The Global Reach of Computers: Your Speeches to Cook Island Elders About “One Laptop Per Child”

Instructions for Teachers:

The documentary “Disconnected” gives you a platform to engage your students with the question: What are the benefits and costs of living in a society that has been saturated with computers?

The following assignment will challenge your students to think about “Disconnected” in the context of Nicholas Negroponte’s “One Laptop Per Child” (OLPC) initiative. One goal of this assignment is have your students think in detail about the role of computers in highly developed societies. Another goal is for them to reckon with the implications of introducing computers in developing societies as OLPC is currently doing.

This lesson has the potential to spiral into a huge project. You’ll want to think carefully about the how large a footprint you want this project to have in your course. Students will have to invest a many hours researching OLPC, globalization, and the Cook Islands (a quick place to start: https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/cw.html) before having the information necessary to write their speeches. This is an assignment for big thinkers, comfortable with thinking outside their own little worlds. It might work best as a special project for highly motivated students-- History Day, for example. There is nothing magical about using the Cook Islands. Any relatively small, developing society would do as well.

A more manageable approach might be to have students write single speeches to Cook Island elders after watching “Disconnected.” This would save your students the complicating factor of having to research and consider the implications of introducing OLPC in a developing society.