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GRADE 8: RESPONDING TO ONLINE HATE SPEECH

Hurtful Meme Dilemma

NAME _____

DATE _____

Directions

Part 1: Read the dilemma below.

Hurtful Meme
Maya saw that one of her friends, Luke, had "liked" a meme on social media. The meme showed a stereotype about people from Maya's background, suggesting they were all lazy and didn't contribute to society. The caption made a crude joke implying that they didn't belong in the country. As soon as she saw the meme, Maya felt uneasy. There were many students from that background at her school, including Maya herself. The racist content hit close to home. Plus, everyone could see that Luke had liked it. Luke was their class president, and the students had elected him to represent them. Maya also considered him one of her close friends.

Part 2: Read the dilemma again and use brackets to identify any examples of online hate speech. Then, follow the steps of Feelings & Options to help you think about what the characters in the dilemma can do to respond to hate speech.

Identify: Who are the different people involved in the scenario? What dilemma or challenge are they facing?

Answers will vary.
- Maya: She sees that her friend Luke has liked a meme that degrades people of a different background.
- Luke: He liked the racist meme, but he may not be aware that it has offended others.
- Others: There are others who also see the post, and they can see that Luke (or others) liked the meme. They may also have left their own responses to the meme.

Feel: What do you think each person in the dilemma is *feeling*? Why might the situation be hard or challenging for each of them?

Answers will vary.
- Maya may feel hurt, offended, or angry. Luke is Maya's friend, and she may feel personally disappointed that he liked a meme that degrades people of different backgrounds. She may feel that he doesn't respect her or her family. And she might feel that as class president, Luke has a responsibility to stand up for all students at the school.
- Luke may be unaware that his liking this meme was 1) seen by others, and 2) hurt others' feelings. He is not taking his responsibilities as class president seriously. He should be demonstrating respect for all students at the school. He also might not be thinking of what his friends would think if they saw he liked the meme.
- Others who see the post: It's unclear from the dilemma what others may feel. But we could guess

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> that many will be offended or hurt. However, others might think it's funny. Some might not think anything of it.

Imagine: *Imagine* options for how the situation could be handled. Come up with as many ideas as possible: There's no one "right" answer! Then choose: Which option might lead to the most positive outcome, where most people feel good or taken care of?

Answers will vary.
- Maya or others could ignore it and not say anything.
- Maya or others could confront Luke by responding online, or saying something face-to-face.
- Maya or others could report or flag the post to the site or app.
- Maya or others could tell a trusted adult about the situation.

Say: Thinking more about the idea you chose for handling the situation, what could the people involved say?

First: How would they say it?

☐ In person   ☐ Call or FaceTime   ☐ Text

☐ Direct/private message   ☐ Email   ☐ Other: _____

Second: What would they say? Write out the conversation.
Answers will vary.

Encourage students to consider whether they would really use the dialogue they created with a friend or peer. Ask "Do you think Maya would really say that?" or "Could you see yourself actually saying/sending a message like this, if you were the person in the scenario? Why or why not?"

Part 3 - Complicate (optional): Discuss these questions in your group, and share responses. Be sure to hear all perspectives -- the more perspectives, the better!

- What if, instead of just liking the meme, Luke had re-shared it?
- What if Maya learned that Luke was actually the creator?
- What if Luke was himself from a different country?
- Does it make a difference if Maya is from another country? Why or why not?
- What if this was part of a pattern -- if Luke was liking memes like this all the time?

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