BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- A University of Toronto study found that one in four local students said they had been bullied on the internet or by mobile phone text messages, and one in five students admitted they had cyber-bullied someone. The study also found that less than 10 per cent of the people being bullied ever told an adult.

- The web site www.mediasmarts.ca identifies six different types of cyberbullying:
  - Insults—Spreading false or insulting information about someone.
  - Targeting—Picking out a person and encouraging others to attack them.
  - Identity theft—Pretending to be someone else online and making comments they would never make in order to embarrass them or ruin their reputation.
  - Uploading—Sharing photos of another person—often embarrassing ones—without their permission.
  - Excluding—Encouraging others to exclude a person from social groups.
  - Harassment—Repeatedly sending abusive or threatening messages to someone.

- There were numerous stories of people cyberbullying athletes during the Winter Olympics in Sochi, Russia, including:
  - Insults and death threats against British speed skater Elise Christie, after she fell during a race and knocked over other skaters.
  - Attacks against Canadian speed skater Brittany Schussler for tweeting a photo of herself with Russian President Vladimir Putin, who many people around the world do not like for his anti-gay laws.
  - Australian snowboarder Belle Bruckhoff received tweets from people who said they wanted her to break a leg, or get arrested by Russian police, because she is lesbian.
  - Racist tweets were made about African-Canadian hockey player P.K. Subban.

NOTE TO EDUCATORS

The following activities are designed to stimulate a current events discussion. Generative in nature, these questions can be a launching point for additional assignments or research projects.

Teachers are encouraged to adapt these activities to meet the contextual needs of their classroom.

In some cases, reading the article with students may be appropriate, coupled with reviewing the information sheet to further explore the concepts and contexts being discussed. From here, teachers can select from the questions provided below. The activity is structured to introduce students to the issues, then allow them to explore and apply their learnings. Students are encouraged to further reflect on the issues.

KEY TERMS

Cyberbullying—Harassment or abuse of a person through online communication such as social media or texting.

Flame—In Internet-speak, to verbally attack or insult a person in an online forum.

Hatemonger—Someone who spreads hatred.
THEMES AND COURSE CONNECTIONS
• Themes: Global Issues, Values and Ethics, Local Issues
• Course Connections: Language, Social Studies

MATERIALS
• Front Board
• Poster paper (about 22” x 28”) per student
• Pencils and colour crayons
• Scissors and a stapler
• String

SPECIFIC EXPECTATIONS AND LEARNING GOALS
Students will:
• Develop and express responses to issues and problems.
• Reassess their responses to issues on the basis of new information.
• Participate in active group work and class discussions.
• Communicate effectively in writing, orally or visually.
• Demonstrate the ability to think critically.
• Develop, express and defend a position on an issue.

DISCUSS
1. What is bullying? What is cyberbullying?
2. Why do you think Olympic and professional athletes get singled out for cyberbullying?
3. Do you think Brittany Schussler deserved the backlash she received online for posting the selfie with Russian President Vladimir Putin?
4. Should athletes stay away from tweeting?
5. What are trolls? How can we discourage this type of online behaviour?
6. Will rules like the 24 hour rule Hockey New Brunswick have put in to place stop cyberbullying in sport?

DIVE DEEPER
Write the word AVATAR on the front board. An avatar is a virtual digital image that represents a person online. Ask students:

• What is the meaning of the word avatar?
• Does anyone use avatars when you are communicating online? What kinds of avatars do you use?

Using the mask-making materials, allow time for students to create their own mask. Explain that you want them to make a mask to represent their online identity. Their avatar can be represented by anything from a symbol to an animal. Students can decorate their masks to look like avatars that they might already use or invent one that they would like to use. Have them name their avatars and ask them to write down the avatar’s likes, dislikes and personality traits.

To make the mask:
• Draw an oval shape on your large piece of paper (the larger the better).
• Cut the oval shape out of the paper.
• At both the top and bottom of the oval, make a 1” cut.
• Draw and cut out where the eye, mouth and nose holes (if any) are going to be.
• Decorate the mask by using the colour crayons.
• Where you made your cuts, fold the paper and staple in place. This will give your mask more dimension.
• Staple string onto the mask so it can be tied around the head.

Wearing their masks, invite students to mingle and introduce themselves to one another in character as their avatar. Once they have done this, have students return to their seats. As a class, discuss the experience.

For those who have used avatars on the Internet, is their avatar like them or different?
• Is your avatar’s online personality similar or different from who you are in real life?
• How did you feel when you were going around the room as your avatar? Did you behave differently than you would have if you were not wearing the mask?
• Avatars can be lots of fun, but what problems do you think could arise by using them?
• What positives do you see in using avatars?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES
Pacer’s Bullying Prevention Center, http://www.pacer.org/bullying/
Media Smarts, www.mediasmarts.ca

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