NEWS BREAK

Article: **Addicted to doomscrolling? The Brick helped me unplug**

Section: **BUSINESS, C7**

Sunday's News Break selects an article from **Sunday, November 30, 2025,** of The Seattle Times print replica for an in-depth reading of the news. Read the selected article and answer the attached study questions.

Feel free to adapt this lesson for your students. For instance, some educators may assign this as a homework task, while others might facilitate the reading and discussion of questions within small groups or larger class discussions.

***Please take a moment to review all NIE content before classroom use to ensure it is suitable for your students.**

Standards:

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.1

- Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.4.2

- Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text.

Learning Objectives:

The learning objective of the article is to illustrate the detrimental effects of constant smartphone and social media usage on personal well-being and genuine connection, and to demonstrate how introducing a physical tool to block it, can be a highly effective strategy for regaining control over one's attention and time.

Pre-Reading Discussion:

- What do you think the article will be about, using this picture?
- Are there any clues? What can you infer?

Vocabulary Building:

Read this sentence, what do you think the highlighted words mean using *context clues*? A ***context clue*** is a word or words that are hints and refers to the sources of information outside of words that readers may use to predict the meaning of the word.

"My friendships became clearer. The relationships that mattered? They survived the Brick. The ones that were mostly built on "keeping up" digitally? They didn't need to. There's a strange intimacy in watching someone's life unfold through carefully curated squares, a ***parasocial*** closeness that feels like connection but isn't."

Parasocial Guess:

Parasocial Definition:

Comprehension Questions:

1. I orchestrate distraction for a living. That's not my job description, but as a social media manager, I understand _____ _____, _____ _____ and why people come back for more.
2. Because I know how social media works, I thought I was immune to "_____ _____" and the _____-_____ trap.
3. I felt like my screen time was different, professional, intentional. That I had boundaries. I was _____.
4. The truth arrived the way most uncomfortable ones do: quietly, then all at once. After a jampacked weekend of snapping photos for social posts, trading memes with friends and scrolling through apps, I realized I couldn't remember the last time I'd been truly _____. Or better yet, _____ _____.
5. If I wasn't physically with someone, I was surrounded by a symphony of _____.
6. According to a recent Washington Post investigation, after only a month, more than three-quarters of TikTok users who had typically spent about 30 minutes a day on TikTok were now spending almost twice that much time on the app, on average. Some people spent more than _____ hours a day on it.
7. What is the Brick-how much does it cost and what does it do?
8. A pattern became clear. My phone wasn't the problem. My inability to be bored was. I had been filling every gap, every commute, every quiet moment — a walk to a friend's brunch spot — with something, anything. Notifications, distractions, photos. These were symptoms of a deeper dependency: the belief that I shouldn't ever be without what four things?
9. But mostly, the device sits on my fridge as a quiet reminder: You get to decide how you spend your time. You just have to be _____ about it.

Class Discussion Questions:

- What surprised (or stood out to) you in the article?
- At first, I thought _____, but now I think _____?

Deeper-Dive comprehension questions for small groups, entire classes or journal entries and/ or essay prompts for extended enrichment:

- The author, a social media manager, says, "I was delusional" about her screen time. What did she initially believe about her usage, and what made her realize this belief was wrong? How does this professional background make her realization more impactful?
- The author describes feeling the "phantom buzz of notifications" even when she was supposedly off the clock. What psychological phenomenon

does this describe? How does the constant anticipation of connection or communication affect our ability to truly relax?

- The key takeaway for the author was that her "inability to be bored was" the real problem, not the phone itself. What is the value of boredom, and how does constant entertainment rob us of this value?
- Define the term "parasocial closeness" as it is used in the article. Provide an example from your own experience or observation that fits this description. Why does the author find this closeness to be an insufficient substitute for real connection?
- The author states, "The relationships that mattered? They survived the Brick. The ones that were mostly built on 'keeping up' digitally? They didn't need to." What does this reveal about the hierarchy of friendship in the digital age?
- Besides reading more books, what were the two most surprising, non-digital benefits the author experienced (e.g., related to physical health, observation, or social behavior)?

Personal Experiment: Imagine you could "Brick" one major app or type of phone use (e.g., games, streaming video, social media) for an entire week. Choose which one and describe the immediate consequences you would face and the potential benefits you anticipate.

Redefining Social Media Expectations: The author starts asking: "What do I really care about when there's no audience? What do I invest in when there's no expectation to check in?" Discuss how the constant pressure of having an "audience" (or the fear of missing out on one) subtly shapes and potentially distorts a person's life choices and sense of self.

NIE News Break program with other teachers. To sign-up for the print replica for your class, please register online or call 206/652-6290 or toll-free 1-888/775-2655.