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Whenever I take a minute to observe a stranger's face, I realize I can't. It's as if their faces are eaten—as if their minds are narrowed to the screen resting in the palm of their hands. This small, unique device aids and destroys our lives at the same time. It prevents us from appreciating our world, from nature, to interactions with others, and even the truth. It has totally shifted what we're good at and what we're capable of doing. It is at once the answer and the problem.

Instead of relying solely on school for new information, nowadays, we can learn everything online. This is something that I find incredible. I don't have to pay for additional educational resources, like tutors or test prep, instead, endless information is accessible to me, not costing a single penny. Whenever I get stuck on my homework, I have at my fingertips, access to millions of responses from professionals and experienced voices. Not only that, socializing and forming relationships has never been easier; I'm able to game, watch movies, and make plans with friends all in one place. However, while it may seem that technology has improved life for the better, it has significantly changed my perception of reality and made it difficult to communicate effectively in-person with others.

Ever since 4th grade, I've been attached to my computer, spending hours on end discovering the new features and possibilities it held. This fascination quickly carried me through the rest of elementary school and throughout my middle school years. At one point, during the pandemic, I was even forced to stare at my computer all day just to attend school. When we returned to in-person school, I was faced with the challenge of carrying on a 1 on 1 conversation with someone else who also spent most of his day online, which made me realize that we both didn't know how to carry on a proper conversation. Whenever one of us spoke, what followed was a

long pause of silence, which now I interpret as the time we usually took to type up and send a message. Because of these long pauses, our interaction felt more like an interview than anything else. It was easy to communicate online because there were a vast amount of things to do between waiting for a response to your message, however, when it came to talking in-person, there was nothing there to really fill the silence and I lacked the ability to do so myself.

Personally, I view communication as an essential life skill. It's essential when you are giving a presentation during class, or when you are trying to form relationships with others. Without effective communication, it is difficult to be understood, and thereby difficult to connect with those around you in meaningful ways.

Ironically, I find that the internet, which tends to close distances between people, is a big source of disconnection. Because there is such a plethora of rapidly changing information, the internet is home to endless pages of inaccurate or incomplete information. Because of this, it's difficult to distinguish between what's fact and what's opinion, which creates conflict and controversy. With the proliferation of AI in recent years, people can now fabricate all sorts of things, even realistic videos of political figures saying things they've never said.

Additionally, I feel that technology has really made it hard for us humans, especially the younger generations, to appreciate our world in general. I feel as though hardly anyone in my age group actually takes a moment to appreciate the nature surrounding us: the air that we're able to breathe, the earth we walk on, and even just being alive.

Technology teaches us many things, but it also teaches us a dark lesson. It makes us take things for granted because of how easy everything has gotten. Only when my phone dies do I take a moment to look around and appreciate nature. And when I do, I take deeper breaths,

trees leave me in awe and it sometimes feels like a part of me just died and was reborn with new lenses. Though technology has become entwined with almost every aspect of our lives, nothing about it is concrete, like the physical sensations of the world and the relationships I have with those around me. Beyond my phone screen, reality awaits.

Overall, technology is great, and that is a fact that I can't change. It has totally altered my capabilities and I feel that it will continue to do so. However, like David Jones once said, "It is both a blessing and a curse." It has produced an overabundance of false information and hindered people's ability to communicate with one another, preventing connection and fostering disunity. Alongside this, we can hardly take the time to look away from our phones to appreciate the world going by around us.