

For Further Inquiry or Support with this Unit

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Social Media & Fake News: Covid19

Objective: In this unit you will learn the process of identifying what you know, understanding the impact of fake news, looking at the way that quality journalism is constructed, and learning what you need to know to be a responsible consumer of media.

Why is it that when people are faced with evidence that disputes already held beliefs, they actually become more convinced that their beliefs are correct?

—Why do people make irrational decisions?

—Why are smart people often victims of fake news?

The first part of this unit deals with cognitive bias, which is one of the main reasons why people fall for fake news.

Understanding Cognitive Bias

Why Do We Believe What We Believe?

It's Just Like Riding A Bike: How Much Do You (Really) Know About Your Brain?

1. On a scale of 1 to 10, rate your understanding of how to ride a bike by circling a number.
(clueless) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (expert)

2. Now, draw a diagram that explains how a bicycle works.

- Can you create a picture that demonstrates how a bike is steered?
- Why doesn't the bike fall when someone is riding it? Can you show that in your diagram?
- Can you demonstrate the way that brakes work in your diagram?
- How do the pedals connect to the chain to move the bike forward?

3. Again, rate your understanding of how to ride a bike.

(clueless) 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 (expert)

4. Has your rating changed? Why or why not?

The goal here was to show you that while you might be able to ride a bike, understanding the steps involved and being able to explain them is a totally different skill. You will soon learn more about the strange ways of the human mind. “The illusion of explanatory depth,” or the tendency to believe that we know more than we really do, is just one of the many cognitive biases.

5. If you have internet access click on the Link to Watch [“The Backwards Brain Bicycle”](#)

Or scan the QR code to the right.



Questions on “The Backwards Brain Bicycle”

1. What does Destin Sandlin say happens when you change any one part of the algorithm of riding a bike?

2. Sandman says, “Once you have a rigid way of thinking in your head, sometimes you can’t change that, even if you want to.” Explain in your own words what that statement means. What implications does it have for thinking beyond riding a bike?

3. After spending five minutes a day for eight months, he learns to ride the new bike. What causes him to lose that knowledge?

4. Why does it take his son only two weeks to learn what Sandlin learns in eight months?

5. What does learning to ride a backwards bike have to do with learning a new language?

6. While describing his experience in Amsterdam trying to ride a regular bike, Sandlin says, "I had set out to prove that I could free my brain from a cognitive bias. At this point, I'm pretty sure that all I had proved was that I could only re-designate that bias." Explain in your own words what that means.

7. At the end of the video, Sandlin says, "Truth is truth no matter I think about it. So be very careful about how you interpret things because you are looking at the world with a bias, whether you think you are or not." Explain in your own words what that means.

8. What are some areas in your life where you might have rigid thinking or where you might see the world with a bias?

9. What does the video suggest that you can do to fight those biases?

4. Watch this Ted Talk: [Are We In Control Of Our Decisions? | Dan Ariely](#)
This 17-minute TED Talk given by a professor in behavioral economics named Dan Ariely is more specific, detailed, and comprehensive.

Questions on “Are We In Control Of Our Decisions?”

5. In the opening line of the speech, Ariely makes a joke saying, “I’ll tell you a little bit about irrational behavior. Not yours, of course — other people’s.” Describe the cognitive bias he is pointing out from the very beginning of his talk.



6. Ariely’s first example is the image of the two tables. What irrational thinking is demonstrated by this image?

7. What happens after he takes away the red lines?

8. Ariely says, “Our intuition is really fooling us in a repeatable, predictable, consistent way, and there is almost nothing we can do about it, aside from taking a ruler and starting to measure it.” What implications does that statement have for thinking beyond measuring a table length? What does it say about what we’ll have to do to avoid flawed or biased thinking?

9. Why do people have a harder time recognizing “cognitive illusions” than recognizing “visual illusions”?

10. What does the example of the organ donors demonstrate about how we make decisions?

11. Ariely says, “But when it comes to us, we have such a feeling that we're in the driver's seat, such a feeling that we're in control and we are making the decision, that it's very hard to even accept the idea that we actually have an illusion of making a decision, rather than an actual decision.” Paraphrase and explain this statement in your own Words.

12. Ariel goes on to say that some people might explain away the organ donor phenomena by saying that it is something that people don't care about. But, he says “it's so complex that we don't know what to do. And because we have no idea what to do, we just pick whatever it was that was chosen for us.” What is he saying about how we make the most difficult and complex decisions in our lives?

13. What does the example of the physicians and the hip replacement surgery demonstrate about how we make decisions?

14. What do the examples of the weekend trip option, the Economist advertisement, and the Tom and Jerry images demonstrate about how people make decisions?

15. How does Ariely believe that we have done a better job dealing with our physical world than with our mental world?

16. What does he say that we need to do to “design a better mental world”?

17. Go back to those decisions and criteria that you listed before watching the video. What are some ways that you might be biased when you make those decisions? How might some of Ariely’s examples apply to you?

