Media Literacy

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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.
The 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.
Fabricated News - Strategies

Students need to:
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!
“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).
Biased News - Strategies

- Have students check their own biases
- Take an op-ed piece (or two) and ask students to highlight what they feel is news and what is news analysis
- Then students compare who highlighted what and why

**THE CONFIRMATION BIAS**

- What the facts say
- What confirms your beliefs
- Undervalued
- Overvalued
- Foolish

Image Source: James Clear

Facing Ferguson: News Literacy in a Digital Age

Facing History: Facing Ferguson
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?
Distracting News - Strategies

- 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 Hamilton 68 Dashboard, a project of the Alliance for Securing Democracy at the Marshall Fund, provides a summary analysis of the narratives and topics promoted by Russian, Chinese and Iranian government officials and state-funded media on Twitter, YouTube, state-sponsored news websites, including bots and trolls.
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.
Critical Thinking:

Logical Fallacies

Errors in reasoning that invalidate the argument
Critical Thinking: Logical Fallacies

- Critical thinking about statements provides a means for addressing some problematic statements that may be stated in classroom discussions.
- It is a key part of media literacy, which is essential for addressing controversial issues.
- It is an important component of critical thinking, which again is necessary for addressing controversial issues.
- It can help students become better consumers of both the media and advertising.
A student says:

- 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? Why doesn’t prove her/his point?
- This fallacy is …
Red Herring

- An intentional diversion to redirect the conversation away from a topic that someone does not want to address.
- E.g., 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.
- E.g., During a class discussion about whether white privilege exists and whether racial reparations are owed, a student starts to talk about crime in the cities.
A student says:

- Of course the student council president is in favor of a reduced homework policy, she’s a student.
- What is wrong with this statement? Why doesn’t prove her/his point?
- This fallacy is ...
AD HOMINEM

- When the statement falsely directs attention from the argument to the person making the claim.
- E.g., “Of course Professor X is in favor of racial reparations (or Black Lives Matter). She’s African-American!”
A student says:

- During a discussion of whether the U.S. should admit vetted Afghan refugees who assisted our troops, a student says “We can’t just abolish our immigration policies, open our borders and let everyone in. It will be crime and chaos!”
- What is wrong with this statement? Why doesn’t prove her/his point?
- This fallacy is …
Strawman

- 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.

- E.g., A member of Congress introduces legislation to limit access to high capacity automatic weapons, similar to what was used in a recent atrocity. A cable news host tells viewers its a bad bill because it will ban all handguns.
A student says:

- “If bakeries have to make cakes for LGBTQ couples, it will destroy the institution of marriage as we know it. If marriage is destroyed, families will fall apart. If families fall apart, society will collapse and the United States will cease to exist.”
- What is wrong with this statement? Why doesn’t prove her/his point?
- This fallacy is …
Slippery Slope

- A slippery slope is when the candidate *false*ly posits a sequence leading to an unfavorable outcome.
- E.g., 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.
A student says:

- “We shouldn’t be discussing gun control. Crime is out of control and people need to defend themselves. Do you want to be the victim of a home invasion?”
- What is wrong with this statement? Why doesn’t prove her/his point?
- This fallacy is …
Appeal To Fear

- This fallacy occurs when a person, in the absence of evidence or reason, plays upon people’s fears to damage an opponent or discredit a policy.
- E.g., A cable news host asserts that “if we continue the past administration's immigration policies terrorists will be ravaging our streets and taking citizens hostage.”
**Student says:**

- “Recreational drug use should be legal because it’s harmless. I know lots of kids who say so.”
- What is wrong with this statement? Why doesn’t prove her/his point?
- The fallacy is . . .
Bandwagon

- Claiming something is true because it has a large number of followers.
- E.g., “White people are discriminated against in America today because 55% of white people think so. I have statistics to back it up*.”

*Source: NPR/Robert Wood Johnson Foundation/Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health: “Discrimination in America: Experiences and Views of White Americans.” Survey of 902 white U.S. adults conducted Jan. 26-April 9, 2017. The situational questions were asked of half of the sample, among those who have been in each situation. (For example, among whites who have ever applied to or attended college, 11 percent say they have been discriminated against because they are white.) The margin of error for the full white sample is +/- 4.7 percentage points.
A student says:

- “Why are we discussing whether a protester has the right to kneel during the national anthem? You’re either patriotic and for this country, or against it.”
- What is wrong with this statement? Why doesn’t prove her/his point?
- This fallacy is …
False Disjunct

- Claiming that a combination of possibilities cannot occur:
- You’re either with us or against us.
- You can only buy chocolate or vanilla or strawberry ice cream (anyone hear of the Neapolitan mix?)
- You’re voting for either Republican or Democratic candidates.
- Candidate X is either on the side of the police or Black Lives Matters.
There are many more logical fallacies:

- This is only a small sample to give you the idea of how to evaluate statements you have to recognize as valid.
  - Other fallacies include:
    - False Alternatives
    - False Analogy
    - Weasel Words
    - Circular Arguments, including Question-Begging Definitions
    - ...and many more.

- If you are interested, the New Jersey Center for Civic Education can design a workshop on this topic. Contact Robert O’Dell at ro205@scarletmail.rutgers.edu