



MEDIA LITERACY

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OVERVIEW

How do you teach the critical evaluation of information in an era of fake news and misinformation? What do we know about how our students evaluate information and engage with media? This lesson has students exploring the multiple questions they should ask when consuming, citing, or sharing information.

OBJECTIVES

- Students will have a more nuanced understanding of how all media is constructed and invite questions about authorship and intent.
- Given information on media deception and bias, students will identify specific techniques that are used to mislead or spread false information.
- Students will learn about disinformation.
- Given factsheets on various media literacy topics, students will collaborate and synthesize key points.

ENDURING UNDERSTANDING(S)

Students will take away some of the following enduring understandings:

- In a media saturated world, all media representations invite critical interpretation.
- There are specific fallacy techniques used in misleading the public.
- There are ways to evaluate the evidence behind a scientific claim.
- Gaslighting is when someone intentionally twists your perception of reality.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION(S)

- What are ways others seek to deceive, mislead, and spread false notions and beliefs?
- How do you recognize bad science reporting and faults in scientific studies?
- What is gaslighting?
- What are red flags that a news source is unreliable?
- How do you spot fake news?
- How do you determine if the sources you cite are accurate and reliable?

KEY ISSUES/CONCEPTS

- The Power of Words and Images
- Being aware of deceptive techniques
- Taking action to cite and propagate truth

For definitions related to this lesson see *Glossary of Terms, Places, and Personalities* at www.museumoftolerance.com/assets/documents/glossary-of-terms.pdf

SUBJECT AREA/CONTENT AREA CONNECTIONS

Social Studies, U. S. History, World History, Civics, Government, Politics, Global Studies, Digital Literacy

TIME/MATERIALS

- One period
- Copies of Handouts A through E for each student; they can be printed on front/back of paper so as to use only 3 sheets of paper per student
- Copy of the Exit Slip Handout for each student

PROCESS

STEP 1: INTRODUCTION

First, define what is meant by media literacy. We take our definition from Common Sense Media at www.commonensemedia.org.

Media literacy is an augmented conception of literacy that can respond to and reflect communication in the digital age. Media literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and communicate using information in all forms. Media literacy is composed of competencies 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.

A Jigsaw is a cooperative learning strategy that enables each student of a “home” group to specialize in one aspect of a topic, in this case, one of the Handouts about consuming, citing, or sharing information. The benefit of the Jigsaw is that peer teaching promotes discussion, problem-solving, and learning. Use of the Jigsaw strategy encourages cooperation and active learning that promotes valuing all students’ contributions. Find out more about cooperative learning by visiting these sites:

- An Overview of Cooperative Learning

<http://www.co-operation.org/what-is-cooperative-learning>

- Making Cooperative Learning Powerful

<http://www.ascd.org/publications/educational-leadership/oct14/vol72/num02/Making-Cooperative-Learning-Powerful.aspx>

Show students the short TED Talk video titled “Helping Students Identify Fake News with the Five C’s of Critical Consuming”. Find the video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xf8mjbVRqao>

Have students respond to the Stanford finding that only 25% of high school students were able to tell real news from fake news, were able to tell real photographs from fake ones, and tell the difference between authentic and staged videos. Ask them what they think about this finding.

Emphasize to students that being astute at media literacy helps them consume critically, think critically, and remind them that critical thinking citizens are good for democracy. As an example of this, pass out to each student the SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN Handout about persistent COVID-19 myths and why people believed them. Go over this handout with them, slowly reading each of the four myths and having them respond to them. Tell them they'll come back to this Handout later in the lesson. Emphasize to them, though, that these COVID-19 myths illustrate multiple important points about the importance of media literacy, namely that some people are easily led astray by false information using specific techniques.

Go over these Five C's of Critical Consuming with students after they view the video to make sure they understand the points:

- **Context:** Look at the context of the article. When was it written? Where does it come from? Have the events it is reporting on changed and is there new contextual evidence?
- **Credibility:** What is the credibility of the source? Does the site have a reputation for journalistic integrity? Does the author cite credible sources? Is it from a source that is well-known to be satirical, like The Onion? Is it on a list of Fake News sites? Is it an advertisement posing as a news story?
- **Construction:** Analyze the construction of the article. What is the bias? Are there any loaded words or propaganda techniques being used that you can identify? Can you distinguish between facts and opinions?
- **Corroboration:** Can you corroborate the information with other credible news sources? Is it the only source making this claim?
- **Compare:** Compare it to other news sources to get a different perspective. Find other credible sources that provide the big picture and give nuance to the topic.

