Fall 12-16-2017

Ignorance Isn't Strength: The Need for Secondary Education to Address Fake News

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IGNORANCE ISN’T STRENGTH: 
The Need for Secondary Education to Address Fake News

By

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Education and Human Development of the College at Brockport, State University of New York, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Science in Education

December 16, 2017
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Abstract

The way people, and notably young people, are receiving information about the world has changed. Gone are the days of reading trusted print newspapers and in are the days of immediate accesses to information from a variety of sources shared virally through social media profiles and platforms. Students are living in a time period where the term “fake news” is continually mentioned throughout politics and mass media, yet their education rarely addresses these realistic concerns about how people are discovering and sharing information. Research has suggested the ways in which we believe students know how to use the internet due to their frequent usage of it is blatantly false. We need to provide opportunities to students to learn about and detect the ways in which information they come across on the internet can be false in order to ensure we are teaching appropriate 21st century life skills and to keep safe the role of democracy in society.
Chapter One: Introduction

Problem Statement: In an age where news and knowledge are widely circulated on the internet, students are not being adequately prepared with the responsibilities that come with finding information about the world online.

The students of the 21st century are much different than those of baby boomers and generation X for a variety of reasons, but the most notable of those reasons is their constant access to technology. Gone are the days of calling someone’s house phone and picking up the Sunday paper from a local grocery store to learn about the happenings of the world; everything is streamed and updated instantly, without time for second thought of being right or wrong. The “smart phone” arguably owns a monopoly on all aspects of communication and world knowledge that is not done face to face. Teens are now comfortable with getting their information online from social media websites like Facebook and Twitter which can often leak through sources that are not reputable or are downright false. Sarah McGrew, writing about the current generation, explains how “Our ‘digital natives’ may be able to flit between Facebook and Twitter while simultaneously uploading a selfie to Instagram and texting a friend. But when it comes to evaluating information that flows through social media channels, they’re easily duped” (McGrew et al. 5). The absolute windstorm of panic and paranoia that came along with the 2016 presidential election was the concept of “fake news” entering national headlines across the globe. A variety of pressing questions entered the public mind: Where can we find trusted information and how do we know who to trust? What is actually reputable information and what is biased or blatantly used to deceive people? Am I being fooled by the media that I always trusted without second-guessing its purpose? These concerning questions have leaked into public debates with ferocity, but an often missed point of these important questions is how does this fear of
misinformation relate to students in the 21st century? More importantly, what about adolescents currently in our schools who engage in self-expression and personal relationships through social media services that tend to be more susceptible to fake news?

Social media has become a staple amongst teenagers in the 21st century. Social media gives students a chance to express themselves in a variety of diverse ways without having to deal with the awkwardness that comes about through common face to face interaction. Although, many adults bitterly point to this as the main issue with social media usage among adolescents today; they rarely consider how these websites are a main source of students discovering knowledge about the world, with little to no experience from educators in teaching them how to accurately assess the information they receive on these websites. Audrey Church, the President of the American Association of School Librarians explains the danger of not teaching students how to use these websites for discovering knowledge appropriately:

that's like teaching [students] to drive in the parking lot and then sending them out on the interstate and saying 'Good luck!'…This is something children don't know unless we teach them. They're not looking for bias. They take what they see on their device at face value, and so teaching them to be critical, thoughtful consumers of information is a challenge that's increasing (Turner).

The reality is that students are not getting the appropriate education within their schooling to learn about the workings of the internet and how to accurately assess information for reliability. The education system is currently failing at teaching students about the dangers of fake news on the internet, leaving them to discover how to do so themselves, although we are aware they are not looking at traditional sources for information: “Instead, these teens say they get their news largely from the social media on their smartphones. An infinite stream of stories.
Some true. Some false. Much of it written by strangers hoping their readers can't tell the difference” (Turner). The solution rests in the hands of educators giving students opportunities at young ages to become aware of their responsibilities as a critical learner and citizen in the 21st century.

**Significance of the Problem:**

Students are no longer gaining their information from solely inside the classroom or reputable media services, but are largely turning towards social media sites to learn information about the world. Although the research is limited and still in its beginning stages on this topic, studies from reputable groups, such as the Stanford Research Group, who conducted the largest study to date on adolescent’s ability to question information online, have pointed to student’s inability to decipher the information they find and understand the sites they use have limits of reputability: "Only a quarter of the students recognized and explained the significance of the blue checkmark, a Stanford press release noted. And over 30 percent of students argued that the fake account was more trustworthy” (Domonoske). The information received from this research largely points to students not knowing the basics of reputability when it comes to dissecting “knowledge” on the internet. Where and how does this come about? One of the lead authors from the Stanford Research Group, Sam Wineburg, has a valid suggestion: “the study demonstrates that U.S. classrooms haven't caught up to the way information is influencing kids daily…”"What we see is a rash of fake news going on that people pass on without thinking," he said. "And we really can't blame young people because we've never taught them to do otherwise” (Domonoske). The truth is we are not teaching students how to appropriately use the internet to find information, but how does this fall on the laps of ELA teachers?
ELA teachers have constantly been required to teach students about the basics of researching through single research papers that are generally given in the middle of the secondary years (9th-10th grade). Although, the Common Core Standards does not directly address media literacy; it is easy to see how we are given the responsibility for teaching students how to read and dissect diverse content as multiple Career and College Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading suggest we need to address multimedia literacy:

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words. Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence. Read and comprehend complex literary and informational texts independently and proficiently (CCSS Anchor Reading Standards, 7, 8, and 10).

If we are required by state law to be the ones teaching students about how to appropriately read informational text, it is imperative we are teaching students about how to do this online as well. One of the main goals for teaching ELA is to make students more critical and more skilled readers and writers, yet how are we doing this if we are not teaching students about the reality of fake news or the significance of reading for reputability and accuracy? How can we not teach students about the danger of clickbait, photo-shopped pictures or videos, no “about page” or author information, outdated stories or information, a lack of hyperlinks or references, and purely pathos-driven opinion pieces? I find it difficult to feel we are keeping our content relevant if students are not aware of these concrete realities to appropriately assessing information online.

Jonna Perillo, writing for the NCTE emphasizes the importance of English teachers, standing as a collective voice to fighting the danger our students face with the prevalence of fake news in the 21st century: “At a time when the curriculum is narrowing, arguing for more is no small
achievement, even if we understand that the end result will yield better readers and writers. But if a political and media culture in which seemingly anything goes has shown us anything, it is that we must argue for more instruction in media literacy with conviction all the same” (Perillo). The key to making our students more fluent in being critical of the information they come across on the internet is providing opportunities in the classroom for students to learn about the different ways and angles one can dissect information they encounter. We make students capable of reading and writing by providing practice nearly every day; we must confront fake news in a similar way for our students to be appropriately educated in the 21st century, and it should start in the ELA classroom.

**Purpose:**

The purpose of this project is to shine a light on the need for ELA teachers to address the reality of fake news in the classroom. It is crucial to raise awareness of this issue through statistics and addressing important questions, but it is even more important to find concrete ways to combat the problem in ways which will directly help our students now. There is no need for money driven agendas or lengthy legal documents that take years to pass; the need is for teachers to have strategies and lessons that engage students in learning how to recognize and veer away from fake news. We do not push children on a bicycle for their first ride and tell them to figure it out themselves; we provide training wheels, explain the concepts of balance, and slowly let go of their weight as they grow in confidence of their ability to ride. The same concept needs to be established for students being independent and responsible learners on the internet, we need to guide them at first, but ultimately we want them to gain independence and enjoy their new skills. In this project, I will provide five detailed engaging lesson plans which teach about the dangers and recognition of fake news, but ultimately pushes towards students learning how to combat
these issues on their own with many standard abilities they learn in the ELA classroom. Limited instruction time is a crucial factor in making changes to what we are teaching, but it is important we are finding short, yet legitimate ways to teach our students about the reality of the multimedia-driven world.

**Rationale:**

The needs of contemporary students to be educated and responsible learners in the 21st century is different than it was at the start of the century. Students are engaging in different modes of self-expression and finding even more convenient ways to learn about what is going on in the world through social media websites. Social media websites are great avenues into discovering oneself and spreading information about what is going on in the world and what is deserving of public attention, but it is also a place where fake news and misinformation has the opportunity to grow rampant. Research which has been done on the topic of an adolescent’s ability to decipher and question fake news they confront online has generally pointed to the reality that they are not capable of accomplishing this feat on their own and need the help of educators to become better suited to combat the explosion of fake news. Teachers are already overwhelmed with the sheer amount of work it takes to be a great culturally relevant educator day in and day out, so it is important they have tools and strategies to combat new issues which have arisen in recent times. The time to fight fake news is now in order to have a functioning democracy where people can find accurate information on their own to better serve their communities and personal intelligence. It is imperative the ELA classroom which has traditionally taken the duty of teaching about researching skills to students, now takes responsibility to teach students about the danger of fake news and how to actively fight against it for the sake of an informed democratic population.
Definition of Terms:

- **About Page** – A page on a website that dedicates itself to explaining what the website is about in purpose, goal, and representation.

