Media Literacy

New Jersey Center for Civic Education
Rutgers, The State University
http://civiced.rutgers.edu
The vision for NJ Student Learning Standards for Social Studies (2020)

An education in social studies fosters a population that:
• Is civic-minded, globally aware, and socially responsible;
• Exemplifies fundamental values of democracy and human rights through active participation in local, state, national, and global communities;
• Makes informed decisions about local, state, national, and global events based on inquiry and analysis;
• Considers multiple perspectives, values diversity, and promotes cultural understanding;
• Recognizes the relationships between people, places, and resources as well as the implications of an interconnected global economy;
• Applies an understanding of critical media literacy skills when utilizing technology to learn, communicate, and collaborate with diverse people around the world; and
• Discerns fact from falsehood and critically analyzes information for validity and relevance.
How do we help our students to become informed and reasoned decision-makers?
Fake News is not a new thing…

Lithograph of “The Ruby Amphitheater on the Moon”

On August 21, 1835 *The New York Sun* reported that an astronomer used “hydro-oxygen magnifiers” to find life on the moon. The paper announced it was fake a month later

“Reporters with Fake News” 1894 by Frederick Burr Oper
Where do you get your news/information? Where do your students get news/information?

- Newspapers
- Radio
- Television News
- Television talk shows
- Television “comedy” shows
- Cable television
- Friends and relatives
- Online
- Social Media
News consumption on social media

% of U.S. adults who get news from social media ...

Don't get digital news

- Never: 21%
- Rarely: 18%
- Sometimes: 30%
- Often: 23%

2020: 7%  2021: 9%  2022: 8%

Note: Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.
PEW RESEARCH CENTER
Where do you get your news?

2017 New Jersey Student Mock Election Student Issue Question Responses. Sample only includes those students who chose to respond.
Figuring out what is true is not so easy these days…

- What is “fake news” and what is “real news”?
- What is “fact” and what is “opinion”?
- What sources can we trust and what sources should we be wary of?
- How can we identify efforts to confuse and distract?
- Why is this important?
Media Literacy Standards

Starting in 2024-25, there will be media literacy standards from the NJDOE that should help you in your classroom. They are focused on:

- The research process and how information is created and produced
- Critical thinking and using information resources
- Research methods, including the difference between primary and secondary sources
- The difference between facts, points of view, and opinions
- Accessing peer-reviewed print and digital library resources
- The economic, legal and social issues surrounding the use of information
- The ethical production of information
Three Types of “Fake News”

● **Fabricated News** - completely made up without any basis in fact

● **Biased News** - stating an opinion as factual news

● **Distracting News** - accurate news intended to change the focus of an ongoing issue, as well as clickbait articles.
Fabricated News - Definition

This is what we mostly think of as “fake news”: reporting that has no basis in fact and is simply false.

In 2016, an entirely false story about Morgan Freeman calling for the jailing of Hillary Clinton spread on the news.

In 2020, QAnon, which the FBI identified as a potential domestic terrorist threat, is spreading unfounded conspiracy theories about prominent Democrats.

Morgan Freeman: ‘Jailing Hillary’ Best Way To ‘Restore Public Faith In Govt’


The best way to restore public faith in government institutions is to “send Hillary to prison”, according to Hollywood icon Morgan Freeman, who warns that unless the former First Lady’s crimes are seen to be punished, “everyday Americans will forever know, deep down, that there is one law for those with money and power, and another for the rest of us.”

“Hillary should be in jail for her unlawful deeds and President Trump should absolutely, absolutely make sure this happens to send the very strong message that no-one, and I mean no-one, is above the law in the United States of America,” Morgan Freeman said in New York while promoting National Geographic’s new docuseries The Story of Us.
Distracting News - Definition

- It is easy for a story to get drowned out in social media.
- Distracting news about irrelevant topics, such as what someone looked like or what they wore, can be purposely used to distract people from the real issues.
- This junk news is a waste of time, but in more serious ways it breaks down our civic dialogue. This news is often built to reinforce our specific bubble.
- How can we make sure that our students know what to focus on?
“Biased” news has always existed: it is new analysis/opinion or propaganda. It is not factual news at all.

When someone finds an article too slanted or biased, they may try to invalidate it by calling it “fake news”.

The issue for “biased” news is how to understand the difference between news (facts) and news analysis (opinions).
Confirmation Bias

“Confirmation bias” is our brain’s tendency to seek out information that confirms things we already think we know.

