Youth Culture Lesson
Finding Teachable Moments in Culture
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Wasting Time
You Can Get College Credit for It in Pennsylvania
By Paul Asay

What Happened
We spend a lot of time online these days: Some would say we *waste* a lot of time online. We wake up to Facebook. We post tweets. We watch lots of cat videos. If we're looking to kill a few hours, the Internet has plenty of ways to help us.

Kenneth Goldsmith, a poet and professor at the University of Pennsylvania, doesn't believe that it's all wasted time. In fact, he believes some great things can come from the hours we spend online. "I'm very tired of reading articles in *The New York Times* every week that makes us feel bad about spending so much time on the Internet," Goldsmith told *VICE's Motherboard*.

Goldsmith is introducing a class tellingly called, "Wasting Time on the Internet." Students are required to fritter away at least three hours, "only interacting through chat rooms, bots, social media and listservs." In the course description, Goldsmith adds, "distraction, multi-tasking, and aimless drifting is mandatory."

Goldsmith doesn't want students to spend copious amounts of time on Instagram and call it a day: All this time-wasting has a purpose. Students will be required to put what they've gleaned online down on paper—or at least a Word document—as a work of creative writing.

"What if these activities—clicking, SMSing, status-updating, and random surfing—were used as raw material for creating compelling and emotional works of literature?" Reads the course description: "Could we reconstruct our autobiography using only Facebook? Could we write a great novella by plundering our Twitter feed? Could we reframe the Internet as the greatest poem ever written?"

Talk About It
How much time do you spend online? How do you spend that time? Would you consider that some, or most, of that time spent online is a waste? What sort of activities strike you as wasteful on the Internet?

On the flip side, how much of the time you spend on the Internet is time well spent? What interactions or online activities are important to you? Why? Do some people have a hard time seeing why that time is important?

Do you have friends who you only speak to online? Is it sometimes easier to express yourself via posts or pictures? What do you think of Goldsmith's query, that maybe the Internet could be one gigantic poem? Does that thought have merit?

What the Bible Says
"For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing" (Eccl. 3:1-8).

"So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom" (Ps. 90:12).

"Yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes" (James 4:14).

Paul Asay has written for *The Washington Post*, *Christianity Today, Beliefnet.com* and *The (Colorado Springs) Gazette*. He writes about culture for *Plugged In* and wrote the Batman book *God on the Streets of Gotham* (Tyndale). He recently collaborated with Jim Daly, president of Focus on the Family, on his book *The Good Dad*. He lives in Colorado Springs with wife, Wendy, and his two children. Check out his entertainment blog at Patheos.com/blogs/WatchingGod or follow him on Twitter @AsayPaul.