



LEVEL 3 – MEDIA LITERACY FOR POSITIVE PARTICIPATION

8. Clickbait and Deepfakes

As you continue to explore “fake” news, it is important to alert students to two concerning ways their attention might be drawn to misinformation online. The first way is via “**clickbait**.” Clickbait is something (such as a headline) designed to make readers want to click on a hyperlink that can lead to content of dubious value or interest. The second, and even more concerning way, is called “**deepfakes**.” Advances in artificial intelligence make it possible to create convincing fake audio and video “deepfakes” that can make a person appear to be saying or doing something they did not actually say or do. Both of these digital age phenomena take “fake” news to a whole new level.

Key Standards—Common Core ELA, Grade 8: RL.8, RL.8.1, RL.8.1.2, RL.8.4, RL.8.10, RI.8, RI.8.1, RI.8.2, RI.8.4, SL.8, SL.8.1, SL.8.1.a, SL.8.1.b, SL.8.1.c, SL.8.1.d, SL.8.2, L.8, L.8.4, L.8.4.a, L.8.4.d. ISTE: 1d, 2b, 3b, 3d, 7d. CASEL: 3a, 4a, 5d, 5e, 5f.

Learning Objectives

Students will...

- ✓ Discover what “clickbait” is and how it is used.
- ✓ Understand the reasons why misinformation is spread.
- ✓ Be introduced to artificial intelligence-generated videos known as “deepfakes.”



Introducing The Lesson

Ask students if they remember this from [Level 2](#): *How do many websites and social media sites make money?* (Answer: advertising).

The Lesson

1. Explain that making money (via advertising) is one of the main reasons misinformation is made and spread in the first place. Here is how it works: Some sites make money by using traffic numbers like page views or number of visitors to bill companies that advertise their products or services on their sites. Additionally, websites sometimes make money from advertisers when users click on stories that appear on their sites. So the catchier the headline of a story, the more clicks it gets, and the more money is made. Even reputable news sites sometimes use “clickbait” simply to get more viewers. Readers often take the “bait” of a catchy headline and the site is rewarded with a page view. Ask students to record:

- **CLICKBAIT:** Something (such as a headline) designed to make readers want to click on a link. Sometimes the link leads to content of dubious value or interest.

The Lesson, continued

2. Tell students that “clickbait” often captures our attention with words like “*shocking*,” “*amazing*,” “*unbelievable*.” Additionally, it can appeal to our sense of curiosity, by leaving a question unanswered. Ask students if they can think of “clickbait” headlines they’ve seen, or share these examples:

“Man Tries to Hug Wild Lion, You’ll Never Guess What Happens Next!”

“The Hot New Phone Everybody Is Talking About”

“Girl Gives Her Lunch To Homeless Man. The Shocking Thing He Did Will Leave You in Tears!”

3. The following story, which happened during the 2016 US election cycle, provides an excellent example of clickbait being used to draw viewers for profit. Read (or explain) this article excerpt to your students:

Kids in Macedonia Made Up and Circulated Many False News Stories in the US Election

“The pope endorses Donald Trump,” roared the headline. Only he didn’t. It’s just not true.

But that didn’t stop the story from getting thousands upon thousands of “likes,” shares and other forms of engagement via social media. And for the guys creating these lies, that means revenue. Cold hard cash. From the gullibility of the American voter. That’s the finding of an investigation by BuzzFeed News.

Voters were deliberately and cynically played by teenagers in a small town in Macedonia called Veles, home to at least 100 fake news sites dedicated to US politics.

“There’s a fairly large group of young people in Macedonia, who, for a long time [have] been running dubious, on-the-edges websites about different topics, whether it’s health or other things,” says Craig Silverman, who co-reported the story for BuzzFeed News.

They seek out clickbait, or come up with their own, to simply get clicks. Every click generates a tiny amount of advertising revenue — a fraction of a penny. But it can add up to a good living for creative kids in a poor town, in a poor country, like the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

Their biggest hit was a story with a false quote from Hillary Clinton, saying a few years ago that Donald Trump should run for president. “She never said that,” says Silverman, “[but] it’s gotten over 480,000 shares, reactions and comments on Facebook.”