Cognitive Bias Part 3

Objective: Synthesizing and explaining the concepts of cognitive bias.

Understanding theories of why our brain works the way it does and some possible solutions to our biased ways of thinking.

The article you're about to read is actually a review of three different books, but it does a great job synthesizing and explaining the concepts of cognitive bias. While the videos that we've watched up to this point have focused on how cognitive bias works, this article delves into some of the studies that have shown biased thinking, as well as theories of why our brains work this way, and it hints at some possible solutions to our biased ways of thinking (though it isn't very hopeful).



Scan the QR code or simply click on the link provided to access the article entitled "Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds." [New Yorker](#)

Questions on "Why Facts Don't Change Our Minds"

1. Explain the study described at the beginning of the post. What lie were the students told initially? What were they told about the lie? What question were they asked after that? How did the information that they were given influence their answers?
2. Kolbert quotes the researchers of that study: "Once formed,' the researchers observed dryly, 'impressions are remarkably perseverant.'" Explain in your own words the meaning of that observation.
3. Explain the second example of the pair of firefighters. What were students led to believe about the qualities of a successful firefighter? What happened after the lie was revealed?

4. How do Mercier and Sperber explain cognitive bias? (Why do behaviors that seem bizarre when looked at from a strictly logical standpoint actually make sense when looked at in terms of evolution?)

5. What is “confirmation bias”?

6. Describe the famous study on students' opinions about capital punishment. What two groups were studied? What kind of data were they shown? How did the students rate the data? What happened when they were asked about their views at the end of the study?

7. Describe the study done by Mercier and some European colleagues. What were participants asked to do? What bias was demonstrated in this study?

8. Why was this kind of thinking advantageous to early humans living in small groups of hunter-gatherers?

9. Explain how Sloman and Fernbach used toilets to demonstrate “the illusion of explanatory depth”? What did they ask people to do? What was revealed by these tests?

10. How does collaboration contribute to the illusion of explanatory depth?

11. Why is incomplete understanding important to the development of new technologies?

12. Where does the illusion of explanatory depth get us “into trouble”?

13. How does our “dependence on other minds” make things even worse?

14. What happened when Sloman and Fernbach asked people to “explain, in as much detail as they could, the impacts of implementing” specific public policy questions? How did their views change after that step?

15. What is the “candle for a dark world”? How do Sloman and Fernbach believe that we can lessen extreme political beliefs?

16. Does Kolbert seem hopeful about undoing the effects of cognitive bias? Why or why not?

It's Not About What You Think It's About

Conclusion - Cognitive Bias

Objective: Understanding a common cognitive bias - human beings like to fill in the blanks to make stories out of sparse data.

To revisit Robert Frost's Iconic Poem "The Road Not Taken" and ultimately, realize that this poem is about the lies we tell others and ourselves in order to add meaning and depth to our decisions in life.

This poem is one that I'm sure you think you know, but really you probably don't. The speaker of this poem describes a common cognitive bias—human beings like to fill in the blanks to make stories out of sparse data.

The title of the poem has become a short-hand way of describing life choices that don't follow the norm. However, when those iconic lines are read in context of the rest of the poem, they actually have quite a different meaning.

Procedure:

Starting with a free write on the following question:

What is Robert Frost's poem "The Road Not Taken" about? (If for some reason you are not already familiar with the poem, respond to the title alone.)

- What does the title of the poem suggest about the themes of the poem?

- When is this poem usually quoted?

- What do most people believe is the story or theme of the poem?

The Road Not Taken

1) Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

2) Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

3) And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

4) I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference.

—Robert Frost



Questions on Robert Frost's Poem "The Road Not Taken"

1. What happens in the first stanza of the poem. Where is the speaker? What does he see? What does he do?

2. How did he feel about the fact that he couldn't travel down both paths?

3. What is implied by the word "diverged" (as opposed to split or fork, for example)?

4. When most people think of this poem, they assume that one road represents an alternative way of living or "the road less traveled." Which road was the less popular choice? Why?

5. From lines 1-12, list and explain all of the evidence that suggests that the two roads are actually almost exactly the same.

6. The first two lines of the last stanza, “I shall be telling this with a sigh / Somewhere ages and ages hence” are often ignored by readers who focus on the iconic ending to the poem. What does the speaker admit in these lines? Why do you think that people often overlook them? How does the way that they are written help a reader to skip over or ignore them?

7. The last stanza describes the way that the speaker will tell this story in the future. What story will he tell about this day?

