Fact-Checker

Summary

In this lesson, students review examples of misinformation, identify a rumor pattern and create a list of red flags to watch out for. Then students will create a social media post warning others to be on the lookout for this type of misinformation and directing them to credible sources about the subject. Finally, students will discuss the impact of misinformation on a democratic society.

Duration
30-60 minutes

Grade Level(s):
3-5, 6-8, 9-12+

Learning Objectives

I can ...
1. identify rumor patterns.
2. list common misinformation red flags to watch out for online.
3. write a social media post warning others about a type of misinformation.
4. describe the impact of misinformation on a democratic society.

NLP Standard

S4: Students demonstrate increased critical habits of mind, including effective verification skills and the ability to detect misinformation and faulty evidence.

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.8: 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.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

Essential Questions

1. What are some different types of misinformation?
2. What does it look like to be a responsible and news-literate participant in a democracy?
   a. If I see misinformation, how should I respond?
3. How can misinformation and false beliefs undermine an individual's participation in a democracy and threaten the political process?
   a. Can misinformation that other people believe still affect those who aren't fooled by it?

Materials

- Rumor Patterns Jamboard. →
- A meme generator, such as https://imgflip.com/memegenerator.
- Classroom needs:
  o Internet access and projector or smartboard.
  o At least one internet-enabled device per student group.
  o Access to NLP's RumorGuard website.
- Poster: "Five types of misinformation" (suggested).
- Types of misinformation quiz (make a copy so you can edit it as you'd like).
- Evaluation Rubric
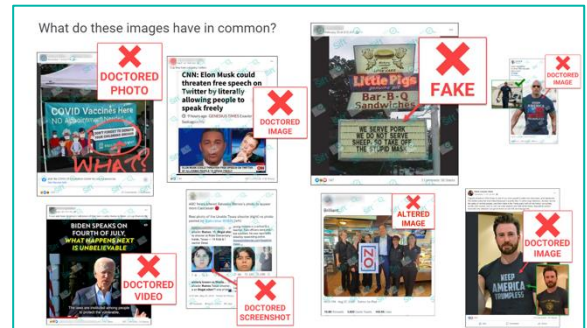
Vocabulary

- **Misinformation:** Information that is misleading, erroneous or false. While misinformation is sometimes created and shared intentionally, it is often created unintentionally or as humor (for example, satire) and later mistaken as a serious claim by others.

- **Viral rumor:** An unsubstantiated claim that spreads widely on social media and elsewhere online. Viral rumors often use deceptive techniques (such as out-of-context or doctored images) to stir up strong emotions and amplify false or misleading ideas.

Procedure

Introduction

Display a viral rumor for students to view from NLP's [RumorGuard](#). Ask students if they have seen the rumor "in the wild." If so, have them describe where and when they saw it. Tell students that this rumor is not credible and ask if they can explain why. Record their responses. Then, learn more about the rumor by reading the "QUICK LOOK" and "THE TAKEAWAY" sections on RumorGuard.

Example below:
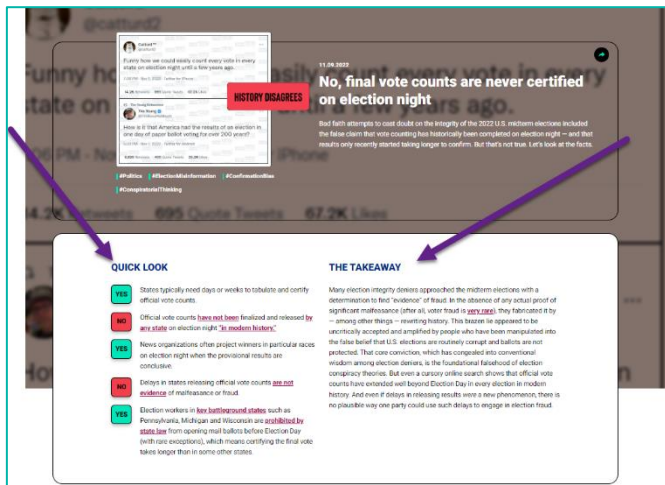
Explain to students that today's lesson will require them to be fact-checkers. Tell them they will be looking at a series of rumors to identify different patterns, developing a list of common red flags to watch out for and writing a social media post warning others about a misinformation trend. Finally, they will share their findings and discuss the impact of misinformation on a democratic society.

