THE TEENAGE GUIDE TO LIFE ONLINE
by Nicola Morgan
TEACHING NOTES

Thank you for your interest in The Teenage Guide to Life Online (TTGLO). You might be thinking of using the book in school; or trying to understand current science about the positives and negatives of screen-use, the Web and social media. Or you might be planning a visit from me to your school. I give talks all over the world and I know the best events happen when students are well-prepared. But you're busy, so these ideas will help you!

TTGLO is perfect for the whole of secondary school. It would also be useful for upper primary and for parents, school staff and anyone who cares about online wellbeing for all ages (including adults).

These notes show you what TTGLO covers and offer ideas and activities to help your students get the most from the book and help you encourage healthy online behaviours. I envisage that you'd read each chapter before sharing aspects of it or reading it to them.

You won't need a class set of TTGLO – though schools do use my books in that way and it would be a great idea! You just need a copy for yourself and maybe one or two in the school library. If I'm doing an event with you, I always bring a free book or two.

## WHAT THE BOOK COVERS – AND IDEAS FOR ACTIVITY OR DISCUSSION:
Note: every section in the book, apart from the introductory **Welcome to the Internet**, is split into **Positives** and **Negatives**, and then has **How to Avoid These Negatives**.

WELCOME TO THE INTERNET
Brief history of the Web; fascinating facts; why it's so tempting and may be addictive; safety.

IDEAS for class activity/discussion:
- Check some of the stats and see how they've changed. (Refs at end of section.)
- Do the smartphone addiction quiz on p31
- Discuss problems they think might come from being dependent on phones/screens. Have any tried to reduce usage? What good/bad habits do they feel they have?
- If you were trying to reduce your chocolate intake, would it be sensible to have chocolate in front of you all day? What does this teach us about sensible phone use?
- Discuss the online safety tips I offer. Do students have stories to tell about problems they've had or heard about? Why do they think people get into trouble online even if they have heard the advice?
- Make a Six Tips to Be Safe Online poster. They should hone the words to make most impact.
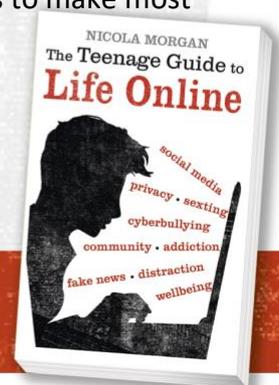
SOCIAL LIFE ONLINE

Opportunities to make friends; broaden minds; contact people with same problems, values or needs; ease of conversation. Many possible negatives including: over-use; oversharing and online disinhibition; competition with "perfect" lives; "like-spamming"; self-esteem; trolling and cyber-bullying; more "friends" than you can manage; loss of conversation skills.

IDEAS for class activity/discussion:

- Debate: "Social media leads to better social lives". Generate a formal debate, with one team arguing for each side. Vote! (Do tell me the result!)
- Each student to choose a positive or a negative (or both) and write a short piece about their experience of each.
- What is their favourite social media platform? Are there things they wish were different about it? What would the "perfect" platform be like? Why hasn't someone designed it? (Think about commercial aspects – need to make money.)
- How important is it that people "like" or respond to posts? How does it make them feel when very few do? What are the problems with this feeling?

THE KNOWLEDGE AND INFORMATION EXPLOSION

Positives – such as the ease of finding facts; becoming good at skim-reading; ability to grow expertise; all the amazing apps and tools – are balanced against negatives: information overload; losing deep reading skills; reduced memory; fake news; access to pornography.

**IDEAS for class activity/discussion:**

- How do we know what we read is true? Why is there sometimes false info online? (Deliberate and accidental reasons.) How could you check? How much effort do *you* make to check? Do you sometimes just believe things because they sound exciting?
- According to Wikipedia, what was my name before I married? (Wikipedia is wrong!)
- Can they find any examples of fake news? (See Snopes – www.snopes.com – for checking truth of viral news/video etc.)
- Discuss skim-reading and deep reading. Merits of each? Which do they do most of? Why do we need to do both? How can they practise deep-reading?

BUSY BRAINS: ACTIVE AND ALERT

Our screens allow us to exercise our brains; never be bored; learn skills; free our memory for other activities. But this is an area with really important negatives: distraction and lower concentration; mental exhaustion; loss of free-thinking and daydreaming time.