8. This poem isn't really about taking an alternate route in life—what is it really about?

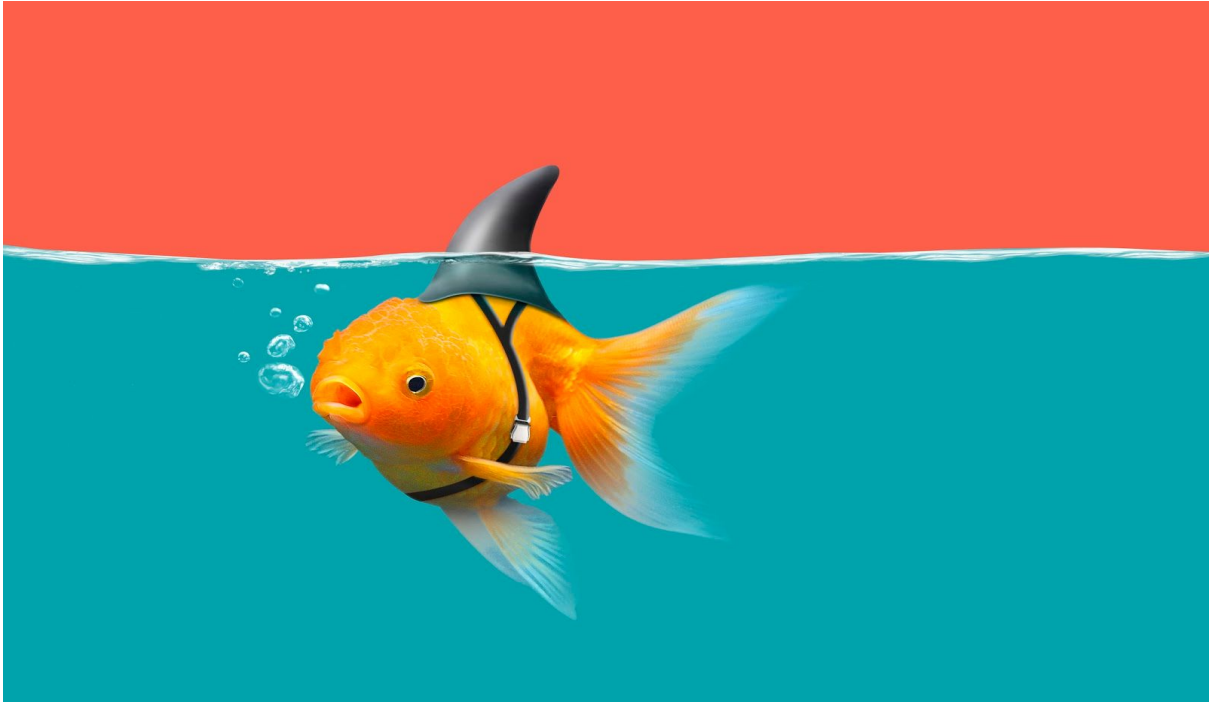
9. How could someone who reads this poem and wants to believe that it is about what the title suggests find evidence to prove that point (thus demonstrating the way that confirmation bias works)?

10. Check out the (overwhelmingly comprehensive) list of cognitive biases by scanning the QR code or by clicking this link [Cognitive Biases](#). Which do you think are exhibited by the speaker of this poem? Why?



11. What are some stories about your life that you might “tell with a sigh... ages and ages hence”?

Social Media Literacy: Journalism In The Era Of Fake News



Essential Questions:

Why does good journalism matter?

How can you tell fake news from real news?

What are our responsibilities as media consumers?

The Unfortunate Era of Fake News

Objective: Taking you through the process of identifying what you know, understanding the impact of fake news and viral sharing on the real world, looking at the way that quality journalism is constructed, and learning what you need to know to be responsible consumers of media.

Also for future or current voters to know how to check on news stories that they read on social media, so they won't decide on candidates with information from fake news.

Advertisements, fake news, unreliable websites—you would think most students who have grown up with the internet would easily navigate it all, but according to a study done by Stanford researchers, that couldn't be further from the truth. Researchers describe the results of the study done on middle school, high school, and college students across the country “in one word: bleak.” Students were asked to judge advertisements, social media, video and photographic evidence, news reports, and websites. Though researchers thought that they were giving students simple tasks, they say that “in every case and at every level, we were taken aback by students’ lack of preparation.” Underscoring the essentialness of these skills, researchers go on to say, “At present, we worry that democracy is threatened by the ease at which disinformation about civic issues is allowed to spread and flourish.”

Fake News, Real News: How Much Do You Know?

Introductory Lesson on Fake News vs Real News

Objective: The purpose of today's lesson is for you to think about the media and to question how much you really know.

This introductory lesson is a "test" of sorts to see how much you know about the difference between fake news and real news. If you have a hard time telling the difference, that's okay. You are not alone, and hopefully through these lessons, you will learn a great deal in the next few days.

Take the "quiz" so we can see how savvy you are about news and reporting.

Fake News, Real News: How Much Do You Know?

For the following statements, write T if they are true and F if they are false.

