

High School Review

To Trust or Not?... Media Literacy: A Civic Right and Requisite Part of Social Studies Education Today

By Liz Ramos



Liz Ramos is a teacher in the classroom for 14 years in the Chaffey Joint Union High School District. She serves on the board of the News Literacy Project and the California Council for the Social Studies. She believes in a student-centered classroom integrating technology and doing history and civics.

Today's information and media ecosystem is vastly different than the one many of today's educators grew up in. Many of us remember going to the library and using the card catalog, books, and encyclopedias to research and planning when to call friends at home using a landline. Today's students are living in a vastly different world. Many of our students have a cell phone that puts the world in their hands. Educators utilize computer labs and Chromebook carts in their classes to have students seek out information and create products to demonstrate their new understandings. Additionally, many of our students spend hours a day on the internet and on their personal cellular devices between school and personal time.

While students have many resources to seek out information and are engaging in social media use, many of them are unaware of how to navigate today's media ecosystem effectively. A

recent study from Stanford University found that middle school students did not cite authorship or sponsorship as key reasons NOT to be-

A graphic with a purple background. On the left, the text reads: "Watch Out!" in large teal letters, followed by "Online tools make it easy to manipulate text on signs and messages printed on clothing." Below this is the text "Original photo of Carl Sagan holding the Pioneer Plaque." and the logo for "the news literacy project" with the hashtag "#NewsLitTip". On the right, there are two images of Carl Sagan holding a sign. The top image shows him holding a sign with a green checkmark, representing the original photo. The bottom image shows him holding a sign with a red X, representing a manipulated version of the photo where the text on the sign has been changed to "DUST FOREVER, NO BILLIGAMES IS SPACE.".

lieve an article. Instead, 80% of middle schoolers believed an ad with the words “sponsored content” was a real news story, high school students may focus more on content than the sources, and college students have difficulty assessing reliability of information and sources.¹ Our students need explicit instruction in evaluating the credibility of websites and images, how to determine misinformation, understanding me-

dia bias and avoiding an echo chamber and confirmation bias, viral rumors, and an awareness of people use social media to push an agenda, often through fake images and video. All of these skills are important for our students in an education setting, but also as engaged and informed citizens.

Media literacy has many dimensions to it. The National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) defines media literacy as “the ability to ACCESS, ANALYZE, EVALUATE, CREATE, and ACT using all forms of communication is interdisciplinary by nature. Media literacy represents a necessary, inevitable, and realistic response to the complex, ever-changing electronic environment and communication cornucopia that surround us.”² While it may seem daunting to address all these elements, there are many great organizations with resources to help teachers out such as the News Literacy Project, PBS, Newseum, and Newsela.

It is imperative that we teach our students to navigate today’s media ecosystem and our curriculum provides multiple entry points to engage in discussion and bring in lessons addressing how to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act in today’s media landscape in an informed and responsible manner. Many states are recognizing the importance of media literacy by passing legislation, as well as its recognition as an international contagion.

The News Literacy Project

The News Literacy Project (NLP), founded by Pulitzer Prize winning journalist Alan Miller, has a variety of resources to help teachers and students with media literacy. NLP has a six-question checklist that students can use to evaluate news to determine if it is fake. These ques-

tions are also ones to utilize when evaluating websites for research. Another site I like to use when examining the validity of a site is [Whois](#). You and your students can enter the URL of a

TOP 5 FACT-CHECKING RESOURCES

The search for factual information is endless in the digital age. Here are five fact-checking resources we rely on to help us tackle rumors and misinformation.

- SNOPES**
Snopes.com investigates all types of information online, including urban legends, myths and rumors.
- POLITIFACT**
PolitiFact uses the Truth-O-Meter™ to evaluate statements made by elected officials, political candidates, activists and more.
- FACTCHECK.ORG**
Factcheck.org seeks to combine aspects of both journalism and scholarship to provide accurate information to media consumers.
- AMERICAN PRESS INSTITUTE**
The American Press Institute's new project provides vetted resources for fact-checkers and journalists.
- WASHINGTON POST FACT CHECKER**
Journalist Glenn Kessler responds to questions from the public and rates statements on a scale of one to four "Pinochios."

website to learn who created it, when and where. This information can be utilized in making a credibility decision. The Sift is a weekly newsletter that is a goldmine. Each edition has a timely topic with lesson ideas, discussion questions, and ideas on actions students may take... perfect for an inquiry lesson. The Viral Rumor Rundown part is great to talk over with students and can be used as a quick bell ringer once a week. This section breaks down rumors and provides important information for teachers to discuss with students to be aware of on their social media and

news feeds. The Sift also offers a Read-Participate-Use for further student engagement and an Around the World section perfect for

media literacy as a global concern.

