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THE PALEY CENTER FOR MEDIA

PALEY EDUCATION @Home
presented by **citi**
What We're Watching



Greetings from The Paley Center for Media's Education Department!

Welcome to the latest installment of "What We're Watching." Twice a month the education department reaches out to the community with tips and ideas for consuming media with kids by highlighting different themes that connect to two selected programs, one for younger viewers and one for older viewers, each with related activities and resources.

Watching media alongside your kids is a perfect jumping-off point to making media literacy a part of your everyday lives. Familiarizing yourself with the basics is a great first step. You can [view our first newsletter about media literacy best practices archived here](#). We also recommend the [National Association for Media Literacy Education's Parents Guide](#)—it's a terrific

introduction!

What We're Watching: Greater Than the Sum of Our Data

We are a complex mix of chemical and physical structures that guide the many functions of our mind and body. Dynamic, hardwired, and above all communal, we crave connections, validation, and acceptance from others we see as our people. In an era dominated by “social” media, where connections are affirmed by the click of a “Like” button or discouraged by toxic comment threads, our very human need to connect can lead the impressionable, like our children, down dire and destructive paths. If social media is our primary, favored, or only human connection then we must proactively find ways to reunite with our tangible, non-virtual selves. Our newsletter this week urges an advisory notice about social media. For younger students, we recommend a superhero cartoon produced in Pakistan where the crimefighter takes on a catfishing cyberbully. For older students, we strongly advocate the screening of a film that persuasively explains how social media abets addiction, spreads misinformation, impairs mental health, and could potentially destroy our democratic institutions. If media can spur action and change, these stories are a spark.

This Week's Recommendations for Younger Viewers

Burka Avenger Versus the Cyber Bully (2023)

Recommended for Grades 3+

[Available on YouTube](#)

This award-winning digital animation series from Pakistan, voiced in Urdu with English subtitles, features a costumed superhero whose alter ego, Jiya, is an elementary school teacher. Many stories focus on the fight to stop “bad guys” from closing schools for girls, an alarming and destructive practice that was done in real life by extremists in north Pakistan. This led series creator Aaron Haroon Rashid to develop the program to underscore the importance of girl’s education. In the story *Burka Avenger Versus the Cyber Bully*, the villainous Baba Bandook bristles with the thought of villagers going online to gain knowledge. He vows to turn the Internet into an “Inter-not,” creating a fake social media account for Burka Avenger and then hacks the social media accounts of the village youth to spread conflict among them. In the climactic scene, Burka Avenger arrives to save the day, concluding the episode with a clear social message about responsible Internet use and cautionary advice to “Stop, Reflect and Verify” what we see online and whom we communicate with through social media.

Viewing Questions

- How does Baba Bandook first cause disharmony among the village youth of Halwapur?
- What does Baba Bandook promise will happen to Mooli if Mooli thinks of

a friend's "bad quality" and shares it online?

- How do the other children react to Mooli's post teasing Ashu, saying she's a "teacher's pet?" How does Ashu react?
- What is catfishing? And how can it cause harm to Internet and social media users?
- How does Mooli apologize to Ashu so others in their social network can see and participate?
- What are things we can do to make sure our online world is safe, joyful, and rewarding?

Additional Resources

[Burka Avenger website](#)

[NY State Government website on Cyberbullying](#)

[UNICEF—Cyberbullying: What It Is and How To Stop It](#)

Read

[Bad Kitty Gets a Phone](#) by Nick Bruel

[#Goldilocks: A Hashtag Cautionary Tale](#) by Jeanne Willis

[The Technology Tail: A Digital Footprint Story](#), written by Julia Cook, illustrated by Anita DuFalla

[Mirage: How Social Media Impacts the Way We Think, Feel, and Behave](#) by Tyler Hendon

Watch

[Moon Girl and Devil Dinosaur: "The Borough Bully"](#)