- **Blue Checkmark** - A checkmark that is listed next to accounts on Instagram, Twitter, and Facebook that shows the social media website has recognized this is a genuine representation of the person or entity they are proclaiming to represent.

- **CCSS** – Common Core State Standards (what we are responsible for teaching at each grade level depending on content area).

- **Clickbait** – Internet content or articles that have sensationalized headlines or photos for the purpose of generating advertising stream.

- **ELA** – English Language Arts.

- **Facebook** – A widely popular free social media site that allows users to upload pictures, post statuses, and share their feelings with a host of people who subscribe to their account.

- **Fake News** – A term popularized by President Trump during the 2016 election that represents inaccurate content that presents itself as fact (mostly online), but is used to manipulate, deceive, or gain money for nearly any cause imaginable.

- **Followers/Friends** – A person that subscribes to a social media account and sees everything a person posts.

- **Instagram** – A widely popular visually driven social media site that allows people to post pictures and videos to their followers.

- **Media Literacy** – The ability to decipher, understand, create, and analyze information in multimedia.
• NCTE – National Council of Teachers of English
• NPR – National Public Radio
• Photoshop – A photo cropping and altering strategy on a computer that allows people to manipulate images.
• Smartphone – A device that is used like a telephone, but has access to social media apps as well as internet browsing, among many other features.
• Social Media – A website that is personally created, generally free, and allows for the sharing of photos, videos, images, information, and words through virtual communities and networks.
• Status – A Facebook feature that allows people to share whatever they want (unlimited amount of characters) with people who subscribe to their account.
• Tumblr – A visually driven blog that allows people to post pictures and videos to their followers.
• Twitter – A social media site that allows people to post statuses (limited to 140 characters) to anyone who follows or subscribes to their account. Increasingly popular with celebrities and politicians in the 21st century.
• Viral – When something on the internet (videos, articles, pictures, etc.) is spread by a large variety of people and it gets popular.

**Summary Statement:**

Students today are much different than their predecessors due to the onslaught of technology and social media being incorporated into their everyday lives. Adults often fear adolescents are becoming socially alienated due to their constant use of technology, but in many
ways they are more socially active than ever due to their access to social media as they are encountering information from all over the world all day. One of the leading issues with social media is its unfortunate ability to generate, spread, and validate misinformation. As educators, we need to come up with concrete ways to battle the spread of fake news and more importantly, teach our students how to function independently with a critical mindset about what they encounter while on the internet.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The Power of Fake News and Social Media

The explosion of technology and how it becomes more involved in our everyday lives appears to expand endlessly as new tools are consistently created that make our lives easier, but also gives over authority to machines in making decisions for ourselves. The advent of technology has largely been accredited to being beneficial as it helps fight diseases, spread awareness of social and political issues, decreases the impact of physical disabilities, and formulates diverse ways we can interact with people from all over the world and spread new ideas. As educators and critical thinkers, we must ask ourselves: how is technology influencing our students, and more importantly how is it impacting their worldview and ability to find accurate information about the world online?

The 2016 U.S. presidential election brought a bitter awareness into the public mind of how people are finding, spreading, and analyzing information. The election was largely fought over social media and finger-pointing type rhetoric, but how people found information in determining how they voted remained controversial. One of the largest legacies related to information in the presidential election was the reality of “fake news” and how information
found on the internet can often be false and used to dupe people into believing inaccurate information which can significantly reduce an individual’s ability to participate effectively in a democratic society. U.S. President Donald Trump even proclaimed that a major news provider, CNN, is “fake news” and that he did not have to answer questions from them because of their alleged inability to report accurate information. The Oxford English Dictionary, who educators and ELA teachers often accredit being the best place to find the history and definition of words proclaimed the word of the year for 2016 was “post-truth” which they define as “an adjective defined as ‘relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief’” (Oxford English Dictionary, 2016). The declaration of “post-truth” being a word of the year brings alarm into how people are more likely to find information that is false comforting and how people are becoming inept at deciphering how facts are more important than personal bias and preference. A growing concern among educators should be focalized on how false information is influencing our students and if they are able to realize something could be false when coming across it in their rampant internet usage.

One of the most important disseminators of “fake news” is social media sites such as Facebook, Instagram, Snapchat, Tumblr, among many others. Alcott and Gentzkow, conducting significant research on the role of fake news in the 2016 presidential election explain the growing power of fake news on social media websites: “Recent evidence shows that: 1) 62 percent of US adults get news on social media 2) the most popular fake news stories were more widely shared on Facebook than the most popular mainstream news stories 3) Many people who see fake news stories report that they believe them” (212). Alcott and Gentzkow, explaining the correlation of fake news to social media help depict how widely adults are being tricked into
believing information they see online, without second guessing the sources or motivations of the pieces they are reading which present themselves as unquestionable facts. Alcott and Gentzkow give three reasons for why fake news is primarily distributed on social media:

There are several reasons to think that fake news is of growing importance. First, barriers to entry in the media industry have dropped precipitously, both because it is now easy to set up websites and because it is easy to monetize web content through advertising platforms. Because reputational concerns discourage mass media outlets from knowingly reporting false stories, higher entry barriers limit false reporting. Second, social media are well-suited for fake news dissemination, and social media use has risen sharply: in 2016, active Facebook users per month reached 1.8 billion and Twitter’s approached 400 million. Third, Gallup polls reveal a continuing decline of “trust and confidence” in the mass media when it comes to reporting the news fully, accurately, and fairly (214-215). The prevalence of fake news has largely grown due to the building of social media as a dominant form of communication and self-expression in the 21st century. People share opinions, blogs, pictures, and news article on social media which are seen as beneficial, but can become a trap into allowing misinformation to be spread. If people are becoming more comfortable with finding information online than they are through major media outlets than it is imperative that we are well equipped with being able to differentiate what is most likely real from what is most likely fake. So far, it appears this is not the case for adults, let alone students. In December of 2016, Edgar Welch, was arrested for bringing an assault rifle into a Washington D.C. pizzeria, as he read online that it was a site of human trafficking orchestrated by Hilary Clinton. The reason this man believed a pizzeria was a haven of human trafficking was due to articles he read on social media websites, “The articles making these accusations were widespread across the web,
appearing on sites including Facebook and Twitter” (Kang and Goldman). The reality of fake news on social media websites has unprecedented power as it continually promulgates misinformation for money, power, or both. Alcott and Gentzkow explain how fake news has two primary purposes: “The first is pecuniary: news articles that go viral on social media can draw significant advertising revenue when users click to the original site. This appears to have been the main motivation for most of the producers whose identities have been revealed…The second motivation is ideological. Some fake news providers seek to advance candidates they favor” (217). The power of fake news in relation to social media also gives rise for the ability of misinformation to be more widespread online than major news outlets. Alcott and Gentzkow put emphasis on how an individual does not need to be a credited journalist or reporter with experience to disseminate powerful and often quoted information in the 21st century, “Content can be relayed among users with no significant third party filtering, fact-checking, or editorial judgment. An individual user with no track record or reputation can in some cases reach as many readers as Fox News, CNN, or the New York Times” (211). If adults have widely struggled with the concept of fake news and its influence on social media in the past year, how can we expect that young people are not also going to fall victim to these struggles as they are not aware of a world without the internet constantly being at one’s fingertips?

**Social Media and Adolescents – A Major Risk Factor of Fake News**

Social media is one of the most common places to express identity for adolescents in the 21st century. Teenagers are now frequently given phones which are essentially pocket-sized computers that can give access to anything a modern desktop computer or laptop can. Young people are virtually online all day as some studies have suggested “teenagers spend nearly nine hours a day online” (McGrew et al 5). The U.S. Department of Health reported in 2016 that “94
percent of teens who go online using a mobile device, do so daily”. They can communicate with friends, share information, potentially start new romantic relationships or friendships, and possibly even bully each other. With the advent of smartphones, come about apps for social media websites. Adolescents are frequently immersed in apps such as Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram which all function as spaces to communicate with friends through images, words, and videos. The U.S. Department of Health explains how “71 percent of teens say they use more than one social media site”. Any teacher operating a classroom in the 21st century could attest to how often students try to use these apps in the classroom and how frequently they come up in classroom discussions on nearly any topic – they are a large component of their social culture.

Many critics of teens using social media sites frequently point to fears of bullying and narcissism, but very few consider the reality that fake news is also a threat to teenagers online. Claire Wardle explains how social media ignites a flame of misinformation that continues to spread as people share news that they accept as automatic fact, “Once they inadvertently share a misleading or fabricated article, image, video or meme, the next person who sees it in their social feed probably trusts the original poster, and goes on to share it themselves” (Wardle). Once people “share” online anyone who is a “friend” or “follower” of that person also sees the same content being spread. There is a need for teachers in the 21st century to become equipped with knowledge about social media sites, and more importantly teaching students to accurately navigate through them for accurate information if they are following the patterns of adults with these sites being their main sources for information. How can teachers be contemporarily relevant if the places where students look for and are presented with news, whether it be real or not, is not a part of the classroom? At the current time it seems contemporary education has veered away from addressing social media and its influence on
our students, “Instead of teaching students the fundamentals of fact-checking, many schools simply ignore the problem, blocking social media sites on school computers” (Turner). More importantly, how can we assure our students are aware of the problem of fake news being spread by social media? How do we know if students are capable of using the internet as a tool and not being taken advantage of by these new responsibilities they are presented with? These are important problems in the 21st century classroom and as our world continues to change teachers need to make sure we are staying relevant in our curriculum to meeting the needs of life after education. If a priority of education is to ensure students are life-long learners, we need to make certain we are giving students the appropriate lessons and strategies in navigating through a world that operates its information primarily through the internet. As research has pointed out so far, our students seem to be incapable of that feat.

