



Itinerary #11 Kind Words



Competences



- 2.1 Interacting through digital technologies
- 2.2 Sharing through digital technologies
- 2.4 Collaborating through digital technologies
- 2.5 Netiquette



- 3.1 Developing digital content
- 3.2 Integrating and re-elaborating digital content



- 5.3 Creatively using digital technologies

Tags

- Hate speech online
- Bullying
- Social networks

Time frame

6-7 hours

Audience

Age 11 - 17

Overview

This itinerary takes place through three main activities, linked by a main theme: language. Through the proposed activities, students will be empowered to speak, write, respond, tell, taking care to carefully choose the words and the way to tell. During the first activity, through a card game, strategies will be tested to deal with insults and negative comments that can be encountered on the web. These strategies are all aimed at "extinguishing" verbal fires, lowering tones and responding in a kind and composed way, sometimes fun and poetic. The second activity foresees that, in the light of the first experience, the students reason about similar situations (insults and hate speech) occurred to them or seen on the web. Through a simple video technique – through the use of their smartphones – they will build a very personal narrative of these situations, proposing potential solutions. The last activity will allow them to verbalize and condense their experiences through the writing of a letter. A very particular video game, *Kind Words*, will allow them to respond to letters from strangers, scattered around the world. This method, the comparison with other users and the responsibility to respond to their letters (often very dense with emotions) will lead students to reason about the importance of the words they choose to write every day.

Context

This itinerary addresses the issues of hate speech, negative comments found on chats and social networks, also asking students to tell about some cases they have seen or experienced. This allows you to deal with the topic by comparing, but it could be problematic, for example if there were unpleasant episodes related to the topic within the class.

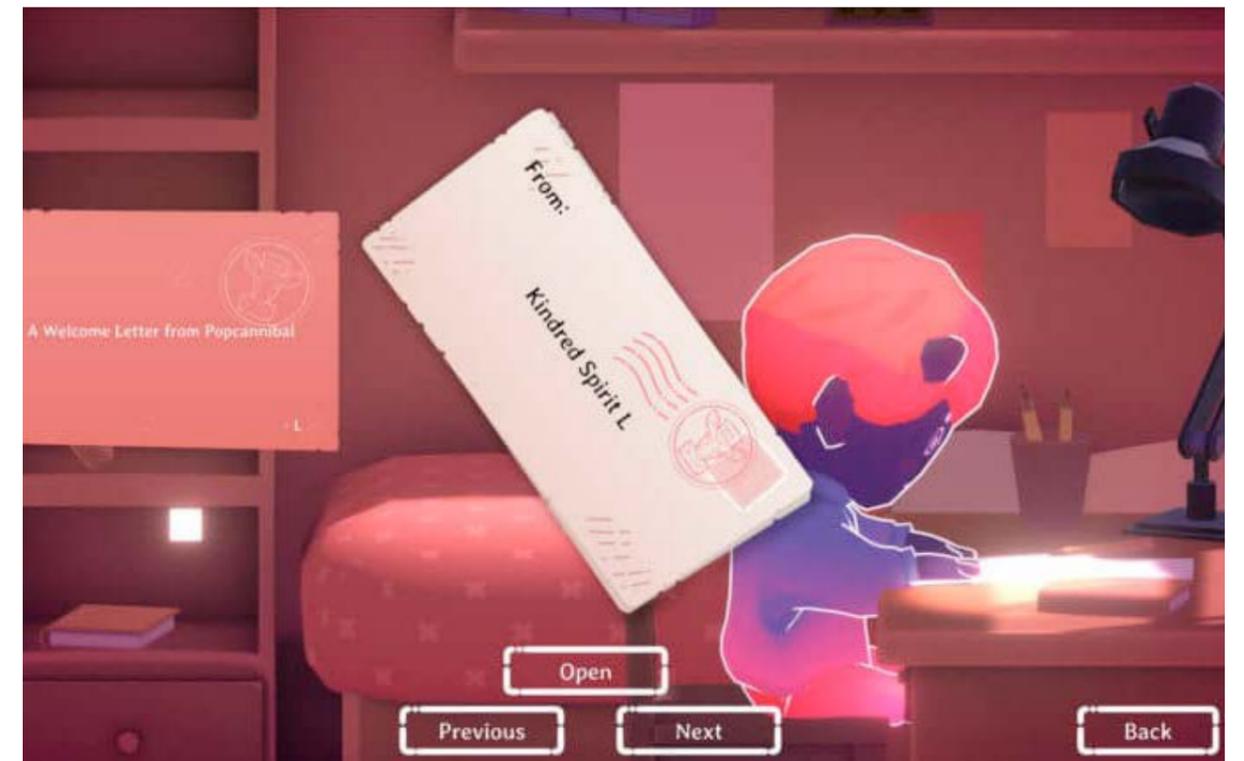
Cautions: if we know that within the group there have been unpleasant episodes related to hate speech we can, in the first phase, make up the groups accordingly, perhaps to avoid feeding certain group attitudes that could be counterproductive. In the same way, we can avoid comparing game situations to the real world, remaining in the context of fantasy. In the second activity, if we prefer, we can propose situations or comments to the students, if we want to prevent them from bringing real stories to class.

