the issue. Issues may include, but are not limited to neighborhood policing, food insecurity in Black communities, access to media during the pandemic, inequity in school funding in Black communities, lack of quality affordable housing for Black people, etc. Students may also choose topics from the content they learned in earlier lessons, such as fairness in the criminal legal system, rates of incarceration of Black people as compared to white people, school-to-prison pipeline, etc. Guide students towards these topics, and ensure they are making a clear connection to how history has made these current contexts inevitable.
- 14 For the remainder of this time, students will begin formulating a hashtag. To be effective, a hashtag must be:
  - Unique (Try not to use a hashtag that is already in use or was employed prior to your use.)
  - Short and to the point (the shorter and clearer the hashtag, the more people will remember it.)
  - Relevant (The hashtag must be relevant to your movement and to what is currently occurring in society.)
  - Shareable (The hashtag must be able to be shared across

social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, etc.)

**15** Share with students some examples of hashtags connected to causes and/or movements.

- #BLM
- #BlackLivesMatter
- #IceBucketChallenge
- #MeToo
- #BringBackOurGirls
- #NeverAgain
- #Stopstopandfrisk

**16** Regarding the last hashtag above, #stopstopandfrisk, share with students about this example of a real campaign that youth won with the use of media. Allow them to visit the links below the description to get inspiration. Youth and adult allies across New York city led a campaign from approximately 2010–2018 that pushed back against stop and frisk and other policies that unfairly targeted Black people. They used various forms of media like video testimonials, large and colorful murals, podcasts, museum exhibits, and interviews with news media to highlight the negative effect that NYPD policing policies were having on Black communities. They along with adult allies created the Community Safety Act that called on the Mayor and the City Council to end discriminatory policing practices. Because of their hard work, parts of the Community Safety Act were signed into law in 2013, and then a federal judge ruled in 2014 that stop and frisk by the NYPD was unconstitutional. Then in 2017 the group won the Right to Know Act which said that police officers had to identify their name, rank, command, and shield number to people at the beginning of any interaction. Officers also had to supply a business card and let people know that in certain situations they did not have to consent to a search. These were big wins for thousands of young people across NYC and would not have been possible without their hard work and use of media.

- Video series on human impact of stop and frisk:  
<https://www.changethenypd.org/resources/where-i-am-going-%E2%80%94-cpr-video-series-human-impact-stop-and-frisk/>
- WNYC Interviews with young people about stop and frisk (click on the link to listen): <https://www.wnyc.org/story/212460-city-teenagers-say-stop-and-frisk-all-about-race-and-class/>

- Radio Rookies podcast clip: <https://www.wnyc.org/story/312820-radio-rookies-react-stop-and-frisk-ruling>
- Overview of Community Safety Act demands and outcomes: <https://www.changethenypd.org/community-safety-act>



- Image of a mural in Brooklyn painted by youth for the campaign.

- 17** Use the list of topics of interest generated earlier in the lesson and have students vote on which they wish to bring attention to as a class. Once students decide on the topic, have them work in pairs to begin generating a hashtag to bring attention to their movement. Each student will then write a synopsis of what the hashtag means and what they want as a call to action as a result. Guidance for this is on their note catcher.
- 18 Lesson Extension:** Students can choose pictures that will narrate the story and purpose of their hashtag. They can take time to find images via a Google search by typing in the topic and ensuring that the permissions for the photos are open content and able to be shared. Students can also take photos if this is a local or school issue.
- 19** Students will vote on the hashtag of their choice. Each student will write a brief synopsis of what it means and the dialogue they wish to initiate, and you will post to their chosen platform.

**PART 4****Share/Closing (5 min)**

**20** Students will discuss the following questions:

- What are your expectations for bringing awareness to this issue?
- What do you hope will happen as a result?

**21** Encourage students to share their work on their own social media platforms. If available, they can also share on the class or school social media platforms, with permissions and guidelines. Explain that this is the first step of activism—forming an idea. Encourage students to find people with similar interests who will invest in and support the movement they are trying to create.



