

Discussion Guide for
Peace Literacy Exploration of Peace and Technology:
Our Five God-like Powers
(peaceliteracy.org/peaceandtech)

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And please send us copies of any materials you produce that are based on this guide so we can put them up on the Peace Literacy website as models for others. Peace Literacy is meant to be shared!

Big Idea:

Our technology has advanced in a way that gives us ‘god-like powers’ which will irrevocably change who we are as a species.

Guiding questions:

What are the possible benefits of these new technology?

What are the possible dangers of these technology.

What skills do we need to learn in order to meet these changes and preserve the best in our humanity, such as hope, inspiration, empathy, reason, and compassion?

Part 1: The Lightning Bolt of Zeus

Discussion questions come after paragraph reproduced here:



For Samuel Morse and Annie Ellsworth, who lived in the nineteenth century, electricity was a force of nature that allowed humans to communicate over hundreds and even thousands of miles in an instant, in ways that only gods seemed able to do. In the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, the use of electricity evolved further, allowing humans to wield what we call the binding and liberating power of Zeus’s lightning bolt.

Discussion questions

- What do you think was the effect of the power to send a message across the country in a matter of minutes rather than days, weeks or even months?
- What uses might it have?



Classics scholars Marcel Detienne and Jean-Pierre Vernant tell us: “To strike a god with his thunderbolt is, for [Zeus] the Master of Heaven, to bind him, to chain him up . . . In the *Iliad*, Agamemnon [commander of the Greek army] fears that the power of Zeus ‘might chain up the energy and arms’ of the Greeks. And bonds are again suggested by the expressions most frequently used to describe the sovereign god’s power of striking with thunderbolts.”

- In what ways do you think our newer technologies such as smart phones and computers can have binding power?



Just as Zeus can use electricity to bind, people can use electric light, in the form of the Internet, to bind themselves and others to ignorance, distraction, disconnection, mistrust, rage, disillusionment, or alienation.

Look at the chains around this person’s brain.

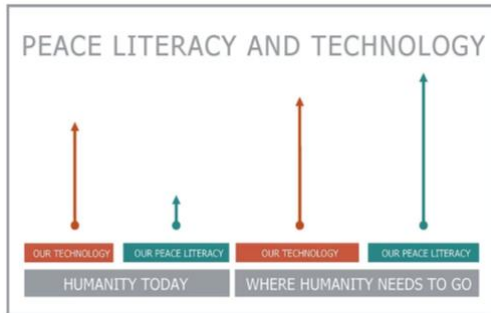
- What do you think is being represented here?
- How can our new technologies have binding power?
- How could our devices help bind us to ignorance?

Distraction? Disconnection? Mistrust? Rage?



We can use the electric light of the Internet to also help liberate our mind from the chains of ignorance and isolation.

- How can our new technologies have liberating power?
- How could our devices be used to help liberate us from injustice? Ignorance? Rage? Mistrust?



For too many years, our technology has been escalating far faster than our ethical evolution and our competency in our humanity. Peace Literacy empowers us to survive and thrive in the twenty-first century by helping us strengthen both our ethical evolution and our competency in our humanity. **To unlock the full liberating power** of electric light, we need to escalate the power of our Peace Literacy beyond the god-like power of our technology.

- Interpret the phrase: “Our technology has been escalating faster than our ethical evolution.”
- Interpret the phrase: “Our competency in our humanity.”
- What do you think we need to learn in order to wield this binding and liberating power responsibly and ethically?



(This image above is a .gif)

Resources

- How the telegraph was used (start at 12m0s to 14m0s): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dRnwT3O7cWQ>
- The electric telegraph transformed how wars were fought and won and how journalists and newspapers conducted business. Rather than taking weeks to be delivered by horse-and-carriage mail carts, pieces of news could be exchanged between telegraph stations almost instantly. The telegraph also had a profound economic effect, allowing money to be “wired” across great distances.
- Even by the end of the 19th century, however, new technologies began to emerge, many of them based on the same principles first developed for the telegraph system. In time, these new technologies would overshadow the telegraph, which would fall out of regular widespread usage. Although the telegraph has since been replaced by the even more convenient telephone, fax machine and Internet, its invention stands as a turning point in world history. <https://www.history.com/topics/inventions/telegraph>
- ‘Do-So’ Campaign in Trinidad:
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omc-5zj70M0>

- Power of Social Media to Liberate:
- Wasow, a professor at Princeton University and co-founder of the pioneering social network BlackPlanet.com, said social media was helping publicize police brutality and galvanizing public support for protesters' goals — a role that his research found [conventional media](#) played a half century ago. And he said he believed that the internet was making it easier to organize social movements today, for good and for ill.
- <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/18/technology/social-media-protests.html>



Part 2: The Dreamworld of Hypnos

Discussion questions come after paragraph reproduced here:



As early humans sat around campfires, they would tell stories and use their imaginations to explore other worlds, such as the world as they thought it existed long ago, the worlds of fables and folk-tales that express allegorical moral instruction, and worlds that enabled them to ponder the immense potential of our outer world, along with the immense potential of our inner world.