Follow-through

1. Display the original example from the introduction with a series of rumors of a similar category by clicking on one of the hashtags on [RumorGuard](#). (In the example above, you could click on #Politics, #ElectionMisinformation, #ConfirmationBias or #ConspiratorialThinking.) Explain what all of these rumors have in common.
2. Once students understand the pattern, tell them it's now their turn. Ask the **first essential question**: What are some different types of misinformation?
3. Place students into three groups.
4. Direct them to the Rumor Patterns Jamboard at https://bit.ly/RumorPatterns.
5. Assign each group a different page. Task each group with identifying the pattern of their assigned page.

6. Allow each group five minutes to determine their rumor pattern. Any group that finishes early should try to determine the pattern in other slides.

> **❗ CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING!**
> Monitor students' abilities to identify different categories of viral misinformation and list red flags. Note their participation in the class discussion — do they describe the impact of misinformation on a democratic society?

7. When all groups are ready, have them share their findings with the class. They should identify the following types:
   a. Group 1: Manipulated content.
   b. Group 2: False context.
   c. Group 3: Impostor content.
   d. Group 4: Fabricated content.
   e. **NOTE:** Sometimes a rumor doesn't fit neatly into a specific type. Something *can* be fabricated, satire and impostor all at once, for example.

   Differentiate by content: Give the same examples to student groups, but have them sort the examples into different categories, such as:
   - Emotional triggers (What emotions are commonly triggered by the examples? Answers include fear, hope, curiosity and anger.)
   - Topic trends (What are some topics that frequently are targets of misinformation? Answers include politics, vaccines, the economy, education and weather.)
   - Taxonomy of misinformation (What are some conceptual frames for thinking about different types of misinformation? Answers include satire, false context, impostor content, fabricated content and manipulated content.)

8. **Optional:** Share the poster "Five types of misinformation" with students. Compare the News Literacy Project's taxonomy of misinformation with the students' explanations.

9. Continue with Slide 5 on the Jamboard: Discuss why we should be cautious of the Barstool Sports tweet. Here's some background on the tweet:

   a. Newsweek, Barstool Sports and Long John Silver's treat this as a genuine list, but this list is not based on real data.
   b. Newsweek wrote a news article and included a quote from Long John Silver's. Here's the opening paragraph: "As major retailers and social platforms continue to dominate the digital commerce landscape, seafood chain restaurant Lohn John Silver's has

emerged as a surprising competitor in the battle for online shopping supremacy. In a list of the 'Top 10 Online Shopping Sites in 2022' posted on Twitter by Barstool Sports, LongJohnSilvers.com was ranked sixth, falling only behind Amazon.com, OnlyFans.com, eBay.com, Target.com and Best Buy.com."

c. This is one of those "news" articles that reports a trend and notes that people have expressed skepticism, but does not include in-depth reporting or verification.

Another red flag for the Newsweek piece is the big typo in the lead ("Lohn" instead of "Long").

CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING (optional)!

Make a copy of this [Google Form quiz](#) on types of misinformation. Adapt the quiz as necessary to meet your students' needs. Have students answer the questions, and make sure they know they are NOT getting graded on it. It's just to see what they understand. Clarify any misconceptions.

NOTE: One of the questions refers to a video of actor Tom Hanks shouting "sexy baby" to a child beauty pageant contestant circulating on social media along with conspiratorial claims about sex trafficking. This video, however, comes from a comedy skit from more than a decade ago. If you'd like to show this video to your class prior to taking the quiz, you can find it [here](#).

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10. As a class, create a list of red flags — signs that content might not be credible — to watch out for, using examples from the debunked viral rumors. Some ideas include:
     a. Doctored photos/screenshots — images with outrageous or sensational text that could have been artificially changed, or posts that fail to include a link to the source of the image.
     b. Images shared in false contexts to provoke a reaction — real images but from different places or times.
     c. Impostor content — false attributions. Often people will claim celebrities or famous people have said something they didn't. It usually involves creating a fake social media post, statement/placard with a logo, etc. Image only (lack of URL) is also an important part of this red flag.
     d. Fabricated content — digital content that is completely made up, containing no authentic elements.
11. Ask students the **second essential question**: What does it look like to be a responsible and news-literate participant in a democracy? If I see misinformation, how should I respond?
12. Ideally, students will recognize they have a role to play when encountering misinformation in the real world. Once they can identify patterns of misinformation, one way to be a news-literate participant in a democracy is to alert others to these patterns. Tell students this brings them to the next part of the lesson: writing a social media warning post.