# Teacher Edition: Vocabulary Definitions

This document is meant to serve to build teacher knowledge and capacity. Please use the following document to know and understand the vocabulary for this lesson. Review and define these terms before teaching your lesson to help better understand and frame the content. There is also space to add any context necessary for your students.

Word	Definition	Teacher Notes/Context
<b>CONTENT VOCABULARY</b>		
Grassroots		
Hashtag		
Digital agency		
Movement		
Organizer		
Momentum		
Pound sign		
Campaign		
<b>ACADEMIC VOCABULARY</b>		
Analyze		
Determine		
Collaborate		
Conduct		





## Note Catcher

### How Black Lives Matter Became a U.S. Protest Cry

#### KNOWLEDGE BUILDING

Please read the following text, “How ‘Black Lives Matter became a U.S. protest cry,” and answer the questions.

**How did the BLM movement gain momentum, and who led this movement?**

*Response*

*What does this make you think of from your previous lessons on social justice?*

**What was the role of the hashtag in promoting or bringing awareness to the BLM movement?**

*Response*

*What does this make you think of from your previous lessons on social justice?*

**In the last paragraph, opposition to the BLM was included. Why do you think the author chose to include this information?**

*Response*

*What does this make you think of from your previous lessons on social justice?*



# Note Catcher

## Social Justice Issues

### PLANNING

Use the following questions to guide your thinking around a social justice issue you are passionate about.

Guiding Question	Responses
<i>What issue do we need to bring attention to? What are you passionate about that hasn't received enough attention?</i>	
<i>How can we begin to create a dialogue around the issue, and with whom do we want to have the dialogue?</i>	
<i>What hashtags could bring attention to this issue?</i>	



# Note Catcher

## Activism Through Social Media Creates Bigger Buzz

### DEEPENING KNOWLEDGE

Please read the article “Activism through social media creates bigger buzz” and consider the following questions about your section. Collect information on your section to present to your peers (jigsaw).

**SECTION:** \_\_\_\_\_

### GROUP MEMBERS

**Presenter:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Analyzer:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Recorder:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Questioner:** \_\_\_\_\_

What are the main points of this section of the text?	Why is this important to activism through social media?

Notes from other sections that connect ideas...	



# Note Catcher

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## Hashtag

### SYNOPSIS

Use prior information on the note catcher to generate a hashtag for your social justice issue, a written synopsis for the hashtag, and an image you think represents it.

<p><i>Hashtag:</i></p>	
<p><i>Synopsis (describe the hashtag, why it's relevant, and what you wish to accomplish by its use. How will this be used as a call to action for social justice?)</i></p>	
<p><i>Draw, collect, or create a digital image that captures the sentiment of your hashtag</i></p>	



# How “Black Lives Matter” became a U.S. protest cry

By Donald Moore and Patricia Hurtado

Bloomberg Quick Take on 06.04.20



Activists with Black Lives Matter protest in Harlem in New York City, July 16, 2019, in the wake of a decision by federal prosecutors who declined to bring civil rights charges against New York City police officer Daniel Pantaleo in the 2014 chokehold death of Eric Garner. The decision was made by Attorney General William Barr and announced one day before the fifth anniversary of his death. Photo by Craig Ruttle/AP

“Black Lives Matter” is a hashtag that grew into a movement, one that resurges on U.S. streets after high-profile deaths of African Americans at the hands of the police. BLM, as it is often known, is fueled by history and the power of smartphone videos spread by social media. The most recent trigger for angry protests nationwide was the May 25 death of a Minneapolis man, George Floyd, after being restrained by an officer who was later charged with his murder.

## 1. WHERE DOES THE TERM COME FROM?

In 2012, a neighborhood-watch volunteer in Florida shot and killed an unarmed, black 17-year-old, Trayvon Martin, as he walked to his father’s house from a convenience store where he’d bought iced tea and

candy. When the volunteer was acquitted of the killing, an activist in Oakland, California, named Alicia Garza wrote an impassioned Facebook post that ended with “Our lives matter.” It was shared on social media by a friend and fellow activist, Patrisse Cullors, with a twist and a hashtag: #blacklivesmatter.