IDEAS for class activity/discussion:

- Discuss: how easy do you find it to concentrate? Who has a phone in view while trying to work? Why do you think that might affect concentration?
- Design an experiment to measure effect of working with phone near or of having other windows/Apps open while working on screen, compared to working without possibility of interruptions. What ideas can they come up with to test this?
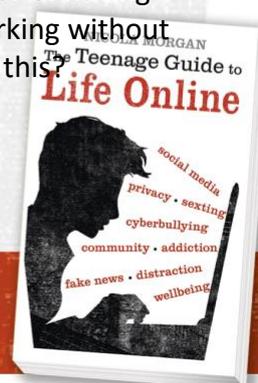
- Experiment with times when no screens are used in class. Talk about how it feels. Do we agree screens/Internet are fantastic but may be times when better to switch off?
- Get students to make a diary to record on/off-screen times over 24-hours. Any time spent looking at screen (including phone) counts as on-screen. Also record how often they check phone. Discuss.
- Who sometimes feels exhausted by online or on-screen activity? Use Switch Off Screen time. Increase daily off-screen time by deliberately building in fun, engaging off-screen activities: play sport, have fun, chat, be creative, read a book, ride a bike.

THE INTERNET AND CREATIVITY

The Web provides loads of ways to be creative, in art, video, writing, crafts or new skills and hobbies. You can showcase creations, make money, improve technique, use design tools and even be famous! On the downside, you might publish work before it's ready; you may not learn crucial skills because software does it for you; work can be stolen or you can be ripped off; and there's copying rather than originality. But these negatives are easy to avoid.

IDEAS for class activity/discussion:
- What creative things do you enjoy? Who has made a video, recorded music, written stories, created artwork, and put it online? What do they like/not like about this?
- What are favourite Apps for creating things?
- How has the Web helped you learn to do things?
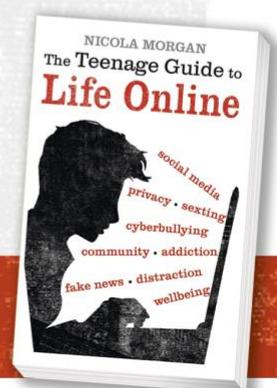
READING ON SCREENS

Reading on screen means we don't have to carry lots of heavy books; we can keep our reading private; we can adapt text if we're dyslexic or visually impaired. But are we losing ability to read deeply? If we read quickly, might we miss things? Evidence suggests screen reading is more distracting; some people find it harder to get *into* a book.

IDEAS for class activity/discussion:
- Who reads for pleasure? Who reads ebooks? Who finds it as enjoyable to read an ebook as print?
- Investigate benefits of reading for pleasure. (My website has a section on the reading brain; also, put "reading for pleasure" or "readaxation" into the search box.)
- Download the "readaxation diary" from my website and use it as a class activity.

THE INTERNET AND MOOD

This is where research tells us least and headlines shout loudest, but we can use self-awareness. Positives include being able to get support; things to laugh at; chance to take our mind off worries. But negatives abound: increased anxiety or low mood from reading scary or sad news stories; bombardment of info; seeing everyone's apparently perfect lives; how easy it is to react angrily and emotionally.

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The Teenage Guide to
Life Online

social media
privacy · sexting
cyberbullying
community · addiction
fake news · distraction
wellbeing

IDEAS for class activity/discussion:
Caution: this is an area where triggering negative thoughts is a genuine risk. This topic needs to be tackled very sensitively, with strategies for opting out and expressing stress. Be aware of who is vulnerable. Emphasise that it is normal to be affected by sad/scary things.

- How do you feel when you first read a story of something bad happening in the news? How do you feel each time you read about it again? Do you feel compelled to read all the details, over and over? Do you get the feeling this is unhealthy? Can you think of some strategies to avoid this?
- How much do people filter and edit what they put online? What effect can it have if we always see perfect versions of other lives?
- Create a poem or piece of artwork to express how someone might feel when they see everyone's perfect lives.
- Look at some of the *Dove Campaign for real Beauty* videos – these are not only aimed at girls and I think all genders should see them.
- Do you know that laughter raises mood? What are your favourite funny YouTube videos? Can the class watch one now and see how it improves mood?
- How hard is it to step away when you realise something online is making you feel bad – whether sad stories on an argument amongst friends? Can you come up with strategies for stepping away?
- Drama activity: in groups, create a <5-minute drama about something happening online which is negatively affecting someone. How does it turn out?
- Who will you turn to if something bad is happening to you online? Do we have strategies in place for that?