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13. Using the red flag list students just developed, direct them to choose one and write a social media post warning others to be on the lookout for this pattern. Students should also direct others to credible sources about the subject.

14. Model expectations by demonstrating how to write such a post using a meme generator like https://imgflip.com/memegenerator. Here's an example:

15. Be sure students understand they also need to explain their post. Here's an example of what you could write with the above meme:

> "Hey there, bad actors constantly play to our emotions to get us to believe bogus information. If a post makes you angry, hit the pause button. Make sure the information is credible before sharing it. Some sites you can use to help verify information include PolitiFact, Reuters Fact Check and RumorGuard."

16. Distribute the evaluation rubric for this activity and model scoring the example. Ensure students understand what is expected.

17. Provide ample time for students to develop their own social media warning posts. As they work, informally meet with students to discuss their ideas and answer any questions they may have.

    a. **Differentiate by process:** Students needing additional guidance may benefit from sentence starters such as "If you see…" or "Even if it looks…" Some students who have difficulty making decisions may benefit from having the meme chosen ahead of time, or limiting the choice to two or three meme options.

18. Have a few students share their memes and explanations with the class.

19. Have students submit their memes and explanations for assessment.

Differentiation

Differentiation by content and process are noted in the instruction steps above. Additionally, you may want to differentiate by process and break this lesson up into three different lessons, one for each of the **essential questions**.

Accommodations and Modifications

Options include breaking this activity into chunks, allowing students to work together to share ideas but having them create their own memes, and offering extended time to those who need it. For those who need a challenge, have them use TinEye or other reverse image search engines to identify the original image from some of the examples.

Closure

Ask students the **third essential question**: How can misinformation and false beliefs undermine an individual's participation in a democracy and threaten the political process? Allow for a student-led discussion, and listen for details about different types of misinformation, red flags to look for and consequences of allowing misinformation to spread unchecked. Some consequences include people not knowing what to believe, believing incorrect ideas or ceasing to believe that any information is credible. When people believe misinformation and hold false beliefs about the world, they can take actions that undermine democracy and the political process because they're being exploited. Misinformation also impacts those who don't fall for it. If community members fall for misinformation, they might be manipulated into supporting or advocating for bad policies. They might downplay urgent problems, such as climate change.

Welcome additional questions and areas of exploration, such as how to develop healthy skepticism, which is a natural outgrowth of this type of activity.

End-of-Performance Assessment

Have students self-evaluate their social media warning posts with this evaluation rubric. Then, evaluate students' social media warning posts using the same sheet. Do they clearly articulate a misinformation trend or red flag to watch out for? Is it valid? Do their explanations of the trend make sense? Do they direct others to credible sources about the subject? Do they describe the impact of misinformation on a democratic society?

Extension Opportunity

For students wishing to further their skills and competencies in fact-checking, have them write a RumorGuard post. They should follow the same format and criteria used at RumorGuard.org. This includes capturing a screenshot of a rumor, writing a one-sentence explainer, writing a short summary, writing a "Quick Look" that says what is accurate and inaccurate about the rumor, summarizing the news literacy takeaway, and analyzing the five factors (source, evidence, reasoning, authenticity and context) to identify if a post is false or not.

Name _____   Date _____

Directions:
1. Use a meme generator to create a social media post that depicts an aspect of misinformation.
2. Write an explanation to accompany the meme that warns others to be on the lookout for this pattern. Be sure to describe the misinformation trend and direct others to credible sources about the subject.
3. **Optional:** For up to two bonus points, outline the impact of misinformation on a democratic society in your explanation.

Rubric for Fact-Check Activity

		Points awarded	Points possible	Comment(s)
Meme	Meme depicts an aspect of misinformation.		2	
	The trend is supported by the meme.		1	
Warning Explanation	Explanation clearly articulates a misinformation trend or "red flag" to watch out for.		1	
	Explanation directs others to credible sources about the subject.		1	
	BONUS: Explanation describes the impact of misinformation on a democratic society. (Can receive up to 2 bonus points)		0	
Final Score			**/5**	