Online search: 'how to' tips

In the book *The Myth of Digital Democracy*, Matthew Hindman argues that the structure of the Internet is stifling the hope that it would be a great force for democracy. In particular, he looks at powerful search engines like Google and their role as gatekeepers. Search algorithms favor popularity, so big news organizations do well, especially when people use only one or two terms when searching.

Choose a class discussion topic:

Flashlight: View this video on how Google's search engine works. Google gets at least 85 percent of all search engine traffic. But there are other search engines, including, at number two, Yahoo! Ask the class: Do you know anyone who uses a search engine other than Google? What are their reasons?

Spotlight: Google publishes a website with various video tutorials that can help you improve your searching skills. Have students prepare for a class discussion by using these new skills to try to determine why Google dominates the search field. What role does the company's indexing system play?

Searchlight: What is information literacy? Sir Tim Berners-Lee, inventor of the World Wide Web, has a new project, CrossCloud, to help people take control of their data. Instead of your personal information residing in just one social media platform, CrossCloud allows you to move it where you want. Yet others, like Apple co-founder Steve Wozniak, have called cloud based computing and applications "a nightmare" because no matter what anyone says, the data resides in computer servers beyond your reach. How comfortable are you with having your data in the cloud? Without information literacy, how will future generations take control of their data?

Extra credit: Share the concept of the "Invisible Web." The "Visible Web" is indexed by search engines, but that just scrapes the surface. The Invisible Web (or "Deep Web") is what indexing bots don't see. It is perhaps 500 times bigger than the Visible Web. Have students explore sites such as Social Mention, Peek You, Ice Rocket and Zabasearch to do a research project. Next, find a local news story from 2008 or 2009 naming journalists who lost their jobs; or call the local newsroom and see who left in recent years; now use these tools to find and contact those journalists; ask them about

changes in the news industry, what they are doing now and their outlook on the future of journalism.

Bonus assignment: Is the Deep Web mentioned in the news? Find articles that mention use of the Deep Web. Do any of them refer to its use in investigative reporting?