**Research on Student Ability to Decipher Fake News**

As the concept of fake news and its relevance to our current society is still in its infancy, the research which has been conducted on students and their ability to fight against misinformation is also only in its beginning stages. One of the major studies on students and their ability to decipher fake news was orchestrated by the Stanford Education Group in 2016. The study conducted research on middle and high school students from diverse educational backgrounds: “Between January 2015 and June 2016, we administered 56 tasks to students across 12 states. In total, we collected and analyzed 7,804 student responses. Our sites for field-testing included under-resourced, inner-city schools in Los Angeles and well-resourced schools in suburbs outside of Minneapolis” (3). The Stanford Education Group’s research, which has become the most widely sourced research on the topic of students and their ability to evaluate
online sources, were not thrilled about their results: “Overall, young people’s ability to reason about the information on the Internet can be summed up in one word: bleak” (4). The group was surprised, as many adults are, that though adolescents may seem technologically superior to adults, they are still natives when it comes to using it: “Many assume that because young people are fluent in social media they are equally savvy about what they find there. Our work shows the opposite” (7). The group even went as far to suggest democracy could be at stake due to their findings about young people and their internet usage: “At present, we worry that democracy is threatened by the ease at which disinformation about civic issues is allowed to spread and flourish” (5). The words used by the Stanford Research Group to describe their findings is intense, but their findings help construe why the problem of fake news online is exceedingly important for the contemporary classroom to address.

The research conducted in the study focused on middle and high school students as each group was given a different task to complete. The middle school students were given a Slate webpage (a credited news organization) and were asked to differentiate whether articles were advertisements or not. The webpage had a mixture of pictures/minituar descriptions of real articles, sponsored content, and downright advertisements. The students struggled with the task: “The students displayed a "stunning and dismaying consistency" in their responses, the researchers wrote, getting duped again and again. They weren't looking for high-level analysis of data but just a "reasonable bar" of, for instance, telling fake accounts from real ones, activist groups from neutral sources, and ads from articles” (Domonske). The researchers explained how the vast majority of students were unable to differentiate sponsored content from a real advertisement on the Slate webpage: “More than 80% of students believed that the native advertisement, identified by the words “sponsored content,” was a real news story. Some
students even mentioned that it was sponsored content but still believed that it was a news article. This suggests that many students have no idea what “sponsored content” means” (10). As demonstrated by this example, students who are in the middle school years are still unfamiliar with the workings of information on the internet and how content is advertised on it. In relation to social media sites, algorithms based on what a person interacts with on their social media pages creates sponsored content that is directly linked to what a person most likely enjoys based on their postings. How can we ensure students are aware that information sponsored on their social media pages is created and uploaded specifically to agree with what they enjoy or believe in?

In the 2016 Stanford Research Group study the high school students were given an image of daisies from Imgur (an image sharing website that often is accredited to creating and spreading viral memes) and simply told they were a result of nuclear birth defects from the Japanese Fukushima Power Plant spill in 2011. The survey asked the students if the post “gave strong evidence about the conditions near the Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant” (16). The findings from this survey did not give strong responses about student’s ability to question images they come across on the internet:

By and large, students across grade levels were captivated by the photograph and relied on it to evaluate the trustworthiness of the post. They ignored key details, such as the source of the photo. Less than 20% of students constructed “Mastery” responses, or responses that questioned the source of the post or the source of the photo. On the other hand, nearly 40% of students argued that the post provided strong evidence because it presented pictorial evidence about conditions near the power plant. A quarter of the students argued that the post did not provide strong evidence, but only because it showed
flowers and not other plants or animals that may have been affected by the nuclear radiation (17).

The importance of students not questioning the source of the photograph further depicts how students are simply accepting what they come across on the internet as automatically true. Students inability to question sources and credibility of the photographer further hint that students are not appropriately trained to be healthily skeptical in their internet usage. The maker of the daisy survey explained his concern with young students not questioning the information they were presented with by stating: “The photograph had no attribution. There was nothing that indicated that it was from anywhere,” he said. "We asked students, 'Does this photograph provide proof that the kind of nuclear disaster caused these aberrations in nature?' And we found that over 80 percent of the high school students that we gave this to had an extremely difficult time making that determination” (Domonske). In relation to social media, it is important to note that the vast majority of these sites are visually driven forms of communication. Popular social media sites such as Instagram, Snapchat, and Tumblr convey information through images that are presented as true, rarely having any accredited reason to believe them. If students are incapable of questioning these sources, will they believe any visual they come across on social media, and have we as teachers promoted skepticism of these visual websites at all in the classroom?

A second source of research that has been done on the topic of student’s ability to accurately assess information of the internet was conducted in 2012 and was given to a large and diverse group of 7th graders testing their ability to evaluate information on the internet. The study focused on the ability to determine the author of a website, the authors credibility, the authors point of view, and the reliability of the website. Each student was given tasks which had them analyze two different web pages for authorship, credibility, point of view/how it affects the
piece, and reliability/what makes it reliable (or not). The lead researcher on the subject, Julie Corio, found the majority of students were unable to prove their ability complete these skilled practices of evaluation with competence:

Unfortunately, over 70 percent of the students’ responses suggested that: Middle school students are more concerned with content relevance than with credibility, they rarely attend to source features such as author, venue, or publication type to evaluate reliability and author perspective, when they do refer to source features in their explanations, their judgments are often vague, superficial, and lacking in reasoned justification (Corio).

The research conducted on these 7th graders further points to how the concept of author on the internet is not appropriately understood by adolescents today. The author is a key source of determining accuracy, relevancy, and bias when it comes to interpreting information on the internet. How and why can I trust the person who is writing this? The inability for students to determine the importance of an author on a website further allows the ability for fake news to be disseminated as information found on the internet can host avenues for authors who are biased or inaccurate. If students are not considering the publication type or venue of where their information is coming from they will often find information which has extreme bias or unreliability unbeknownst to them. How can students trust information they find on the internet if they cannot tell the difference between Breitbart and the NY Times?

**The Need for Media Literacy Instruction Incorporating Fake News**

Through the viral nature of social media, students may even be sharing inaccurate information with each other unknowingly. Viral content spreads quickly and often the question of “why should I believe this” is rarely put in before content is generated: “Viral content includes stories, vignettes, ads, rumors and memes that catch on like a flu in the winter, quickly passing
from one person to the next, often with little regard as to whether the content is true or not." (Turner). Cory Turner, interviewing Sam Wineburg, a lead researcher in the Stanford Study, explains how students are going to come across information without tools, hopelessly clinging to what they see if these skills are not taught in the classroom, ""How do they become prepared to make the choices about what to believe, what to forward, what to post to their friends," Wineburg asked on NPR’s All Things Considered, "when they've been given no practice in school?" (Turner). The need for these practices to be discussed in schools is apparent as research has pointed to students being incapable of navigating the internet for accuracy and generally not considering where the information they are getting is coming from.

It is imperative students are given a chance to learn about the workings of the internet within the ELA classroom. Students have been handed new responsibilities which were not relevant in prior decades through the prevalence of fake news on the internet. Online content on the internet is significantly different than traditional reading sources and we need to ensure we appropriately teaching this to our students. Jonna Perillo, writing for the National Council of Teachers of English, explains how in the past we often controlled the resources which came into the classroom that students learned from, but now we are presented with students who are finding information on their own at home through the array of opportunities provided by the internet. Perillo explains how the NCTE must stand together in advocating for more detailed media literacy as student’s research skills are generally discussed in one research project done in ELA class annually which does not meet the need for our students today: “Too often teachers limit instruction in evaluating sources to a single research assignment rather than a regular practice, something that is unlikely to make an impact. Teachers must have the room, resources, and, perhaps most important, preparation to address fake news in the English classroom”
(Perillo). It has been noted through research that students can become more media literate if time is dedicated to it within the school year, “studies have shown that teachers who invest time working on media literacy with their students produce readers who are 26% more likely to be able to discern fake news from real” (Perillo). There is a need for students to become more independent in their ability to navigate information on the internet as it is often done on personal devices like smartphones through social media websites. Wineburg, commenting on his work with the Stanford Research Group, explains how it is our responsibility as teachers, to adjust to the contemporary world of information and teach these skills so students can operate them independently now, and in their adult life: “The kinds of duties that used to be the responsibility of editors, of librarians now fall on the shoulders of anyone who uses a screen to become informed about the world,” Wineburg told NPR. "And so the response is not to take away these rights from ordinary citizens but to teach them how to thoughtfully engage in information seeking and evaluating in a cacophonous democracy.” (Domonoske).