It keeps each of us in our own “boxes” of information and weeds out anything that does not fit with our own biases.
Confirmation Bias

- It can result in ignoring what the facts actually say if they conflict with what we think we know (see image).
- Help your students learn to recognize their own biases so that they will examine competing opinions and ideas and avoid drawing questionable conclusions.
- Here is a lesson from [https://www.learningforjustice.org/framesworks/digital-literacy](https://www.learningforjustice.org/framesworks/digital-literacy)
- Have your students take an op-ed piece (or two) and ask them to highlight what they feel is news and what is news analysis.
- Then have the students compare who highlighted what and why to see their confirmation biases.
Print Media

- We need to develop the skills to be able to separate fact from fake, biased or distracting news.

- Print media is regulated:
  - Print media must clearly separate “News” articles from “Opinion” articles.
  - Print media controls what its reporters write and is responsible (and liable) for the veracity of what it prints.
  - Libel and slander are NOT protected speech. You can sue a publication for defamation if it published a false fact about you and you suffered damage as a result—such as a lost job, a decline in revenue, or a tarnished reputation. If you are an ordinary, private person, you must show that the news outlet was negligent (careless).
Television and Radio

- Broadcast media (not cable) are subject to significant federal regulation because, according to U.S. law, the public owns the airwaves and television and radio broadcasters must get a license.
- For many years a federal "fairness doctrine" required broadcast media to provide fair coverage of political candidates and political opinions. The requirement has been removed but the practice continues, which is why you have so many talking heads with "differing opinions."
- Broadcast media, including cable TV, are subject to liability for falsehoods the same as print media. E.g., Dominion Voting System sued Fox News for defamation for its claims that its voting machines were rigged and that's why Trump lost in 2020. Fox settled for almost $800 million after discovery that made it clear that Fox knew what it was saying was false.
- Today's problem is that news has become entertainment and entertainment (e.g., Saturday Night Live, The Daily Show, etc.) has become a source of news.
Digital/Online Media

- Most of our young people get their news, as well as their information for their class assignment, from digital media.

- Digital/Online Media is NOT subject to Federal Communication Commission requirements.

- Digital/Online Media is easy to access and has so much information.

- How can we help our students to identify and use reliable sources of online information?
Search Smarter: Exercise “Click Restraint”

- Too often students click on the first “hit” in any Internet search. This may not be the best source but could be a sponsored item or misinformation.
- Teach students to carefully investigate the list of potential sites before choosing to click.
- https://cor.stanford.edu/videos/better-info-click-restraint
Use Wikipedia Wisely

● Wikipedia can be a good starting point for gathering information if you use it wisely

● Check the sources in the footnotes and follow them

● Go to https://cor.stanford.edu/videos/how-to-use-wikipedia-wisely
HOW TO SPOT FAKE NEWS

CONSIDER THE SOURCE
Click away from the story to investigate the site, its mission and its contact info.

READ BEYOND
Headlines can be outrageous in an effort to get clicks. What’s the whole story?

CHECK THE AUTHOR
Do a quick search on the author. Are they credible? Are they real?

SUPPORTING SOURCES?
Click on those links. Determine if the info given actually supports the story.

CHECK THE DATE
Reposting old news stories doesn’t mean they’re relevant to current events.

IS IT A JOKE?
If it is too outlandish, it might be satire. Research the site and author to be sure.

CHECK YOUR BIASES
Consider if your own beliefs could affect your judgement.

ASK THE EXPERTS
Ask a librarian, or consult a fact-checking site.

IFLA
International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions
Deep Fakes

• Deep fake videos are becoming more prevalent, and the technology to create them is improving.

• https://youtu.be/I8c0NgTKFW8

• Deep fake video of President Zelensky urging Ukrainians to surrender.

• Fortunately, the technology is not yet foolproof, and other technology is evolving to combat deep fakes.
15 Hints to Spot a Deep Fake Video

1. Unnatural eye movement
2. Unnatural facial expressions
3. Awkward facial-feature positioning
4. A lack of emotion
5. Awkward-looking body or posture
6. Unnatural body movement
7. Unnatural coloring
8. Hair that doesn’t look real
9. Teeth that don’t look real
10. Blurring or misalignment
11. Inconsistent noise or audio
12. Images that look unnatural when slowed down
13. Hashtag discrepancies
14. Digital fingerprints
15. Reverse image searches
Strategies to Identify Fabricated News

1. Consider the source: Who made it (author and publisher)?
2. When was it made?
3. Why was it made?
4. How is it written (are there lots of exclamation points to get your attention!!!)?
5. What was your emotional reaction?
6. What makes sense?
7. Consider other sources on this topic--read laterally.

