

Bring digital literacy education into your classroom.



Lesson plan: Calling Out versus Calling In Helping youth respond to casual prejudice online.

Created in partnership
with MediaSmarts.



Grades: 6-8

Duration: 1 hour

Overview

Youth are often reluctant to “call out” their friends or peers who say or do prejudiced things online because they’re afraid that others might get mad at them or because they’re not sure if the person intended to be prejudiced. Putting someone on the spot for something they’ve said or done is more likely to make them feel guilty or angry and not likely to change their mind around the impact of their actions, and it can also make the situation about the person who’s “calling out” instead of what the other person said or did.

This lesson introduces students to the idea of “calling in” – reaching out to someone privately with the assumption that they didn’t mean to do any harm – and explores how this idea can be applied both to casual prejudice online and when responding to stereotyping and other negative representations in media. Finally, students explore the different benefits of “calling out” and “calling in”, and consider when the two strategies would be most appropriate.

Learning outcomes

Students will:

- Identify implicit messages in media texts
- Think about how different audiences respond differently to media
- Separate criticism of media and actions from judgment of individuals
- Develop efficacy in responding to prejudice online
- Learn the difference between “calling out” and “calling in” in response to prejudice online
- Judge the drawbacks and benefits of each approach and determine which might be best for different situations

Preparation and materials

- Prepare to project the slideshow: *I Like It, But...*
- Prepare to project or distribute the graphic: Call Out or Call In? Example 1 (page 7) and Example 2 (page 8)
- Prepare to distribute the handout and assignment: Calling Out Versus Calling In (page 9-12)

Procedure

Slide 1

Start by showing the slideshow I Like It, But... and play the video. Tell students this video clip is from the 1963 Disney movie, “The Sword in the Stone”, where Merlin the wizard has turned himself into a grey squirrel and is seen talking to a brown female squirrel.

Ask students, is there anything in the clip that you think is wrong or inappropriate? If students don't mention anything about consent, ask them if it's okay to hug and kiss someone who doesn't want to be hugged and kissed.

Play the clip again, this time asking students to think about the idea of consent and how the movie creators are conveying their own view of what's right or wrong.

Ask students, what about the clip gives you the idea that it's okay to hug or kiss someone when they don't want you to? Make sure students observe how the female squirrel ignores Merlin, saying “No” partway through the clip, and then grabbing him by the tail when he tries to leave.

Now ask, what about the clip gives you the idea that hugging or kissing someone without their consent isn't a big deal, even if they object to it? (For example, we see Merlin objecting to what the female squirrel is doing, but other elements in the scene – the light music, the way the female squirrel is drawn to look harmless and that Merlin is drawn to look foolish – make it seem like doing these things is funny instead of a serious problem.)

Slide 2

Now ask if it's okay to kiss someone when they're not awake, like in Sleeping Beauty or Snow White? Point out that in both movies the man has a reason for doing so (to wake the woman up from a spell), but in both cases it's still treated as romantic. Does that make it seem like it's okay?

Slide 3

Ask students whether there are any books, comics, movies, video games or TV shows that they like, but that intentionally or inadvertently convey inappropriate or stereotypical messages – like the ways that Indigenous people are drawn and portrayed in works like Tintin and Peter Pan. If students say they've seen such portrayals, ask them for examples and what they found inappropriate.

If students volunteer examples, ask: Did they always recognize these messages, or did they notice after consuming the content multiple times? How did they come to notice the stereotypes? How did it make them feel?

If no students volunteer examples, ask: Did they notice the problem with the clip in slide one (with the squirrels) right away? How did it make them feel when they understood it?

Slide 4

Ask students the first question on screen:
Is it okay to like something that conveys an inappropriate message?

Let students discuss for a few minutes and then explain that we don't have to like every part of something, but we also don't need to ignore the parts we don't like: we can take the time to think about them and talk about them. If content is sending a message that you know is wrong, it's important to stop and talk about why we disagree with it.

Tell students that just because we criticize something doesn't mean we don't still like it, but sometimes the problems we identify are big enough that we can no longer like or support the content. For example, the earliest Tintin books (from the 1920s) are mostly no longer in school libraries because the Black characters are drawn and depicted in a very racist way.