Inform students that, in much the same way that they've watched the video of the Five C's of Critical Consuming, they'll now do the same thing with different pieces that help all of us look more critically at the media we consume on a daily basis.

STEP 2: STUDENTS EXPLORE AND PRESENT

Mention to students that one of the things that is brought up in this short video they've just viewed is that it explicitly says that the problems with fake news isn't going away. It is here to stay. In this information-rich world we live in where everyone consumes many different types of media all day long, it is important for everyone to be critical consumers of what they read and view.

Lead students in a discussion about where they get their news from during the day. List on the board what sources they read and/or view. Ask them which ones they think are more reliable and which ones are less or not reliable. Why do they think this way about the source they're consuming? Tell them that they're going to view some more templates for critical consuming of media as a way to begin to nuance their media consumption.

Place students in small groups and give each group one of the Handouts A-E. They are to review it with their group and decide a way to present it back to the whole class. They can use any technique they like – presentation, poster, or new media presentation to present the information to their classmates. Students have 15-20 minutes to read, synthesize, and be ready to present their information to peers.

STEP 3: POST PRESENTATION COMPREHENSION CHECK

As groups present, students are to take notes on their Exit Slip Handout (provided in the lesson) that asks them to identify two pieces of information that impacted them the most, plus one way they'll change their information and/or media viewing and consumption.

STEP 4: UNDERSTANDING NUANCE

What is "nuance"? Nuance is a subtle difference in or shade of meaning or expression.

What is "naïve"? Naïve is showing a lack of experience, wisdom, or judgment.

Explain to students that the six handouts they're taking home with them today (*Handouts A-E*) contain a lot of information. The goal of becoming a critical thinker is to be a little more nuanced every day and a little less naïve. Never before has so much information been available as it is today and, while consuming this massive amount of information, it is important that we grow more and more critical and nuanced and less and less naïve about what we're reading. Nothing is more embarrassing in our social media-driven world than to be called out for reposting some fake news. Affirm students that they've taken an important step in nuancing today as they'll be identifying two key pieces of information they learned and one action they'll take to consume media more critically. Step-by-step, they can become more nuanced and less naïve about the media they consume.

STEP 5: NUANCE CHECK

Now that students have become a bit more nuanced about media literacy, check to see if they can apply what they have learned to the *SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN* Handout they received at the beginning of the lesson. Just have the turn to a neighbor and check in with them, noting which constructs they've now heard about that can name and/or apply to any of the four myths. For instance, the COVID-19 myth that wealthy elites are using the vaccine to profit from it can be linked to HANDOUT B's concept of sensationalized headlines because of the sensationalized conspiracy parts of that particular myth. This culminating activity has students apply what they have learned.

Close the lesson by reminding students that they spend an average of 28-32 hours a week in front of some type of screen consuming a form of media. It is imperative, then, that we all consume with a critical lens.

COMMON CORE STANDARDS CORRELATION

The content provided in this lesson supports the goals and objectives of the Common Core State Standards across multiple content areas. Since Media Literacy is written for middle and high school students, we provide CCSS that span 6th-grade to 12th-grade.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS-SPEAKING & LISTENING

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.4; 7.4; 8.4; 9-10.4; 11-12.4

Present claims and findings, sequencing ideas logically and using pertinent descriptions, facts, and details to accentuate main ideas or themes; use appropriate eye contact, adequate volume, and clear pronunciation.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6.5; 7.5; 8.5; 9-10.5; 11-12.5

Include multimedia components (e.g., graphics, images, music, sound) and visual displays in presentations to clarify information.



SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN HANDOUT

A *Scientific American* article titled *Eight Persistent COVID-19 Myths and Why People Believe Them* by Tanya Lewis addresses some of the virus to vaccine conspiracy theories and why people believed them.

The virus was engineered in a lab in China.

This is false and all U.S. agencies have categorically denied the possibility that the virus was engineered in a lab. The Intelligence Community concurred with the scientific community that the virus was not man-made or genetically modified. *So, then, why did people believe this false statement?* People want a scapegoat for the immense suffering and economic fallout caused by COVID-19 and China, a foreign country and U.S. competitor, was an easy target for some.

COVID-19 is no worse than the flu.

This is false and The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated that the flu causes roughly 12,000 to 61,000 deaths per year while, in contrast, COVID-19 had caused 542,000 in the U.S. as of mid-March 2021. *So, then why did people believe this false statement?* They believed it because their leaders kept saying it. Leaders also stated that the death count from COVID-19 was exaggerated when, in fact, reported deaths from COVID-19 are likely an undercount.

