English Language Arts – New Media 10

Critical Thinking in the Age of “Fake News” and “Post-Truth”

# Introduction

Oxford Dictionaries declared “post-truth” the 2016 word of the year. Fake news is the boldest sign of a post-truth society. Fake news can be described as news meant to mislead the reader or viewer through deception, fabrication, or distortion.

In this learning plan, students first complete at least one online quiz to determine how astute they are at identifying fake news. They then analyze potential problems associated with the spread of fake news and discover techniques, strategies, and tools they can use to discern fact versus fiction when it comes to news in social media.

# Curriculum connections

## Big Ideas

Digital citizens have rights and responsibilities in an increasingly globalized society.

## Learning standards

### Content

**Text features and structures**

* features of multimodal texts

### Curricular Competencies

**Comprehend and connect (reading, listening, viewing)**

* Recognize the complexities of digital citizenship
* Apply appropriate strategies to comprehend oral, visual, and multimodal texts
* Explore the relevance, accuracy, and reliability of texts
* Identify bias, contradictions, and distortions

## Core Competencies

### **Communication**

* Students **connect and engage with others** as they discuss their point of view and help create a mind map, as well as presenting their recommendations about the future of the Site C Dam hydroelectric project.

**Possible assessment statements:**

* I can recognize that there are different points of view and I can disagree respectfully.
* I can share my ideas and connect with others.
* I can ask clarifying questions.
* Students **acquire, interpret, and present information**.

**Possible assessment statements:**

* I can understand and share information.
* I can present information clearly and in an organized way.
* I can present information and ideas.

### **Critical Thinking**

* Students must **analyze and critique** data and resources from their research.

**Possible assessment statements:**

* I can analyze evidence from different perspectives.
* I can analyze my own assumptions and beliefs and consider views that do not fit with them.
* Students must **question and investigate** the social media they are consuming.

**Possible assessment statements:**

* I can ask open-ended questions and gather information.
* I can evaluate the credibility of sources of information.
* I can tell the difference between facts and interpretations, opinions, and judgments.

# Critical thinking in the age of “fake news” and “post-truth”

## Learning plan overview

Prior to class, students complete an online quiz to determine if they can identify fake news from verified factual news. Students then take notes and pose questions based on a TED Talk, and discuss as a class. For another activity, students read three pieces of online media and determine if what they are consuming is verified or if it’s fake news, using tools and strategies discussed in class. Finally, students write a 500-word essay, on either a related topic of their choice or a topic chosen from the list provided.

## Essential questions

* What are the problems and potential consequences of fake news?
* How can factual news be discerned from fake news?
* How can news stories, photographs, posts, and other online information be verified?
* What happens when fake news spreads?
* Why is fake news bad for society?

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| **Activities** | **Possible assessments** |
| Class discussion on fake news quizzes | Student observations made during the opening discussion  Observations of student participation:   * Are they contributing to the class discussion? * Are they demonstrating an understanding of the issues? |
| Fukushima Nuclear Flowers | Student observations and discernment during class discussion |
| TED Talk: How Fake News Grows in a Post-Fact World (18:23)  <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkAUqQZCyrM> | Questions students write after viewing TED Talk  Students’ explanations of their thinking on fake news during discussion  Informal questioning of students |
| Using the CRAAP Test | How well did students verify that the item they chose was factual or fake news?  Criteria/rubric created for presentations |
| Assignment option 1:  Short essay | Teacher and students co-develop the criteria for the essay  Students write a short reflection assessing their essay  Students share the draft of the essay with a classmate  Classmates provide a short written piece that reflects on how well the essay meets the criteria  Students revise their essay based on classmates’ comments and submit a final draft to the teacher  Essay rubric |
| Assignment option 2:  Poster and presentation | Poster rubric |

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| **Materials** | **Key terms** |
| * Computer/projector * Student computers/tablets/personal devices * Website resource list * Chart paper or whiteboard | **clickbait:** Internet content (paid for by an advertiser) meant to attract attention and encourage visitors to click on a particular web page  **fake news:** news that is meant to mislead the reader or viewer through deception, fabrication, or distortion  **post truth:** “Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief.” (Oxford Dictionaries) |

## Hook

Prior to class, have students complete one or more of the fake news quizzes (included in [Resources](#_Resources)) to determine if they can distinguish fake news from factual news. Ask students to report their results back to the class.