John Silva hosts a bi-weekly [Civics Connection Blog](#). Here teachers will find

timely ideas to incorporate media literacy with civics and media literacy. The NLP also has a complete media literacy curriculum available to teachers called [Checkology](#). Checkology consists of four modules covering Filtering the News and Information, Exercising Civic Freedoms, Navigating Today's Information Landscape, and How to Know What to Believe. These lessons are very interactive with engaging examples and include appearances from a number of journalists. My students have been very engaged and the lessons led to rich discussions in class, including how some of them have been fooled by ads. The Information Zone, Watchdog and First Amendment lessons are favorites. The lesson topics relate to media literacy topics within curriculum and the connection to the First Amendment is an important topic and bedrock to an informed citizenry taking civic actions.

PBS

[PBS](#) has a wealth of media-literacy lesson resources. When teaching media in my government class, I show students the PBS We the Voters Mediocracy video and then we complete the [Decoding Media Bias](#). In this particular lesson, students go to three news outlets and note the top three stories on the home page and politics page. They then read a story topic from the three different outlets and note what

THE SIFT
AN EDUCATOR'S GUIDE TO THE WEEK IN NEWS LITERACY BY PETER ADAMS
BROUGHT TO YOU EVERY MONDAY

Monday, Nov. 20, 2017

Exploiting history for clicks

History Lovers Club @historylvrclub

This is a genuine conversation between Tony Blair and Bill Clinton.

Prime Minister Blair: Yes, Bill. Nice to hear from you.
The President: I apologise for calling you an idiot.
Prime Minister Blair: That's quite all right. Cheers and see you soon.

No it's not!

A partial screenshot of a tweet by viral history photo account @historylvrclub, which frequently posts inaccurate or incomplete information on Twitter.

Most people active on social media — and especially on Twitter — have probably encountered posts from viral image accounts that rack up a large number of followers by sharing “amazing” images of historical figures and events, celebrities and nature.

Last Friday, historian [Alexis Coe examined one such Twitter account](#), demonstrating how its anonymous owner irresponsibly repurposes engaging — though often fake or manipulated — images found elsewhere online. Even when the images are authentic, and even when the accompanying post accurately describes the subject, @historylvrclub almost never provides attribution or sufficient context. But, as Coe demonstrates, it isn't difficult to post (authentic) historical images responsibly.

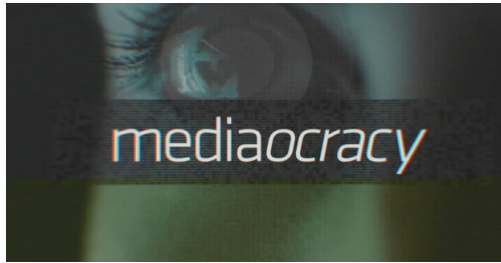
With just a few minutes of research on lazily posted images, Coe easily crafts a more informative, accurate, responsible and engaging way to share the same image.

- **Discuss:** Does the sharing of fake, manipulated or otherwise inaccurate pictures of historic figures and events matter? What repercussions might follow?
- **Idea:** Explore one or more viral history picture-sharing accounts as a class, then assign students to work together to select one, research it using a reverse image search, and rewrite the post (as Coe does) to provide complete and accurate context, including attribution. Then share it on Twitter, tagging the original account and @AlexisCoe.
- **Act:** Help curate a list of viral image accounts on Twitter by turning your students loose on Twitter for a class period. Have them add their results to this shared spreadsheet, then email or tweet to me about the experience.
- **Act 2:** Have teams of students pick one or more viral image accounts to monitor for the rest of the school year. When they spot posts or tweets that are inaccurate or otherwise “lazy” they should set the record straight in comments under the original.
- **Related and relevant:** The work of several photo fact-checkers active on Twitter might be useful as examples for students. Check out @HoaxEye and @PicPedant.

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was similar and different. Students are exposed to the gatekeeper aspect of media and how the same story is reported differently, starting with



the title and placement. This is another lesson that leads to rich conversations the next day when we debrief it in class. I use this as an opportunity to discuss why it is important to get one's news from multiple sources and not exclusively seek news from a source that reinforces their political ideology. Next, I show my students [Flipboard](#). Flipboard is a news curation site. My students create an account and follow political news from multiple perspectives. They create magazine topics based on course content. Over the course, they add/'flip' articles into the appropriate magazine. Flipboard has allowed my students and me to come across articles we would not have otherwise and to read the news from multiple perspectives. It also is a great tool to check students' connection of current events with government concepts. PBS does a great job of structuring media literacy lessons around timely and difficult topics. Their lessons have student friendly videos and readings, questions, and extension ideas great for an inquiry lesson.

Newseum

Newseum also has a variety of media literacy lessons and infographics to use with students. [Is This Story Share-Worthy?](#) is one of my favorite infographic/posters. The questioning criteria are great for news stories and social media posts as well. This serves as a great en-

try point to discuss with students ways to be engaged and responsible citizens in their social media feeds and their role in the media ecosystem. As the other resources, [Newseum has a variety of lessons](#) that address access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act in today's media literacy world. Teachers will need to sign up for a free account to access some of their resources. One such resource is their [Fact Finder: Your Foolproof Guide to Media Literacy](#). Here you will find a variety of well laid out lessons for teachers to take students through with handouts and links to resources.