THE INTERNET AND SLEEP
This is the only topic where I found no positives! (Other than the ability to use the Web to learn about sleep…) I cover the reasons why using screens can have a negative impact on sleep, because of the light (usually) being a similar wavelength to daylight and our devices bringing us alerting, exciting or stressful messages.

IDEAS for class activity/discussion:
- Ask students to investigate – it's often more productive than telling them.
- Discuss the "digital sunset" idea in my website article: "Digital sunset – a great idea for wellbeing and sleep: www.nicolamorgan.com/life-online/digital-sunset-great-idea-wellbeing-sleep/ There's a link to a useful video.
- Challenge: for one week agree to keep all screens off from 1.5 hours before an agreed bed-time until the morning. (Where possible, devices should be *out* of the bedroom, to avoid temptation.) Get parents (and you!) to do the same.
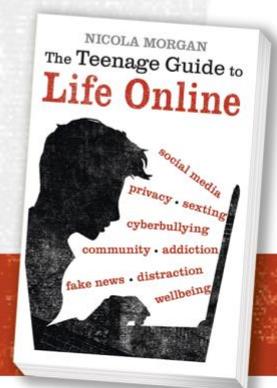
USE YOUR NEW POWERS

The final section encourages readers to make use of what they have learnt and suggests a range of tips for good screen habits, followed by SIX STEPS TO ONLINE WELL-BEING. (I have a useful postcard to highlight the four most important points.)

IDEAS for class activity/discussion:
- Read the tips and discuss each – or choose a few to focus on.
- Investigate the Pomodoro technique and think of ways to apply it.
- How might you get parents/family to follow the same guidelines.
- Each student could make a poster to show the ways they spend their day, including online and off-line activities. (Could be a clock-face.) Ask them to decide whether they feel they do *enough* of the following: sleep, physical exercise, face-to-face conversation, offline/off-screen hobbies and just time to let their minds wander. (Daydreaming is good for us – there is more on that in the book.)
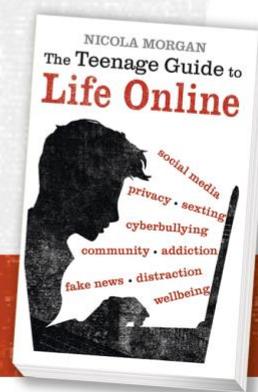
GENERAL IDEAS FOR YOUR STUDENTS

1. Download a postcard of tips, which you can print and/or enlarge for display. (See www.nicolamorgan.com → Books → Teenage Guide to Life Online → scroll to the link.) If I visit your school, I'll bring some signed postcards and some posters for the school.
2. Ask students to investigate me online. They should use my website *and* other places. Get them to consider how they'll know what is reliable.
   - What sort of person do they think I am? Why do I understand teenagers well? Am I a scientist? Why do I want to help young people? Do I spend a lot of time online?! What social media platforms do I use? Do I use them well? What do I not use? Why?
3. Take this Life Online survey online: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/P8R939R
4. Take this Positively Teenage survey: www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/5L8LCQK
5. Take the Readaxation survey: www.surveymonkey.com/r/QHRPCC9
6. Choose a question to ask me via my website. Obviously, I can't answer loads and loads of questions but if your class picks one I'll be more than happy to answer. I might answer it on my website and give the school/class a name-check – let me know if that's ok. Contact using the Contact page of my website. **(Until June 8ᵗʰ 2018 there's a competition involving asking questions. See the News section of my website.)**
7. If I'm visiting, discuss questions to ask. You can make this work best with a class discussion in advance, so that the class can choose interesting questions. We could put them in a box for me to pick or you could send them in advance or whatever you like.

Do visit my website to see all the free resources as well as information about my other books and work with young people. I hope you enjoy The Teenage Guide to Life Online and my other books, especially Blame My Brain, The Teenage Guide to Stress, The Teenage Guide to Friends and Positively Teenage. Remember: I do events for teenagers, professionals and parents. See the Speaking area of my website.

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