Are you a Facebook user? Do you post status updates about what you’re doing and thinking? If so, you’re not alone. Facebook is the world’s largest social networking platform, with 1.5 billion users. In Canada, some 14 million people check their accounts at least once a day.

**Timeline**

Facebook’s story began 11 years ago when 19-year-old university student Mark Zuckerberg created a computer program at Harvard University to share information. Within 24 hours 1,200 Harvard students had signed up to his network of users. It expanded to include students at other universities and high schools. By 2006 anyone with an email address could join.

Since then, Facebook has grown explosively. Nearly every business, organization, politician, group or celebrity with a public profile has a Facebook page. They all want you to ‘like’ them – and many are willing to pay money to promote what they have to offer. In 2014, Facebook generated $12.5 billion in advertising revenue.

As for Mr. Zuckerberg, he became the youngest billionaire in history at the age of 23. Now, with over $41 billion, he’s the 8th richest person on the planet. His university project was clearly a huge success!

**Thumbs down**

However, as with any communications technology, Facebook has negative as well as positive applications.

Privacy, cyberbullying, and even child predators using fake accounts are issues that people young and old are aware of. Jobs have been lost due to embarrassing photos, lives have been destroyed by hateful words and, of course, Facebook mines your data and posts to customize the advertising that you see.

But more and more researchers have started exploring some concerns that are less frequently reported. For example, does Facebook promote narcissism? How much time do people spend on Facebook? (The global average is just over 20 minutes, or about 20 percent of all time that humans spend online.) How many people would meet the criteria for addiction? Does Facebook interfere with the possibility of having deep, meaningful, face-to-face conversations? As one observer says, “Fast (social) media and deep slow thought don’t mix well.”

Some suggest that Facebook can also contribute to jealousy, loneliness and depression. Dilney Gonçalves, a researcher in Spain, conducted a study which argues that much of how we judge our success in life is by comparison with others: “The problem is that Facebook gives us a limited view of our friends’ lives, and that view tends to be unrealistically positive.” Another term for this selective presentation: A ‘curated life.’

**Thumbs up**

On the other hand, Facebook does what it is supposed to do very well. Social sharing can be empowering, educational and fun.

Teachers create Facebook pages to help students with their learning. Politicians use it to reach and mobilize their supporters. Grandparents use

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**Definitions**

- **Curate**: to pull together, sift through, and select for presentation
- **Network**: a group or system of interconnected people or things
- **Narcissism**: personality disorder characterized by self-preoccupation, need for admiration, lack of empathy, and unconscious deficits in self-esteem
it to keep in touch with faraway grandchildren. Political activists have used Facebook to organize anti-government protests. People suffering from various medical conditions find online Facebook support groups, and health educators distribute life-saving information.

INTERNET.ORG

As Facebook’s first decade drew to a close, Mr. Zuckerberg and his tech company began thinking about their next big project. What would be the challenge – the mission – for their second decade?

They knew that Facebook had made it easier for many people to connect… yet two-thirds of the world still was not on the Internet. Could they bring these 4.3 billion people online?

Welcome to Internet.org. It’s a global partnership of technology companies, led by Facebook, that is working with non-profits and local communities to connect the world. It’s based on the belief that, as Internet.org’s website says, “The more we connect, the better it gets.”

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

To begin, Mr. Zuckerberg and his team identified three barriers that stand in the way of global connectivity. Then they devised strategies to overcome them.

One barrier is purely technical. About 15 percent of the world’s population doesn’t use the Internet because there is no access at all where they live. The solution is to provide them with an Internet connection. How best to accomplish this varies by region.

The second barrier is financial. In the world’s poorest countries, people can’t afford the cost of a phone and data plan. The solution? Facebook is working on ways to simplify the services it provides so that they work on very basic hardware and in ultra-low-bandwidth situations. This will lower the cost.

The biggest hurdle is social. Some people don’t see the need to be online and may not understand how the Internet could improve their lives.

To tackle this challenge, Mr. Zuckerberg decided that everyone should have free access to a set of basic Internet websites. It might include, for instance, a weather website, health information, farming tips, Wikipedia, Google search and, of course, Facebook. These services would be accessed via a free Internet.org app.

Finally, the Facebook team has to convince local cell-phone providers to offer its app for free with no data charges. Why would a cell-phone company agree to do that? The idea is that once customers see this sliver of the Internet, they’ll want more and be willing to pay for it. In the long run, cell-phone providers will get more paying customers. They will be able to invest more in their networks so they can reach even more people.

