Socially Distant Teen Programming
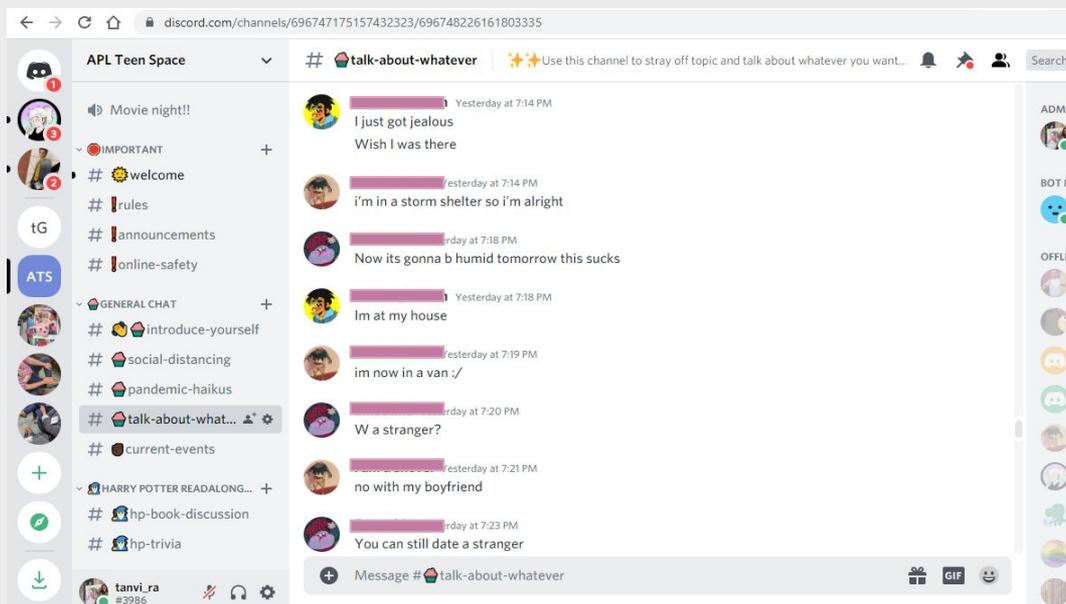
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Tanvi Rastogi, Teen Librarian, Ames Public Library
Ben Schrag, Youth Services Library Assistant, Ames Public Library

Q: How are we staying connected?

A: Discord (and some email).

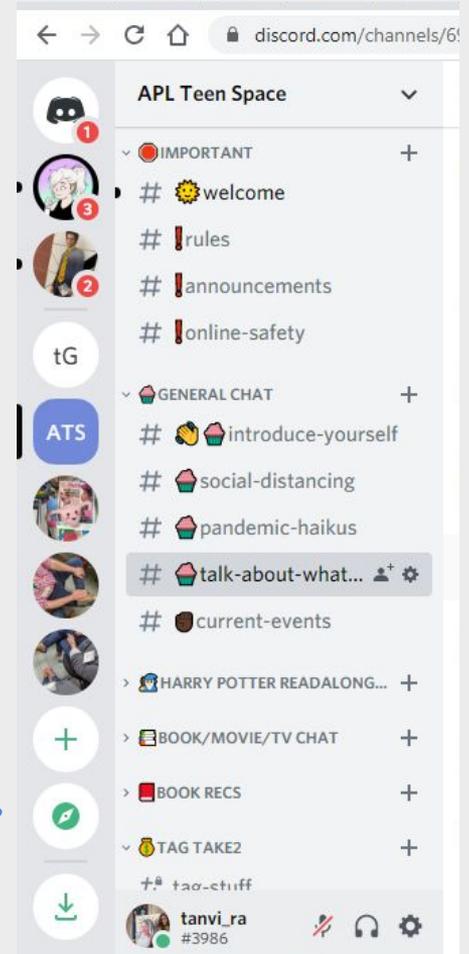*Ames Public Library "Teen Space" Discord server*

Q: What is Discord?
A: It's a chat app!