Objective

The activity aims:

- Experiment and discuss strategies to respond to hateful comments
- Knowing how to narrate unpleasant situations and tell of possible solutions
- Knowing how to use smartphones to make videos collectively
- Think about the words to use in a comment, in a speech
- Compose a letter using "kind words"

Required Media



Kind Words

Kind Words is a very particular video game, available for Microsoft Windows, Linux, macOS; the game is paid. The whole mechanism is based on the reception of letters, to which it is possible to reply. The video game leads us to carefully read the words of thousands of strangers, decide whether to answer or not, and how. It is an interactive experience, more than a video game. Practically, *Kind Words* is a game where you send confessional letters to strangers. You play as an avatar in a small, cozy room who writes letters, and you can click through dozens of letters sent by real people, some of which touched on frustrations around joblessness, love, solitude, family, personal issues. You can choose to respond to letters however you

want, and if the sender likes your response, they can send you a sticker. The game has a more or less extensive form of moderation, so basically it is not possible to write some terms, concepts, sentences. The space is quite contained, designed more for emotional and empathic responses. It is important to note that the conduct of the community has an immense impact on the game, and offers valuable feedback to the developers. Playing *Kind Words* could be a very strong experience. We don't know what the next letter will contain, and it could move us a lot. The kindness of the exchanges does not prevent you from writing or receiving deep and touching contents. An important advice: *Kind Words* links players to mental health resources in its "Help" section.

Working Methods

This working methods allow you to design experiences in which students and adults can reflect on online hate speech starting from life, from experiences, but also by imagining the necessary antibodies to face it in the future. Working in groups, collective discussion, artistic

and digital practice become concrete tools to raise awareness and give students tools to react. The Strategic Reactions card game propose useful operational strategies to contrast hate speech in an easily replicable way in real life.

SEGMENT 1

Overview

In this segment the card game Strategic Reactions is used to reason about strategies for responding to negative comments

Time: 2 hours

Methods

Initially, students will probably be inclined to answer "in tone", both to impress and because it is simpler and more immediate. As the game progresses, we need to make them understand that the goal of the game is another: to prevent the other from arguing, being poetic, kind, not fueling other discussions. The scoring mechanism usually helps, as does being responsible for mediating.

Equipment

Card game *Strategic Reactions* (attached); paper and coloured pens, markers or pencils (see Additional options / Variations at the end)

At the beginning of the itinerary we introduce the Strategic Reactions card game to the students. Attached to this itinerary are, in addition to the cards, instructions and rules for playing in groups

in the classroom. All you have to do is print all the material and cut out the cards to prepare for the game session. Reading the rules in class with students is a good way to make sure everyone understands them, and it is advisable to have a "test game" before starting.

It is also important to create well-balanced groups, based on the specificities of the students and the class.

The rules are listed in the annex, but we summarize them here for convenience. In short Strategic Reaction is a card game which consists in finding the "best" reaction to an offense, a negative comment, a mockery. After forming the groups, each of them is given a deck of Strategies Cards, the cards that are used to "respond" to the offenses. At each turn a Situations Card is drawn (the offenses) and the groups must propose a strategy - according to them convincing and effective - through a Strategies Card. At each turn one of the groups does not play the cards, but acts as a "moderator": draws the offense, reads it, observes the proposals of the other groups and decides which one is best suited to the situation. At each turn the moderator role changes, until everyone has been able to play it.

Working Methods

Whenever the moderator group chooses the group that has reacted best, it assigns a point to that group. Whoever has collected the most points wins.

One thing is fundamental: it is important to make students understand that the ultimate goal is to put out the "verbal fires", to lower the tones, not to feed the hatred with other hatred. They could be led, especially initially, to counteract "on tone"; this is understandable, but we must make them understand that the aim of the game is to displace, aggrilate, leave the hater speechless. Their role is that of people who react with maturity to offenses and who try to break the loop of hatred.