Newsela

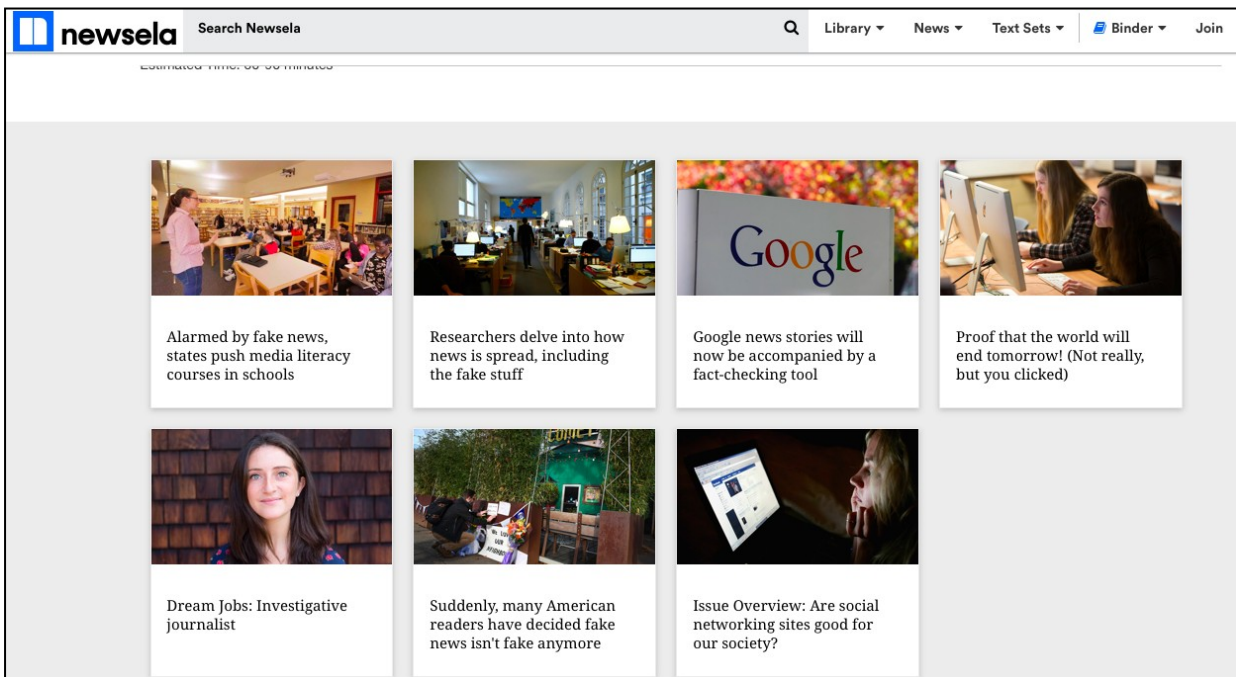
[Newsela](#) takes news stories and primary sources and offers them at different lexile levels with reading comprehension questions tied to

specific Common Core ELA skills and sometimes offer them in Spanish. Newsela has created text sets that include [Media Literacy](#), [Media Literacy in the 21st-century](#), and [Media Literacy: US Election Season](#). The nice point about these resources is you can assign or go over one in class or use them for an in-depth inquiry.

Last Words

Computers, internet, and social media are not

leaving us any time soon. We cannot dig our heads in the sand. We need to show our students how to navigate these responsibly with a discerning eye. The resources above will help you to engage your students in this ever-changing media literacy ecosystem. Educating our students on media literacy will not only assist them in their academic pursuits, but also give them tools to be engaged and informed citizens in their post education life.



¹Donald, Brooke. "Stanford researchers find students have trouble judging the credibility of information online." Stanford University. <https://ed.stanford.edu/news/stanford-researchers-find-students-have-trouble-judging-credibility-information-online>.

²National Association for Media Literacy Education (NAMLE) <https://namle.net/publications/media-literacy-definitions/>

References

Whois: whois.com/whois/

Civics Connection Blog: <https://newslit.org/educators/civic-blog/>

The Sift: <https://newslit.org/educators/sift/>

Checkology: <https://newslit.org/educators/checkology/>

PBS: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/tag/media-literacy/>

Decoding Media Bias: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/lessons-plans/decoding-media-bias-lesson-plan/>

Flipboard: <https://flipboard.com>

Newseum: Is This Story Share-Worthy?: <http://www.newseum.org/2018/11/05/newseumed-fights-misinformation-this-media-literacy-week/>

Newseum (Lessons): <http://www.newseum.org/tag/media-literacy/>

Newseum Fact Finder: Your Foolproof Guide to Media Literacy: <https://newseumed.org/fact-finder>

Newsela: <https://newsela.com>

Newsela: Media Literacy: <https://newsela.com/text-sets/337857>

Newsela: Media Literacy in the 21st century: <https://newsela.com/text-sets/146690/media-literacy>

Newsela: Media Literacy: US Election Season: <https://newsela.com/text-sets/116575/api-media-literacy-election>



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