Lesson Plan: Fighting Fake News

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Featured resources

[The Honest Truth About Fake News](#) (KQED's The Lowdown)

[Breaking News Consumer Handbook: Fake News Edition with printable](#) (WNYC's On the Media)

[Evaluating Evidence: The Cornerstone of Civic Online Reasoning](#) (Stanford University History Education Group study)

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Opening quick write prompt:

What are potential consequences when fake news goes viral? Do you think you could spot fake news or would you be fooled? Why or why not?

A quick write allows students to write down their thoughts before discussing the opening question in order to increase participation and make the discussion more accessible to English Language Learners.

Objective

- Students will analyze the problems and potential consequences associated with the spread of fake news.

- Students will identify and evaluate ways to avoid fake news in social and academic settings.

Essential Question and Lesson Context

What happens when fake news spreads? What actions can I take to verify news stories, photographs and other sources of online information?

Fake news is no longer a matter of the occasional hoax. There is growing evidence that fake news has the power to shape public opinion and even sway elections. As more Americans get their news online, it is increasingly vital that students know how to verify sources and spot fake news or images, which often appear indistinguishable from a reliable source. This lesson asks students to analyze the consequences of fake news and build the skills needed to question and verify what they view online.

Key vocabulary

Pre-teach key vocabulary before students do the activity, especially if you have English Language Learners. After going over the simple definition, consider providing a visual aid or having students draw one. More ideas for how to pre-teach vocabulary can be found [here](#).

Word	Simple definition
Credible (adj.)	Believable based on evidence, convincing
Discern (v.)	To recognize or identify, to perceive something using your senses
Impressionable (adj.)	Easily influenced or persuaded
Prolific (adj.)	Producing a large amount of something
Teem (v.)	To be filled to overflowing, to be full of something

Activity: Evaluating an online image

- Students share responses to the quick write. Do your students think they would be duped by fake news? Gauge students' prior knowledge of the issue and possible consequences.
  - If students aren't aware of possible consequences, quickly discuss recent fake news stories such as the Pope endorsing Trump. But don't share The Lowdown post or other resources yet!

- Show students the image of mutated daisies from a Stanford study which measured students' ability to evaluate online evidence. The image and exercise can be found on page 16 of the executive summary.

- Students complete the Stanford study exercise OR show only the image and explain its source.

- **Ask or review the exercise:** Does this image provide strong evidence of conditions near the Fukushima plant? How do you know either way?
  - Primed by the topic, students may say the image is faked or altered. In fact, the image is not altered, according to Snopes. The daisies really look like that.
  - Guide the students to the questions they should be asking themselves about the photo.

- Make a list of reasons why this image shouldn't be trusted to confirm Fukushima nuclear contamination. (*Ex: We don't know the photographer's credentials, there is no way of knowing if the daisies are near the power plant or if radiation caused the mutations or even if the photo was taken in Japan!*)

- Debrief the experience by revealing that less than 20% of the high school students in the study could fully evaluate the image or come up with the above list. Remind students that many fake images and news stories exist online. **Ask:** What will you do next time? What will you do every time?

- Individually or in small groups, students read The Lowdown post on fake news in order to answer those two questions and prepare for the following discussion.

Discussion

- Explain at least two ways fake news could affect the results of future elections or may have affected the recent presidential election?

- What will you do next time? Every time? What are three ways you can verify articles and images to avoid being fooled by fake news?

- What can companies like Facebook and Snapchat do to stop users from spreading fake news? What can ordinary people do? What do you think would work, especially with younger users?

Circle chats, small-group discussions and think-pair-share provide a safer space for students to practice speaking and listening, and also boost participation during whole-class discussions.

Extension activities

Explore more exercises from the Stanford study: Along with the mutant daisy photo, two other exercises in the executive summary help students evaluate evidence online. The exercise given to college students, which draws on research methods used in middle and high school classrooms, could be especially powerful (are you smarter than a college student?) and lead to the kind of guided practice and reflection used in this lesson.

Common Core standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1	Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7	Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.8	Delineate and evaluate argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of evidence.