Of course this is the mechanical structure of the game, simple and constructed so that there is a lot of interaction between the members of the groups and between the groups themselves. But what matters is that the game has been designed in this way to bring out reasoning, discussions and comparisons on the topic of hate speech. It is important, in fact, at each turn, to allow students to compare themselves, internally to their groups, and when evaluating strategies. The moderator group should explain their choice, and the participants should explain why they proposed that strategy, and say whether or not they agree with the moderator's choice. The game has already been widely tested in various schools. Often students had the desire to bring examples, or to deepen some attitudes or behaviors, bringing them back to everyday life. If the game excites and is understood, the

students appreciate it very much and dedicate themselves to it. For this reason it is important to dedicate the right time to the game session: both to allow everyone to perform the role of moderator, and to suspend the game at any time to deepen interesting discussions and comparisons.

Strategic Reactions can be a great way to open up to many discussions, starting from a group discussion, and deepening some aspects that may seem more relevant and important to the students. It is also very important to reason with them about the game itself, if they find it effective, functional, and if they have proposals.

See the end of this itinerary for an optional proposal regarding Strategic Reactions.

Working Methods

SEGMENT 2

Overview

In this segment, students will make videos with their smartphones using a fun and creative technique

Time: 3-4 hours

Methods

In this segment, after giving indications on technique and content, students are left very free to create. It is important to create well-balanced groups, and to foresee moments in which the state of the works is taken into account (for example after the storyboard phase, but before starting shooting) to verify that everything has been understood and that the projects remain feasible. The teacher should constantly follow the work of the various groups to verify that the proposed themes and topics remain central to their narratives.

Equipment

Smartphones; pen and paper; pencils, pens, markers, coloured paper and other creative material

This segment, considering the presentation of the comments, the creation, the writing of the storyboard, the creation of the necessary contents and filming will probably take 3 or 4 hours. It is advisable to divide it into two different moments, in order to allow students, between one session and another, to take the photos and shoot the necessary videos.

In this phase the students will make short videos with the technique called "Puzzle Smartphone", created by Vinz Beschi. The themes and contents of these videos will be inspired by the reflections that emerged in the first part, so the two parts are closely connected. In the previous days (perhaps at the end of the first activity) we ask students to bring to school (with photos, screenshots, writing them) negative comments that they find particularly significant, or serious, or that have affected them. Remember to ask to bring their smartphones and verify any permits to use them. Also for this phase, we ask students to work in groups. Before starting the practical and creative work, we ask students to present the comments chosen by them and tell why they chose those. Some may have read them in a chat, others found on social network profiles; of course we always respect their sensitivity and the desire to tell about. This initial phase can serve to select the comments on which each group will work, but it can also offer the opportunity for further reflections on the topics addressed.

Once the groups are created and the comment (or comments) to work on is selected, we show the students the technique with which they will create their videos. Essentially it is a matter of bring near various smartphones, on which images (photographs or videos) flow and shooting everything with another smartphone (or a camera) to make a video.

Let's take an example with the students creating a collective portrait; we need six smartphones: two for the eyes, two

Working Methods

for the ears, one for the mouth, one for the nose. We ask students to photograph these parts of the body, very close, so that the subject (for example the eye) fills the frame. Let's not stop at one photo / video per subject, we ask to make several (for example, seven/eight noses). They can take photos or videos, and set them to loop. Now we place the smartphones with these images on a horizontal plane, and we compose a face by moving and placing the smartphones together. We make sure that all screens are turned on and the videos are running. We can now, with the fingers, change the eyes, nose, mouth by scrolling through the gallery of images or videos just made. In this way the face is composed by the details of the students involved.

With this technique we ask students to make short videos focusing on the selected comments. The example of the face is useful for showing the potential of the technique in an immediate and fun way, but it can also be a starting point. For example, their story could be told by a character initially, and then leave room for other ideas. Photographs of places, objects, chat posts, videos with shots of landscapes, people, and everything that can come to their mind could follow on the screens. A narrating voice could tell the facts, or they could make a voiceless video.

But what exactly must they represent? We ask students to think deeply about the selected comments and to invent a short narrative that allows to present the unpleasant situation of the comment, but also a possible solution, just like for the card game. For example, if they wish

to start from an unpleasant comment on social networks, they could tell how the victim reacts, how the bully feels, and perhaps the best way to end this story, how to get out of the trap of constant offenses and propose a happy ending. The possibilities are many and at this juncture students' creativity can find free rein. However, we pay close attention to directing them immediately to a clear and manageable project, otherwise they risk expanding and dispersing ideas and energies. We can propose them to use the storyboard tool. A storyboard is a visual and written representation of a story, a fundamental tool used by all videomakers. They are "visual notes" to keep track of the story and prepare the scenes to be shot, represented by simple drawings. It is recommended to divide a sheet into equal rectangles; students must identify which are the main scenes of their story, and represent them with simple drawings, sequentially, inside the rectangles. They can help themselves with writing (e.g. "the character enters the scene"). This tool will be very useful for shooting the video.