Ask students, how does it feel if someone criticizes something you like? For instance, how would you feel if a friend pointed out that your favourite comic depicted some groups in a stereotyped way? Tell students that while it's okay to criticize a media work like a cartoon, movie, comic or book, we shouldn't think someone is bad for liking it – and at the same time, we shouldn't get upset when someone criticizes something we like.

Lastly, ask students: what if there's something that we like - like a Disney movie - that has things about it that we don't think are okay? Can we criticize something and still like it? Let students discuss for a few minutes.

Slide 5

Begin by telling students that we can't tell other people what to like or not like. For example, even though shows or comics like Batman or Justice League fall into what's called the "Smurfette principle" – where there is only one girl or woman in a group, and she is defined simply by being a girl – many girls and young women are still inspired by characters like Catwoman and Wonder Woman. At the same time, you can't tell someone that they shouldn't be offended by something, especially if you're not a member of the group being portrayed and they are.

Point out to students that criticism can help us become more aware and it can also help media makers. Both of these shows have added more female characters because people pointed out a lack of female diversity and representation.

Calling Out

Now ask students: if it can hurt your feelings to have something you liked criticized, how does it feel when someone criticizes something you said or did?

Let students discuss this for a few moments and then ask if they are familiar with the term calling out. What does it mean to "call someone out?" Explain that "calling out" means criticizing someone in a public space (such as a classroom or an online community, like a game, a social network or a group chat) for something they said or did.

Now engage students in a brief discussion with these questions:

- Have you ever called someone out, or been called out online? How did it feel?
- Have you ever been wrong about what someone meant when you were talking to them online?
- Has anyone ever misinterpreted something you said online? If so, how did it feel?

Now start a chart on the board with the headings OFFLINE and ONLINE. Ask students how talking to people online (in games, on social media and in messaging apps) is different from talking to people face to face. Make sure to include the following points:

OFFLINE:

- You can see the people you're talking to and their expression
- You can hear their tone of voice
- Things you say are only heard by people right there (though they can be repeated)

ONLINE:

- You can't see the people you're talking to
- You can't hear the people you're talking to
- People who aren't part of the original conversation can get involved

Ask students: have you ever wanted to call someone out about a racist, sexist or otherwise prejudiced comment (whether online or offline), but you didn't? If so, what stopped you?

Tell students that eight in ten Canadian youth say that it's important to say something about prejudice we see online so that people know it's wrong, but almost half (46 per cent) say they sometimes decide not to because they're not sure if the person really meant it.

Ask:

- Is it important to be sure somebody meant to say something prejudiced before you call them out?
- If no, what would it feel like to be called out for something you didn't mean to say?
- If yes, what might be the harm in not calling someone out?

Calling In

After students discuss these questions for a few minutes, ask them if they have ever heard the term "calling in." What might "calling in" mean in comparison to "calling out"?

Tell students that calling in isn't the opposite of calling out, but a different way of responding to a possibly hurtful or prejudiced comment. It's usually done in a private space (like a private message), so that the person doesn't feel like they're under attack or being put on the spot. It's more about getting someone to see things differently (for example, understanding why something they said might have hurt someone) than changing how they act.

Distribute the handout **Calling Out Versus Calling In** and go through it with the class.

Class exercise: Call In or Call Out?

Distribute or project **Call In or Call Out? Example 1** on page 7, and ask students:

What is the problem here?	The word “lame” is hurtful to people with physical disabilities.
Do you think the person meant to be hurtful?	Probably not, unless someone in the chat had a physical disability.
Is this something you should respond to?	If the person doesn’t realize the word is hurtful, they might keep using it. If they know it’s hurtful to people with disabilities but use it anyway, they should realize that seven in ten Canadian youth say prejudice against anyone hurts their feelings.
After considering those questions, does it make more sense to call the person out or call them in in this situation?	There might be other things about the people and the situation that we don’t know from seeing the chat – but based just on what we’ve seen, it would make more sense to call the person in. They don’t seem to have meant to hurt anyone’s feelings and calling them out would probably make them more defensive.
What could you do to call them in?	Remind students to look at the handout: which of those phrases would work best here?