BETTER FOR WHOM?

This ambitious global initiative is not without its critics. Some suspect that Facebook is more interested in expanding its network to increase the number of eyeballs that are exposed to its ads. Mr. Zuckerberg – who has formally pledged to give more than half of his wealth to charity – points out that there isn’t any profit to be made in showing ads to people who don’t have money.

BEYOND FACEBOOK

Facebook is the largest of many social media networks that facilitate the sharing of information, photos and videos. Twitter, LinkedIn, Pinterest, Google+ and Tumblr are the next five on the tip of this iceberg.

Other countries have their own popular social media networks. In China, where Internet access is restricted and Facebook is blocked, two popular sites are RenRen, known as ‘Chinese Facebook,’ and Qzone.

“We feel like this is just an important thing for the world,” he says. “Connectivity can’t just be a privilege for people in the richest countries.”

But do people who lack basics such as food, water and medicine really need the Internet? Mr. Zuckerberg says it’s not a case of ‘either/or.’ For instance, connectivity can lead to better health care. He points to Zambia, where local officials asked Internet.org to include websites where people could learn about HIV and maternal health.

There are other examples that show how Internet.org is already improving lives, he says. A poultry farmer has used Facebook to sell more chickens. A university student is saving money on books by using Wikipedia to study for an exam.

FACEBOOK’S MISSION

Mr. Zuckerberg believes that the Internet can transform lives. His mission is to help make that happen.

“[This] is something that we want to do. That is why Facebook is here on this planet,” he said.
Answer the following in complete sentences:

1. List the top six social media sites that generate revenue through advertising.

2. How popular is Facebook worldwide and in Canada? How much time do people spend on this social media network?

3. Describe how Facebook was created.

4. Using Facebook is free. So how did this social media site make Mr. Zuckerberg the 8th richest person on Earth?

5. List at least three positive applications of Facebook.

6. List at least four concerns that people have with Facebook.

7. Two out of three people are not connected to the Internet. What is Facebook’s plan for changing this? Explain.

8. List the three barriers that Facebook identified to increasing global connectivity.
BETWEEN THE LINES

An **inference** is a conclusion drawn from evidence. A plausible inference is supported by evidence in the article and is consistent with known facts outside of the article.

What inference(s) can you draw from the fact that some 14 million Canadians check their Facebook accounts at least once a day?

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JUST TALK ABOUT IT

1. For what reasons are you in favour of social media apps like Facebook? For what reasons are you opposed? Overall, are you more in favour of or more opposed to social media?

2. What is your understanding of Internet.org’s belief that “**the more we connect, the better it gets**”? Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?

3. In 2010 Mark Zuckerberg said that “people have really gotten comfortable not only sharing more information and **different kinds**, but more openly and with more people. That social norm [privacy] is just something that has evolved **over time**.” That he is correct is no longer in question – people have clearly been willing to sacrifice once cherished privacy rights in return for free social media services. But how much is too much? Generate a T-chart that lists what you are and aren’t OK with publicly sharing. Be prepared to explain your reasoning.

ONLINE

Visit our student website at [www.news4youth.com](http://www.news4youth.com) and click on the What in the World? tab to:

1. Watch a documentary about the controversial origins and stratospheric growth of Facebook called “Mark Zuckerberg: Building the Facebook Empire” (or visit [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WiD1h1kPoM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5WiD1h1kPoM)).

2. Find out how you can customize your privacy settings on Facebook (or visit [https://www.facebook.com/about/basics](https://www.facebook.com/about/basics)).

3. Learn more about Facebook’s plan to connect the world and listen to Mark Zuckerberg narrate a superb video about this plan (or visit [https://internet.org/](https://internet.org/)).

4. Facebook isn’t the only technology giant looking to connect the world to the Internet. Research Google’s Project Loon (or visit [http://www.google.com/loon/](http://www.google.com/loon/)). How does it compare to Internet.org? ★
ACROSS
2. Facebook creator is the _____ billionaire ever
6. transmission capacity of a communications device or system
9. to promote goods or services for sale through media, such as radio or television
11. a group or system of interconnected people or things
12. worldwide communications system that connects computers and networks
13. Facebook is the largest _____ networking platform
15. Canada has 14 _____ Facebook users

DOWN
1. income from a business enterprise or investment
3. Facebook creator is the 8th _____ person
4. Facebook users want others to _____ them
5. person who created Facebook
6. one thousand million
7. second largest social media network
8. personality disorder characterized by self-preoccupation
10. Facebook began at this university
14. Facebook is not available in this country