**Chapter Three: Application**

As I have identified throughout the first two chapters there is a dire need for contemporary students to receive instruction on how to appropriately use the internet for finding facts and information. Students are seemingly always using technology to communicate with friends, find humorous videos, and learn about the world; yet they are rarely receiving instruction about what the responsibilities are that come with being a part of an online learning culture. We assume that since they use it the most or have grown up with it by their side they will automatically understand the intricacies of what is reliable information on the internet. There is
no concrete way to tell if a source is “real” or “fake” but teaching students strategies and giving them practice in class can immensely help fill this void.

The internet and social media have created large opportunities for misinformation to spread like a virus. We need to be reminded of the need to educate our students on what is current and most relevant in their lives as technology has inevitably changed the way we will teach in the future. ELA teachers have always held the responsibility of teaching the process of research papers to students so I think the progression of moving this responsibility to addressing “fake news” is also our responsibility. The purpose of these five lesson plans will be to give ELA teachers at the 9th-10th grade level an opportunity to quickly and efficiently teach students about the workings of the internet, what the best strategies are for teaching students about finding information online, and ultimately letting students apply these skills to their daily lives. The lessons are meant to be quick and progress by each lesson as teachers already have many different obligations and standards they need to address in the classroom, but this should help provide a road map for teachers interested in the topic or at least provoke discussion about what our students need from us in the 21st century ELA classroom.

**Lesson 1 – Introduction to Fake News pt. 1 – Survey Day & Fake News Intro Activity**

NYS Common Core Standards:

- Common Core Standard for Reading Informational Text 9-10:3 Analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of ideas or events, including the order in which the points are made, how they are introduced and developed, and the connections that are drawn between them.
• Common Core Standard for Reading Informational Text 9-10:7 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

Student Learning Outcomes/Opportunities:

• Students will engage their minds about what their analytical skills associated with “fake news” are.

• Students will be introduced to the concepts of “fake news” and begin to analyze what their own ideals about information and news are.

• Students will define and explain their knowledge/philosophy associated with the “news”.

Anticipatory Set, Introduction, Or Motivator for the Lesson:

• Students are given and take the “Fake News survey” in order to get an idea about where their level of comfort/skill is within analyzing information on the internet.

Procedures / Order of Lesson:

• Students take the “Fake News” Survey

• Students score classmates survey while the teacher explains what qualifies as each point (i.e. why it is important they have each component, what the components are, and helping pin point what is faulty in each piece).

• Teacher explains what the important of the topic is and how some of these components to the surveys were brought up (i.e. the Imgur image is from the Stanford Research Group’s 2016 research, the Hilary headline was shared thousands of times during the election; although, she did not say this. It is also important students understand the importance of
how a Tweet is rarely sufficient evidence of something). These points are explained on the Power Point grading scale slides.

- Students work in groups on the Fake News Questionnaire and explain their views with each other.
- Students report back to teacher about what their views are which enables teacher to get access into the student’s background knowledge and vision of information on the internet.

Direct Instruction:

- Teacher explains to students the origins of the survey created and what justifies as each point.
- The direct instruction of this piece should help students realize what a model for analyzing content on the internet is as well as noticing the intricacies and difficulties associated with analyzing content online.

Group Work:

- Students work in groups to answer the following four questions:

  1) What is “News”?
  2) What can make news “fake” or faulty?
  3) Where do you get the majority of your “news”?
  4) Why is it important we are able to tell if information is “real” or “fake”?

- Students complete the worksheet they complete with classmates and we discuss as a whole their answers to these questions.

Assessments:
• Fake News Survey
• Fake News Group Questionnaire

Checking for Understanding:

• There will be continual checking for understanding throughout this lesson. The purpose of this lesson is for the teacher to get an understanding of what student’s skills are associated with analyzing information on the internet before the topic of fake news is genuinely discussed in full. The teacher should continually ensure students are understanding what makes an analysis of each prompt on the survey a “good answer” and the teacher should ensure students understand the importance of their ideals about news in contemporary society.

Closure:

• Teacher will go over the group questionnaire with the class and probe into their ideas about where they get their news, what they believe is “fake news”, and why (or if) they think it is important to be able to differentiate between the two. The closure should help the teacher get an idea into where their students generally are in regards to this topic.

Materials Needed for Lesson 1:

Name: ____________________________ 11/15/17

Mr. Larkin
ELA

Directions – Take the quiz below and answer the questions to the best of your abilities. Make sure to read the entire question and prompt.
1) On March 11, 2011, there was a large nuclear disaster at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant in Japan. This image was posted on Imgur, a photo sharing website, in July 2015.

![Image of mutant daisies](https://www.snopes.com/nuclear-mutant-daisies/)

Does this post provide strong evidence about the conditions near the Fukushima Daiichi Power Plant? Explain your reasoning.
2) Hilary Clinton was said to have given a speech to massive financial institute Goldman Sachs in 2013 where she reportedly said the quote below.

[Image of a news article titled "Hillary Clinton In 2013: “I Would Like To See People Like Donald Trump Run For Office; They’re Honest And Can’t Be Bought”

https://www.snopes.com/people-like-donald-trump/]

Do you believe Clinton said this, why or why not? How can this be proven? How could we learn more?

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________________________________
3) Below is a Tweet from President Trump posted on July 1st, 2017 where he confronts the epidemic of what he feels is large media companies like CNN reporting false stories.

![President Trump's Tweet](https://americanmilitarynews.com/2017/07/president-trump-tweets-video-of-himself-bodyslamming-cn-at-wrestlemania/)

Does this Tweet provide evidence that CNN is fake news or biased towards Trump? How so?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Name: ____________________________  11/15/17

Mr. Larkin  ELA
Directions: Pair with a group and answer the following questions to the best of your ability. Be prepared to discuss with the rest of class.

1) What is “News”?

2) What can make news “fake” or faulty?

3) Where do you get the majority of your “news”?

4) Why is it important we are able to tell if information is “real” or “fake”? 

Slides 1-2
Lesson 2 – Introduction to Fake News – Instruction on Fake News and Article Example

Day

NYS Common Core Standards:

Common Core Standard for Reading Informational Text 9-10:5 Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.
Common Core Standard for Speaking and Listening 9-10:2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

Common Core State Standard for Speaking and Listening 9-10:3 Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

Student Learning Outcomes/Opportunities:

- Students will learn about the four different categories of “fake news”
- Students will work with their peers to discover how examples of “fake news” classify into each category.
- Students will examine language, pictures, and style in order to determine how a source is qualified as “fake”.

Anticipatory Set, Introduction, Or Motivator for the Lesson:

- Students will watch *Ted:ED* video which explains how fake news spreads and get a glimpse into the different categories associated with fake news.
- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSKGa_7XJkg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSKGa_7XJkg)

Procedures / Order of Lesson:

- Students watch intro *Ted:ED* video on fake news and how it spreads.
- Students receive direct instruction on categories of fake news and peer into examples of each.
- Students take gallery walk and work with peers on uncovering how each examples fits into its specific category.
• Students discuss with the teacher how they were able to figure out each example’s category and why it is false or faulty.

Direct Instruction:

• Teacher will explain each category of “fake news” from the PowerPoint slide and question/explain to students (using examples on slides) about how each cannot be classified as legitimate news.

Group Work:

• Students will work with peers on the gallery walk which will place an article of fake news into each corner of the room (total of four – one for each category).

• Students will fit out sheet which asks them the following:
  1) What category of fake news does this article fall under?
  2) Why is it not “true”? 
  3) What gave away its falsehood? (Think of the words, phrases, images, style, etc.)

Assessments:

• Gallery Walk Sheet

Checking for Understanding:

• The teacher will continually check for understanding throughout the lesson, but the closure activity should help students understand why each article can be considered fake news and what gives this away.

Closure:

• Students report back to teacher their findings with the gallery walk and teacher explains with students why each article qualifies as “fake news”
Satire Article – Clearly making jokes about quotes, sources of information, and the ACLU defending a Nazi’s right to burn down their own building.

Clickbait Article – Shows a list, sensationalist type headline, and even suggests its own information is not important if you care about careers or graduate school.

News with Bias Article – The article does report on a news worthy story, but continually uses language that shows it is biased (repeated offensive language towards left siding people).

Outright Invented News Article – Tells of a story that is presented as fact, but is not true. This might be the most difficult for students to understand since it is presented as fact, but a few Google searches (as well as questionable spelling/content) should present it as false.

Materials Needed for Lesson 2:

Name: ____________________________ 11/16/17

Mr. Larkin  ELA

Directions: Pair with a group and visit each of the four articles I have posted in each corner of the room. Answer the prompts below about each exhibit.

Exhibit 1: What type of “fake news” does this qualify as? (Satire, Clickbait, News with Bias, or Outright Invented News).

Why is it not true?

What gave away its falsehood? (Think of the words, phrases, images, style, etc.)
Exhibit 2: What type of “fake news” does this qualify as? (Satire, Clickbait, News with Bias, or Outright Invented News).

Why is it not true?

What gave away its falsehood? (Think of the words, phrases, images, style, etc.)