Now distribute or project **Call In or Call Out? Example 2** on page 8, and ask students:

What is the problem here?	First, the person is stereotyping Black people as all being good at sports – even a ‘positive’ stereotype can be harmful. Second, they’re putting their friend Darius, who is Black, on the spot by asking Darius to defend them.
Do you think the person meant to be hurtful?	Probably not. They may not think that ‘positive’ stereotyping is harmful or that anyone would object to it.
Is this something you should respond to?	Yes. They need to know that any kind of stereotyping is harmful because it makes it seem like all the members of a group are alike. Even ‘positive’ stereotypes can limit people’s views of what that group can and can’t do. As well, putting someone on the spot like that – in this example Darius – and asking them to speak for everyone in the group isn’t okay.
After considering those questions, does it make more sense to call the person out or call them in in this situation?	Calling in might be the best way to respond to the stereotyping because it wasn’t done to hurt anyone. But they may need to be called out for putting Darius on the spot like that.
What could you do to call them in?	Remind students to look at the handout: which of those phrases would work best here?

Call In or Call Out?

Ask students what general rules tell us whether it makes more sense to call someone in or out. Make sure the following points come up:

It makes sense to **Call In** if:

- You're not sure the person knew how what they said or did might make other people feel. (For instance, a lot of old books and cartoons use words like Gypsy or Eskimo, so people might not know that those terms are offensive)
- You think the person will probably change how they act once they understand it was hurtful
- What's most important is getting someone to think about the impact their words can have

It makes sense to **Call Out** if:

- You need to stop something that's happening before someone gets hurt (or more hurt)
- You feel safe speaking out
- It's important to send a message about what isn't okay in your community
- You're sure the person knows that what they said or did could be hurtful
- You've tried to call in and it didn't work

Make sure students understand that you should never judge someone else's decision to call someone in or out – especially if the thing they're responding to was hurtful to them or to a group they're in. As well, remind students that if you're called in, it's important to listen and consider what's being said to you rather than getting defensive.

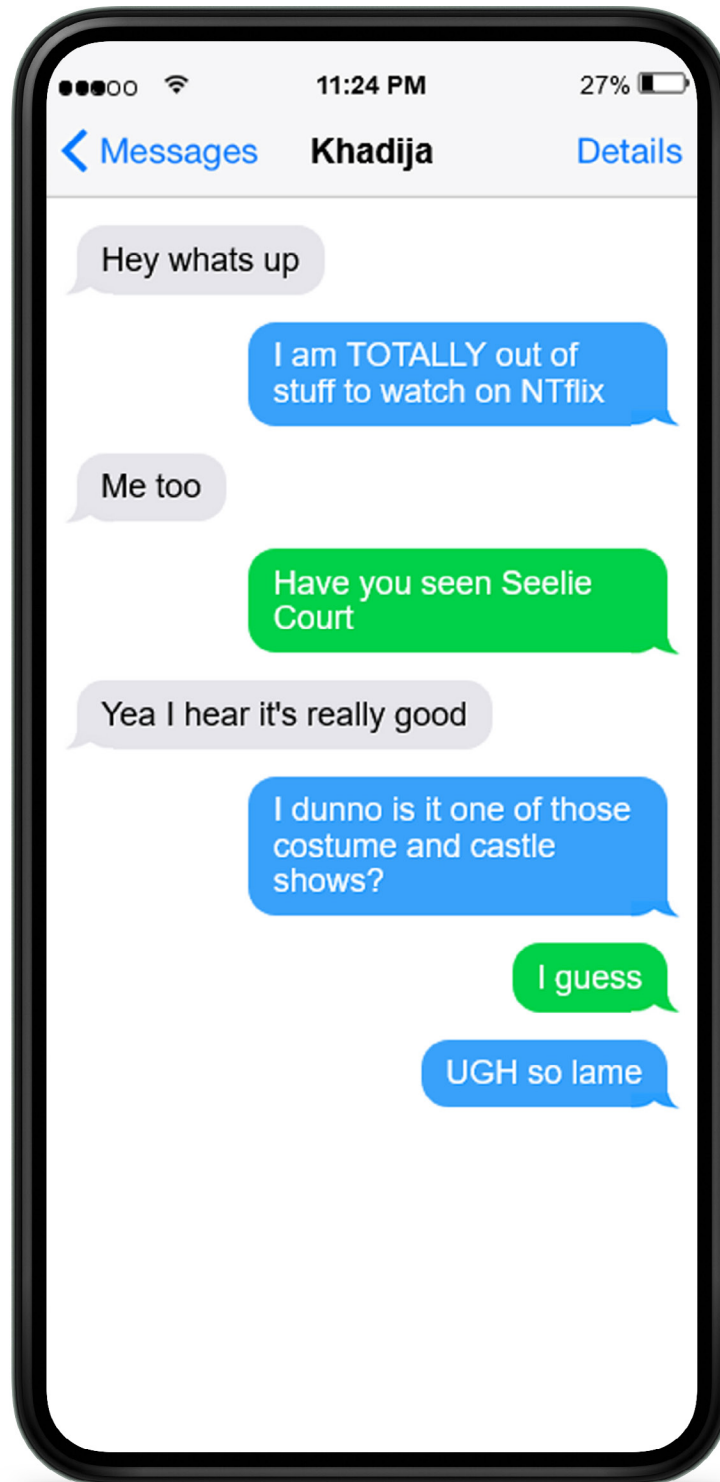
Assessment Task:

