READY-TO-USE LESSON PLANS

"That's a Fact!"—Or Is It?

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The term "fake news" seems to be everywhere. But do your students know how to recognize real and fake information? Use this lesson to show students that sometimes what appears to be news is not just the facts.

Objective: Students will be able to define the term "fake news" and describe ways to evaluate the credibility and accuracy of a news story.

Grades: 6–8

Time: 60 minutes

Materials: class supply of the handouts "Media Literacy Vocabulary Terms," "Ten Red Flags to Help Identify Fake News," and "How Do They Compare?"; list of six to eight local and national news websites appropriate for students; list of five or more news topics from the week; access to news websites

DIRECTIONS

Bell-Ringer Activity

1. Write the terms *real news* and *fake news* on the board.
2. Ask each student to write what he or she thinks each term means on scrap paper or in a journal.

Whole-Group and Partner Practice

1. Provide time for students to share their definitions from the bell-ringer activity above. Then give each student a "Media Literacy Vocabulary Terms" handout. Review the terms and definitions with students.
2. Reread the definition of *fake news* aloud with students. Ask students to raise their hands if they have ever read a news article they believe was fake news. Point out that informed readers must be able to distinguish between real news and fake news. Discuss why this ability is important, particularly in the age of social media and 24-hour news. *(An informed opinion must be based on facts; a fake news story will provide false or misleading information to skew your opinion. Fake news can spread quickly over social media and by websites that lack credibility.)*
3. Distribute copies of "Ten Red Flags to Help Identify Fake News" and go over it with students.
4. Divide the class into pairs and display the list of credible news websites prepared in advance.

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Direct each pair to choose a news website and read one article from it. Then, have students put a checkmark on the handout next to any red flag that might indicate the article is fake news.

5. Provide time for several sets of partners to share their articles and evaluations with the rest of the class.

Independent Practice

1. Display a list of five or more news topics from the current week. Give each student a copy of the "How Do They Compare?" graphic organizer and review directions as a class.
2. Direct each student to locate and read two articles about one news topic on the list displayed in Step 1, making sure each article comes from a different news website. Then have the student complete the graphic organizer. Encourage students to use the "Ten Red Flags to Help Identify Fake News" handout to help them.
3. Provide time for students to share their findings in small groups. Then, as a class, discuss why it's important to look at a variety of sources when consuming news.

Progress Check

Wrap up the lesson by asking each student to write on paper or a sticky note one reason it is unwise to assume a news article is accurate. Also have the student write one thing he or she will do the next time they read a news article on a website, in a newspaper or magazine, or on social media.

Recognizing real news, calling out fake news

Our popular course ***Teaching Media Literacy in a Post-Truth World*** helps students **become more discerning consumers of news**. Encourage students to discard the assumption that anything presented as news is accurate and to learn to evaluate the differences between real news and fake news.

Other courses you may like:

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- *Social Media Tools for Teaching and Learning*
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MY NOTES

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Media Literacy Vocabulary Terms

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accuracy: how well a specific news piece's portrayal of events lines up with the reality of what occurred

bias: prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair

credibility: the extent to which a news or media source is regarded as accurate or authoritative and can be relied upon to produce accurate content

fake news: "news" reports that are intentionally false or misleading

hard news: news that only reports the most essential information in a concise and impartial manner; usually appears on the front page of newspapers; often includes news about politics, foreign affairs, and business.

outlets or providers: organizations such as websites, newspapers, and television networks that write both hard and soft news stories

satire: content that is meant to be a humorous take on current events; may fabricate or exaggerate facts, and is not meant to be read as informative news

soft news: news that may be accurate but not necessarily considered relevant. Human interest stories, arts, entertainment, and lifestyle stories are generally considered soft news; often referred to as "infotainment."

source: a person or document that provides news information for a period of time; can include experts, television or radio stories, newspaper articles, news website articles, press conferences, interviews, and information from institutions like representatives of schools or the police.

yellow journalism: news that provides little evidence to support its conclusion and instead relies on eye-catching headlines to attract readers; also known as *clickbait* or *sensationalism*.

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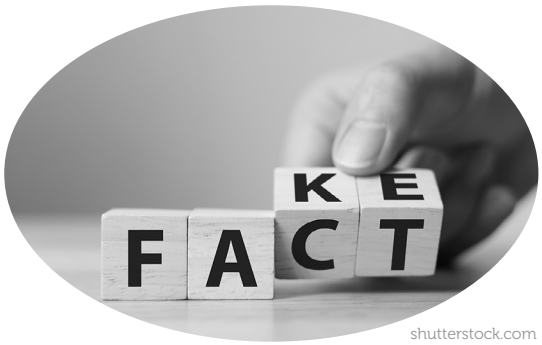
Name _____

Date _____

Ten Red Flags to Help Identify Fake News



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News site: _____

1. ☐ The news site has lots of **annoying ads and pop-ups**, which could indicate the story is clickbait.
2. ☐ **Reputable news sites** are not reporting the story.
3. ☐ The **domain's URL looks odd**—for example, it ends with "com.co" or looks like an altered version of the URL of a reputable news website (for example, "cbsnews.co" instead of "cbsnews.com").
4. ☐ The news article expresses **only one point of view**, has an angry tone, makes a wild claim, or predicts disaster. The story seems designed to make one feel a strong emotion, such as fear or anger.
5. ☐ The news article leaves out the **author's name**.
6. ☐ The **headline** is misleading or sensational; it doesn't communicate the main point of the news article.
7. ☐ The article is full of **errors**—misspelled words, poor grammar, lots of exclamation marks, or words in ALL CAPS.
8. ☐ The article cites anonymous **sources**, unreliable sources, or no sources at all.
9. ☐ There is **no About Us section** on the website. If there is an About Us section, it does not provide detailed background information, policy statements, or email contacts.
10. ☐ The **name of the news outlet is unfamiliar**. If so, do a search online for more information.

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Name _____ Evaluating news articles

Date _____

How Do They Compare?

Read two news articles about the same topic and complete the organizer below.

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Article headline: **News source:**	**Article headline:** **News source:**
Point of view about the news event/topic	
Headline's communication of main idea of article	
Tone of article/language used	
Evidence of bias	

On the back of this page, list anything else you noticed about each article. Then write a paragraph that explains which article you think is more accurate and credible, and why.

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