

# An introduction to fake news for secondary schools

A National Literacy Trust resource

## Curriculum links

As part of the key stage 3 and 4 English national curriculum students should be given a range of opportunities to develop their critical thinking skills in response to a range of texts. Encouraging them to identify fake news will give students the opportunity to:

- Know the purpose, audience for and context of the writing
- Make inferences and refer to evidence in the text
- Make critical comparisons across texts

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

- How can you define fake news?
- What impact does fake news have on the reader?
- How can you identify whether a news story is reliable?
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## Key vocabulary

- Biased
- Source
- Satire
- Exaggerated
- Intentional
- Hoax

## Ideas for introducing fake news into the classroom

### Defining fake news

Students may have a varied 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.

- Using the headings from the definition below, ask students to share the examples of the different types of fake news they have seen or heard. Create a **class definition** together.
- Create a **fake news glossary** to include words that may be unfamiliar to the students e.g. biased, intentional, hoax
- **Trusted places** - share common sources of fake news e.g. newspapers, magazines, websites, social media, radio and TV and ask students 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. The internet means that fake news can be spread very quickly through the use of fake news websites and social media.

Here are some of the main types of fake news:

**False stories that are made up on purpose:** these stories make people believe something that isn't true. Sometimes this is done to get lots of people to visit a website.

**Misleading stories:** these stories may have some truth to them but they are not completely accurate. This is because the people writing them don't check all of the facts before publishing the story or they only use the facts that fit with the story they want to tell. The stories are often biased.

**Satire (which means using humour):** websites such as the Onion or Daily Mash create fake news stories to make fun of the real news. These stories are meant to be funny and entertaining but some people don't realise the story is meant to be a joke and think it is true.

## Discussing fake news

Revealing that they have been misled by fake news can be embarrassing for students. 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 students 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 students to critically think about the author's purpose and intended audience and how this changes the way they feel.

## Identifying fake news

Teaching students how to recognise fake news is an effective way to get them to critically respond to a text by asking questions and make comparisons.

- **Fact or opinion:** give students 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 students a news story and ask them to **check the facts** using trusted search engines or information sources about the same topic.
- **SPAG check:** give students 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 students 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 students 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 secondary 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 2017.

<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/>