Distribute the assignment, **Calling Out versus Calling In** and explain to students that they will be responding to three of the six scenarios. For each scenario, they will write a paragraph where they explain:

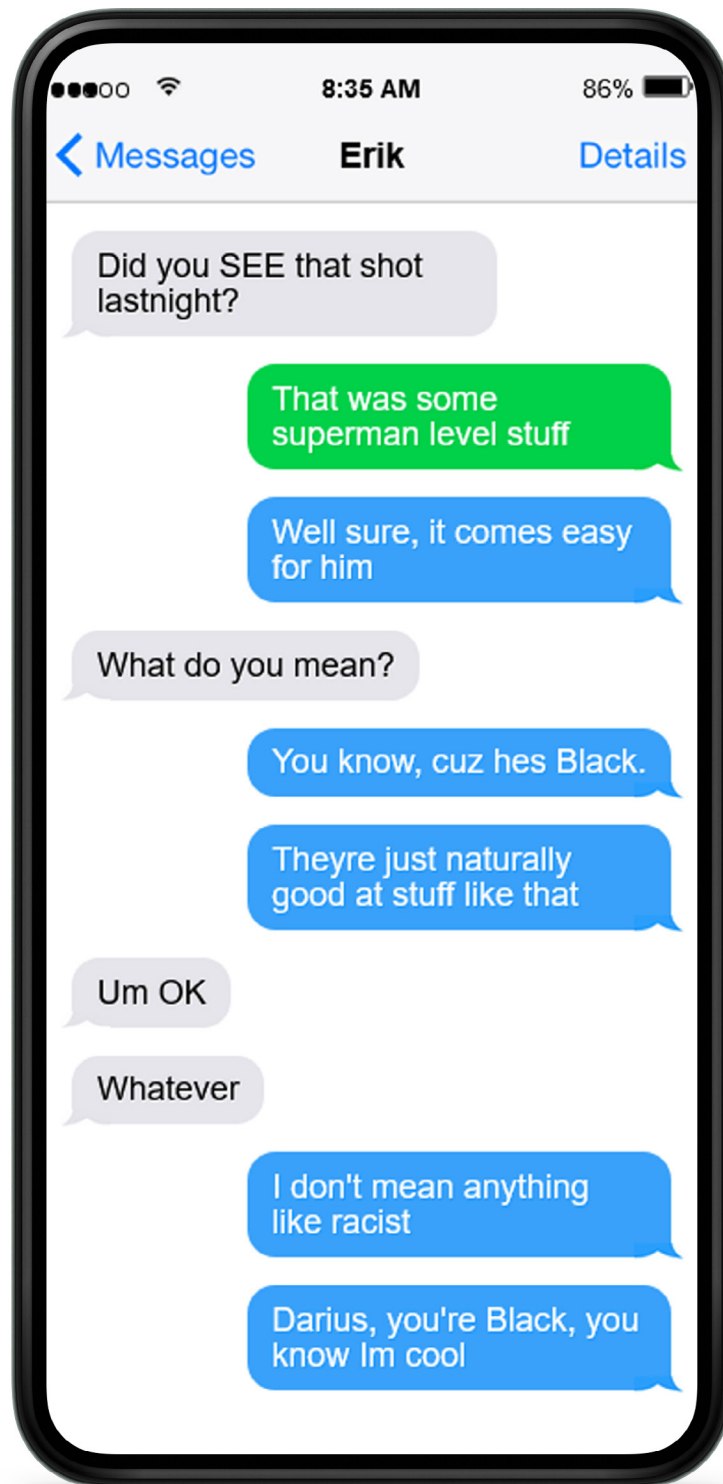
- Why what was said was hurtful?
- Whether they think it would be better to call the person out or call them in, and why?
- What they would say to call the person in or out?