Media Literacy Resources at The Newseum

“Ten Questions for Fake News Detection,” thenewsliteracyproject.org

IFLA also made a nice flyer of fake news procedures and translated it into over 35 languages!
Teaching for Justice

- Teaching for Justice (formerly Teaching Tolerance) has a **Digital and Civic Literacy** Framework to help students understand how digital information comes to them and how to evaluate online searches.
The News Literacy Project

Has a variety of resources and lessons for the classroom, for example:

- Arguments and Evidence
- Conspiratorial Thinking
- Evaluating Science based Claims
- Making Sense of Data
- Misinformation
- Understanding Bias
- What is News

at https://get.checkology.org/
Stanford University: Civic online Reasoning

Offers a series of free, online lessons for you and your students to help assess the reliability of online resources at

Home | Civic Online Reasoning
(Stanford.edu)
Lateral Reading

To help determine the reliability of a source, read laterally rather than simple reading down the page.

- https://www.learningforjustice.org/classroom-resources/lessons/choosing-reliable-sources
Climate Change: Which sources are reliable?

- The Institute for Energy Research
  https://www.instituteforenergyresearch.org/about/

- Journal of Climate Resilience and Climate Justice at MIT
  https://direct.mit.edu/crcj

- Yale Program on Climate Change Communication
  https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/for-educators/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwy5maBhDdARIsAMxrkw0LKrqjpbc0MqS_EFB3K8xIK9PlqH7l9UEe51qZGj6WNqVE4Ihl6sgaAsDZEALw_wcB

- Heartland Institute
  https://www.heartland.org/topics/climate-change/

- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
  https://www.ipcc.ch/
Criteria for Reading Laterally
Climate Change: Which sources are reliable?

- What is the source?
- What is the mission?
- Where does the funding come from?
- Who is the author? Check the bio or other publications
- Is it peer reviewed?
- Does it make sense?
Read Laterally
Climate Change: Which sources are reliable?

- The Institute for Energy Research
- Journal of Climate Resilience and Climate Justice at MIT
- Yale Program on Climate Change Communication
- The Heartland Institute
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
Social Media

- Sec. 230 of the Communications Act of 1996 provides immunity to online platforms from civil liability based on third-party content (with exceptions, such as federal crimes): "No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider."

- E.g., If you or I or *The New York Times* puts an article on Facebook, you or I or *The New York Times* is responsible for its veracity, not Facebook

- Social media earn large profits from their platforms and websites

- Large internet platforms use sophisticated opaque algorithms to determine the content their users see—to maximize the amount of time spent on platforms—help to spread false claims, some promoting violence, to millions of people.

- Social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat, Reddit, and other online platforms) are free to set their own practices and rules on what can be posted and spread.
Social media is the main source of news for today’s students

- What problems with social media have you encountered with your students?
- How can we help students navigate this unregulated area?
- Have students practice click restraint, identify the source, check a variety of sources, and use critical thinking skills with social media
- Teach students “don’t amplify until you verify”
Bots and Trolls

The Clemson University Media Forensics Hubs offers Spot the Troll, a quiz where students can practice with actual social media content to determine if it is from a legitimate account or an Internet troll.
Critical Thinking:

Logical Fallacies

Errors in reasoning that invalidate the argument

Logic: another thing that penguins aren’t very good at.
“In a republican nation, whose citizens are to be led by reason and persuasion and not by force, the art of reasoning becomes of first importance.” - Thomas Jefferson
Why Teach How to Identify Logical Fallacies?

- Critical thinking about statements provides a means for addressing some problematic statements that may be stated in classroom discussions. It allows critiques according to *structure*, rather than *content*. It also helps avoid the problem of "vulgar relativity".

- Logic is a key part of media literacy and critical thinking, which are essential for addressing controversial issues.

- Logical fallacies are committed by politicians and partisan pundits, either with the intent to deceive or as a result of sloppy thinking, leading to false conclusions and untrue positions. Students need the tools to recognize this.

- Similar to other media literacy skills, this can also help students become better consumers and protect their financial security.
Ad Hominem

- This is when the statement falsely directs attention from claim evidence to the person making the claim.
- Candidate X attempts to discredit Candidate Y’s economic policies by describing her as a career politician.
Strawman

- This is replacing the original claim with an extreme or exaggerated version. When a candidate cannot refute the opponent’s original claim, he/she may attack an extreme version easier to knock down, as a strawman would be easier to knock down.

- Candidate Y criticizes a particular (unpopular) treaty. Candidate X claims Candidate Y will rip up all of the nation’s security treaties endangering the nation.
Red Herring

● These are intentional diversions to redirect the conversation away from an argument the candidate doesn’t want to address.

