


**TEACHER NOTE:** to use this resource in your classroom - click 'file' and then click 'make a copy' to create your own Google Doc version to edit as needed and share with your students.

## The History of TikTok

**Warm-Up:** At the beginning of class, individually brainstorm and record your response to the following questions.

Brainstorm Activity	
What is TikTok?	
Which social media platforms do you use and which do you not use? Explain your choices.	

**Introduction:** After discussing the brainstorming questions with a partner and listening to your classmates' responses, consider the following questions from the first clip your teacher plays. Be prepared to share your answers with the class.

Clip #1: Introduction to TikTok (2:34)	Notes:
	
Which Chinese "tech giant" created TikTok?	
How did Zhang Yiming "come up with" TikTok?	
What makes TikTok "really different"?	


compared to other social media platforms?	
Based on the clip, how and why does a user's experience on TikTok change over time?	


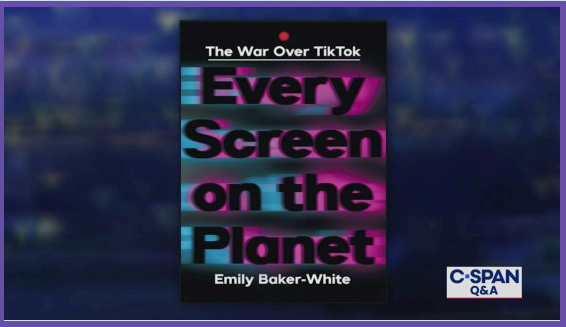
**Vocabulary:** Review the following list of terms before beginning the lesson. Provide a definition for each term. Make sure to reference this list when you encounter an unfamiliar word in the video clips.

Term	Definition
Advertising	
Algorithm	
Application	
Artificial Intelligence	
Asset	
Censorship	
Chinese Communist Party	
Congress	
Content Moderator	
Data	
Discourse	
Due Process	
Export	
Foreign	
Interventionist	

Lobby	
Manipulation	
National Security	
Propaganda	
Short-form Content	
Silicon Valley	
Subsidiary	
Take Care Clause	
Zeitgeist	

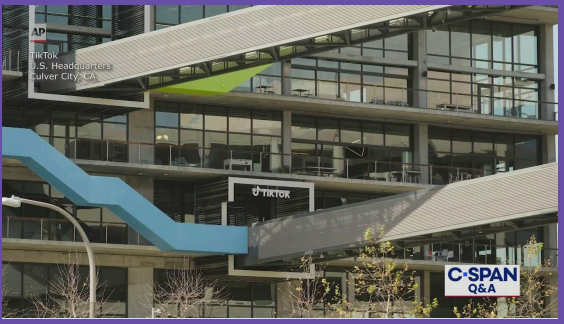
**Background:** View the following three video clips that provide background information about the social media platform TikTok, recording your notes and answers to the questions below. Prepare to share your responses with your classmates.

<p><b>Clip #2: The Company and Name (3:29)</b></p> 	<p><b>Notes:</b></p>
<p>Describe Zhang Yiming's background. Did he have a "connection" with the Chinese government?</p>	
<p>Where did the company name "ByteDance" come from?</p>	

Is TikTok a “subsidiary” of ByteDance?	
Why was the name “TikTok” selected?	
<p><b>Clip #3: Users and Content (1:51)</b></p> 	<p><b>Notes:</b></p>
How many “users” were on TikTok in the United States and globally as of 2024?	
What “videos” are on TikTok? To what other application does its content closely compare?	
Who can and cannot “post” to TikTok?	
What is TikTok “worth?” Explain.	
<p><b>Clip #4: TikTok’s Algorithm (2:05)</b></p> 	<p><b>Notes:</b></p>
What does TikTok’s “algorithm” determine? What does it not impact?	

Who “controls” TikTok today and why is this a concern?	
According to Emily Baker-White, how does TikTok’s algorithm compare to other applications’ algorithms?	