That’s better than most scoops from leading news outlets like the New York Times or the Washington Post. And that level of engagement can provide the story’s generators with a few thousand dollars a day. Typically, though, these teens get just a few thousand dollars a month, according to Silverman.

The Lesson, continued

4. Although what the Macedonian youth did was not illegal, ask your students: *Was it ethical?* Discuss.
5. Next, explain that in addition to spreading misinformation for profit, here are other reasons it is spread:
 - **Misinformation is spread for political purposes.** Dating as far back to the days of Julius Caesar, rulers spread misinformation to charm their allies and confuse their enemies. Until recently, this was referred to as “propaganda,” but today, “fake” news can be something even more sinister: state-funded fraudulent websites set up by one country to sow confusion in another, for example.
 - **Misinformation is spread for criminal reasons.** Hackers sometimes gain access to the websites or social media accounts of reputable news outlets and disseminate fake stories. Though they may be motivated by profit or politics, sometimes it's just to create confusion for the heck of it.
6. Tell students there is another type of misinformation that you have not discussed yet—the “deepfake.” Explain that advances in technology make it possible to produce or alter video content to make it look like someone is saying or doing something that they did not say or do. Ask students to record:
 - **DEEPPFAKE:** An artificial intelligence-generated video of a person in which their face or body has been digitally altered so that they appear to be someone else or are saying something they did not say.
7. Screen [Video 1]. Afterwards lead a class discussion. Ask: *What harms might there be to society when people are being completely fooled by a “deepfake”?*
8. **Activity or Homework.** Tell students that it is important for digital citizens to recognize “clickbait” headlines when they see them, which is the purpose of this activity. The idea for this comes from the TechNotes blog (<https://blog.tcea.org/clickbait/>). Ask students if they remember the fairy tale “The Three Little Pigs.” Chances are they will, but if not give students the attached story and have work individually or in pairs to write a “clickbait” headline that will make everyone want to read it! Here is an example:

“Building with Straw or Sticks Leads to Shocking Death!”

After students have completed this task, have them share their “clickbait” headlines and vote on the best one!

Goal

For students to understand why misinformation is made and spread, and to recognize “clickbait” and “deepfakes” and be aware of the possible societal harms of both.

Your Name(s) _____



The Three Little Pigs

By James Halliwell-Phillipps

Once upon a time there were three little pigs and the time came for them to leave home and seek their fortunes. Before they left, their mother told them, "Whatever you do, do it the best that you can because that's the way to get along in the world."

The first little pig built his house out of straw because it was the easiest thing to do. The second little pig built his house out of sticks. This was a little bit stronger than a straw house. The third little pig built his house out of bricks.

One night the big bad wolf, who dearly loved to eat fat little piggies, came along and saw the first little pig in his house of straw. He said, "Let me in, Let me in, little pig or I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in!" "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin," said the little pig. But of course the wolf did blow the house in and ate the first little pig.

The wolf then came to the house of sticks. "Let me in, let me in little pig or I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in." "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin," said the little pig. But the wolf blew that house in too, and ate the second little pig.

The wolf then came to the house of bricks. "Let me in, let me in" cried the wolf. "Or I'll huff and I'll puff till I blow your house in." "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin," said the pig. Well, the wolf huffed and puffed but he could not blow down that brick house.

But the wolf was a sly old wolf and he climbed up on the roof to look for a way into the brick house.

The little pig saw the wolf climb up on the roof and lit a roaring fire in the fireplace and placed on it a large kettle of water.

When the wolf finally found the hole in the chimney he crawled down and KERSPLASH right into that kettle of water he fell. And that was the end of the pig's troubles with the big bad wolf.

The next day the little pig invited his mother over. She said "You see it is just as I told you. The way to get along in the world is to do things as well as you can." Fortunately for that little pig, he learned that lesson. And he lived happily ever after!

Write a "clickbait" headline that will make everyone want to read this story:

VOCABULARY

CLICKBAIT

Something (such as a headline) designed to make readers want to click on a link. Sometimes the link leads to content of dubious value or interest.

DEEPPFAKE

An artificial intelligence-generated video of a person in which their face or body has been digitally altered so that they appear to be someone else or are saying something they did not say.