## 2. HOW DID IT GROW?

The term took off a year later, when smartphone images of the deaths of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri, and Eric Garner in New York City, both black men killed by police officers, galvanized the movement. They were followed by protests over deaths caused by the police in Cleveland, Baltimore, Chicago, Cincinnati and other cities.



# How “Black Lives Matter” became a U.S. protest cry (continued)

## 3. WHAT CAME BEFORE BLM?

Incidents of police brutality have been flashpoints for demonstrations for decades, including the 1992 beating of black motorist Rodney King in Los Angeles that set off six days of riots and the 1997 torture of Haitian immigrant Abner Louima by officers in the New York borough of Brooklyn. Both episodes resulted in federal prosecutions and convictions of police officers. But before BLM, there was less of a sense of a movement that carried over beyond individual events.

## 4. HOW BIG IS THE PROBLEM?

According to The Washington Post, which has been tracking police shootings since 2015, police killed 1,004 people in 2019, of whom 370 were white, 235 were African American and 158 were Hispanic (202 were listed as unknown). An advocacy group, Mapping Police Violence, reported similar numbers covering all forms of police killings. The group said that 24 percent of those killed by police in 2019 were black Americans, who make up only 13 percent of the population. It also found that 99 percent of officers involved in a death between 2013 and 2019 were not charged.

## 5. WHAT HAS BLM CALLED FOR?

The decentralized movement has no formal agenda but protesters have pushed for policies to increase accountability and reduce deadly encounters between police and African Americans. These included calls for officers to wear bodycams that document the events leading up to and during shootings; the end of military-style equipment like riot gear, assault weapons, and armored personnel carriers being used by municipal forces; transfer of police department oversight to local community boards; and legislation to address court rulings that activists say make it all but impossible to sue officers for acts performed in the line of duty. In the latest protests, there have also been calls to cut budgets for police departments.

## 6. DID ANY OF THAT HAPPEN?

The use of bodycams has been widely adopted, including in New York City and Los Angeles. President Barack Obama’s Justice Department conducted dozens of investigations into whether police violated the civil rights of minorities, reaching so-called consent decrees overseen by federal courts that mandated changes in some local police departments. Obama also restricted the sale of military equipment to law enforcement.

Under President Donald Trump, the Justice Department has largely dismantled those police oversight initiatives and curbed the use of consent decrees. The Justice Department has also curtailed wide-ranging “patterns and practices” investigations of local police departments, arguing they harmed police morale and were an inappropriate use of federal power.

## 7. WHAT OTHER OPPOSITION HAS THERE BEEN TO BLM?

In the movement’s early years, some law enforcement groups called BLM responsible for rioting and anti-police violence. A counter-movement known as Blue Lives Matter advocated that those convicted of killing law enforcement officers should be sentenced under hate crime laws. Some critics turned to the hashtag #alllivesmatter, leading BLM supporters to respond that they weren’t seeking special treatment for African Americans, just equal treatment. Some white nationalist groups promoted #whitelivesmatter. While running for president in 2016, Trump called BLM “very divisive.”



# Activism Through Social Media Creates Bigger Buzz



*“I am out here because I am part of the masses of people in St. Louis and soon to be in the nation that is exhausted and fatigued with the progression of police genocide. It’s not police brutality anymore. It’s genocide against young black Americans,” said Sunny Ford during a rally on Aug. 12, 2014, in Clayton, Missouri, protesting the fatal shooting of Michael Brown by a Ferguson police officer.*

By Atlanta Journal-Constitution, adapted by Newsela staff

Published:08/13/2014

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

What are the main points of this section of the text?

Why is this important to activism through social media?

### SECTION/GROUP 1

ATLANTA — In the new use of social media as activism, few hashtags have generated as much buzz as “#iftheygunnedmedown,” which has been circulating on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram. The hashtag is being used to counter media images shown of Michael Brown, whose shooting by Ferguson, Missouri, police has sparked riots.

After the fatal shooting of Brown, 18, several media outlets used what many said was a distorted image of him taken from his Twitter account — casual, bordering on menacing. They argue that a majority of his photos show a different side, like broad smiles, hearty laughs, and the tenderness of high school graduation photos. He was set to begin college on Monday.