**Issues:** View the following three video clips that detail issues that exist with the social media platform TikTok, recording your notes and answers to the questions below. Prepare to share your responses with your classmates.

<p><b>Clip #5: Employees and the “Heating Button” (3:30)</b></p> 	<p><b>Notes:</b></p>
<p>How many “employees” does TikTok have, what do they do, and where do they work?</p>	
<p>Where are TikTok’s “offices” in the United States?</p>	
<p>How does TikTok’s “operation” compare to other technology companies’ operations?</p>	
<p>Is there “human manipulation” in TikTok’s algorithm? What is the “heating button” and how has it been used and misused?</p>	
<p><b>Clip #6: Censorship and the “Employee Shakedown Problem” (4:51)</b></p>	<p><b>Notes:</b></p>



Is there “censorship” on what can be posted to TikTok by users? Explain.

How have TikTok’s “content policies” compared to other technology companies’ policies?

Define the “employee shakedown problem.” What “fear” does it create for the United States?


What “erodes really fast” in the Chinese system?

Who is the “owner” of TikTok?

How does TikTok make money and is it “profitable?” Explain.

**Clip #7: National Security Concerns (4:32)**

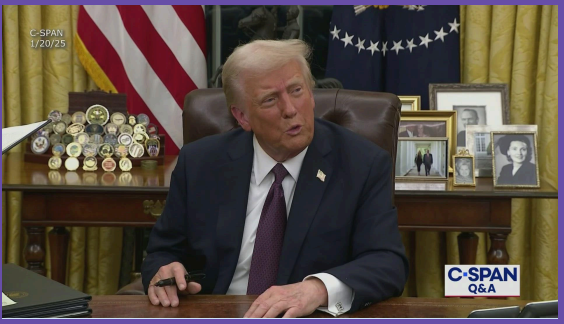
**Notes:**

	
<p>Does Emily Baker-White use TikTok? Why or why not? Summarize the story she shares.</p>	
<p>What “threat” did Senator Josh Hawley (R-MO) say TikTok posed during a 2019 Senate hearing?</p>	
<p>Are Senator Hawley’s concerns “legitimate?” What related question does Baker-White pose?</p>	
<p>Is most of the information on TikTok of concern to “national security?” Explain why or why not.</p>	

**Growing Concerns:** *View the following three video clips that highlight growing concerns related to the social media platform TikTok, recording your notes and answers to the questions below. Prepare to share your responses with your classmates.*


<p><b>Clip #8: Trust and Safety and Content Policy (2:34)</b></p>	<p><b>Notes:</b></p>
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<p>What do the “trust and safety” or “content policy” teams at technology companies do?</p>	
<p>Where did the title of Emily Baker-White’s book come from?</p>	
<p>What does the “book jacket” refer to and symbolize?</p>	
<p><b>Clip #9: Business Model (5:34)</b></p> 	<p><b>Notes:</b></p>
<p>Based on the clip, how do business models of technology companies compare to other industries’ business models?</p>	
<p>What is “always good to remember?” Explain.</p>	
<p>Define “enshit-tification” and its connection to the technology industry.</p>	


<p>What is the role of “artificial intelligence” with TikTok and other social media companies? Explain.</p>	
<p>According to Emily Baker-White, what did Alex Zhu create and what became his connection to and roles with TikTok and ByteDance?</p>	
<p><b>Clip #10: Controversy and Ban (5:27)</b></p> 	<p><b>Notes:</b></p>
<p>At what point did TikTok become “controversial?”</p>	
<p>When did TikTok first face a “ban?” Summarize Emily Baker-White’s related comments.</p>	
<p>Based on the clip, what steps did the Biden administration initially take regarding TikTok?</p>	
<p>What did the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States conclude about TikTok and how did ByteDance “react?”</p>	
<p>What “law” did the Biden administration work with Congress to pass?</p>	
<p>According to Baker-White, what happened</p>	

at the beginning of and during the first months of President Donald Trump's second term in office?	
Summarize the video clip excerpt of President Trump.	
Is President Trump "breaking the law?" Explain why or why not.	