Exhibit 3: What type of “fake news” does this qualify as? (Satire, Clickbait, News with Bias, or Outright Invented News).

Why is it not true?

What gave away its falsehood? (Think of the words, phrases, images, style, etc.)

Exhibit 4: What type of “fake news” does this qualify as? (Satire, Clickbait, News with Bias, or Outright Invented News).

Why is it not true?
NEW YORK—At a press conference Monday, American Civil Liberties Union officials announced that the organization will go to court to defend a neo-Nazi group's right to burn down ACLU headquarters.

ACLU president Nadine Strossen told reporters that her organization intends to "vigorously and passionately defend" the Georgia chapter of the American Nazi Party's First Amendment right to freely express its hatred of the ACLU by setting its New York office ablaze on Nov. 25.

"I am reminded of the words of Voltaire: 'I may disagree with what you say, but I will defend to the death your right to say it,'" Strossen said. "While the ACLU vehemently disagrees with the idea of Nazis torching this building, the principle of freedom of expression must be supported in all cases. If we take away these Nazis' right to burn down our headquarters, we take away everyone's right to burn down our headquarters."

Buddy Carver, president of the Georgia chapter of the American Nazi Party, praised the ACLU for taking on his case. "I would like to thank Ms. Strossen and all the other n***er-loving bleeding-heart liberals at the 'ACL-Jew' for defending
my constitutional right to express my loathing of them with hundred-foot-high flames," said Carver, sporting a tan uniform and swastika armband. "We must finish the job Hitler was unable to."

ACLU associate director Mel Rosenblatt agreed. "The real danger here is not the American Nazi Party," he said. "The real danger here is what would happen to the rest of us if the Buddy Carvers of this world were not allowed to commit arson against n**er-loving, bleeding-heart-liberal Jew attorneys."

Making the case all the more controversial is the neo-Nazis' demand that the ACLU's entire 315-person staff be in the building at the time of the blaze. Strongly opposing the request are New York City police commissioner William Bratton, fire chief Ed Holm and mayor Rudolph Giuliani, who said that all 315 will die if trapped in the 47-story building during the blaze. ACLU attorneys responded that they will request a federal appeals hearing if the City of New York attempts to stop them and their fellow ACLU employees from perishing in the Nov. 25 blaze.

"Yes, my loving wife Linda and three wonderful children, Ben, Robby and Stephanie, will be devastated when I am killed next month," ACLU attorney Harvey Gross said. "But I recognize that, in a very real sense, it would be a victory for Mr. Carver and his fellow hatemongers if I did not burn to death, because their terrible message of bigotry and intolerance would be all the more effective if suppressed."

The Carver case is one of several controversial legal battles with which the ACLU has been involved this judicial year. In State of California v. Tubbs, the organization defended the right of a San Francisco art gallery to display a piece of performance art in which innocent passersby are shot to death by gunmen. In
February, the ACLU went to U.S. Appeals Court to defend the Grand Wizard of the Coahoma County, Mississippi, chapter of the Ku Klux Klan's right to beat a black man to death and spray-paint 'White Pride' across his chest.

"We can have no arbitrary setting of limits when it comes to the Bill of Rights," Strossen said. "The Constitution does not say, 'You have the right to express these opinions, but not those opinions.' Nor does it say, 'You can express these opinions by word, but not by violence.' For a free society to work, hatred, in all its forms, must be encouraged."

Article 2 (News With Bias)

Nolte: Jon Stewart Is the Only Person On Earth ‘Stunned’ By Louis C.K. Scandal
Jon Stewart told NBC’s *Today Show* Tuesday that he was “stunned” by the news that his close friend and colleague Louis C.K. admitted to exposing himself to and masturbated in front of repulsed women.

This means that the left-wing Stewart is the only person on the planet stunned by this news, stunned by allegations that have been reported on for over two years, stunned by what has been rumored about, talked about, and discussed within the comedy world — which is Stewart’s world, by the way — for over a decade.

The comedy world is not my world, and I was not “stunned” by this news. Nor was anyone else with access to the Internet or the *New York Times* or the *Daily Beast* or social media or what one might describe as “news."

Stewart will get away with this pretense because he is a left-wing sacred cow, and our corrupt media protects left-wing sacred cows. The only reason the question even came up has absolutely nothing to do with our useless media.

Stewart’s problem is that this video from May of 2016 is making the rounds on social media, a video where the former *Daily Show* host is asked about and then dismisses the rumors and stories about C.K.’s appalling behavior.

Naturally, it was not a journalist who asked Stewart this question. It was a citizen. Because our advance.

Fast-forward to Tuesday’s softball-fest on the *Today Show*:

**Matt Lauer:** What was the impact on you when you heard about the accusations [about C.K.] and his admission?
**Jon Stewart**: Stunned. I think, you give your friends the benefit of the doubt. I tried to think of it in terms of, I’ve had friends who have compulsions and have done things — gambling or drinking or drugs — and we’ve lost some of them. Some of them have died. You always find yourself back to a moment of, ‘Did I miss something? Could I have done more?’ In this situation, I think we all could’ve.

Savannah Guthrie then told Stewart that this was an “open secret” in the comedy world … and then let him off the hook:

**Savannah Guthrie**: But in this case, you said you were stunned.

**Stewart**: I was stunned.

**Guthrie**: So you hadn’t heard that?

**Stewart**: No. I heard that a year ago. I was doing a podcast with David Axelrod. A man in the audience asked me about it. I hadn’t heard at that point.

After some more of Stewart’s word salad, Guthrie thanked him for his “time and thoughtfulness.”

Democrats sure got it good.

**Article 3 (Clickbait)**

**Twentysomething: Why I regret getting straight A’s in college**

Posted in: College & grad school

280 Comments

inShare 47

*This is a guest post from Jon Morrow, who is 25 years old. His blog is On Moneymaking.*
**By Jon Morrow** – I nearly killed myself in college to get straight A’s. Well, almost straight A’s. I graduated with 37 A’s and 3 B’s for a GPA of 3.921. At the time, I thought I was hot stuff. Now I wonder if it wasn’t a waste of time. Let me explain:

1. **No one has ever asked about my GPA.**

   I was told that having a high GPA would open all kinds of doors for me. But you know what? I interviewed with lots of companies, received a total of 14 job offers after graduation, and none of the companies asked about it. They were much more impressed with stuff like serving as Chief of Staff for the student government and starting a radio station run by 200 volunteers.

   I suppose a college recruiter from a Fortune 500 company might ask, but honestly, I can’t see any employer hiring a straight-A student over someone with five years of relevant work experience. It might tip the scale in a competitive situation, but in most cases, I haven’t seen that grades are really that important to employers.

2. **I didn’t sleep.**

   Unless you’re a super genius, getting 37 A’s is hard work. For me, it was an obsession. Anything less than an A+ on any assignment was unacceptable. I’d study for 60-80 hours a week, and if I didn’t get the highest grade in class, I’d put in 100 hours the next week.

   Translation: I didn’t sleep much. From my freshman to junior year, I averaged about six hours a night. By my senior year though, I was only getting 3-5 per night, even on weekends. I was drinking a 2-liter bottle of Mountain Dew and 2-3 energy drinks per day just to stay awake. Not only is that unhealthy, but it’s not particularly fun either.

3. **I’ve forgotten 95% of it.**

   I majored in English Literature and minored in Communication Theory. The main reason I chose those subjects was I thought they would teach me how to write and speak, two skills that would serve me well for the rest of my life.

   Boy, was I stupid. Instead, I spent all my time reading classic literature and memorizing vague, pseudoscientific communication theories. Neither are useful at all, and I’ve forgotten at least 95% of it.

   I’d guess the same is true for most college graduates. Tell me, what’s the point of spending 60-80 hours a week learning things that you immediately forget?
4. I didn’t have time for people.
Being in the student government and running a radio station, I had lots of opportunities to build a huge network. But I didn’t have time. Between studying and doing my job, I had to prioritize the people I wanted to develop relationships with and narrow it down to the handful who could help me the most.

That’s no way to go through school. College isn’t so much a training ground for entering the workplace as a sandbox for figuring out who you are and how you relate to other people. You develop your social skills and forge relationships with people that might be colleagues for the rest of your life.

If I could do it all over again, I would spend less time in the library and more time at parties. I would have 50 friends, not 3. I would be known for “the guy that knows everyone,” not “the smartest guy in class.” Not only because it would’ve been more fun, but because I would still be friends with most of those people now and would have access to the networks they’ve developed over the last four years.

5. Work experience is more valuable.
In retrospect, I could’ve probably spent 20-30 hours a week on my studies and gotten B’s. That would’ve freed up 30-70 hours a week, depending on the course load. When I think of all of the things that I could’ve done with those hours, I just shake my head.

If there’s one thing graduates lack, it’s relevant work experience. If you want to be a freelance writer, you’re much better off writing articles for magazines and interning with a publishing company than working your tail off to get straight A’s. The experience makes you more valuable to future employers and usually results in a paycheck with a few more digits on it.

