



LEVEL 3 – MEDIA LITERACY FOR POSITIVE PARTICIPATION

7. Understanding Fake News

A [survey](#) conducted by Common Sense Media/Survey Monkey revealed that more than half of teens (54%) get their news from social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook and Twitter.

Unfortunately, social media is full of news that is not accurate or true. During the recent pandemic, the Director-General of the World Health Organization (WHO) said, “We are not just fighting an epidemic; we’re fighting an infodemic,” referring to fake news that “spreads faster and more easily than this virus.” What makes this problem even worse is that the most popular fake news stories on social media are **more widely shared** than the most popular true stories. Additionally, a Yale University [study](#) finds that news headlines that *seem* familiar are perceived as substantially more accurate than unfamiliar stories. In other words, **the stories we share are the stories we start believing**. For all these reasons and more it is imperative to teach students how to spot, report, and avoid sharing “fake” news.

Key Standards—Common Core ELA, Grade 8: 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.8.6. ISTE: 2b, 3a, 3b, 3d, 7d. CASEL: 3a, 4a, 4b, 5a, 5c, 5d, 5e, 5f.

Learning Objectives

Students will...

- ✓ Understand what “fake” news is and how it is spread.
- ✓ Discover what “fake” news is not.
- ✓ Practice identifying “fake” news stories that appear on social media networks.



Introducing The Lesson

Have students report on their homework from your previous lesson (Ask: *What images and sources did you observe in the news? Did you see any questionable sources of information? If so, what were they?*). Be sure to ask students where they get their news (or if they get any at all!) and discuss whether or not these are credible places to gather information.

The Lesson

1. Screen [Video 1] to prepare students for this lesson.

The Lesson, continued

2. Ask: *What are some downsides of people falling for “fake” news? Have you ever believed a news story you later learned was untrue? In addition to relying on the three essential questions you learned, how else might you avoid believing “fake” news?* Discuss. Tell students that one way is to know what is *not* “fake” news (have them take notes as you explain):

“Fake” News is NOT:

- **News you don’t like or don’t agree with.** Sometimes people say *fake news* when they don’t like or agree with something. Disagreeing with or not liking something does not make it “fake” news.
- **Opinion stories on news sites.** Sometimes authors share their own opinions on legitimate news sites, however these are almost always marked as “Opinion.”
- **Honest mistakes.** Even the best reporters sometimes make honest mistakes. These are often corrected or retracted later. But this is also not “fake” news.
- **Stories from satire sites.** There are many satire or parody sites online that pretend to be legitimate news sources, however they are simply meant to entertain or poke fun at real news. Explain the meaning of each term and have students record:
 - **SATIRE:** A form of communication that uses humor to poke fun or ridicule.
 - **PARODY:** A humorous or mocking imitation of something (students may recall this term from Level 2).

Satire and parody sites can sometimes be tricky to identify, that’s why it is important to look carefully at the site where a story originates (remind students about essential question #1: *Who is behind this information?*). Check the site’s “About” section and determine if it is a legitimate news source or not.

Stories from **parody** and **satire** sites can end up becoming “fake” news if they are spread elsewhere. Screen [Video 2] to illustrate this point. (Note: please be aware that this video contains “twerking” footage that some teachers may find inappropriate for their class, in that case you can skip the video and read the following.)

In 2017, comedian Jimmy Kimmel aired a video on his show (Jimmy Kimmel Live!), called “Worst Twerk Fail EVER – Girl Catches On Fire!” In this staged video, a girl performs a dance routine that goes completely awry, ending with the young lady apparently catching on fire (the girl in the video is actually a professional stuntwoman and had planned this stunt with Jimmy Kimmel).



The Lesson, continued

*The video, which first appeared on the Jimmy Kimmel Live! website instantly went viral, racking up over 9 million views in less than a week. Even though the “About” section of this website plainly states the show is a late-night talk show, **not** a news site, multiple television news outlets reported on the incident as though it were “real” news. Had they dug deeper, they would have realized it was clearly satire or parody.*

3. Tell students that sometimes recognizing that news is fake, or that a social media post is promoting news that is fake, is difficult. In fact, even adults have trouble with this. [A study](#) finds that most American adults (64%) believe fabricated news stories are causing a great deal of confusion about current events, and about one in four acknowledge having shared a made-up news story. Help students break this cycle through the following activity.
6. **Activity.** Explain that the best way to spot a “fake” news story or to recognize that a social media post is promoting a “fake” news story is by using plain-old common sense. If something causes you to wonder, *Is that fake?...* then it’s time to do some investigation! Let your students tell *you* how they would investigate the examples that follow. Use the Teacher’s Guide to conduct a discussion about each example.

Goal

To help students understand what “fake” news is, is not, and how to identify it.

EXAMPLE #1

This appeared on Twitter. Is it real or fake? What are your clues? How would you check?



From:

<https://www.theglobeandmail.com/community/digital-lab/fake-news-quiz-how-to-spot/article33821986/>

EXAMPLE #2

This image shared on Facebook claimed to be the “closest image to Saturn we have ever gotten.” Is it real or fake? What are your clues? How would you check?



The image is a composite. The top portion shows Saturn's rings and atmosphere, with a bright light source illuminating the rings from the left. The bottom portion shows a view from a space station looking down at Earth's clouds, with the station's structure visible in the foreground. The two images are overlaid, with the Saturn image appearing to be a digital rendering placed over the real photograph of Earth.