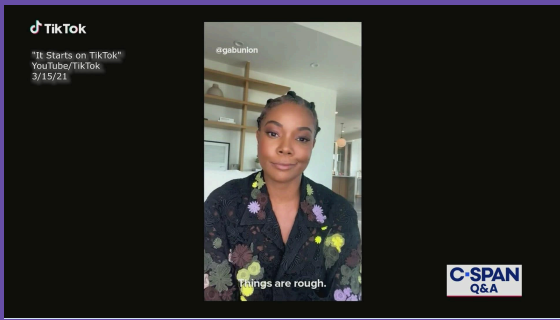
**Recent Events:** View the following three video clips that explore recent events affecting the status of social media platform TikTok, recording your notes and answers to the questions below. Prepare to share your responses with your classmates.


<p><b>Clip #11: TikTok's Status (4:22)</b></p> 	<p><b>Notes:</b></p>
<p>What is the "status" of TikTok in the United States? Explain.</p>	
<p>Describe the impact of President Donald Trump's use of TikTok during his 2024 presidential "campaign."</p>	
<p>Is it "technically possible" to separate U.S. user data from the rest of TikTok? How so?</p>	
<p>What is the "solution" to the TikTok issue?</p>	
<p>Based on the clip, how and why might the status of TikTok change in the future?</p>	

<p>Is TikTok the “major portion” of ByteDance? Explain.</p>	
<p>What “coalition” exists regarding TikTok?</p>	
<p><b>Clip #12: CEO and Directors (5:37)</b></p> 	<p><b>Notes:</b></p>
<p>Based on the clip, who is Shou Zi Chew?</p>	
<p>How and why is Singapore the “Switzerland of Asia?”</p>	
<p>What should we “think about” Chew’s attendance at President Donald Trump’s second inauguration? Explain.</p>	
<p>Summarize what you hear in the video clip excerpt of Chew’s testimony before Congress.</p>	
<p>What does Emily Baker-White say about Chew’s testimony?</p>	
<p>Who is currently “the head” of ByteDance?</p>	
<p>Why is it “advantageous” that Chew is not Chinese and does not live in China?</p>	
<p><b>Clip #13: Access Across Countries (3:23)</b></p>	<p><b>Notes:</b></p>

	
<p>Is TikTok “tailored” to each country?</p>	
<p>What idea has TikTok “embraced” more than other social media companies? Explain.</p>	
<p>What is “problematic” with TikTok’s localized policies?</p>	
<p>What things are “banned” in China? Why?</p>	
<p>Based on the clip, can Chinese residents access content when outside of China?</p>	

**Reflection:** View the following two final video clips that provide concluding thoughts for the lesson, recording your notes and answers to the questions below. Prepare to share your responses with your classmates.

<p><b>Clip #14: Lobbying in the United States (2:01)</b></p> 	<p><b>Notes:</b></p>
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Describe what you see and hear in the TikTok commercial that is shown in the clip.	
How and why have TikTok’s ads been "positive" in the United States?	
What is “next” for social media and related applications?	
<p><b>Clip #15: President Trump Signs Executive Order on TikTok (3:12)</b></p> 	<p><b>Notes:</b></p>
What has President Donald Trump charged his administration to do since the “first days” of his second term?	
What "fundamental thing” did the deal accomplish and what did it protect?	
Summarize President Trump’s comments.	
Based on the clip, who will be taking TikTok over?	

**Closure:** *Using what you learned in the lesson, complete the following prompt.*

**Having now completed the lesson, assess whether you think TikTok was a net-good or net-bad before the September 2025 deal. Be sure to include evidence from the video clips in the lesson to support your argument.**