1. _____ There is nothing that I can do if I see a fake news story on Facebook.
2. _____ Photographs are irrefutable pieces of evidence.
3. _____ It doesn't matter where a story is published—if it is written by a journalist, I can trust it.
4. _____ If someone I know or trust tweets about a study or article, it's fine for me to retweet it.
5. _____ If a news article has quotes from eyewitnesses, I can trust what it says.
6. _____ If a blogger or vlogger has been paid to talk about a product, they have to let their audience know.

7. _____ I can trust professional journalists to decide what is true and what isn't—that isn't my responsibility.

8. _____ Every writer has some bias.

9. _____ If a news story has been retweeted by important people, it's an important story.

10. _____ If a news story turns out to be made up, it's not that big of a deal, and it won't really hurt anyone.

Scoring:

8-10 correct: Nice job! You are a very savvy consumer of media. Now you can help your classmates to learn more about how to defend themselves against fake news.

5-7 correct: You are learning about media, but you could still be tricked by stories or images that seem real. Time to learn more about how to defend yourself against fake news!

1-4 correct: It's time to buckle down and learn how to analyze what you consume. Get ready because you are about to learn a lot!

Fake News: Why Does It Matter?

Objective: To understand how fake news has real life consequences, the results of which are deadly.

Fake news has extremely harmful results. On April 14, 2014, 276 girls were kidnapped in the middle of the night from their beds at a boarding school by Boko Haram militants. The girls were aged between 16 and 18. Unfortunately “alternative facts” affected the retrieval of the Chibok girls.

Watch this short video to find out more, by scanning the QR code or by clicking this link [Fake News = Real Harm](#)



Questions on “How Fake News Does Real Harm” a TEDTalk by Stephanie Busari

1. What does Busari mean when she says that the story “caused ripples around the world”? Explain this expression in your own words.
2. What were the “alternative facts” put out by the Nigerian government?
3. Why do you think that the Nigerian government would assert that the story of the Chibok girls were a hoax?
4. What did Busari accomplish with the video that she obtained?

5. Why is Busari “furious”?

6. What does Busari say that we can all do about the danger of fake news?

7. What do professional journalists do to verify a story?

8. What does she say that we need to think about before we share stories online.

Fake News and Quality Journalism Part 1

Objective: To learn about how and why fake news can go viral, and also have a good idea of the elements of a quality news article.

Understand the role of viral sharing in spreading false reports. How fake news is created and spread and what happens when people believe it—and the way that the articles are written.

To know how to tell if you can trust a tweet, so you won't inadvertently retweet a damaging story about an innocent individual.

This article is an example of how fake news goes viral. Additionally, this piece was published in a respected periodical and it is an example of quality journalism.

Read this article by scanning the QR code or clicking on this link [Fake News Goes Viral](#)

Questions on “How Fake News Goes Viral: A Case Study” By Sapna Maheshwari, published in The New York Times on November 20, 2016



1. What does it mean that “speed often takes precedence over truth”?
2. Describe the process that Eric Tucker followed to verify his suspicion that the busses were full of professional protesters.
3. What does it tell you that Tucker’s “admitted lack of evidence, however, had little effect”?
4. Why do you think that the tweet and story refuting the original tweet got so little attention?

5. How is the viral nature of social media sharing to blame for what happened with Tucker's Tweet?

6. What has the author of the piece done to remain objective in telling the story?

7. How did the author of the story research what happened? (Contrast that to Tucker's process.)

Fake News and Quality Journalism Part 2

Objective: To learn about how and why fake news can go viral, and also have a good idea of the elements of a quality news article.

Understand the role of viral sharing in spreading false reports. How fake news is created and spread and what happens when people believe it—and the way that the articles are written.

In addition, knowing how to tell if you can trust a tweet, so you won't inadvertently retweet a damaging story about an innocent individual.

This article is another example of fake news going viral. It also has been published in a respected periodical and is an example of quality journalism. It is unbelievable the consequences that occur when people believe fake news. Events such as a man firing an assault-style weapon at a New York pizza restaurant demonstrates that fake news can have very real effects.

This is a longer article but it is a great example of how important it is to be a responsible consumer of media. Read this article by scanning the QR code or clicking on this link [Rumor to Gunfire](#)



Questions on “Pizzagate: From Rumor, to Hashtag, to Gunfire in D.C.” by Marc Fisher, John Woodrow Cox, and Peter Hermann; published in the December 6, 2016 edition of The Washington Post

1. What was the eventual almost tragic outcome of the “Pizzagate” story? What did Edgar Welch do?

2. What does the author mean when he says, “a fear that has spread through channels that did not even exist until recently”? What are those “channels”? Explain in your own Words.

3. Explain the following quote in your own words: “Pizzagate... is possible only because science has produced the most powerful tools ever invented to find and disseminate information.” What does the author blame here for what happened at Comet Ping Pong?

