

***Fact-checking in the Digital Age***

A lesson on how to best navigate fact from fiction using online resources

***Summary***

In this lesson, students will learn about the importance of fact checking in the journalism profession. This lesson explores the practice of fact checking and requires students to identify and accept information with a critical eye for accuracy. Students will learn to use online resources to verify information. This is the third lesson in a week-long unit on news literacy. A great segue into this lesson is to show the movie "Shattered Glass" first and discuss the breach of trust that happens when news media get things wrong. If you’d like to show the movie, add two-three extra class periods to this unit to show the film and discuss.

***Objectives***

* Students will evaluate claims of fact to determine authenticity.
* Students will analyze false statements to determine what information is necessary to make them accurate.
* Students will use online research tools to aid in the fact checking process**.**

***Common Core State Standards***

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| **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.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. |
| **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.1**  | Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.. |
| **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.9-10.7**  | Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation. |
| **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6**  | 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. |

***Partnership for 21st Century Skills—Student Outcomes***

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| --- | --- |
| *Skills* | *P21 outcomes* |
| Critical Thinking | 1. Reason effectively
2. Use systems thinking
3. Make judgments and decisions
 |
| Communication | 1. Communicate clearly
 |
| Information Literacy | 1. Access and evaluate information
2. Use and manage information
 |
| Media Literacy | 1. Analyze media
 |

***Length***

50 minutes

***Materials/Resources***

1. Access to the following websites:

[http://theweek.com/article/index/235578/10­fake­photos­of­](http://theweek.com/article/index/235578/10%C2%ADfake%C2%ADphotos%C2%ADof%C2%AD%20hurricane%C2%ADsandy)

[hurricane­sandy](http://theweek.com/article/index/235578/10%C2%ADfake%C2%ADphotos%C2%ADof%C2%AD%20hurricane%C2%ADsandy)

[http://www.theatlanticwire.com/entertainment/2012/12/best­](http://www.theatlanticwire.com/entertainment/2012/12/best%C2%AD%20typos%C2%ADmistakes%C2%ADcorrections%C2%AD2012/59828/)

[typos­mistakes­corrections­2012/59828/](http://www.theatlanticwire.com/entertainment/2012/12/best%C2%AD%20typos%C2%ADmistakes%C2%ADcorrections%C2%AD2012/59828/)

<http://www.deweydefeatstruman.com/>

2. Student computer access with 1:1 ratio

***LESSON STEP-BY-STEP***

**1. Building background**—20 minutes

Explain to students that in the world of journalism, nothing is more important than being accurate. Our reputation depends on us verifying information and getting things right. Ask: What happens when you read something that is incorrect? What do you think about the person who wrote it? How does this change your perception of them or the news organization? Do you rely on people you know are not accurate? Ask students to think of things they may have seen or heard in the news media that were wrong. For example, they may have heard facts during the presidential campaign about either side that weren't actually accurate. Maybe they saw photos online through Twitter or Facebook of Hurricane Sandy that were actually from Hollywood movies.

Ask students what sorts of things they have to get right in a story. Make a list on the board: facts, numbers, names, spellings, addresses, locations, numbers (figures). This requires a lot of fact checking!

Using a smart board (or other projection device), use the links below to show students the following examples of false reports and typos. Discuss each site and ask: Why do you think these errors/mistakes happened? Is a typo (an error in spelling, for example) as bad as an error in fact? What do you think the newspaper/journalist should do to correct these errors? How would you feel if you made this kind of error in fact or judgment?

1. Fake photos of Hurricane Sandy<http://theweek.com/article/index/235578/10>­fake­photos­of­hurricane­sandy

2. Famous typos of 2012<http://www.theatlanticwire.com/entertainment/2012/12/best>­typos­

mistakes­corrections­2012/59828/

3. A historical blunder of presidential proportions: Dewey beats Truman<http://www.deweydefeatstruman.com/>

**2. Exercise**—30 minutes

For this exercise, each student will need access to his/her own computer. Distribute the attached fact checking worksheet, and instruct students to use online resources to find the correct answers. Students may NOT use Wikipedia. Once they have checked their facts, they must locate 5 websites they could use to reliably check general or local facts. This exercise will take the rest of the period.

The teacher should pace the room, observing students as they research and correct the sheet to check for understanding. Ask often: How do you know this fact on this site is accurate? What makes you think it is reliable?

**Checking The Facts Exercise**

**(30 points possible)**

**PART 1** (20 points possible–two points per question):

First, using the Internet, verify whether the information in the following statements is true. For each sentence, circle the “fact” to be checked, and then provide the correct fact AND the source of your correct information. If the fact is correct, write “correct.”

***NOTE TO TEACHERS****: You should substitute questions 6-10 for ones that are SPECIFIC to your school and often incorrect. Numbers 6-10 below are specific to MY school/community and are facts about which my student journalists often reported incorrectly.*

1. In the year 2010, there were 4.15 billion people living in the United States.

2. In the year 2010, the average home in the United States cost $110,000.

3. There were four candidates for president on the ballot in Maryland in 2012.

4. The Speaker of the House is currently Jon Boehner.

5. There are currently 8,000 troops deployed to Afghanistan.

6. The state of Maryland spends $3,500 per pupil in education funding.

7. The head of school is Jonathan Canon.

8. Channukah is always celebrated at Christmas time.

9. High school tuition costs $25, 715 per year for grades 11-12.

10. Students at the lower school are in grades k-7.

**PART II:** (10 points possible —two points per website/explanation).

Create a list 5 websites you can use to fact check general information (politics, economy, historical facts, etc.) or information about your school/city/state. Explain in 1-2 sentences how you know these sources are reputable and reliable.

1. Website:

2. Website:

3. Website:

4. Website:

5. Website