## Activity 1: Fukushima Nuclear Flowers

1. Start the class by debriefing about their experience completing the online quizzes. How astute were they at discerning fact from fiction?

2. Show students the images of the [Fukushima Nuclear Flowers](https://imgur.com/gallery/BZWWx). Tell the class that on March 11, 2011, there was a disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Japan. These images were posted on Imgur, a photo-sharing website, in July 2015.

3. Ask students if this post provides strong evidence about the conditions near the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant. What do we know about the person who posted these photos and/or the source of the photograph? What questions do students need to ask themselves about the photos, source, or caption?

4. Tell the class that the flowers are not from nuclear fallout but are a naturally occurring mutation.

5. Discuss the implications of such a post.

## Activity 2: TED Talk and discussion

1. Introduce TED Talk: [How Fake News Grows in a Post-Fact World](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkAUqQZCyrM) (18:23)

*Veteran journalist Ali Velshi believes that out of the many forms of news, one that poses a threat and is exacerbated in our digital media society is fake news. In this TED Talk, Velshi discusses the problems of fake news, how people are affected by it, and how to discern fact from fiction.*

2. As they watch the TED Talk, have students write down three topics, issues, or questions of interest that arose for them during the presentation.

3. Have students present their three topics, issues, or questions of interest in small groups, or discuss as a class.

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| **Communication**  *Student self-assessment prompts:*  I can understand and share information.  I can ask questions when I need clarification. |

4. Introduce the CRAAP Test as a tool for the assignment that follows:

**CRAAP Test:**

**Currency** – When was it published or posted? Has it been revised or updated?

**Relevance** – Does it relate to your needs? Who is the audience?

**Authority** – Who are the author and the publisher? What are their credentials or qualifications? What are their biases?

**Accuracy** – Is it reliable and truthful? Is it supported by evidence? Can you verify any of the information in another source? Does the language or tone seem biased? Free of emotion?

**Purpose** – Why does this information exist? To teach? Sell? Entertain? Persuade? Is there a bias? Is the information fact? Opinion? Propaganda? Is the point of view objective and impartial? Are there political, cultural, ideological, religious, or institutional biases?

## Activity 3: Using the CRAAP Test

1. Individually or in pairs, have students choose three articles, photos, or posts on social media (Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram, Snapchat, Reddit, etc.).

2. Have students first use the CRAAP scale to determine whether the article, tweet, photograph, and so on, is fake or real news. Students then write up their results, backing up their conclusions using verifiable evidence.

3. You may want to have students also verify their article, photo, Tweet, and so on, using at least one fact-checking website, such as:

* Associated Press
* Snopes.com
* Politifact
* *The Washington Post* Fact Checker
* FactCheck.org

4. Have the groups present their findings to the class.

5. As a class, co-construct an assessment for this activity.

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| **Critical Thinking**  *Self-assessment prompts:*  I can evaluate the credibility of sources of information.  I can tell the difference between facts and interpretations, opinions, and judgments. |

## Assignment

There are two options for this assignment.

* Option 1: Students write a short essay on a topic of their choice about what they learned, or on a topic chosen from the list.
* Option 2: Students create a poster or a media product to give other students tips on assessing the reliability of the stories they read on social media and present to other students in the school. You may wish to have students complete both assignments.