Discussion questions:

- **What fables, folktales or myths have you heard of? What can people learn from those stories?**
- **Are there worlds that you like to explore with your imagination through books, comic books, movies, television shows or video games?**
- **What if you could be inside of that world? Do you think that people would be interested in being inside of those worlds? Would you be interested in that?**

Show Stanford University Video https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1E_Ndt9kssg

Show video of Paul in VR https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdVuMM1XY_M

(Begin at 9mins 42 seconds)

- **Have any of you already used this technology? How have you used it?**
- **How many positive uses can you think of for this technology?**
- **How many negative uses can you think of for this technology?**



By empowering us to be embodied as avatars, VR/AR allows us to become any human form or to surround ourselves with virtual humans who can look like anyone – giving us the god-like power of Morpheus.

- **Have you used an avatar while playing video games? What kinds of avatars have you used?**
- **What would be a positive thing about people being embodied as avatars?**
- **What would be a negative thing about people being embodied as avatars?**

Guiding questions for teachers:

How can avatars express people's identities and imaginations? How might they hide people's identities? How might they make people become confused about their identity?

- **Which human needs will have to be fed in healthy ways in order for people to create the most amount of positive effects and reduce the negative effects?**



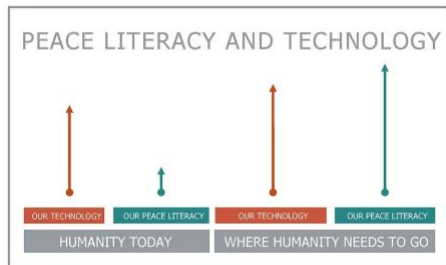
With VR/AR, we can surround ourselves with forms that resemble any plant, landscape, or inanimate object – giving us the god-like power of Phantasos. VR/AR allows our avatars to resemble not just any human form, but also any animal, monster, plant, landscape, or inanimate object.

- **Imagine some of the possibilities VR/AR will offer for us to express our imaginations.**
- **What might you be able to create?**
- **In what ways might this power become binding? In what ways might it become liberating?**



Digital deep-fakes are already possible with traditional computing technology, but VR/AR spatial computing technology, along with related machine learning and computer vision advancements, will take digital deep-fakes to a far more powerful and dangerous level.

- **How might people use deep-fake technology?**
- **What might some of the dangers be?**
- **Respond to the following statement: “Imagine what kinds of dreamworlds will be sculpted by people’s tangles of trauma—their rage, alienation, disillusionment, and addiction.”**



- **Peace literacy means increasing our ethical evolution and our competency in our humanity.**
- **How can increasing our ethical evolution and our competency in our humanity help combat the dangers inherent in deep-fake technology?**

Resources:

- **“Psychological Presence” Stanford University study of VR and children:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1E_Ndt9kssg
- “There is a misconception that VR is just being used for games. There’s been some traction in video games but not at the magnitude that people expected,” Bailenson said about the existing trends in adoption with adults.
- “With VR it’s the more useful applications – training, learning, communication – that are really gaining some traction,” he said. His lab is exploring how VR experience can increase empathy, overcome prejudice and confront unconscious biases like ageism.
- Because virtual reality can resemble an actual experience, it could help children translate skills learned in educational environments to the physical world.
- As virtual reality becomes part of everyday life, Bailenson recommends that people take precautions. In the survey, 11 percent of parents reported their 8- to 17-year-olds experienced dizziness, 10 percent experienced a headache and 13 percent bumped into something.
- He advises that VR be closely supervised and in moderation: 5- to 10-minute increments are recommended for young kids and 20 minutes for older children and young adults.

- *Study co-authors include researchers from the University of Arizona and Common Sense Media. Bailenson is the Thomas More Storke Professor of Communication, a senior fellow at the Woods Institute for the Environment and professor, by courtesy, of education.*
- <https://news.stanford.edu/2018/04/04/emerging-research-shows-potential-power-vr-kids/>
- Video of Paul Chappell talking about using VR/XR for Peace Literacy:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdVuMM1XY_M
- Tom Cruise Deep-fake CNN Videos:
<https://www.cnn.com/videos/business/2021/03/02/tom-cruise-tiktok-deepfake-orig.cnn-business>

Part 3: The Robots of Hephaestus:

View these videos:

- [Boston Dynamics Dancing Robot](#)
- [Boston Dynamics Robot Dog](#)

Discussion questions:

- Think back to the important changes the telegraph brought at the time of its invention.
- What changes can these robots bring today?
- Imagine positive uses.
- Imagine uses that might bring harm.
- What ethical choices might we need to make in order to wield this power responsibly?

Part 4: Nemesis Messenger of Justice, Dispenser of Dues

Discussion questions:

- What does it mean to pay your dues?
- What are different examples where we have to pay our dues by taking responsibility?
- Think of this in terms of the environment.
- Think of this in terms of social justice.
- Think of this in terms of relationships.
- People who experience trauma are often in pain, and often react by hurting others.
- What are some ways people react to having experienced trauma?

- How might someone use the god-like power of Zeus to cause harm?
- How might someone use the god-like power of Morpheus to cause harm?
- How might someone use the god-like power of Hephaestus to cause harm?

- How might these technologies be used to heal?

- What is our responsibility as users of these technologies?
- What do we need to know?
- How do we need to act?

Still to come...

Discussion question for Helios and Prometheus

Please Share Your Experience!

If you used this discussion guide in your class, **please send a quick email** to our curriculum coordinator, Sharyn.clough@oregonstate.edu, and let us know:

- * the name of your school or school district
- * how many students were in your class
- * what parts worked best
- * any suggestions you have for improvement

Thank you! 😊