● During a debate, Candidate X identifies potential conflicts of interest on the part of Candidate Y. Candidate Y starts talking about the age of Candidate X.
Slippery Slope

- A slippery slope is when the candidate *falsely* posits a sequence leading to an unfavorable outcome.
- Candidate X says if we pass regulations prohibiting dumping in rivers, the chemical industry will go bankrupt. If the chemical industry goes bankrupt, the economy will collapse. If the economy collapses, America will be weak and conquered by enemies. Therefore, we should not pass regulations prohibiting dumping in rivers.
- This one is tricky. Our example was preposterous to make it easy to understand. However, in the “real world” if one can show evidence that a sequence does lead to unfavorable consequences, a slippery slope doesn’t occur.
The candidate attempts to redefine terms to rule out contrary views.

Candidate X asserts that no “true American” can support a peace treaty. Candidate Y points out that Person W, an American war hero and diplomat, does support a peace treaty. Candidate X states that this just goes to show that Person W is not a “true American”.

**Question Begging Definition**

- **WORD REDEFINITION FALLACY**
  - PLAYER IS REWRITING THE STANDARD DICTIONARY DEFINITION OF A WORD TO ADVANCE HIS ARGUMENT
Appeal To Fear

● This fallacy occurs when the candidate, in the absence of evidence or reason, plays upon people’s fears to damage an opponent or discredit a policy.

● Candidate X asserts that “if we continue the past administration's immigration policies terrorists will be ravaging our streets and taking citizens hostage.”
Bandwagon

- This is the fallacy of basing the truth of a position on a large number of followers.
- Candidate X says that his policy of printing lots of extra money is sound because many people say so.
False Disjunct

- In our deeply divided partisan era, this one is especially problematic.
- This is the fallacy of claiming that a combination of possibilities cannot occur. While some options are indeed mutually exclusive, that is not always the case.
- You’re either with us or against us.
- You’re voting for either Republican or Democratic candidates.
- Candidate X is either on the side of the police or Black Lives Matters.
- This fallacy is used by those who disdain compromise and may profit from exploiting wedge issues.
NOW LET’S TRY A FEW

● Take a few minutes to discuss them with your table. Identify the fallacy. Be prepared to explain your reasoning.

● Reconvene as a class to briefly discuss and compare notes.
During a discussion of anti-Semitic chants by neo-Nazi marchers in Charlottesville, a student says “what about the yelling and looting during the Newark riots in the ’60s?”

What is wrong with this statement?

This fallacy is . . .

A Red Herring
- Of course the student council president is in favor of a reduced homework policy, she’s a student.

- What is wrong with this statement?

- This fallacy is . . .

Ad Hominem
During a party policy conference, a Republican states that it is the belief of Republicans that the 2020 election was fraudulently stolen and there should be tighter restrictions on voting. Someone points out that a former Bush administration official stated the election was fair, without widespread fraud, and that the GOP should increase voter rights to attract diverse voter groups. The Republican then states “That just proves he’s a RINO (Republican In Name Only)”

What is wrong with this statement?

The fallacy is . . .

**Question Begging Definition**
President Biden announces his pledge to have the United States reduce carbon emissions, part of which may suggest a reduction in meat production. A right-wing media commentator announces “America has to stop eating meat” and a colleague says the “elites will mandate a 90% meat reduction, limiting Americans to one burger per month.” (based on a true scenario).

What is wrong with this statement?

This fallacy is . . .

\textbf{Strawman}
● “Recreational drug use should be legal because it’s completely harmless. I know lots of kids who say so.”
● What is wrong with this statement?
● The fallacy is . . .

Bandwagon
“If bakeries have to make cakes for LGBQT couples, it will destroy the institution of marriage as we know it. If marriage is destroyed, families will fall apart across America. If families fall apart, society will collapse and the United States will cease to exist.”

What is wrong with this statement?

This fallacy is . . .

**Slippery Slope**
• “Why are we discussing whether a protester has the right to kneel during the national anthem? You’re either a patriot for this country and its policies or against it.”

• What is wrong with this statement?

• This fallacy is . . .

**False Disjunct**
“We shouldn’t be discussing gun control. Crime is out of control and people need to defend themselves. Criminals are emboldened and out to get us! Do you want to be the victim of a home invasion?”

What is wrong with this statement?

This fallacy is . . .

Appeal to Fear
There are many more logical fallacies

This is only a sample of some logical fallacies to give you the idea of how to evaluate some statements you may hear from politicians, activists, parents, and especially your students.

Other fallacies include:

- False Alternatives
- False Analogy
- Weasel Words
- Circular Arguments, including Question-Begging Definitions
- ...and many more.
The bottom line: Help your students develop and use their critical thinking skills!

These are life skills they will need as consumers of media and other products and as citizens who need to make reasoned decision-makers in elections.
Go to our [website](#) for additional resources

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