The trending hashtag was several hours old before Alexis Nwaiwu, a 19-year-old sophomore at Georgia State University, decided to post.

### SECTION/GROUP 2

#### Two Photos Collide

It wasn’t necessarily Michael Brown’s photo that inspired her. Rather, it was a news image of Brown, placed along with that of James Holmes, the Colorado theater shooter, that enraged her.

Someone posted the photo of Brown in his red Nike tank top flashing a peace sign. The headline, taken from a news site, read: “Police: Michael Brown Struggled With Officer Before Shooting.”

On top of that was a photo of Holmes, wearing a tie in what looked like a class picture. The headline: “Theater Shooting Suspect Was Brilliant Science Student.”

“I just thought it was interesting how they portrayed someone who is Caucasian as a brilliant scholar — who was a mass murderer,” Nwaiwu said. “Michael Brown is shown as a thug because he was throwing up a peace sign.”





# Activism Through Social Media Creates Bigger Buzz

## Both Sides of the Story or Image

Brown was shot and killed last weekend after an encounter with a police officer in his hometown. His death has not only sparked unrest in Ferguson, but social media have also exploded, picking up his cause.

Nwaiwu, a varsity cheerleader at GSU, has also taken up his cause, posting a picture of herself laughing at a party and flashing two peace signs. Next to it is a smiling image of Nwaiwu in her high school graduation robe.

“The one at the party with a peace sign portrays my generation,” she said. “But don’t get it confused. I still graduated with honors from high school. I am in college. I am a cheerleader and I make good grades. But the media will always show one side of you.”

## SECTION/GROUP 3

### Dangerous Perceptions

Brown’s death comes nearly 2 1/2 years after the shooting of Trayvon Martin and about 13 months after George Zimmerman was acquitted at his trial in the Martin case. More recent episodes fueled the Michael Brown protests: the videotaped death of Eric Garner at the hands of New York City police, and the second-degree murder verdict against Theodore Wafer. Wafer shot Renisha McBride, 19 after she knocked on his door after crashing her car.

“The assumption is that black males are predators and because of that perceived threat as a predator, you can do anything to them,” said David Wall Rice, a professor at Morehouse College. “You can gun them down and not be worried about being convicted, like with Trayvon. You can ask what Michael Brown was doing wrong instead of what the person with the gun was doing wrong?”

Al Tompkins, a teacher at the Poynter Institute, a school for journalism in St. Petersburg, Florida, posted on the school’s website that the hashtag campaign forces people and news organizations to re-examine how images are received and perceived.

“No single image can define an individual. It is possible for an image to be accurate, real, and unaltered and

still not be a true depiction of who that person is,” Tompkins said. “A booking photo could be a single image of a person at the worst moment of his or her life. A wedding photo could be of that same person at the best moment of his or her life. Both are extremes. Seek context.”

### Hearing the Voices of Many

Since the hashtag campaign started, the phrase “#iftheygunnedmedown” has been used on Twitter more than 158,000 times, according to The New York Times. Many of those posted similar photos with similar stories.

Eric Deggans, a television critic for National Public Radio, said the use of social media, particularly among African-Americans, has given voice to people who might have otherwise been silenced.

“With social media, we get to tell our story,” Deggan said. “We can put up a blog post or Tweet that reflects our attitude and it reaches millions of people.”

Morehouse’s Rice said black people shouldn’t have to worry about which photo of them might be used and argues that both images contribute to a complete picture.

“That does add to the complexity of how black men are viewed in the United States,” Rice said. He says the media reduce black men to an image they are comfortable with. It ignores “the complexity of the wholeness of who black men are — it should not be a question of which one, but rather showing the whole person.”

Tarshia Stanley, chairwoman of the Spelman College English Department, said that while she agrees that the hashtag campaign has been positive, she cautions about it ultimately being reduced to just a slogan.

“We have to, as a community, think about these issues of safety and violence toward young black men,” Stanley said. “We have to get a real dialogue going. Where is the dialogue with law enforcement before things like this happen? We have to figure out how we move beyond the hashtag.”