

English Conversation Club – Saratoga Library

April 18, 2024

Social Media, Flip Phones and Luddites

Today's Topic: We will continue discussing the addictive nature of digital technology and how some teens are trying to cut back on screen time. First, review the following words.

1. addictive nature (uh-dik-tiv nay-chur)	A. the generation born in 1996 or after; also called digital natives due to their familiarity with digital technology and internet
2. consuming (kuhn-soo-ming)	B. not slowing or stopping; ongoing; maintaining speed; unyielding to an extreme point
3. driving force (dry-ving fors)	C. (to be) annoyed with; to be tired or sick of; to be frustrated with
4. to endure (en-dyoor)	D. completely overcome in mind or feeling
5. (to be) fed up (fed uhp)	E. to say one will cause harm to another
6. flip phone (flip fohn)	F. to continue to exist; to last
7. Generation Z (jen-uh-rey-shuhn zee)	G. a person opposed to new technology. Refers to English workers who destroyed machinery they thought threatened their jobs.
8. to journal (jur-nl)	H. strongly and urgently felt
9. Luddite (luhd-ahyt)	I. a cell phone with an attached cover that opens and closes
10. to opt for/out (opt for/owt)	J. the power or energy behind something that moves it forward
11. over-saturation (oh-ver sach-uh-ray-shuhn)	K. to rise or increase rapidly or suddenly especially to unexpected levels
12. overwhelmed (oh-ver-hwelmd)	L. to make a choice from several possibilities; to choose to quit or stay with something
13. relentless (ree-lent-lis)	M. a trait that tends to cause a psychological or physical dependence on something that becomes a strong obsession
14. to skyrocket (sky-rok-it)	N. to write in a journal or diary
15. to threaten (thret-n)	O. the action of soaking a substance beyond what it can absorb

ANSWERS: 1 – M; 2 – H; 3 – J; 4 – F; 5 – C; 6 – I; 7 – A; 8 – N; 9 – G; 10 – L; 11 – O; 12 – D; 13 – B; 14 – K; 15 – E

Dialogue One: Opting out

Kim: **Generation Z** kids are **overwhelmed** with social media and smartphones.

Cal: We all are. Digital technology is an all-**consuming driving force** in almost everything we do.

Kim: Yeah, it's **relentless**. From morning to night, I check my texts, email, Instagram and videos.

Cal: It's too **addictive**. My screen time **skyrocketed** during the pandemic.

Kim: Mine too, but I'm going to try quit. I have reached the point of **over-saturation**.

Cal: I'm **fed up** too. I'm going to **opt out** of all social media except email and phone calls.

Dialogue Two: Opting out, continued

Alex: Did Kim and Cal trade in their smartphones for **flip phones** to cut back on social media?

Sandy: Yes, it was hard for them to **endure** the lack of social media the first few weeks.

Alex: I heard they started to **journal** to get their minds off social media.

Sandy: Yeah, it helped a lot. They go on hikes too. Their kids tease and call them **Luddites**.

Alex: They tease back and **threaten** them with taking their smartphones away.

Sandy: They actually are limiting screen time for their kids to no more than two hours a day!

The Anti-Social Network

by Lynn Ma, NYCITY NewsService, Brooklyn

Logan Lane was 11 when she got her first smartphone. Like many kids, she started using Instagram, Snapchat and TikTok. When she was 14, the pandemic hit. School went virtual. Her social media usage **skyrocketed**. Lane felt **overwhelmed** as she found herself online for too many hours each day.



"I was **fed up** with the **over-saturation** of my life and the social aspects of it being connected to my online presence," she said. "And I saw that primarily with social media." She deleted her accounts and said goodbye to her smartphone.

Now 17, the high school senior is the founding member of the **Luddite Club**—a group of teenagers who feel technology is **consuming** too much of their lives. They took their name from the [19th-century English textile workers](#) who destroyed the machines they saw as **threatening** their work. The word has **endured** as a way to refer to people who oppose the **relentless** creep of the use of technology.

The club has 16 members. Like Lane, some of them have **opted** for **flip phones** to cut back on their screen use. Members of the **Luddite Club**—a group of Brooklyn, New York high-school students—use **flip phones** to reduce their internet and social media time and still be able to communicate with friends and family.