Discord is a chat app that allows you to create a community (or "server"). You can invite people to your server and create different "channels" that everyone (or just some people) can post in. Channels allow you to keep your chat organized. Want to talk about current events? Go to the "current-events" channel. Want to debate pizza toppings? Go to the "my-pizza-toppings-are-better-than-yours" channel. This allows kids to participate in or avoid whatever topics of conversations they want.
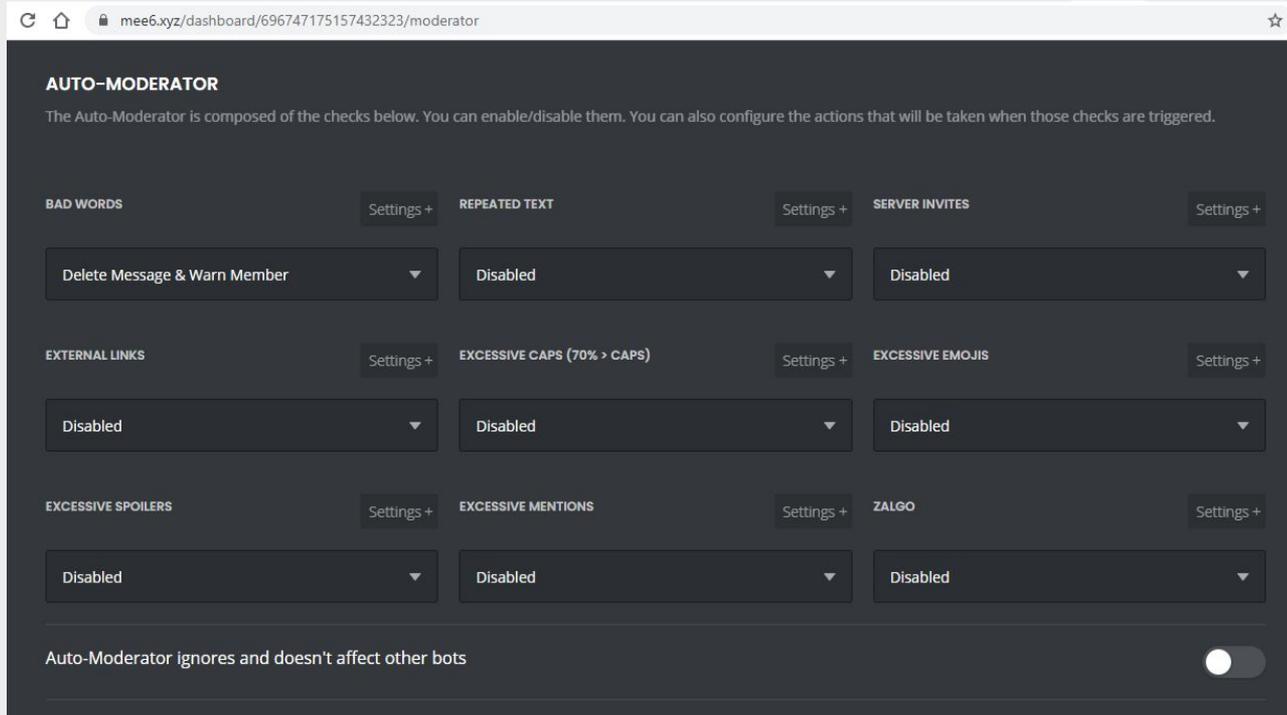
Our channels

Q: How do you set up a Discord Server?
A: It's just a few steps.

1. Create an account - it's free! You can download the Discord app, but you can also just open the Discord website in a browser.
2. GET A BOT! We use Mee6 (https://mee6.xyz/). A bot will automatically delete inappropriate language, warn members when needed, post a welcome message whenever someone new joins your server, and be able to moderate your server in any number of ways.
3. Create "roles"! Roles allow you to give different people different permissions. You probably want to be able to kick someone out if necessary. You probably don't want one kid to be able to kick out another kid. You might want to have servers that only some people can access. Roles can help!

Q: How do you set up a Discord Server?

A: It's just a few steps.

The Mee6 website. You can use it to moderate a lot of things!

Q: What are the pros and cons of a teen Discord server?
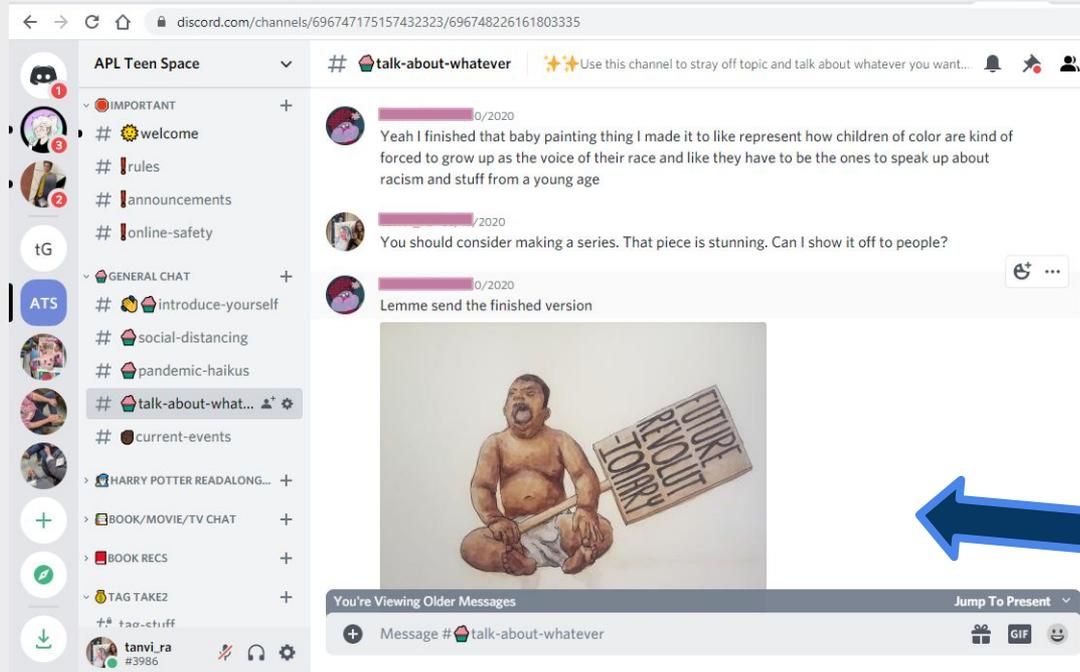# A: See below.