You don't need to wear a mask.

Despite a strong consensus among public health officials that masks limit transmission of COVID-19, many people refused to wear one. Again, many leaders throughout the country reinforced that it wasn't necessary to wear a mask. *So, then why did people believe this falsehood?* Early guidance on masks was confusing and inconsistent, but many people refused to wear a mask because they considered it emasculating (lacking strength or vigor) or a violation of their civil liberties.

Wealthy elites are using the virus to profit from vaccines.

In a book and in the conspiracy theory film *Plandemic*, Judy Mikovits makes the unsubstantiated claim that National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases director Dr. Anthony Fauci and billionaire Bill Gates could be using their power to profit from the COVID-19 vaccine. Mikovits makes this claim without a shred of scientific evidence. *So, then why did people believe this false statement?* Wealthy or influential figures are often the target of conspiracy theories and leaders referred to Dr. Fauci as "alarmist" and said that he was exaggerating the severity of the outbreak. Mikovits made a video about her false claims that was viewed more than 8 million times on social media.

Source:

<https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/eight-persistent-covid-19-myths-and-why-people-believe-them/>

HANDOUT A / TEN COMMON FALLACIES EVERYONE SHOULD KNOW

Fallacy: A deceptive, misleading, or false notion or belief.

Ad Hominem: when someone attacks the person instead of the argument. Example: “Jenny is just a stupid blonde on unemployment. Why would you ever consider her strategy for getting a job?”

Appeal to Authority: when a statement is considered true because it’s made by someone who is considered an “authority” on the topic. Example: “My doctor says taking St. John’s Wart everyday will make me less depressed. He should know, he’s a doctor!”

Appeal to Ignorance: when a claim is considered true because it hasn’t been disproven (or vice versa). Example: “Since you cannot prove that Aliens do not exist, then they must exist.”

Bandwagon Fallacy: when a concept is considered true because lots of people believe it’s true. Example: “9 out of 10 doctors agree that Medicine XYZ is the best. So then Medicine XYZ must be the best.”

Begging the Question: when the statement is assumed true based on the statement itself. Example: “The Bible is the word of God, because it says so in the Bible.”

Loaded Question: when a question contains the presumption of guilt. Example: “So when exactly did you stop hitting your wife?” (Assumes the person WAS hitting his wife).

Non Sequitur: when a statement’s conclusions does not follow from its premise. Example: “If you don’t buy this type of food, then you are neglecting your children’s health.”

Red Herring: when someone diverts the attention away from the topic to a NEW topic to throw you off and win the argument. Example: “So you think abortion results in lower crime rates. Well, we’ve all seen what happened in Nevada with that abortion doctor who killed his patients with dirty equipment. You want that? You want to see patients killed in dirty clinics? Then go ahead and support abortion.”

Slippery Slope: when it’s assumed that a small step leads to a larger chain reaction of events resulting in a greater impact. Example: “If we legalize abortion, then next thing you know we’ll be killing new born babies.”

Straw Man: when someone ignores the argument and replaces it with a distorted or exaggerated version of that argument. Example: Person A: “Evolution states that humans developed over a long time from the same common ancestor as the gorilla.” Person B: “Everyone listen to Person A. He’s saying that we descended from baboons!”

Source: <https://kreativcopywriting.com/10-logical-fallacies-know-spot/>

HANDOUT B / A ROUGH GUIDE TO SPOTTING BAD SCIENCE

Being able to evaluate the evidence behind a scientific claim is important. Being able to recognize bad science reporting, or faults in scientific studies, is equally important. These 12 points will help you separate the science from the pseudoscience. Pseudoscience consists of statements and beliefs that claim to be scientific, but then are not compatible with the scientific method.

Sensationalized Headlines: Article headlines are commonly designed to entice viewers into clicking on and reading the article. At times, they can over-simplify the findings of scientific research. At worst, they sensationalize and misrepresent them. Example: “Drunk scientists pour wine on superconductors and make an incredible discover!”

Misinterpreted Results: News articles can distort or misinterpret the findings of research for the sake of a good story. If possible, try to read the original research, rather than rely on the article based on it for information.

Conflicts of Interest: Many companies will employ scientists to carry out and publish research. Research can also be misrepresented for personal or financial gain.

Correlation & Causation: Be wary of any confusion of correlation and causation (or cause and effect). A correlation between variables doesn't always mean one causes the other. Global warming increased since the 1800s, and pirate numbers decreased, but lack of pirates doesn't cause global warming.