Doug Rolland
May 2 · 🌐

Closest image to Saturn we have ever gotten!
🌈 that is so incredibly beautiful

👍❤️👏 161 18 Comments 579 Shares

👍 Like ➦ Share

View 2 more comments

Alex Jarman
So many questions
Like · 7w
➦ Tapshil Desai replied · 5 Replies

Robert Prince
The hexagon at the north pole is amazing.
<https://youtu.be/LcmNMWG9vqA>

YOUTUBE.COM
The Huge Hexagon-Shape...
Like · 7w 👍👏👤 3

Alex Jarman
Some of the clouds look like explosions
Like · 7w 👍 1

Nicholas Hilliker
So many deadly Gases!
Maybe it's the begging of the new world 🌍 God is creating
Like · 7w 🙏❤️👏👤 4

Cody Joe Gooding
Like everybody above me said think about all the chaos under them clouds
Like · 7w 👍 1

Tyler Walker
Cgi is impressive stuff
Like · 7w 👍❤️👏👤 11
➦ Tyler Watkins replied · 1 Reply

From:

EXAMPLE #3

This Instagram post showed a laminated card that says it exempts the owner from "any ordinance requiring face mask usage in public." Is it real or fake? What are your clues? How would you check?



From:

<https://slate.com/technology/2020/06/ada-exemption-face-mask-cards-utter-nonsense.html>

EXAMPLE #4

This image of a raccoon hitching a ride on an alligator appeared online and became a viral sensation. Is it real or fake? What are your clues? How would check?

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NEWS

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US & Canada

Man captures photo of raccoon 'riding an alligator'

f WhatsApp Twitter Email Share



WFTV

A man walking in a national forest in central Florida has captured a rare image of a raccoon appearing to ride on the back of an alligator.

From:

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-33143367>

EXAMPLE #5

This story appeared online looking like news. Is it real or fake? What are your clues? How would you check?

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Gizmo Files Lawsuit Against Disney Over ‘Baby Yoda’, Claims Company Stole His Likeness

POSTED ON JANUARY 12, 2020 BY BOB THE EMPIRE NEWS POTATO

[Twitter](#) [f | LIKE](#) [0](#)



LOS ANGELES, California –

Gremlins star Gizmo has filed a lawsuit in a Los Angeles superior court against Disney over their latest viral property, “Baby Yoda,” also known as The Child, from the hit Disney+ series *The Mandalorian*. Gizmo claims that Disney stole his likeness when they created the cute, cuddly character.

“My client is clearly the basis for the new Disney character affectionately known as Baby Yoda, and designers at Disney knew exactly what they were doing when they developed The Child’s final form,” said lawyer Chris Dante, who is representing Gizmo. “We are seeking damages for the extreme distress, loss of work, and emotional turmoil that Baby Yoda has caused my client. I am confident we have a strong case.”

Lawyers for Disney could not be reached for comment, but an anonymous employee who works on *The Mandalorian* said that there were draft notes that indicated Disney executives “very much” wanted to have a new character that “was 50% Yoda, 50% Gizmo, and 100% adorable.”

Gizmo first rose to fame in 1984 with his starring role in the Christmas-themed horror film *Gremlins*.

[Twitter](#) [f | LIKE](#) [0](#)

From:

<https://empirenews.net/gizmo-files-lawsuit-against-disney-over-baby-yoda-claims-company-stole-his-likeness/>

TEACHER'S GUIDE

1. **FAKE:** First of all, if the Queen was dead, that would be big news. You could easily verify this tweet by checking legitimate news sources. Second, while the BBC's U.K. news feed is named "BBC News (UK)," its handle is @BBCNews, not @BBCNewsUKI. The extra "I" at the end, which a reader in a hurry might mistake for a parenthesis, is a giveaway that the account is not real.
2. **FAKE:** This image of Saturn seemed real to some people because it shows the Cassini spacecraft in the foreground. The Cassini spacecraft did actually capture hundreds of thousands of images of Saturn before concluding nearly two decades of space exploration by plunging into the ringed planet's atmosphere in September 2017. However, this particular image is an artist's concept of Mars. Facebook has since flagged the image as "False News."
3. **MOSTLY FAKE.** The ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) does require that businesses with mandatory mask rules for customers due to COVID-19 also must accommodate people who may not be able to wear masks due to medical conditions or disabilities. So that much is true. However, this face mask "exempt" card, which appeared in multiple places online, was declared fraudulent by the U.S. Department of Justice (a visit to their website would verify this). The FTBA, the organization mentioned on the card to "report" potential violations to, does not appear to be officially recognized by any government agencies as an enforcing body. In fact, a smart digital citizen could visit www.ftbagency.com and discover there is no such site!
4. **FAKE.** The source, BBC News, is legitimate, but the photo is a fake. The raccoon-riding-an-alligator story went viral in 2015, spreading from Florida media to global news outlets like the BBC. But it all turned out to be a hoax by American performance artist Zardulu, who staged the photo with taxidermied animals.
5. **SATIRE.** Your students first clue should be the fact that Gizmo is not a real person. Additionally, the author's name is suspicious: *Bob The Empire News Potato*. A little research into the "About" section of *The Empire News* website would quickly reveal that it "is intended for entertainment purposes only. Our website and social media content uses only fictional names, except in cases of public figure and celebrity parody or satirization. Any other use of real names is accidental and coincidental."

VOCABULARY

“FAKE” NEWS

A popular term that refers to news stories that are false.

SATIRE

A form of communication that uses humor to poke fun or ridicule.

PARODY

A humorous or mocking imitation of something.