What about Graduate School?
If you’re getting your masters, going to law school, or becoming a doctor, then you’ll need all 37 of those A’s to get into the best school possible, and you can safely disregard this entire post. Just be sure that you follow through. I thought I would go to law school, and then I found out what a miserable career it is and how little it actually pays. All of those good grades are now going to waste.

It also comes down to the question, “What’s the most effective use of your time?” If you can’t imagine living without an advanced degree from an Ivy League school, then reading until your eyes fall out and sleeping on a table in the library is a perfectly defensible lifestyle.

On the other hand, if you want to get a job and make as much money as possible, then good grades aren’t going to help you as your teachers and parents might have you believe. You’re better making
powerful friends, building a killer resume and generally having the time of your life on your parent’s dime.

Jon Morrow’s blog is On Moneymaking.

Once you’re done with college, what should you focus on next? It’s clear your grades don’t matter, but what does matter? The most important thing after you graduate college is to treat your 20s like they matter. This is not practice. This is your life. And here: How to Make Your 20s Count.

Article 4 (Outright Invented News)

BREAKING: Planned Parenthood Employee Charged With Using Aborted Babies as Halloween Props

November 7, 2017 Flagg Eagleton Tuna Steak Medium Rare 0
Eileen Gunderson of Piedmont, North Dakota was arrested and charged with unlawful use of “biological waste” and misconduct after she took “an entire trash bag” full of aborted baby parts. Not to sell; not to expose the horrors of abortion but to put on display at her Halloween party.

Gunderson, a 22-year-old employee of Planned Parenthood, says she didn’t mean any harm and that none of the “waste” could have possibly come in contact with anyone:

“I just wanted really cool props for the party. They were all under tupperware or hung out of reach. Other than my dog grabbing a couple there was nothing really gross about it. They’re just parts of zygotes.”

According to reports, Gunderson had everything from arms, legs and heads to full fetal position infants on display, which disgusted and concerned her neighbor, Bethania Sky:

“People need to understand that they don’t need to meet their own standards in society, they need to be what we all expect them to be. What Eileen did was horrifying. She’s no longer my friend or a good person. I’m blogging about it.”

It was Sky’s reports that brought the police, who had to research whether or not a crime was committed. Once they figured it out, they shut down the party, took Gunderson into custody and declared the entire building a biohazard. She faces up to a year in jail and fines of $10K if convicted.
Lesson 3 – Why does “fake news” matter? Should we care? (Deepening of Purpose/Case Study)

NYS Common Core Standards:
Common Core Standard for Reading Informational Text 9-10:7 Analyze various accounts of a subject told in different mediums (e.g., a person’s life story in both print and multimedia), determining which details are emphasized in each account.

Common Core Standard for Reading Informational Text 9-10:8 Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

Student Learning Outcomes/Opportunities:

- Students will learn four strategies to detect and fight against fake news.
- Students will learn about a real incident where fake news had disastrous and potentially violent consequences.
- Students will practice their skills on the internet by applying these strategies to an article of their choosing.

Anticipatory Set, Introduction, Or Motivator for the Lesson:

- Students watch video of President Trump calling CNN a “fake news” organization which he uses to justify not answering or taking their questions. Students respond to questions about this interaction.
- [https://youtu.be/W6ZHY0E4_Wg](https://youtu.be/W6ZHY0E4_Wg)

Procedures / Order of Lesson:

- Students watch YouTube clip of CNN being called “fake news” by President Trump.
- Students answer warm-up sheet questions concerning how this could affect the view of the organization/could possibly deter news power and enhance a politicians.
- Students watch video and read article (as a class) about the Pizzagate scandal in December 2016.
• https://youtu.be/7fyN9DdyuPk

• Students learn about four strategies one can use to fight against and detect fake news

• Students practice the skills they learned and apply the four strategies to an article of their choosing which they turn in at the end of class.

Direct Instruction:

• Students read along with classmates/teacher as they read the article aloud about the pizza gate scandal.

• Students follow along with teacher as they discuss the four strategies associated with finding fake news.

• For the purpose of the task, it could be helpful for teacher to go over the fact-checking websites with students. For example, entering “pizza gate” into any of these search engines will show how it has been proved as false.

Group Work:

• Students will work on finding their own article and using the four strategies to recognize and detect why it is real or fake.

• Students will work together to answer the questions associated with using each strategy.

• NOTE: Students must have personal access to the internet to do this lesson.

Assessments:

• Students will turn in their strategy work sheet at the end of class.

Checking for Understanding:

• Students will learn new concepts to help them fight and detect fake news and the worksheet should help teacher know if they understand how to use these strategies.
Closure:

- Students will turn in their worksheets as we prepare for them to become more independent in their learning and application next class.

**Materials Needed for Lesson 3:**

Name: ____________________________ 11/16/17

Mr. Larkin

ELA

Directions: Watch the Warm-Up video of President Trump calling CNN “fake news” and answer the following questions.

1) What would it mean for an international news organization to be “fake”?

2) How would this affect the way people view this organization?

3) Do you believe an organization is fake from his claims? How could it help to discredit a news organization for a politician? (imagine if you could discredit everything me or your principal said).

‘Pizzagate’ gunman says he was foolish, reckless, mistaken — and sorry.
The armed North Carolina man who commandeered a pizza restaurant in Northwest Washington apologized to his victims and residents in the nation’s capital in a letter to a federal judge seeking leniency at his June 22 sentencing.

Writing in his own hand, Edgar Maddison Welch, 28, said in a court filing that he was “truly sorry for endangering the safety of any and all bystanders who were present that day. Unfortunately, I cannot change what I did, but I think I owe it to the families and the community to apologize for my mistakes.”

Federal prosecutors countered in their own memo to the judge that it was “entirely the product of good luck” that no one was shot when Welch entered Comet Ping Pong carrying a fully loaded AR-15 military-style rifle and revolver seeking to investigate a viral Internet rumor known as “Pizzagate.”
False stories propagated an unfounded conspiracy theory that linked Hillary Clinton to an alleged child-sex-trafficking ring run from the family restaurant, where Clinton’s presidential campaign chairman, John Podesta, occasionally dined.

Welch pleaded guilty in March to a District assault and a federal firearms charge in the Dec. 4 incident, which drew national headlines to the Connecticut Avenue retail block where the restaurant is located. The set of filings over his sentencing was made Tuesday night. In court filings, assistant federal defender Dani Jahn asked for an 18-month prison sentence for Welch, saying Welch “does not seek to minimize the impact his reckless and frightening actions had on those who encountered him. . . . Rather, Mr. Welch is hopeful that those victimized by his actions can forgive him.”

Welch, whose neat cursive handwriting on ruled paper was excerpted and cited by his lawyer, said he “came to D.C. with the intent of helping people” and to relieve suffering, “especially the suffering of a child.”

He expressed “sincere regret for any emotional trauma I might have caused, especially to the families who were present.” Welch added, “It was never my intention to harm or frighten innocent lives, but I realize now just how foolish and reckless my decision was.”

U.S. prosecutors called for a 4½-year prison term, urging U.S. District Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson to send a strong message to deter those who would commit violence based solely on “malicious and misguided” Internet rumors.

Welch “was lucid, deadly serious, and very aware” that he would end up dead or in jail, prosecutors wrote, on the drive from his home in Salisbury, N.C., in a Toyota Prius.
“Beyond Pizzagate, the Internet is full of wild conspiracy theories where people urge members of the public to take action,” wrote assistant U.S. attorneys Demian S. Ahn and Sonali D. Patel.

“A significant sentence is required to deter other people from pursuing vigilante justice based only on their YouTube feed,” prosecutors wrote. “The fact that no one was shot was entirely the product of good luck.”

Both sides filed unusually lengthy and detailed sentencing documents, which included Welch’s letter for the defense. Prosecutors included transcripts of interviews with several witnesses with whom Welch communicated, online files he downloaded, wrenching victim impact statements and additional disturbing threats made by people fixated on fake news accounts.

Prosecutors included the arrest warrant of a Shreveport, La., man, Yusif Jones, who pleaded guilty to telephoning a copycat threat to a nearby pizza shop on Dec. 7, saying: “I’m coming to finish what the other guy didn’t. I’m coming there to save the kids, and then I’m going to shoot you and everyone in the place,” according to court charging documents.

Welch “traumatized the employees and customers at the restaurant, and his crimes affected an entire community, leaving many people feeling threatened,” prosecutors wrote. The defendant “made clear that he had no respect for the public institutions of the District of Columbia, telling detectives that everyone in D.C. is ‘crooked,’ ” and did not trust the FBI to investigate the truth, prosecutors wrote.

In plea papers, Welch, a father of two young girls, acknowledged that he had become agitated by reports and videos he read and saw online about the supposed sex ring.

“Raiding a pedo ring, possibly sacrificing [sic] the lives of a few for the lives of many,” Welch wrote in one of several text messages in an
unsuccessful effort to recruit friends for what he said would be a violent confrontation, authorities said.

“Standing up against a corrupt system that kidnaps, tortures and rapes babies and children in our own back yard,” he wrote in another exchange.