4. Explain the following sentences in your own words, especially the four elements identified as contributing to pizzagate: “What brought Welch to the District on a crisp Sunday afternoon in early December was a choking mix of rumor, political nastiness, technological change and the intoxicating thrill that can come from running down a mystery.”

5. Explain the role that “bots” played in spreading the fake news.

6. Why did the decade-old column about the game tables on the sidewalk start trending on Twitter?

7. How were the photographs of Clinton visiting neighborhood establishments used to fuel the scandal?

8. How did the “Internet sleuths” interpret the St. Jude Children’s hospital symbol? What does that suggest about how people might interpret evidence when they are looking for something?

What Are Our Responsibilities As Consumers of Media?

Project Assignment/Paper

Objective: By the end of this part of the lesson, you will be experts in at least one area of media.

For this activity, you will be teaching me what I need to know about different forms of media. As you learned from the newspaper articles that we read, it is especially important that you know how to examine any content that you might be sharing on social media platforms. Now you are going to learn how to examine and verify news for yourself.

First, spend some time going over the questions and answers for your topic. If possible, spend some time exploring examples online so that you can see what things look like.

Once you feel comfortable with the information, think about how best to present it. Remember that these are important lessons—reciting rules from a poster won't help me the next time I am trying to decide what I should do with a tweet or Facebook post.

Following are a few ideas to teach, but get creative with your presentations—you are not limited to this list.

- Essay for Reaction Paper on student Information Handout *
- Make a video involving visuals and images of your topic.
- Make an engaging slide show involving visuals and images of your topic.
- Create an online scavenger hunt after you have explained your topic and see if I can find examples of everything online.

The more real-life examples that you include, the more effective it will be in teaching the information.

Handouts and rubrics are provided in the pages that follow.

Essay for Reaction Paper on a Student Information Handout

Here are some following questions to help you formulate a reaction paper focusing on one of the informational handouts. This should be 2-3 pages long - 12 font and double spaced.

1. What was new information to you on the handout?
2. For what do you usually go to this media source?
3. Have you been tricked in the past by any of the fake news tactics? If so, what were they?
4. Why might the spread of fake news on this media platform be especially dangerous?
5. Find an example of manipulative media on this platform to explain, analyze, and discuss.

Information Handout: Photographs

1. Why are people likely to believe a photograph?

We are used to believing what we can see. Traditionally, it was impossible to change a photograph so they could be used as evidence, but now it is easy to alter or change one, especially with digital photography.

2. What steps can you take to verify a photograph?

1. Check the source of the photograph. If there is no source or you can't trace the source of the photograph, then likely it is not credible.

2. Check on the photographer. Who took the photo? Look into what you can about the person who is credited with taking the picture. What biases can you find about the person who took it.

3. Think about how or why the photograph proves what the post claims it proves. Is it a sensational photo, meant to evoke an emotional response? Is the photograph not actually related to the news story? Does it truly prove what it claims to, or is it just a way to garner attention and get people to click through to a post?

4. Do a reverse google search on the image. Can you find it in other places? Is it used for more than one purpose? If so, it might be a stock photo rather than documentary evidence.

5. Check on the weather if it is a photo of an important event. What was the weather on the day and place of the photograph? If someone claims to have taken a picture at an event, does the weather in the photo match up with what the real weather was on that day?

Information Handout: Twitter

1. What is a tweet?

A tweet is a posting on the social media site Twitter; traditionally, the posts are no longer than 140 characters.

2. How are “Top Tweets” pushed to the top of the list?

The Twitter algorithm looks at elements such as retweets, favorites, and interaction with the tweets. In other words, if something gets a lot of attention it might be determined to be a top tweet.

3. What is a “Twitter bot” and how do they influence the news that people receive?

A Twitter bot is a program that is created to automatically posts, retweets, or follows others on Twitter. In the past, Twitter bots were used to try to make a tweet seem more popular. Recently they have been used to purposely spread fake news.

4. Why do people often inadvertently spread fake news on twitter?

People often read the tweet and share if they think that they agree with what it says; even when the tweet refers to an article, study, or source, many people don't ever click through to read it. If they like the sound of the tweet, and especially if it agrees with their political leanings, they retweet it.

5. What steps can you take to examine a tweet to see if it is credible?

1. Click through to examine the profile of the source of the tweet. Do they have any biases? Do they belong to groups that might have specific goals? If so, the tweet might still be credible, but it is important to note any agendas that people might have.

2. Click on the link to the actual article. What do you notice there? Is it a real article? Does it match the headline or the tweet? If they are not the same, the article may have been taken out of context on purpose (with the assumption that many people will retweet without ever reading the article itself).

3. Check the time of tweet. If someone claims to have been at an important event, for example, does the time of the tweet validate that claim?

