

Using Social Media to Connect

Tweeting with one of my student's favorite authors, I was able to remove the classroom walls and help that student connect with the author behind the words.

Many children's authors use social media as a way of connecting with their audience and providing a way for readers to share their thoughts and questions with them. While you might not find it possible or practical to have a classroom filled with seven-year-old Tweepers, consider starting a class Twitter account. If students wish to connect with or follow specific authors, these writers are generally quite easy to find, either through Twitter or their own websites. Most authors have a Contact Me section on their websites. Since this would require an e-mail address in order to receive a response, consider creating a class e-mail account strictly for this purpose. Young readers are often awestruck when they realize that authors are real, live people who they can connect with through social media.

Tweets shared with permission from Marina Cohen, @marinacohen



We're Talking Digital

Talk can take many forms. Students can engage in rich conversations face-to-face. Or they can use digital tools to connect with people outside their school or community, an option that allows them to talk first-hand with experts or learn together with students in other schools, cities, or even countries. As global citizens, students are able to engage in world events and actively communicate with children in other parts of the world. Digital tools can be used in all aspects of a literacy program to support students' reading, writing, and communication skills. Using online resources, students can read about current world events, research information, and engage with different forms of media to strengthen and apply their reading skills. They can also create and share a variety of media works in response to the things they are reading. When digital tools are integrated into the literacy block, students can use their time to read, create, share, and respond to the work of others.

The reality of budget restrictions is a challenge that all teachers face. While it would be lovely to have unlimited access to digital tools, it is most likely that we are all struggling to get our hands on these tools. But when we consider digital tools and media literacy as a vehicle for delivering content, rather than a subject itself, it becomes possible to use whatever tools are available in the most effective way. For example, having access to one computer and an LCD projector, the teacher can use online sources as text during direct-instruction times, focusing on the different text features and strengthening students' media awareness. If teachers have access to only a few classroom computers or devices, they can be

used during guided-reading times, possibly to provide the text for discussion. With access to as few as five computers or devices, teachers can create a designated section of AWARD Time in which students work independently using these tools. Teachers can bookmark sites that students need to visit, download apps that support specific skill development, or provide assignments that require students to create and share media works. There is really no need for a class set of devices or computers. By integrating media awareness and digital literacy into the 100 Minutes framework (through direct instruction, guided groups, and independent work times), teachers allow students to use the resources available to them in the most effective and efficient manner. As we work our way through the realities and challenges, we need to be flexible and creative to maximize the resources we have available to our students.