

An introduction to fake news for primary schools

A National Literacy Trust resource

Curriculum links

As part of the key stage 2 English national curriculum pupils should be given a range of opportunities to develop their critical thinking skills in response to a range of texts. Teaching them to identify fake news will give pupils the opportunity to:

- Ask questions to improve their understanding
- Discuss and evaluate how authors have an impact on the reader
- Distinguish between statements of fact and opinion

These key skills can be taught across a number of subjects, including English, ICT, history and geography, in which the context of the text can be adapted to suit the context of the topic.

Key questions

- What is fake news?
- How does reading fake news make you feel? How do you respond to fake news?
- How can you identify whether a news story is real or fake?

Key vocabulary

- Biased
- Trustworthy
- Fact
- Opinion
- Mislead
- Exaggerate
- Sinister

Ideas for introducing fake news into the classroom

Defining fake news

Pupils may have a varied or limited understanding of fake news based on their own personal experiences. It is important to create a shared definition so that they can discuss and identify it appropriately.

- Ask pupils to share words and phrases that they think about when they hear the term fake news. Create a **class definition** together using the example below.
- Create a **fake news glossary** to include words that may be unfamiliar to the pupils e.g. biased, trustworthy, sinister, exaggerated
- **Trusted places** - share common sources of fake news e.g. newspapers, magazines, websites, social media, radio and TV and ask pupils to clap if they can trust that news source. Create a trusted places display in your library or computer suite.

Definition

Fake news is news or stories that are not true.

Fake news is published on the internet, in newspapers and shown on TV and radio to mislead people. Fake news stories often have shocking, exaggerated or false headlines to grab people's attention.

Some websites make up fake news for fun, but others have more **sinister** reasons, such as swaying people to vote a particular way in an election, or changing your opinions about a person, place or product.

The internet means that fake news can be spread very quickly through the use of fake news websites and social media.

Talking about fake news

Revealing that they have been misled by fake news can be embarrassing for pupils. It is important to provide a safe space for them to be able to discuss their experiences openly and share how they feel about it.

- Create a **real or fake? display** in the classroom and ask pupils to continually add to the board after they have read or heard a piece of interesting real or fake news. They could add a post-it note to share their feelings or questions about the text.
- Have a **daily or weekly discussion** about a current news story and ask pupils to critically think about the author's purpose and intended audience and how this changes the way they feel.
- Create a **news worry box** for pupils to share their concerns about fake news. Speak to the child individually and/or discuss as a class during circle time.

Identifying fake news

Teaching pupils how to recognise fake news is an effective way to get them to critically respond to texts by asking questions and thinking about the intentions of the author.

- **Fact or opinion:** give pupils a selection of statements from real and fake news stories. Ask students to sort them into facts and opinions and discuss whether it suggests that the story is real or fake.
- Give pupils a news story and ask them to **check the facts** using trusted search engines or information books about the same topic.
- **SPAG check:** give pupils examples of fake news that are badly written and ask them to spot the errors. Explain how poor grammar and spelling is a good indication of fake news.
- **Picture comparison** – give pupils examples of real and fake photos and videos that have been used in news stories. Ask them to make comparisons between them and decide which is real or fake.
- Share a number of news stories and ask pupils to identify whether it is **true or false** using the five top tips for spotting fake news. A good starting point would be the PowerPoint included with this pack of resources which provides the answers to the test questions within the primary survey for pupils. Don't forget to make sure that your pupils have completed the survey **BEFORE** going through the PowerPoint! The survey is open from 13 September – 22 October.

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/fakenews>

Five top tips for spotting fake news

- 1. Think about who has shared the news** – check that the story is written by someone that you trust and if not, find out more about the author first.
- 2. Look at the audience** – think about who the story is meant for and the reasons why it has been written.
- 3. Check the information** – try to find the same story from another source and check that the facts are the same.
- 4. Look carefully at the text and pictures** – check that the story makes sense and look closely at the photos or videos.
- 5. Think about how you feel** – if you think the story is funny or if it worries you in any way, think about whether the facts are all true. It is possible that the author is biased or is trying to make you believe something that is false.

These tips are also available as a standalone handout.

Look out for our scheme of work on fake news and critical literacy in spring 2018. We'll be developing it in response to the evidence we receive over the coming months.

You might also be interested in our *Get Your Copy Right* resource that challenges pupils to research and develop a promotional information guide to a local attraction, while learning about issues around plagiarism, copyright and intellectual property. Find out more:

<https://literacytrust.org.uk/resources/get-your-copy-right/>