### Option 1: Short Essay

Students write a 500-word essay on a topic of their choice or on one of the following topics:

* Why is fake news bad for society?
* Discuss the following statement: Journalism exists in the zone between truth and falsehood.
* How have big media organizations like Facebook and Google been complicit in spreading fake news? What steps are they now taking to respond to fake news?
* Discuss the following quote: “No society can conduct the informed conversation necessary for civility, the resolution of disputes, or the judicious exercise of power and law if there is no agreement on basic facts.” (Amol Rajan, BBC Media editor)

#### Essay-writing Rubric

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| **1. Emerging**  Your composition is developing competence, originality, and purpose. | * Thesis is apparent, but with help it could be more directly developed throughout the composition * Simple sentence structure is evident * Mechanical or spelling errors can be correct with help |
| **2. Developing**  Your composition presents originality of thought or expression. | * Thesis is simply expressed and developed through the composition * Sentence structure is correct but simple; transitional and topic sentences are predictable * Some mechanical or spelling errors are present but do not affect understanding |
| **3. Proficient**  Your composition is effective and has a clear sense of purpose. Strong evidence of originality. | * Thesis argues a clear point and is developed through the composition * Sentence structure is varied and competent; transitional and topic sentences are used carefully * Mechanical or spelling errors are minor and do not interfere with understanding |
| **4. Extending**  Your composition is engaging and developed with originality. The writing is consistently strong in content and expression. | * Thesis is clearly articulated, engaging, and developed throughout the composition * Sophisticated vocabulary is used, with effective word choice * Sentence structure is varied and controlled; transitional and topic sentences are well executed * Few mechanical or spelling errors |

### Option 2: Poster presentation

Students create a poster or medium of their choice to give other students tips on assessing the reliability of the stories they read on Instagram or Facebook. Students then present their poster or media to other classes in the school.

#### Visual-design Rubric

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| **1. Emerging**  Working on organizing and designing the product | * Product uncover a purpose and sense of audience * Some details are present but others are yet to be developed * Working to develop important elements such as headlines and titles but could be developed further * Visuals are present and with help could add to the product |
| **2. Developing**  Product is adequately organized and designed | * Product has some purpose and sense of audience * Some significant details are present * A few important elements, such as headlines and titles, are highlighted * A few visuals add to the product |
| **3. Proficient**  Product is well organized and well designed | * Product has a purpose and sense of audience * Many significant details are present * Important elements such as headlines and titles are included * Strong visuals add to the product |
| **4. Extending**  Superior product is thoughtful, creative, and well-designed | * Product has a clear purpose and sense of audience * Includes significant details * Important elements are clearly emphasized * Excellent visuals add to the product |

## Resources

### Fake news quizzes

<https://www.channelone.com/feature/quiz-can-you-spot-the-fake-news-story/>

<http://factitious.augamestudio.com/#/>

<http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/quiz-can-you-spot-the-fake-news-headline-1.3934368>

<https://www.theguardian.com/theguardian/2016/dec/28/can-you-spot-the-real-fake-news-story-quiz>

<https://beta.theglobeandmail.com/community/digital-lab/fake-news-quiz-how-to-spot/article33821986/?ref=http://www.theglobeandmail.com&>

### TED Talk

TEDx - Journalist - Ali Velshi

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nkAUqQZCyrM>

### Fukushima Nuclear Flowers

<https://imgur.com/gallery/BZWWx>

### Other resources

On the Media, Breaking News Consumer’s Handbook: Fake News Edition (includes a good poster to print off)

<http://www.wnyc.org/story/breaking-news-consumer-handbook-fake-news-edition>

How Does Clickbait Work?

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qskqM9O0FC0> (4:48)

### Videos

News literacy is…

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QlF75iGrIvA> (3:50)

How to choose your news

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q-Y-z6HmRgI&feature=youtu.be> (4:48)

How false news can spread

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSKGa_7XJkg> (3:41)

How to Spot Fake News

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AkwWcHekMdo> (3:22)

The Problem with Fake News

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xf8mjbVRqao> (2:55)