Pros:

- The server can always be "open" - having a bot allows you to let kids chat on their own time while allowing you to not live on your server 24/7
- Allows you to run multiple conversations at once
- Allows you to maintain communication with kids in a safer, more public way (than, eg. email), because multiple staff can moderate and/or participate
- But also allows participants to have a relatively private space to chat with one another and staff
- You can control who invites are sent to

Cons:

- Can potentially take a lot of time to moderate (remember, bots only catch language!)
- You may find yourself chatting at irregular hours, unless you choose to only engage in conversation at specific times of your day (my teens are most active at night)
- Depending on their mood, kids can sometimes be hard to engage; sometimes they only want to chat with me, not with each other
- You can't control what kids may access elsewhere on Discord

Q: What else can you do on Discord besides chat?

A: A bunch of stuff!

- Share photos and art
- Voice chat - good for chatting while watching the same movie
- Organize other events, like Jackbox game nights
- Play D&D (I don't do this but a lot of other libraries do)
- Talk about current events in real time (yes, technically this is just chatting)

Art by one of my kids after the murder of George Floyd

Q: What else are we doing online?
A: TAG meetings!

- My TAG used to meet twice a month on Saturday mornings. Now we meet on those same Saturdays but via Zoom and in the evening.

- **PROS:** There's some consistency in kids' lives; they have time to "see," hear, and socialize with peers and another adult besides those they see regularly; they maintain a connection to the library; they are earning volunteer hours; we've been able to continue program planning

- **CONS:** My group has become much smaller as kids get tired of online meetings (also, there's no free pizza)

- **PROS:** My group has become much smaller = more focused meetings and specific assignments!

Q: What else are we doing online?

A: Adapting canceled programs for an online world.

Program description:

Join our panelists for a conversation and hear how menstruation connects to gender identity, learn about the different types of period products that exist, and discuss stigmas surrounding menstrual health. Participants can enter to win prize packs of menstrual health products. For teens and adults of all genders.

Q: What else are we doing online?

A: Adapting canceled programs for an online world.

Moderator:

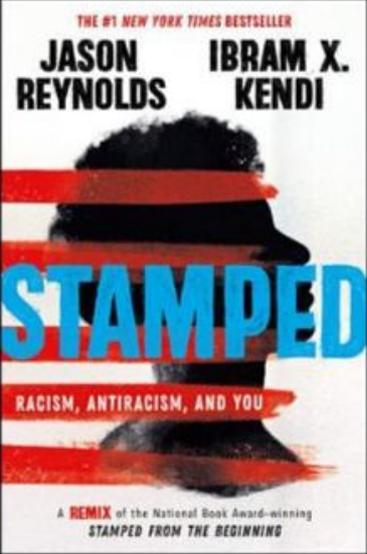A professor of Human Sexuality

Panelists:

A health educator at Planned Parenthood, a nonbinary gender expert, a nonbinary artist/activist

Donations from GladRags and Party In My Pants for prize pack drawings!

Q: What else are we doing online?

A: Adapting canceled programs for an online world.

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AMES PUBLIC LIBRARY

ANTIRACISM TEEN BOOK CLUB

Facilitated by Dr. Monic Behnken & Pastor Eileen Gebbie

Goal:

To give young adults the opportunity to have conversations centered around anti-racism and tools to begin their own antiracist learning process and engage in antiracist work.

Facilitators:

A Black professor of Sociology and a White pastor/community organizer

Q: What else are we doing online?
A: Adapting canceled programs for an online world.

Other upcoming programs

- A vegan curious program featuring a vegan chef and student president of ISU's Ethical Eating Club
  - Topics will include why presenters chose to adopt a vegan diet; tips for how youth can transition to a vegetarian or vegan diet; discussion of implications for one's health and for the environment; and simple recipe ideas
- Expressing oneself through hip-hop, featuring a local musician (SLICE the Celestial Sorcerer)
- Expressing oneself through visual art, featuring a local artist
- Monthly Ames Pridefest storytelling programs that feature a local queer person sharing their story via conversation, panel discussion, art, music or spoken word performance, etc

Q: What AREN'T I doing online?
A: A lot of cool things that other libraries ARE doing!

- Roleplaying games
- Arts and crafts videos
- Cooking videos
- Read alouds aimed at an all ages audience
- Group movie or tv viewings (I tried; it didn't work well for us)
- Book talks
- Trivia nights
- Engagement via TikTok, Snapchat, Instagram, etc (I don't have library accounts for any of these apps)

Q: But Tanvi, why aren't you offering all the cool things?!

A: I don't know how to do all these things (I don't cook; no one wants to watch me cook); I asked my kids what they would want to watch; I don't have time!

Get in touch with us!

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