4. Check on studies or sources of the tweet. Do they cite a specific study or source for their tweet? Can you click on the study? Can you verify the study or source in other places by googling it? If you can find the study mentioned in more than one legitimate news source, then you can trust it. If the link is to an actual peer reviewed independent study, then you can also likely trust it. If the tweet just says something vague like “studies show” or refers to another piece of information that is passed off as fact, such as “millions of people are voting illegally” without citing or referring to any evidence, and if you cannot verify the claim by finding it on reputable news sources, then it is likely not credible.

5. Look into the group that is putting out the tweet. What is the goal of the group or their political leaning? Everyone has some political leaning, even the most objective news sources, but some have strong partisan leanings. They could still be telling the truth in their tweet, but you will better judge what they have to say if you know why they are saying it.

Information Handout: News

1. How can a reader distinguish between an opinion piece and a news article?

In reputable news sources, opinion articles are always identified as such. They might be labeled opinion, editorial, or op-ed. Well written opinion pieces also have clearly stated arguments.

2. How can readers examine and verify news stories?

1. Some false news stories or hoaxes appear on snopes.com. Checking there is a good place to start. Again, googling the story and seeing if it has been covered by reputable sources is another good test.

2. Think about the emotional response that the story evokes. If the story seems to appeal to emotions, especially anger or outrage, be wary. (Though some legitimate stories may make you angry, they are usually written with a less inflammatory tone.)

3. Examine the quotes in the story. What do you notice about the quotes in the story? Who says them? Why should we trust those people? Who are they? If famous or well-known people are attributed with a quote, can you find it in other places? Have their words been taken out of context or somehow manipulated to suggest that they are saying something that they didn't actually say? Are all of the quotes for one side of the story? Has an attempt been made to get context or quotes from the other side of the issue?

4. Check out the comments. If there are lots of people saying that the story is fake, perhaps they are on to something.

5. Compare the headline to the article. Click-bait headlines—which are designed to get people to click through to an article so that they will see advertisements or otherwise bring traffic to a site—often don't actually relate to the content of an article. Again, if the emotion evoked by the headline is outrage or anger, be wary.

6. Watch for sweeping generalizations about a group or side of an issue. Quality news reporting might make statements about individuals or groups, but it won't make the kind of antagonistic statements designed to get people angry. Objectivity is the goal of most reputable news sources.

7. Check to see if other reputable sources are reporting on the same topic. If it comes up elsewhere, it might be true, but if you can only find the story in one location, especially if it is a nationally relevant story, then it is likely not true.

Information Handout: News Websites

1. What are some well-known legitimate news websites?

The New York Times and The Washington Post are perhaps the most respected news sources you can find. Others include The Wall Street Journal, PBS, NPR, CNN, and the major network news outlets, ABC, etc.

2. How can readers examine and verify news websites?

1. Do a google search for the website. Before you even start reading, it is a good idea to check out what is being said about the website elsewhere. Act like a professional fact checker and decide if the website is worthwhile before jumping into a story.

2. Look at the domain name. Some false news websites choose their name to look like a legitimate source in order to confuse people. For example, abcnews.com.co has been set up to appear as if it is abcnews.com, but it is not.

3. Examine what is told about the people behind the scenes. Can you find a way to contact the website? Are there names given for publishers, editors, or authors? If you do a google search for those people, what comes up? Can you find their credentials? Are they real people?

4. Examine the purpose of the website. If the website has a stated partisan goal, then it is always beneficial to read any news it gives with that goal in mind.

5. Check out the “about us” section. Who are these people? Are they real? What does the “about us” section tell you about possible biases or goals?

6. Check to see if the headlines match up with the stories. Often, fake news creators use click-bait type headlines which are designed to get people to share or tweet the piece without really examining the actual article. If the headline is designed to get an emotional response out of readers but the article doesn't relate, then likely it is not a credible source of news.

7. Look at the emotional content of the articles. Does the website generally use techniques to get an emotional response like all caps, angry language, or a call to action? Do the tones of the pieces insight an emotional response—specifically anger or outrage? If so, it is likely not a credible source of news.

8. Look at the design of the website. Many fake news or hoax websites have become more sophisticated recently, but many still are overrun with advertisements. If the design of the website is cheap, overly cluttered, or unprofessional in an “I know it when I see it” way, that is another clue that it is not a reputable site.

9. Check out the website’s social media pages. Do they have “click bait” that entices readers to read based on their emotions (usually anger)? Do they try to get people riled up or upset about stories? If so, that is another sign that it is not a good source of news.

10. Check the date of the story. Often, fake news will take something that once happened but try to pass it off as a current or recent event. It might have happened in the past, but it couldn't happen now. This might include politicians making statements that are taken out of context when read as current news.

11. Make sure that you're not on a satire or humor news website. If you read a site such as The Onion as real news, you won't be the first to be tricked into believing that you are reading a straight news website. Most satirical sites will tell readers that they are reading humor, but not all of them will make that identification easy to find.