Welch binge-watched YouTube videos about the alleged child-trafficking ring on Dec. 1, setting a plan, court files show. Still, Welch was warned by a friend and his girlfriend against doing “something stupid,” as she put it in a text. Using a “camera” and conducting “recon” first would be better than going to the restaurant with “guns blazing,” the friend advised in other messages cited by authorities.

Finally, as he drove to Washington, Welch texted his girlfriend a Bible verse about being anointed by God and recorded a message to his family saying he loved them and hoped his daughters would understand someday that he was trying to protect the defenseless.

Shortly before 3 p.m. Dec. 4, Welch parked and left a loaded 12-gauge shotgun and box of shells in the car, then walked into the restaurant carrying a loaded, six-shot revolver on his hip and holding the 9mm long rifle with about 29 rounds of ammunition across his chest.

After a panicky evacuation by workers and customers, including children, Welch fired the rifle multiple times at a locked closet door, striking computer equipment inside, court documents said. He also pointed the rifle toward an unwitting employee retrieving pizza dough who entered at the back of the restaurant and then immediately turned and ran for his life, according to the government’s evidence signed off on by Welch.
Welch ultimately did not shoot anyone and surrendered after he found no evidence of hidden rooms or sex trafficking.

Welch has agreed to forfeit the rifle, the revolver, a shotgun and ammunition he carried with him that day and to pay restitution of $5,744.33 to the restaurant for damaged computer systems, a door, a lock and a ping-pong table.

In March, conservative radio host and Infowars website operator Alex Jones apologized for promoting the Pizzagate conspiracy. Jones posted a six-minute video on his website in which he read a prepared statement saying that neither the restaurant nor its owner, James Alefantis, had anything to do with human trafficking. The statement came after Alefantis’s attorneys had requested a retraction.

Name: _____________________________________________________                     11/16/17
Mr. Larkin
ELA
Directions: Find an article online of your choosing (keep it appropriate) and apply the four strategies we learned to analyze why it is a real or fake article.
Article URL (copy/paste this in):

Article Title:

Website of Article:

**The Google Method** – What happened when you Googled the title of the article or what the event was about? Did other searches come up? Did any Google searches offer something different?

**The Advertisement Method** – Did any advertisements come up when you clicked your article? Is the article “sponsored content”? What were the advertisements for?
Analyzing the Content Method – Are there any hyperlinks, quotes, references, or dates used in the source? Any readily obvious spelling/grammatical mistakes? Does the language seem biased or wanting you to believe something?

The Fact-Checking Method - Plug your articles headline or content of what it speaks about into one of the fact-checking sources I taught to you. Which one did you use and what did it say about it?

Day 3: Why does fake news matter? Should we care? How can we fight it?

Now that the video is over....

- Answer the following questions on the sheet provided:

  1) What would it mean for an international news organization to be "fake"?
  2) How would this effect the way people view this organization?
  3) Do you believe an organization is fake from his claims?

- Be prepared to share your responses with the class.

Slides 1-2

A case study of Fake News: Pizzagate

- Together, we will view this video which discusses a recent event of actual "fake news" leading to a disastrous and almost violent outcome.
- Welch, believing to be acting in the interest of saving children’s lives to sex trafficking, ended up being completely misled and is now serving jail time for what he believed to be his heroic actions.
- https://youtu.be/7HyW90dyULk

Reading article (as a class) of man who committed Pizzagate.

- It’s important we interact with real news articles in this learning segment so we can better understand what they look and read like.
- Note how Welch (who believed he was genuinely helping people) is now serving time in federal prison.
- I hope this serves to show us how “fake news” can have “real consequences”

Slides 3-4
SO what can we possibly do to avoid being like Mr. Welch?!?!?

- I will now teach you four strategies you can use to help you when you are on the internet and coming across information.
- I provided a hand-out of this, but it is crucial you listen as you will be responsible for using these strategies today.

Four strategies you can use to fight being duped by fake news

- The Google Method – If you are reading an article and it says an event happened, simply Googling the event can help you see if other people reported on this.
- NOTE: If it is a major event countless organizations will run a story on it. This will help you avoid all genres of fake news.
- This should help you combat against all genres of fake news and is time efficient.

Slides 5-6

The Advertisement Method

- Advertisement Method – If there are countless ads popping up, there is a good sign this article may be inaccurate.
- If an article is labeled with the title “Sponsored Content” (even if it appears to be real) someone paid money to have this posted.
- The majority of news articles and organizations run off advertising money, so don’t openly discredit an article because of this, but if it seems absurd be conscious of that.
- Advertisements are a crucial component to making money in the 21st century on most websites that function for free (Spotify, Facebook, Instagram, etc.) be cautious of content you see using these sites.
- This method can be helpful in sniffing out click bait.

Slides 7-8

Analyzing the Content Method

- This is where the skills you learned in ELA come in handy =)
- **Analyzing the Content Method** – If you are reading an article, be conscious of how the material is presented and if it sounds professional to you.
- What to look for – Misspellings, biased or offensive language, no hyperlinks, possibly photo-shopped images (no credit given to photographer), and lack of dates/quotes.
- Also to consider – Look at the domain name (fake sites will often go by “.co” in order to seem real) and check the websites about page.

Slides 9-10

Fact-Checking Method

- **The Fact-Checking Method** – Using specific fact-checking websites to help you come across controversial opinions or articles.
- This should be a last resort method, but there is nothing wrong with seeking help.
- Snopes – Fact-Checking website you can search that keeps its database updated on popular fake news stories that are spreading.
- Factcheck.org – Fact-checking website geared towards checking what U.S. politicians say and if it is true or not.
- PolitiFact.com – Fact-checking website that is once again geared towards checking what U.S. politicians say and offers interesting features of how accurate or inaccurate their claims are (Mostly True Vs. Pants on Fire)

Fact-Checking Method (continued)

Practice Time!!!

- Now that you have learned about how and why fake news is important to recognize as well as learned strategies for fighting against it - you and your group will analyze a piece of news content of your choosing on the internet and use each strategy in order to detect whether it is reliable or not.
- It is not necessarily important what article you choose – the importance resides on using each strategy and finding which works best for you. Try to pick something of interest!

Lesson 4 – Beginning Student Project of Creating Fake News

NYS Common Core Standards:

Common Core Standard for Writing 9-10:1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

Common Core Standard for Writing 9-10:6 Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.

Student Learning Outcomes/Opportunities:
• Students will learn how young people have used fake news in order to make money
during the 2016 presidential election.

• Students will apply their knowledge of fake news to creating their own “fake” article.

• Students will use their communication and collaboration skills in order to create their
“fake” article with a group.

Anticipatory Set, Introduction, Or Motivator for the Lesson:

• Students will watch two videos which detail Macedonian teenagers using the internet in
order to publish fake news stories which they made a hefty amount of money from.

• This should serve as an interesting information piece, but also help transition students
into the idea of creating their own “fake” news article.

• https://youtu.be/0F7BT-mZFTw

• https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gOiHIlsYA03I

Procedures / Order of Lesson:

• Students watch warm-up video about young people creating their own fake news to make
money in Macedonia.

• Students learn about their project as their teacher explains it to them (students receive
hand-out which describes this as well).

• Students take class-time to work on their project

• Students must get their headline and explain to teacher what the content of their article
will consist of.

Direct Instruction:

• Teacher explains the presentation and what is expected of them.
Group Work:

- Students work together on creating a headline and content for their article they will present for the reminder of class.

Assessments:

- Students will be assessed on their ability to work together and will need their topic/headline approved by teacher by end of class (preferably earlier).

Checking for Understanding:

- Students will have teacher to assist them in deciding what their article will be about (does it get approved by teacher should serve as a good standing if they are understanding their assignment/topic).

Materials Needed for Lesson 4:

Fake News Article Creation Outline

**Directions**: Now that we spent a reasonable amount of time learning about fake news, how to track it, and why it is important, you and your group will create a fake news article which you will share with the class.

**Genres of Fake News your group can choose from:**

1) **SATIRE** - purposely false news with the goal of making a joke or criticizing a social or cultural phenomenon.

2) **CLICKBAIT** - articles or videos which demand reader’s attention through highly sensationalized words or headlines, but is mostly meant to attract readers with opinions or non-facts.

3) **NEWS WITH A BIAS** - has inklings towards being biased as it generally gravitates towards a specific political side. IE) An article that uses offensive language towards illegal immigrants or millennials.

4) **OUTRIGHT INVENTED NEWS** - “news” that is straightforwardly fake, but pretends to be serious.

**Requirements** –
**Headline:** Write a headline that grab reader’s attention and would make someone want to “click” onto your article.

**Content:** Write an article that has believable content (and is school appropriate) and reaches 200-300 words.

**Approval:** You must receive approval from me about your content and headline before you can begin constructing your article.

**Presentation:** You and your entire group will present your article in a 5-minute time-span. You will also be asked about your Rationale at the end which is someone in your group explaining why your article could be believable.

**Participation:** Each group member must participate in the project and each member will be graded differently. You are all accountable and will have class time to work on this so make sure you are being helpful.