Access our online workshops at telus.com/WiseWorkshops

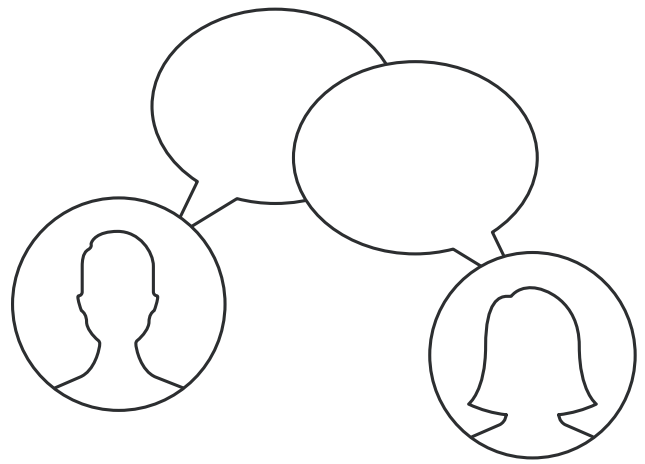
Call Out or Call In? Example 1



Call Out or Call In? Example 2



Calling Out versus Calling In



Eight in ten Canadian youth say that it's important to do something about prejudice online so that people know it's wrong, but almost half (46 per cent) say they sometimes decide not to because they're not sure if the person really meant it. That's why we need to know how to "call someone out" when they say something prejudiced and how to "call them in."

Calling Out

"Calling someone out" means speaking up in public when somebody says or does something hurtful, like making racist or sexist comments. Because other people see a call-out, it helps to show that what was said isn't okay in your community. Remember: a call out should not be an attack on the person, but a criticism of what they said or did.

If you're calling someone out, stay away from insults or personal comments. Be specific. Keep your focus on what was said or done, not the person who said or did it.

Below are some phrases you can use (either online or offline) to call out someone's behaviour without attacking them:

- "It's not fair to talk about a whole group of people like that."
- "I don't want to put you on the spot, but words like that can really hurt people's feelings."
- "I don't think you'd say that if someone from that group was here."
- "I don't like hearing that stuff."
- "That really makes me uncomfortable."
- "Use a different word, please."
- "I don't think that's funny."
- "Do you really mean that?"
- "I think that's totally wrong and I don't like hearing it"
- "That kind of stuff will get this whole server shut down."

Calling In

Professor Loretta Ross, who coined the phrase “calling in,” describes it as “a call-out done with love.” Calling in starts by assuming that the person didn’t mean to hurt anyone by what they said or did, and being clear about what they said or did and why it was hurtful. Calling in usually happens in private (for instance, you could send them a private message), so they aren’t ashamed or embarrassed.