12. Think about your own biases. This one is tricky—it's easier to see bias when you read news articles by people with whom you don't already agree. Many fake news stories have been shared by people who are eager to believe the false news because it reaffirms what they already believe.

Information Handout: Facebook

1. Why are people more likely to believe stories shared on Facebook?

Often, what people see on Facebook was shared by friends or family, so they are more likely to believe the stories. Additionally, the Facebook algorithm favors sources or people that we interact with, so we are already predisposed to agree with what we see.

2. What is a "Facebook echo chamber"?

The term "echo chamber" refers to what happens when our social media feed is made more and more narrow showing us less diversity of opinion. The factors that contribute to this include personal choices to unfollow people when we don't agree with their views or opinions as well as the Facebook algorithm which shows us more of what we like (and less of what we don't.)

3. Why is Facebook an especially dangerous place for fake news?

Like with Twitter, when a story goes viral on Facebook it can spread exponentially, which means that people spread it faster than it can be verified. Right now, news stories are being curated by algorithms rather than people, so fake news can easily slip through the cracks.

4. How can you examine Facebook news stories?

1. Look for the blue check that signifies a Facebook verified page. This means that the post comes from who it says it does (often a famous or well-known person).

2. Look at the source of the article. If it is a website, you can then apply the criteria for examining a website.

3. Look for the article in mainstream sources. Often, a simple google search will reveal if the story is a hoax or a rumor. If you can find it in more than one legitimate journalistic source, then it is likely credible.

5. How do you report a fake news story on Facebook?

Facebook has installed a system for reporting fake news. First, click on the little down-pointing arrow at the corner of the post. Then pull down to "report post." After that, click on "I think it shouldn't be on Facebook" and finally, when given the option, click on "It's a false news story."

Information Handout: Advertisements

1. What is an advertisement?

An advertisement is anything that tries to convince a consumer to buy something.

2. What is an advertorial?

An advertorial is an advertisement that looks like an objective editorial piece; it is paid for by a company that is trying to sell something, but it is made to appear as if it is part of the magazine or other media.

3. How can you tell that you are looking at an advertorial and not looking at a news article?

When media outlets run advertorials, they are legally required to identify to readers that they are reading an advertisement. They will identify somewhere that it is an advertisement; they might write something like “special promotional feature” or “special advertising section.”

4. What is a native advertisement?

A native ad is basically a different name for an advertorial, but often it is a little sneakier. One technique that native ads use to further confuse readers into thinking that they are reading content created by the magazine or other media outlet is that they only publish an ad once, suggesting that it is original content.

5. What is a sponsored post?

A sponsored post is a post that a blogger has been paid to write about a product; it is often a review of the product.

6. How can you tell that you are reading a sponsored post or watching a sponsored vlog?

Bloggers and vloggers are legally required to disclose their relationship to the product—if, for example, they were given a free product and then asked to review it, or if they were paid for the post or video, they have to let readers/viewers know somewhere in the post or video.

7. What are some of the ways that advertisements try to sway a buyer?

There are many strategies that advertisers use, including but not limited to the following: repetition, when advertisers hope that familiarity with their brand or product will convince you to buy; claims, when advertisers make claims about how you will benefit from the products; bandwagon, when advertisers want you believe that you should do something because everyone else is doing it; testimonial, when an everyday person tells you that you should buy something because of its benefits.

Project Rubric

	4	3	2	1
Content	Content is complete and all information is included in the project. Explanations are thorough and easy to follow.	Content is mostly complete and almost all information is included in the project. Explanations are easy to follow.	Content is somewhat complete and some information is included in the project. Explanations are somewhat easy to follow.	Content is mostly missing and most information is lacking in the project. Explanations are mostly not easy to follow.
Creativity	The project demonstrates an exceptional amount of creativity which aids in the delivery of the material.	The project demonstrates creativity which aids in the delivery of the material.	The project demonstrates some creativity which aids in the delivery of the material.	The project demonstrates little creativity which aids in the delivery of the material.
Organization	The material is shown in a logical and organized way that makes sense.	The material is mostly shown in a logical and organized way that makes sense.	The material is shown in a somewhat logical and organized way that somewhat makes sense.	The material is mostly not shown in a logical and organized way that makes sense.
Visuals	Visuals provide insightful and interesting real life examples of the content and aid significantly in the project.	Visuals provide real-life examples of the content and aid significantly in the project.	Visuals provide some real-life examples of the content and aid significantly in the project.	Visuals are mostly lacking.