Into the unknown

Today's teens—part of **Generation Z**—have never known a life without smartphones and social media. Spending up to eight hours of screen time every day, they are the **driving force** on TikTok, which has more than a billion global users. When Lane first went offline, she didn't know what to do.

"I could feel my brain chemistry changing," Lane said. "I was so bored. It's really not at all common for people to be bored and be alone with themselves, because smartphones keep us stimulated and connected to other people." But she stayed offline—and discovered her time could be used more creatively.

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Lane is now early to bed, early to rise. She always has a book with her for her subway commutes. She is more engaged in school. She's **journaling**, running, and making clothing. A year ago, Lane met Jameson Butler, 16, at a party where they bonded over not having smartphones. They started hanging out, and the **Luddite** Club was born.

Sewing and strumming

On a recent cold Sunday afternoon, the group gathered at the Central Library in Brooklyn for their weekly meeting. Biruk Watling, arrived with Odille Zexter, both 17, and a guitar. As they waited for everyone to show up, Lane sewed together the ripped handle of her backpack while Watling **journalled**. Zexter sketched, while her classmate Max Frackmanm, 17, paged through a magazine.

"Technology for me has always been an escape," Watling said. She used to get upset when her parents told her to log off at bedtime after spending hours online. She had become interested in stepping away from social media when she read the Don DeLillo novel "White Noise," which she interpreted as a criticism of how technology detaches users from reality. Soon she quit Instagram and got rid of her smartphone at the beginning of this year.



Members who still have smartphones attend the meetings as a way of reducing their screen time by a few hours. They hope more people will reflect on the **addictive nature** of technology and give opting out or at least stepping back a try.

The biggest thing the club stands for is using your day more wisely, said Watling. "The best part about being a Luddite is becoming more **self-aware**. I have time to reflect about my day and my life."

The members are working on how to keep the club going when most of the current members go off to college next year. "Even if people want to spend a couple of hours off of social media a week," Butler said, "they would be welcome in the club."
(Photos/Lynn Ma)

Notes:

- Did you know a **flip phone** is also called a **dumbphone** by Gen Z? With their limited features, dumbphones provide a simpler and less addictive user experience than their smartphone counterparts. Interest in flip phones is exploding among Gen Z and younger

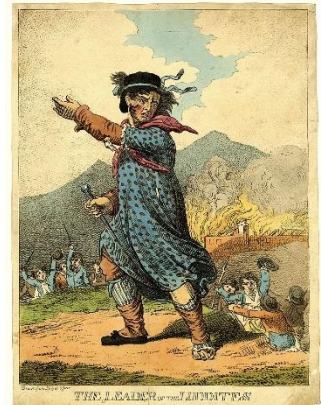
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Millennials. According to ZDNET, the number of foldable phones sold in 2023 increased nearly 44% over the year before.

- Who were the **Luddites**? The **Luddites** were members of a 19th-century movement of English textile workers who opposed the use of cost-saving machinery. They often destroyed the machines and protested against manufacturers who wanted the machines to drive down wages and make cheaper products. Members of the group described themselves as followers of "[Ned Ludd](#)", a legendary weaver whose name was used to sign threatening letters to mill owners and government officials.



Engraving of Ned Ludd,
Leader of the Luddites, 1812

Discussion questions:

1. Do you have a flip phone? Would you consider getting one to cut down on screen time?
2. "Luddite" is often used in a negative way to make fun of someone who cannot keep up with technology. Do you think the meaning of Luddite will change in the next few years?
3. What was your life like for you before smartphones?
4. Do you think smartphones and digital technology detach us from reality? Explain.
5. What are the pros and cons of switching to a flip phone?
6. A reporter wrote that switching to a flip phone made him feel more human. Why do you think he would feel that way?
7. What would you do with the extra time you might save if you stopped using a smartphone?
8. Would you use both a smartphone and a dumbphone? Why or why not?
9. How many texts do you send each day on average?
10. What was your first mobile phone like? What brand was it?
11. How have mobile phones changed the world for the good and the bad?
12. What do you think mobile phones will be like in fifty years?

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