This Week's Recommendations for Older Viewers

The Social Dilemma (2020)

Recommended for Grades 9+

Available on Netflix

A powerful cautionary tale, *The Social Dilemma* is an ominous film that warns of the five-alarm fire scorching our human relations and consuming our sense of self with social networks that know us better than we know ourselves. Constructed as a hybrid of documentary and fiction, the film interviews tech developers, academics, doctors, and human rights advocates while intercutting a scripted drama of a typical American family with teenage children struggling with social media addiction. Like all prior communications media, social media was heralded for its positive, populist, and progressive potential but as tech companies became singularly focused on profit, the disturbing practice of preying on our human weaknesses and personal neuroses became another engine for monetization. The steep rise in hospital admittance and suicide rates for teens happening at the same time as social media's dominance in adolescent communication is harrowing. Likewise, our political, social, and cultural polarization reflects the narrow streams of our curated news feeds where fake news spreads six times faster than fact. When "truth" is designed by artificial intelligence using algorithms to keep users hooked, advertisers paid, and platforms profitable then the urgency of social media literacy is critical. We must emphasize that our intelligence is real and that algorithms are never neutral nor complex enough to achieve consciousness. Our humanity is greater than any sequence of code.

Viewing Questions

- When former Google design ethicist Tristan Harris first spoke up about the addictiveness of email, how was it addressed by Google?
- What does "if you're not paying for the product then you are the product" mean? How are people the product when using social media applications?
- Do you believe that social media is a neutral tool and users bear responsibility for how platforms like Facebook, Instagram, Google, and Twitter are used? Why do you feel that way?
- How do technical innovations such as Facebook's "Like" button impact the confidence and self-esteem of young people?
- How does a user's location and other personal data impact how Google auto-completes search questions like "Climate Change is..." For climate change deniers how might this question finish? For climate change believers how might this question finish?
- How have the recommendation engines of social media apps elevated the rise of conspiracy theories like Pizzagate and Covid-19 disinformation?
- How has Facebook been used by the military in Myanmar to incite violence against Rohingya Muslims?
- Facebook cofounder/CEO Mark Zuckerberg argues that the long-term solution is to build more artificial intelligence. Do you agree that technologists should be the ones solving our social dilemma? Why or why not?
- What are some of the solutions offered by the technologists, academics, and researchers to the problems of social media?

- When Shoshanna Zuboff, author of *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism*, calls social media platforms markets that trade in “human futures,” what does she mean?
- When Zuboff advocates outlawing these markets, what other markets in history were eliminated because of their “inevitable destructive consequences?”
- In addition to the technologists, academics, doctors, and human rights advocates interviewed, who else’s voice could have provided insight on this issue? What are your opinions on social media’s influence?

Additional Resources

[The Social Dilemma website](#)

[Mathbabe, a blog examining social issues and technology](#)

Read

[Ten Arguments for Deleting Your Social Media Account by Jaron Lanier](#)

[The Age of Surveillance Capitalism by Shoshana Zuboff](#)

[Weapons of Math Destruction by Cathy O’Neill](#)

[Zucked: Waking Up to the Facebook Catastrophe by Roger McNamee](#)

Watch

[Eighth Grade](#)

[The Great Hack](#)

[Black Mirror: "Nosedive" episode \(for students 15+\)](#)

As always, if you have any questions, thoughts, or ideas, don’t hesitate to reach out to us at eduny@paleycenter.org.

Happy viewing,

Carlos Pareja
Manager of Education

Rebekah Fisk
Director of Education

Photos—*Burka Avenger*: Unicorn Black; *The Social Dilemma*: Netflix





NYC High School Students: Apply for a paid, media-focused internship

Teen Transmitters is a paid 100-hour summer internship for rising 11th and 12th grade students who attend New York City public high schools. This summer 2023 internship will last five weeks, meeting four times a week and is in-person at the Paley Center in Manhattan.

Applications are due by April 16.

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