Unsupported Conclusions: Speculation can often help to drive science forward. However, studies should be clear on the facts their study proves, and which conclusions are as yet unsupported ones.

Problems with Sample Size: In trials, the smaller the sample size, the lower the confidence in the results from that sample. Larger samples often give more representative results. Example: “I interviewed a guy and he says he doesn't like gum so, men don't like gum.”

Unrepresentative Samples Used: In human trials, subjects are selected that are representative of a larger population. If the sample size is different from the population as a whole, then the conclusions from the trial may be biased.

No Control Group Used: In clinical trials, results from test subjects should be compared to a “control group” not given the substance being tested.

No Blind Testing Used: To try and prevent bias, subjects should not know if they are in the test or the control group. In “double blind” testing, even researchers don't know which group subjects are in until after testing.

Selective Reporting of Data: Also known as “cherry picking”, this involves selecting data from results which supports the conclusion of the research, while ignoring those that do not.

Source: www.compoundchem.com

HANDOUT C / WHAT IS GASLIGHTING?

Gaslighting is when someone intentionally twists your perception of reality for their own gain. Gaslighting is a form of abuse and manipulation (think of it as “intellectual abuse”) that focuses on making someone doubt their reality.

- They ***deny*** they said or did something even when you have ***proof***.
- They ***accuse*** you of doing things that you ***know*** they themselves have done.
- They turn others ***against*** you to take away your ***support*** system.
- They tell you that you are ***crazy***.
- You are ***never*** right.
- You ***constantly*** feel like you have to ***defend*** reality.
- Your ***trust*** in yourself and your intuition erodes.
- You always feel ***confused*** about whether you’re on ***good*** terms.
- You are not ***allowed*** to have feelings.
- You find yourself ***collecting*** “proof” that things happened so you can reassure yourself and defend yourself.

What does gaslighting sound like?

- *You’re overreacting.*
- *I didn’t do that.*
- *You must be confused again.*
- *Just calm down.*
- *I never said that.*
- *What are you talking about?*
- *You’re so sensitive.*
- *You’re remembering things wrong.*
- *It’s always something with you.*
- *You need help.*
- *You’re upset over nothing.*
- *You’re so dramatic.*
- *Why are you so defensive?*
- *It’s your fault.*
- *Stop imagining things.*
- *I was just joking.*

Source: **Domestic Violence Awareness Month**

It explicitly states that it is telling the truth, and/or everyone else is lying to you. If they have to preface it by swearing it’s true, it’s probably not true.

What it sounds like:

- *“We know the truth!”*
- *“What the (media/government/corporations) are hiding from you!”*
- *“This is definitely true!”*

It contains short, conclusory opinion statements. Good journalists typically don’t write like this.

What it sounds like:

- *“It’s all hogwash!”*
- *“The media has it all wrong.”*

It is organized as a list of questions or hypotheses. This is literally the opposite of news, which is answers, not questions.

What it sounds like:

- *“Why wasn’t this...”*
- *“It doesn’t add up that...”*
- *“It’s really unlikely that X happened...”*

It puts the burden on YOU to answer the questions. A good journalist will research and find truth and then share it with you, not the other way around.

What it sounds like:

- *“If you can’t answer these questions...”*
- *“Do you REALLY know what happened?”*

It asks you to prove a negative, which is often impossible. Pro- tip: Don’t try this argument in court!

What it sounds like:

- *“No one has proven that the government WASN’T involved!”*
- *“They SAY it was X, but how do you know it wasn’t Y?”*

It suggests an insidious plot by “someone” (“the media,” “elites,” “corporations,” “the government”) but doesn’t say exactly what the plot IS or provide any evidence for it. “Cool story, bro!”

What it sounds like:

- *“No one knows how deep this goes...”*
- *“They’re not telling who is behind all of this...”*

Source: Vanessa Otero, Founder of Ad Fontes Media. @vlotero

HANDOUT E / FIVE KEY QUESTIONS OF MEDIA LITERACY

- Who created this message?
- What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?
- How might different people understand this message differently than me?
- What values, lifestyles and points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?
- Why is the message being sent?

REMEMBER, MEDIA IS PURPOSEFULLY CONSTRUCTED!

- All media messages are “constructed.”
- Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
- Different people experience the same media message differently.
- Media have embedded values and points of view.
- Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.

Source: www.medialit.org

EXIT SLIP Handout

After listening to your peers, list two pieces of information that were most memorable and impacted you the most.

Why did this information impact you the most?

- 1.
- 2.

Identify one way that you will change your viewing and consumption of information and media.

- 1.