**Pictures:** NOT REQUIRED but can be very helpful in making your piece more believable.

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**Day 4: What can we learn about fake news by creating it ourselves?**

- To begin class today, we are going to watch two videos about a group of Macedonians who created fake news websites about the 2015 U.S. Presidential election with the sole goal of making money (which they made a ton off).
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0RT91H6631](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0RT91H6631)
  - [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9F7B1n97Tw](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9F7B1n97Tw)

- Do you think these groups of people are wrong to cash in on these websites that are used to deceive people or are they right for trying to make ends meet off of irresponsible new consumers?

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**PROJECT TIME WOOT WOOT!**

- Now that we have learned about the workings of fake news, how it is made, what it looks like, what the “genres” of it are, and why it is important you and your group will make a fake news article which you will share with your classmates.

- We will now discuss what the guidelines and grading for this project are.

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**Genre Choice of Fake News Article**

- You are going to write an article of approximately 200-300 words that follows one of the four “genres” of fake news we learned which are:
  1. Satire - an article or video that is purposely false with the goal of making a joke or criticizing a social or cultural phenomenon.
  2. Clickbait - articles or videos which demand readers attention through highly sensationalized words or headlines.
  3. News With Bias - it has inklings towards being biased as it generally gravitates towards a specific political side.
  4. Outright Invented News - “news” that is straightforwardly fake, but pretends to be serious.

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**Reminders**

- Use the articles from the other day as guides into how these “fake” news articles are created/what they look like.
- Be appropriate! Make sure you are getting your content and headline approved by me before you start writing it.
- Use your resources! I am a resource, feel free to bounce ideas off me and your classmates.
- The work should be evenly split – make sure all of your group is contributing!

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**Slides 1-2**

**What to think about**

- We will all know your articles are fake, but how can you make it more believable?
  - **Headlines:** It is important your headline grabs readers by attention, so use words that grab reader’s attention.
  - **Content:** Write about something people (or you) are generally interested in so they would hypothetically be willing to click on your article if it appeared on their social media page.
  - **Length:** Make sure you are meeting the appropriate word length. Most news articles can be read quickly, but shouldn’t take 20 seconds to read.
  - **Pictures:** Include a picture (if you believe it will make your article more believable - not required but could be helpful).

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**Slides 3-4**

**Presentation**

- Your group will present your article to the class for about 5 minutes each.
- You will present the following:
  - **Your Headline**
  - **Your Content** (you will read your article to the class)
  - **Pictures** (if you have any)
  - **Your Rationale:** You will explain why you think this article could be deceiving to others/could make your group advertising $5$"$5$"$5$"$5$"$5$
Lesson 5 – Students present their fake news article & conclusion of learning segment

NYS Common Core Standards:

Common Core Standard for Listening and Speaking 9-10:2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.

Common Core Standard for Listening and Speaking 9-10:3. Evaluate a speaker’s point of view, reasoning, and use of evidence and rhetoric, identifying any fallacious reasoning or exaggerated or distorted evidence.

Student Learning Outcomes/Opportunities:

- Students will present their “fake” news article to class
- Students will be responsible for contributing in some way to their group presentation
- Students will have the opportunity to see different

Anticipatory Set, Introduction, Or Motivator for the Lesson:

- Students get back with group – reminder of what is expected of them when they present.

Procedures / Order of Lesson:

- Students will get back with their group and get prepared for their presentation of their “fake” news article.
• Students will present their article (approximately 5 minutes each).

• Students will answer self-reflection questions concerning some of the main purposes of doing this learning segment.

• Students turn in their presentation sheet and receive a grade for what they did.

Group Work:

• Students present their work together and are held responsible for listening to others.

Assessments:

• Students will be individually assessed on their ability to create an attention-grabbing news headline, an article that could possibly be seen as real as well as meets length requirements, and their involvement/respect with others during the process.

Checking for Understanding:

• How students perform during their assessment

• Class discussion during closure segment.

Closure:

• Go over Self-Reflection sheet and have discussion about the major purposes behind doing this learning segment (ability to recognize the internet phenomenon of fake news, having strategies for dealing with fake news, and recognizing democracy cannot function without informed citizens).

Materials Needed for Lesson 5:

Name: __________________________________________________________          Mr. Larkin
Fake News Presentation Sheet                      ELA


**Headline (5 Points):** Was the article believable and did it grab people’s attention? 

**Content (10 points):** Did the article meet the word length? Was the article of moderate quality even though it is “fake”? 

**Rationale (5 Points):** Was the explanation sufficient for why the group believed it could grab reader’s attention? Is the article capable of being believed? 

**Presentation (10 points):** Did everyone contribute to the presentation? Was class time used productively? Was this student respectful during other presentations? 

(TOTAL/30)

**Self-Reflection:**

1) Why is it important we can recognize fake news?

2) What are some strategies I can use on my own to help me find reliable news sources?

3) How do you think democracy is at stake if people cannot decipher fake news or know who to trust?
Chapter Four: Conclusions and Recommendations

The time period of people getting their information directly from trusted sources in the daily newspaper is a practice of the past. People in the 21st century use a wide range of generally online resources in order to gain knowledge about what is going on in the world. Social media has begun to not only provide opportunities for people to express themselves and connect with others, but it also is one of the largest places to find and spread information. Educators and parents of the 21st century, who may have not grown up with hand-held technology attached to their fingers often mistakenly assume that young people know everything about the internet simply because they use it a lot. The harsh reality is this knowledge via frequent use is rarely the case. Students are not being given opportunities to learn about the reality of false information on the internet and the countless shapes it may form. Research conducted by the Stanford Education Group in 2016 showcased eerily how young people struggle to understand what is sponsored
content, how images can be manipulated with anything from a caption to photo-shop, and maybe even worse, their reasoning for believing information on the internet is superficial at best. The research conducted by the Stanford Education Group sent alarms through learning communities and made countless educators reconsider what role information from the internet should play in the classroom and if we are appropriately addressing it. The ability of democracy to function is genuinely at stake if citizens are not capable of being well-informed and are increasingly mislead by “fake” multi-media.

The presidential election of 2016 brought about a general hysteria about the information we were receiving. President Trump continually referred to news organizations he disagreed with as “fake news,” continual stories came up, such as those about the citizens of Macedonia, where people were creating fake news content about politics in the U.S. in order to gain more clicks and generate revenue for themselves. The reality is that “fake news” has many shapes and purposes. It can be created in order to deceive and motivate specific political agendas, but it also can be used in order to make money. One of the realities of fake news and the ability for it go viral is the prevalence of social media. Social media allows posts, images, articles, and links to be “shared” immediately so people who follow each other are exposed to the same content. Instead of waiting for a night or a day for a story to be shared to the public – it often is shared immediately which creates massive opportunities for error and even purposeful deception. In many ways this ability of “sharing” destroys the concept of fact-checking and makes people who use social media extensively more vulnerable to believe fake news over people who do not use it. As many know, younger people use social media at a much higher rate than adults so it is extensively important we are teaching students in school how to not only be aware of fake news, but have legitimate strategies in detecting it themselves.
In order for students to learn about the realities of “fake news” they must practice being able to detect it. In order to do this, I created a 5-day learning segment where students learn about the different genres of fake news, strategies in detecting it, and ultimately creating their own fake news in order to help them gain awareness of how easily this can be made by someone. Students should be aware of how “fake news” is not just misinformation and has many forms. Satire, clickbait, news with bias, and outright invented news all hold different structures and purposes, but each could easily mislead someone into believing something that is inaccurate or is simply created to make money. Students need to understand how broad of a topic “fake news” is and classifying it into genres can be helpful in molding a more in-depth perspective. Many strategies exist for detecting fake news; I would argue the most simplistic method is being a careful and critical reader, but there are other ways students can prevent themselves from being duped. In this learning segment I teach students about the Google Method (using Google to search headlines to see if other people are reporting stories), Advertising Method (more advertisements equal less likely to be true/simply generated for revenue), Fact-Checking Method (using websites established for the sake of fighting fake news), and the Analyzing the Content Method (using the skills used learned in ELA to be cautious and critical readers). The learning segment ends with students doing a group project where they create their own piece of believable fake news which allows them to practice the skills they recently learned and helps reveal how easily this content can be created.

The topic of fake news and its impact on young people is still in its primitive stages. Genuine research on the topic is still in its infancy and there still is a lot which needs to be considered about the way in which fake news is impacting young people and how we can fight it. There are a variety of questions we need to consider as educators: Is social media truly making
young people more susceptible to false information? Are we giving students opportunities to learn about information on social media or we banning social media altogether in schools despite it being a legitimately popular avenue into information? Are we being responsible and keeping our curriculum up to date if we do not include the topic of fake news? Are students finding it difficult to trust the information they receive about the world due to the hostile political climate around fake news? Are children of poverty more susceptible to fake news as their electronic use often differs from children of wealth (or is the other way around)? Should fake news and misinformation on the internet be included into Common Core State Standards in order to ensure all students are being given an adequate education in the 21st century? All of these questions suggest legitimate concerns around the dense concept of fake news and research should probe into these questions. Despite Big Brother’s suggestion, ignorance is not, nor never was strength. We need to ensure our students are conscious and critical of the information they are receiving online in order to effectively participate in a democratic society in the 21st century.
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