

Video and Discussion Guide



American
Spaces

PBS News Hour: ***How Media Literacy Can Help Students Discern Fake News***



News Story Date: June 6, 2017

Length: 7 min 31 sec

English level: Medium

Themes: Media Literacy

Link: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/show/media-literacy-can-help-students-discern-fake-news>

Warning/General Advisory

Acceptable for all audiences

Context

This 7+ minute news piece reports on how schools in Washington State are starting to teach media literacy in their classrooms. In the news report, we see how elementary school and high school students are applying critical thinking skills to discern bias in news, as well as fabricated news.

From PBS website -- Recognizing bias in news stories is one form of media literacy. Spotting when the news is totally fabricated is something else entirely. How can teachers help students tell fact from media fiction? Educators and media literacy advocates in Washington State are working together with legislators to address the problem. Special Correspondent Kavitha Cardoza of Education Week reports.

Media Landscape Today

The sheer volume of media available today is overwhelming. We receive information from television, the internet, radio, advertisements, newspapers, magazines, motion pictures, music and video games. Being able to access this information via digital handheld devices means many of us are receiving information on a constant basis. It is estimated that globally there are now between 3 - 4 billion people using the internet. Many of these users are children and teenagers who spend hours each day with different forms of media. Much of the information they are exposed to may be false or biased. There are many websites that contain hoaxes and misleading information which are frequently shared on social media.

According to a recent study by Stanford University, many young people today have difficulty determining if the information they are receiving is real or not. With the rise of disinformation, many U.S. educators and lawmakers are starting to focus on media literacy. The **National Association for Media Literacy Education** describes **media literacy** as “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create and act using all forms of communication. Media literacy empowers people to be critical thinkers and makers, effective communicators and active citizens.”

Listed below are some media literacy skills for which educators are advocating and developing programs and tools:

- **Learning critical thinking** – learning to assess media to determine if the information consumers are exposed to is believable or if it has a hidden agenda. Analyzing media to figure out what information may or may not have been included is important for consumers to determine if they should accept the media as being truthful and accurate.
- **Determining bias or point of view** – figuring out if the news story is biased is key for consumers to understanding whether the story is simply informing or if it is seeking to persuade consumers to agree with the journalist's viewpoint. We can ask ourselves – who is presenting this information? Does the source only or overly present one side of the story? Are they leaving critical information out?
- **Evaluating if information is true or false** – given that not everything we read on the internet is true, consumers are increasingly looking to reliable sources for their news and information. In situations where consumers are uncertain about the source's honesty, they are double checking information with other more dependable sources. As a teacher from the PBS video mentions, if we see a story that says "*Share if you're outraged*," we should exercise extreme caution. If the story makes us so angry and outraged, then it is probably a good idea to keep reading about the topic using other sources to make sure the initial story wasn't intentionally trying to make us angry with potentially misleading or false information.
- **Understanding the different types of media** – is this story from a celebrity gossip magazine or a reliable news source? Is the meme intended to just be funny, or is it seeking to make us think a certain way? Consumers should not assume that an unknown website is truthful just because it looks formal, attractive and/or informative. Consumers should conduct research, or "due diligence" on unknown sources to make sure the source is reliable and legitimate.

The internet has created an environment where a few people can attempt to manipulate the opinions of many. The targeted nature of social media allows for information – true or false- to spread faster than ever before. By encouraging children and teenagers to become media literate, we can help them learn how to make informed, better decisions in their lives.

Key Vocabulary/Places

- **Clickbait** – the use of attention grabbing headlines to attract readers into clicking on a particular web page.
- **Critical viewing** - the ability to question and analyze issues presented both transparently and subliminally in movies, videos, television and other visual media.
- **Discern** – to perceive or recognize something.
- **Fake news** – misleading or fabricated stories that appear to be real journalism.
- **Hidden agenda** – having a secret or ulterior motive.
- **Hoax** – a falsehood or lie that is intended to hide the truth, and deceive and trick people.
- **Meme** – an image, video, piece of text, or some other cultural item that a lot of people send to each other on the internet.
- **Propaganda** – a message designed to persuade an audience to think and behave in a certain manner. The word propaganda is often used in a negative sense, especially for certain people (for example, politicians) who make false claims to get elected or spread rumors to influence audiences.

- **Spin** – in the journalism context, news and information that is manipulated or slanted to influence its interpretation and public opinion.
- **Transparent** – easily understood and very clear; open and candid.

Discussion Questions

- At the beginning of the video, a teacher is working with 3rd grade students in Washington State to evaluate if there is **bias in reported news**. Do you remember the topic of the article the students were examining? What examples of bias did the students report?

The topic of the article was about internment camps for Japanese-Americans during World War II in America (these camps were the sites of forced relocation and incarceration of people of Japanese ancestry during World War II, and established in direct response to the Pearl Harbor attack). Some of the examples of reported bias in the media included usage of the following phrases to sway public opinion: “evacuate,” “assembly centers,” and saying “Japanese people” were relocated rather than “Japanese Americans.”

- One lawmaker in Washington mentioned that **“From 2003 until today, humanity has created more information than we created in all of human history until 2003.”** A media literacy advocate says that while students are using their phones [and consuming all of this information], **“it’s a wilderness out there for some kids,”** and that students may not yet have the **“emotional intelligence piece.”** What do you think of all of these statements?
- Lawmakers in Washington State recently passed a **state law encouraging educators to develop policies around media literacy** and to share resources. Do you think this is necessary for our communities? Are your communities promoting media literacy?
- What was the creative exercise that a high school English class did to understand more about false news?

*They used Shakespeare’s **Hamlet** to talk about fake/false news. The teachers and students created untrue and very dramatic and shocking stories based on the play. After the students realized how easy it was to create a false headline and story, they learned to be more analytical and even distrustful of what they read.*

- How can we tell if something is false news?
- Why is it important to determine if there is bias in the media we are consuming?

Additional Free Media Literacy Resources and Lesson Plans:

- Media Literacy lesson plans using Newseum resources: <https://americanspaces.state.gov/home/new-media-literacy-curriculum/>
- Newseum Education (registration is free and easy): <https://newseumed.org/>
- PBS Media Literacy lesson plans: <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/tag/media-literacy/page/3/>
- **Digital Literacy** resources on **eLibraryUSA***: <https://elibraryusa.state.gov/resources.html>
*An American Spaces account is required to sign in; if you do not have an American Spaces eLibraryUSA account, please email: americanspaces@america.gov
- **First Draft** Media Literacy Program: <https://firstdraftnews.org/>