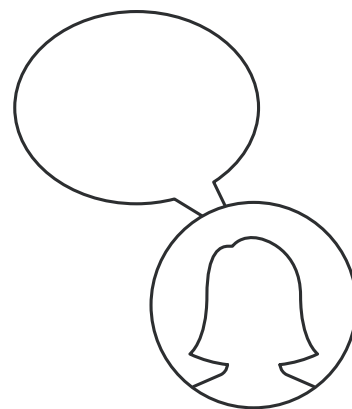
If you call someone in and they tell you that what they said wasn’t offensive because nobody in that group heard it, tell them it was hurtful to you (seven in ten Canadian youth say prejudice against anyone hurts their feelings.)

Remember that nobody’s perfect! People can have good intentions but still use a word that they don’t realize is offensive. That calls for teaching them, not attacking them.

Below are some phrases you can use to call in if someone says or does something that seems hurtful to you:

- “I know a lot of people think that, but it isn’t true.”
- “I don’t understand. What do you mean?”
- “Can you give me an example?”
- “You’ve probably seen that word in old books or movies, but I think they prefer [correct name].”
- “I’m not sure you realize how that sounded. I’m sure you didn’t mean to insult anybody.”
- “I’m sure you didn’t mean anything bad, but did you think about how somebody else might see it differently?”
- “I hear that word a lot in song lyrics, but I don’t think it’s okay for us to use it.”
- “It hurts my feelings to hear jokes like that.”
- “Why do you think that’s true?”
- “I’m really surprised you would say something like that. It just doesn’t sound like you.”

Remember, if someone calls you in, don’t get defensive. Someone who calls you in is taking the time to teach you why something is hurtful to them (or other people). Always listen and consider what’s being said to you.



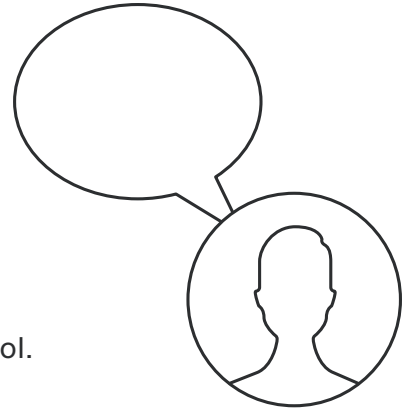
Assignment: Calling Out Versus Calling In

Read each of the scenarios below and pick three to respond to.

1. You are playing an online game. You know some of the other players, but not all of them. One player makes a lot of spelling and grammar mistakes and other players start making fun of them, telling them to learn English.
2. A friend of yours decides to start a robotics competition team at school. They send invitations to all of the boys but none of the girls. When a female classmate hears about this and complains, your friend says that “Girls aren’t interested in that kind of thing.”
3. Someone in your class walks with a limp. Somebody shoots a video of them walking and then edits it to look like they are dancing, adding a popular song as a soundtrack, and posts it to TikTok.
4. Someone you know shows you an Instagram filter that changes your skin colour and face so that you look Asian. Other people start taking pictures of each other and sharing photos that have been changed by the filter.
5. A friend of yours, who is not Black, really likes hip hop. They post a duet of themselves with one of their favourite video creators, singing a song that uses a word that is offensive to Black people.
6. You’re doing a science project with some classmates in a shared Google doc. One of your classmates, who is East Asian, doesn’t do a very good job with their part of the project. Another group member gets angry and says “Aren’t you supposed to be good at science?”

Choose three scenarios and for each scenario write a paragraph where you explain:

- Why what was said was hurtful?
- Whether you think it would be better to call the person out or call them in, and why?
- What you would say to call the person in or out?



Category	Learning Expectations	Achievement
Use	<p>Ethics and Empathy</p> <p>Demonstrate a knowledge of the appropriate strategies for sharing and expressing feelings and emotions online</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of the difference between being a passive bystander and an active intervener</p>	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>
Understand	<p>Media Representation</p> <p>Understand how issues such as racism, sexism, and homophobia are represented in media and how they influence media creation and consumption</p> <p>Ethics and Empathy</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding of online conflict and harassment, how they're similar to or different online and in person, and strategies for handling them when they arise</p> <p>Community Engagement</p> <p>Demonstrate understanding what it means to be responsible to and respectful of his/her offline and online communities as a way to learn how to be a good digital citizen</p> <p>Making and Remixing</p> <p>Understand how meaning is produced through media and how culture is produced through the internet and social media in particular</p>	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>