

Developing whole-school critical literacy practices: advice for secondary teachers

“Children and young people today are growing up in a globalised world and are processing information from a wider variety of sources than ever before. It is essential to ensure that children and young people are given the opportunity to develop the appropriate critical literacy skills to be able to navigate the world around them.” (National Literacy Trust, 2018)

What is critical literacy?

Critical literacy is a whole-school, cross-curricular approach towards the teaching of literacy that encourages readers to be active participants in the reading process as opposed to passive absorbers of information. Critical literacy encourages readers to:

- Challenge what they read by asking critical questions
- Explore how texts position them as readers by analysing authors’ language use
- Examine how texts/authors construct power relationships
- Analyse how texts/authors make assumptions or construct stereotypes
- Explore how texts represent, underrepresent or misrepresent groups of people
- Explore differing points of view and perspectives in regards to social issues

The role of secondary schools

Over the past year we have researched the impact of fake news on children and young people and published our findings, along with conclusions about the action needed to address the problem. We found that a cross-sector response is needed, including action from the government, media agencies, parents and schools. Of particular relevance to secondary school leaders and teachers is the following recommendation:

“A whole-school approach to teaching critical literacy is essential to embedding critical literacy across the curriculum. Teachers and schools must be provided with the necessary CPD and resources to enable them to teach critical literacy actively and explicitly within the teaching of any and every subject.” (National Literacy Trust, 2018)

The good news is that many of you are already doing this. We have been delighted by the innovative and typically creative approach taken by teachers across the country to ensure young people are equipped with the skills they need to navigate the world around them. We have also seen teachers from a broad range of subjects advocate for their subject as an antidote to fake news.

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How this resource pack can help

We have provided **critical questions** in this document and [critical literacy discussion cards](#) which can be used by teachers of any subject and are intended to support and encourage critical engagement with texts or images students are exploring as part of their studies.

We have selected a number of excellent examples of teachers making explicit the critical literacy skills required for their subject and compiled a number of [case studies](#) with example lesson plans from the following subjects:

- Citizenship (KS3)
- Drama (KS3)
- Economics (KS5)
- English (KS4)
- History (KS4)
- Maths (KS4)
- PSHE (KS4)
- Science (KS3)
- School library (KS3)
- Sociology (KS5)

This is by no means an exhaustive list but is intended to spark ideas about how teachers of every subject can address the challenge presented by fake news.

We have also provided a teacher briefing PowerPoint presentation which can be used during a twilight CPD session to explore the links to fake news and critical literacy within each subject.



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Critical questions

Here are some examples of critical questions that will help pupils to question, analyse and challenge what they read in order to decide to what extent they agree or disagree with the information presented to them.

Examining different points of view

- Does the text include different points of view?
- Whose point of view is included? Whose point of view missing?
- How would the text be different if it were told from the point of view of _____?
- Why might _____ and _____ have different points of view?

Examining stereotypes and judgements

- Does the author make any judgements about a person, groups of people, or places? Are these judgements fair or unfair? Why do you think the author has done this?
- Does the text include any stereotypes? What makes you think they are stereotypes? Why do you think the author has done this?
- How does the text portray _____ (e.g. women)? Can you find evidence in the text that demonstrates this? Do you agree or disagree with this portrayal? Why/why not?

Examining power

- Who has the most power / authority in the text? How do you know? Why do you think the author has done this?
- Who doesn't have any power in the text? What makes you think that? Why might the author have done this?
- Would you want to change this power balance? If so, why? What would you change?

Examining author intention

- Why do you think the author has chosen to write about this subject?
- What do you think the author wants you to believe / feel / think? How do you know? What words or phrases has the author used to influence you?
- Do you think this text is trying to change what you think? If so, how?
- Which character do you want to defend? Which character do you want to criticise? Why? How has the author influenced you?

Challenging the text

- Is there anything you would like to change about the text? Why? How would you do this?

- Do you agree or disagree with what the author has written? Why?
- Are there any views in the text that you don't agree with? Why? How could you change the text to make sure it includes your views?
- Would you recommend this text to others or not? Why? If yes, who would you recommend it to?

Directory

This is a useful directory of some of the organisations that may be helpful to you in implementing critical literacy approaches or exploring the news with your students. We are constantly adding to this list and welcome your suggestions if you find something you think will help.

[The Guardian Education Centre](#) offers an array of resources to support the teaching of news literacy in the classroom including lesson ideas and display materials. The centre also offers free full day workshops, events and conferences for teachers and pupils.

[BBC School Report](#) offers a journalism project for secondary schools students, providing them with the opportunity to produce and share their own news stories. To support teaching about fake news, the website also hosts a range of lessons and films, including an interactive [BBC iReporter](#) game, which enables students to experience some of the decisions journalists face: from fact checking to identifying inaccurate information.

[Diverse Shorts: Literature to Promote Critical Thinking](#) is a book that has been developed jointly by EMC and Hackney Learning Trust for English and Citizenship teachers. It includes text extracts and discussion prompts.

[Media Smart](#) offers free educational materials for schools to support pupils' critical literacy skills when engaging with media and advertising.

[Irish News Critical Literacy Project](#) provides a structured approach to developing critical literacy skills through the Northern Irish newspaper.

The [Deliberative Classroom](#) is a project delivered by the Association of Citizenship Teaching to support teachers to lead knowledge-based debates with students on topical issues relating to fundamental British values, citizenship and equality.

The [ACT Building Resilience Project](#) involved teachers in schools developing innovative teaching strategies to build children's criticality and resilience to extremism and being drawn into terrorism. Schemes of work and lesson plans are available to download.

[BBC Real News](#) is a mentoring programme to support secondary school students to identify fake news.

[The Burnet News Club](#), provided by the [Economist Educational Foundation](#), offers resources to support the running of a school news club, helping to develop pupils' critical thinking skills and encourage active discussions about current affairs.

[The Times and The Sunday Times media literacy programme](#) is a new programme aimed at students to navigate and think critically about the news they consume and what sources earn their trust. Schools can register their interest now.

[The Day](#) is an online daily news service for schools, colleges and young people, also offering free teaching resources and online training about how to use the website with students.

[The Week Junior](#) is a current affairs magazine for 8-14 year olds, making current news and events accessible and exciting for young people.

[Child Net's 'Trust Me'](#) resource offers lesson plans and teacher guidance to support with the teaching of Fake News in the classroom.

[The Association for Citizenship Teaching \(ACT\)](#) is the subject association for citizenship representing teachers and others involved in citizenship education, and have published lots of citizenship resources for use in the classroom.

[School Journalism](#) is an online resource for students and teachers that offers lesson plans and resources for teaching about journalism and news literacy.

[Facebook's e-learning journalism course](#) is a three part programme aimed at media or journalism students focusing on providing people with the basics on how to use Facebook's platform and products successfully.

The [Facebook safety guide for journalists](#) is a downloadable document available in 15 languages for anyone who wants to see the 10 simple ways to protect their identity and content on Facebook.

ASCEL have produced a [guide to activity taking place around the UK](#) supporting children to stay safe online and avoid fake news.

The PSHE Association have provided a [resource to support discussion about terrorist attacks](#) in the primary classroom. Also a [PSHE Association Character Curriculum Planning Toolkit](#) which looks at ways to develop key 'character aspects', including self-awareness, values, and interpersonal and social effectiveness.

Thinkuknow have produced an [information page](#) on how to spot fake news, including links to [BBC Newsround report and information](#).