When the students have made all the necessary material for their video on the various smartphones, they will be able to place them on the table and carry out the shooting. It is recommended to use a camera or smartphone placed on a tripod, in order to have a steady shot. A black surface in this case can result in an interesting effect, as the smartphone screens will be very bright and will contrast with the background.

Based on the skills, time and possibilities, we can do some editing on the videos made, or keep them as they are.

Working Methods

After shooting, it is important that all students see the work of the other groups. We can organize a projection in the classroom if the equipment allows. Each group could present their work to others, telling what their starting case was and what resolution they proposed through their video. We can stimulate the discussion by asking audience if they think the comments chosen are offensive, if they can identify where the offense has exceeded the limit, how they would have solved the situation and so on. It is important that the effort of each group is best valued.



Working Methods

SEGMENT 3

Overview

In the last segment students use the video game *Kind Words*, very different from the canonical ones.

Time: 1 hour

Media

The video game *Kind Words*

Methods

This is an opportunity to condense the work done so far, discuss it together and shape it through the writing of a letter. All the arguments, experiences and reflections that emerged can find their rightful place in the latter activity, where students are asked to write one or more letters. The game is called "kind words", therefore students will have to think about what strategies and words to put in place in contexts such as those of communication on the web.

Equipment

Computer with the video game; projector.

For the last segment of the itinerary the plan is to use the video game *Kind Words*. The video game is paid, so it is suggested to buy it especially if, in addition to this phase, there is the intention to use it on other occasions as well. It may be very interesting for example, once a week, to read a letter and reply, or compose one and send it, waiting for a reply.

When we start playing in *Kind Words*, we can decide whether to send a letter or respond to a letter. The letters we receive are all real letters written by other users, and the ones we send will be received by users, who will be able to reply. We can scroll through the letters received and decide whether to reply or not. As anticipated in the Required Media section of this itinerary, some contents can be very serious and delicate, sometimes heavy. If we know the students, we will know how to manage the contents accordingly.

To continue the itinerary, we start from the videos made by the students. Taking advantage of the "send a letter" functionality of *Kind Words*, we ask students to compose one. We can create a collective letter, or ask each group to create one. The space available is limited, but it is sufficient to write something meaningful. We ask students to think about what was discussed together, about the reactions adopted with the Strategic Reactions game, about the reflections that emerged from their videos. What could we write? Is there a thought, a reasoning, a new awareness that you would like to share with someone, unknown, perhaps on the other side of the world? A way of reacting, of facing difficulties, which could be useful to someone who, although we do not know, could have the same problems raised by us? What are your "kind words" for them?

Let the groups - or the class - discuss each other and compose the letter, writing it first by hand. Reread it together

Working Methods

and verify that it can be shared by everyone. Now let's compose it within the game, perhaps projecting the whole procedure to the whole class. Once we are sure of the letter (or letters), send it and wait for a reply. This could happen immediately, after hours or days; we can't know, it depends if someone wants to answer our letter. If the mechanism of receiving and sending letters should be particularly pleasing to the class, it could be interesting to dedicate an hour a week to *Kind Words*, a moment in which we confront, compose letters, respond to letters, or read the responses.



In a nutshell

Students attend daily hate speech episodes on the web, directly or indirectly. Everywhere, from chats to social networks, it is easy to find unpleasant comments, insults, disrespect, anger and hatred. One of the risks is precisely that, being daily and widespread practice, can become "normal" and accepted, especially by those who - like students - in social networks often look for a way to assert themselves, tell about themselves, form their own image. It is therefore essential to reason with them on the methods of communication, and if they consider it correct that this hatred is now an indispensable part of communication. It is important to show them alternatives, other strategies, polite and respectful ways of communicating, and to understand that these attitudes can help lower the level of hatred they encounter on a daily basis.

Additional options / Variations

If during the first activity there was time, and interest in doing it, it is possible to propose to the students to create new cards, invented by them. We can ask groups or individually to create both types of cards: Strategies Cards and Situations Cards. We ask students what other cards they would like to add to the decks, based on their needs, or based on experiences seen or lived. They can discuss among themselves the strategies and situations to be proposed and then create the card, with the title, the phrase, the drawing and everything they deem necessary to be able to be played. The new cards are then placed in the class deck and can be played just like all the others. It is interesting at this stage to collect their proposals and their points of view, which can also help to relaunch a theme or topic that seems to us to be particularly close to their hearts.

Sources / Links

Here is a video that shows the *Puzzle Smartphone* technique by Vinz Beschi:
www.youtube.com/watch?v=dAglxX2AqYQ