

TOPIC BACKGROUNDER

News & Media Literacy

What to Know

Media consumption has become the norm rather than the exception for today's youth. And with the recent influx of unsubstantiated news circulating on social media and other online channels, young people often struggle to decipher credible sources from sponsored ad content. From clickbait headlines and bogus sources to fake news sites, today's digital landscape is as scattered with techniques designed to deceive and manipulate as it is filled with opportunities to inspire and educate. Successfully navigating today's media requires students to have a broad range of literacy skills to sift through the noise.

"Children have difficulty determining whether a news story is fake; less than half (44 percent) of children agree that they can tell fake news stories from real ones. And, among children who have shared a news story online in the last six months, 31 percent say they shared a story that they later found out was wrong or inaccurate."

Common Sense, News and America's Kids: How Young People Perceive and Are Impacted by the News, 2017

Why Teach It

Help your students ...

- think critically about the information they're consuming.
- become active consumers vs. passive consumers.
- distinguish between credible and not credible sources.
- build awareness around conscious and unconscious biases in media consumption and creation.
- better understand media as merely a construction shaped by the creator's opinions, assumptions, and perceptions.
- foster responsible media creation by understanding the use of effective communication and how one's messages can affect and influence others.

What to Look For

Signs of Fake News

- Advertorial content
- Viral videos
- Unusual URLs
- Low quality
- Clickbait
- Unflattering or manipulated photos
- Implications of guilt by association
- Unclear creator or author
- Annoying, intrusive ads

Signs of Legitimate News

- Standards and ethics
- Full disclosure
- Objective sources
- Trustworthy research
- Attribution

Encourage Your Students to Think About These Key Questions:

Who created this?

Why did they create it?

Whom is the message for?

What techniques are being used to make this message credible or believable?

What details were left out, and why?

How did the message make me feel?

Key Vocabulary

information literacy: the ability to find, evaluate, and synthesize information from a variety of sources. Information literacy includes both digital literacy and media literacy.

digital literacy: the skills and perspectives needed to read and write using a range of digital devices, typically in a digital environment.

media literacy: the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and communicate using information in all forms. Media literacy comprises competency in understanding and using fundamental dimensions of communication, including but not limited to: authorship, message construction, message purpose (both implicit and explicit), audience, aesthetic and technical elements of production, and message effects.

news literacy: the application of critical-thinking skills to the identification and consumption of news and journalistic information. News literacy includes skills in analyzing and evaluating the reliability of news information, specifically in discerning fact from opinion, bias, or agenda.

fake news: completely fabricated information manipulated to resemble credible journalism. The purpose and intent of fake news is to drive traffic or clicks to hoax sites, hyper-partisan blogs, and the like.

clickbait: the use of attention-grabbing headlines and outrageous claims to lure readers into clicking on what would normally be uninteresting content. Clickbait is a digital-marketing technique that helps produce higher click-through rates.

“Whether you call it media literacy, news literacy, digital literacy, information literacy, it all deals with building critical-thinking skills.”

Clark Bell, McCormick Foundation