Essay Rubric

	4	3	2	1
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Word Choice	The author uses vivid words and phrases. The choice and placement of words seems accurate, natural, and appropriate.	The author uses vivid words and phrases. The choice and placement of words is inaccurate at times and/or seems overdone or inappropriate for the subject matter.	The author uses words that communicate clearly, but the writing lacks variety and seems inappropriate to the subject matter.	The writer uses a limited vocabulary. Jargons or clichés are not used properly and detract from the meaning.
Sentence Structure, Grammar, Mechanics, & Spelling	All sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length. The author makes very few errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling	Most sentences are well constructed and have varied structure and length. The author makes a few errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling, but these mistakes do not interfere with understanding.	Most sentences are well constructed, but they have a similar structure and/or length. The author makes several errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling, that interfere with understanding.	Sentences sound awkward, are distractingly repetitive, or are difficult to understand. The author makes numerous errors in grammar, mechanics, and/or spelling that interfere with understanding.

The Infodemic: Covid 19 and the Real Dangers of Fake News



Essential Questions

- What are some of the rumors about Coronavirus and how have they been spread?
- Why is fake news about COVID 19 especially dangerous?
- What should we all do to make sure that we have the correct information about the corona virus?

Objective: The real fear inspired by an actual pandemic is enough to get people to turn off their critical thinking skills and let their decisions be dictated by fake news. Instead we are going to learn how to explore the myths and misunderstandings about COVID 19, see why this kind of fake news can be so dangerous, and think about what we can do to stop the “infodemic.”

The Infodemic: Vocabulary Sheet

Start by filling out this vocabulary sheet with the definitions of the terms. (You can use an online dictionary for this exercise but make sure to write the definitions in your own words.)

Conspiracy theory

Huckster

Reputable

Scapegoat

Scientific Method

Vetted Sources

Virus

Xenophobia

Click on this link to watch this video from [NBCnews](#)

Questions on “Coronavirus misinformation: When a pandemic leads to an ‘infodemic’” from nbcnews.com March 13, 2020

1. What are some of the different kinds of misinformation that have spread along with the virus? Describe a few of the kinds of rumors.

2. What happened in a small town in Ukraine in February as a result of rumors spreading in new ways? How were those rumors spread?

3. What is one way that individuals are “manufacturing rumors for profit” or trying to make money by spreading false information?

4. What is being done by social media sites and search engines to help stop the spread of misinformation about COVID 19?

Click on this link to watch this video from [NYtimes](#)

Questions on “Coronavirus Racism Infected My High School” an opinion film published by The New York Times on March 14, 2020

1. Describe the racist statements that Katherine Oung, and her friend heard from their classmates after the Coronavirus had spread to the U.S.

2. Why does Katherin say about her classmate, “it is no wonder that she feels this way”? (What do the video clips from news sources suggest about how Chinese Americans have been portrayed in the media since the outbreak of the virus?)

3. What does it mean that “historically pandemics have stoked xenophobia”? Explain in your own words. What are some examples of xenophobia during past pandemics?

4. In the video, Katherine Oung says, “It is important that people have accurate information on how to stay safe.” Why might scapegoating a specific group of people actually be dangerous for others, including those doing the scapegoating?

Click on the link to read this article from the [New Yorker](#)

Questions on “Trump’s Dangerous Messaging About a Possible Coronavirus Treatment” by Paige Williams - March 27, 2020 issue of The New Yorker

1. For what is chloroquine usually used? What are some of the side effects of chloroquine?
2. How did Gregory Rigano misrepresent the findings of the French study on chloroquine?
3. How was Rigano’s false information about the drug spread on Twitter?
4. How did other media outlets quickly try to stop the dangerous rumors?
5. How did Trump “run with” the misinformation about the drugs?
6. What reason does the article give for why we can trust the opinions of Anthony Fauci?

7. What were some of the other “troubling” declarations that Trump made?

8. What are some of the possible side effects from HCQ?

9. Why is the French study not a complete source of information?

10. What was Marino worried that sick people might do if they followed Trump’s advice?

11. What process does Marino suggest that we follow to find a cure for COVID 19?

Click on the link to read this article from the [New York Times](#)

Questions on “Why Coronavirus Conspiracy Theories Flourish. And Why It Matters.” April 8, 2020

1. What has the Coronavirus given rise to and why?
2. What makes this pandemic different from all the others in past history?
3. What are the reasons that people are drawn to conspiracies according to Dr. Douglas?.
4. What did president Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil promote and what was done about it?
5. What is “really, really dangerous” according to Mr. Brookie and why is it so dangerous?

The “Rumor Control” Page of the FEMA and the CDC: [FAQ on Corona Virus](#)

The “Myth Busters” Page of the WHO: [Advice-for-Public](#)

Questions for Reaction Paper on CDC & WHO MythBuster Pages

Choose a specific myth, misunderstanding, or fake news item about COVID 19 from the FEMA or WHO myth buster pages. Then, use the following questions to write a reaction to that story.

1. Which myth did you choose and why were you drawn to that piece of misinformation?
2. Quickly summarize in your own words the myth you chose.
3. Why might believing this information be dangerous for people?
4. Based on what you have learned in the unit about cognitive bias and the spread of fake news, why do you think that people believed that idea?

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