



# CITIZEN ADVOCACY CENTER

## How to Spot Fake News

### LESSON PLAN AND ACTIVITIES

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## Illinois Election Law Lesson Plan and Activities

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**Grade Level:** 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12

**Subject(s):**

- Social Studies: U.S Government, State Government
- Language Arts: Reading, Writing, Research, Journalism

**Duration:** 1 45-minute class period

**Description:** The rise of “fake news” has troubled and misinformed Americans all over the country, and now many are unsure whether their news sources are reliable. In this lesson, students will learn how to differentiate reliable from unreliable news, and explore how the First Amendment impacts “fake news,” if at all.

**Goals:**

Illinois Learning Standards

**A. Social Science:** SS.IS.1.9-12 , SS.IS.4.9-12 , SS.CV.3.9-12 , SS.CV.5.9-12 , SS.CV.6.9-12 , SS.CV.9.9-12

**Objectives:**

1. Define fake news
2. Understand how society is impacted by fake news
3. Understand how to differentiate fake from true news stories
4. Apply the First Amendment to the issue of fake news

**Materials:**

1. Copy of the First Amendment Freedom of Speech Clause
  - a. The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees that the government “shall make no law [...] abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press.”
2. The News Literacy Project’s “Ten Questions For Fake News Detection”
3. Fake news articles:
  - a. Jimmy Rustling’s “Fireman Suspended and Jailed By Atheist Mayor for Praying At Scene on Fire” (ABC News)

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- b. “Donald Trump Wants Debates To Be Pay-Per-View” (National Report)
4. Accurate news articles:
  - a. Joohee Cho’s “Kim Jong Un's half-brother killed in Malaysia, sources report” (ABC News)
  - b. Lauren Del Valle’s “Lawsuit alleges sixth death linked to Pittsburgh hospital mold outbreak” (CNN)

### **Pre-Lesson Teacher Preparation:**

Before teaching the lesson to students, take some time to read and review the materials listed above.

### **Lecture and Activities:**

#### **Lecture**

Opening Questions:

- What does it mean to “look to be accurate” or “look to be reliable”? If an article looks accurate and reliable, does that mean it is?
- What are the effects of fake news?
- When doing a research project, what resources do you use? How do you know that resource is reliable and accurate? What are good strategies for finding out whether a news source is authentic or not?
- Under the First Amendment, is the media allowed to deliberately provide its viewers with inaccurate information?

It is important for students to be educated on fake media, so that they are able to perceive what is actually happening in the world. Students need to be educated on what the media can and cannot do, learn how to differentiate fake news from accurate news, and use it to their advantage.

In recent months and years, some media outlets have deliberately developed false or misleading stories made to look like real news stories. In 2016, Facebook’s top fake news stories, such as “Pope Francis Shocks World, Endorses Donald Trump for President, Releases Statement” (*Ending the Fed*) and “WikiLeaks Confirms Hillary Sold Weapons to ISIS...” (*The Political Insider*), [received over 2.1 million shares, comments, and reactions](#).

This fake news phenomenon has had some major consequences in our society: citizens are confused and uninformed, the media is no longer trusted, and accurate information is more difficult to find.

Social networks and search engines such as Facebook and Google have announced they will put a stop to fake news postings on their websites.

Fake news is important to debunk, and here are ways for viewers to determine the validity of a news story. These simple steps can help identify false information.

First: Be skeptical. The most important question to ask yourself is if the news source is reliable. It's very unlikely that sources like CNN or ABC News would deliberately provide viewers with false information; fake news often comes from small, lesser-known websites. However, remind students that news reporters are human, too: it's possible for even the most reliable news sources to accidentally provide inaccurate information. While students should trust accredited media, they shouldn't eliminate the possibility of mistakes.

Do additional research. It's also important to be able to find the story from more than one news source. If the claims are true and important, more than one reliable news source is going to cover them.

Check for citations within a story. A story is nothing without its sources; for a story to be credible, it needs to include primary sources. A primary source is a document, video, recording, person, etc., that records a first-hand account, at the scene of the event. It's important for news stories to include primary sources, so that readers can know where the information is coming from. This keeps alterations, inaccuracies, and spin out of the story.

The First Amendment of the United States Constitution guarantees that the government "shall make no law [...] abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press." This means that both the people and media have the right to say what they please, as long as it does not threaten, harm, or defame anyone. As long as the media does not violate these narrow restrictions, they can make any claim, whether true or false.

***Activity: Find the Fake News***

As a class, go over The News Literacy Project's "Ten Questions for Fake News Detection." The "[Ten Questions For Fake News Detection](#)" provides 10 important questions readers should ask themselves when questioning a news story's reliability. The more red flags the students circle on

the flyer, the more skeptical they should be. Go over each point and further explain each piece of advice.

After reading the fact sheet, present students with multiple accurate news and fake news articles. With each news article, have the students guess whether it is reliable or not. After the students guess, reveal the accuracy of the news source. After going over each news story, discuss with the students about what they’ve learned from the activity.

The two fake news articles are from websites that appear to be legitimate, which is why students might have trouble detecting them as fake news.

**Indications of Reliability: Check the source, and double-check the website address**

*Jimmy Rustling’s “Fireman Suspended and Jailed By Atheist Mayor for Praying At Scene on Fire” (ABC News)*

The “[Fireman Suspended & Jailed By Atheist Mayor For Praying At Scene Of Fire](#)” article can throw students off with its “ABC News” website title, a news source children might have learned to trust. However, the title is fake; the real website of ABC News is <http://abcnews.go.com/>, not <http://abcnews.com.co/>.

Teacher’s Answers to “[Ten Questions For Fake News Detection](#)” for this article:

Is it strong? Are you angry? Are you intensely hoping that the information turns out to be true? False?	Subjective question
Was it promoted on a website? Did it show up in a social media feed? Was it sent to you by someone you know?	No, this article was given as an example
Does it use excessive punctuation (!!) or ALL CAPS for emphasis? Does it make a claim about containing a secret or telling you something that “the media” doesn’t want you to know?	No
Is this information designed for easy sharing, like a meme?	<b>Yes, there is a sidebar for readers to share on social media</b>
Is it a well-known source?	<b>No, website domain mimics a reliable source</b>
Is there a byline (an author’s name) attached to	Yes

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this piece?	
Does the site describe itself as a “fantasy news” or “satirical news” site?	No
Does the person or organization that produced the information have any editorial standards?	No
Does the “contact us” section include an email address that matches the domain?	<b>No contact information provided</b>
Does a quick search for the name of the website raise any suspicions?	Yes
Does the example you’re evaluating have a current date on it?	Yes
Does the example cite a variety of sources, including official and expert sources?	<b>No expert or official sources</b>
Does the information this example provides appear in reports from (other) news outlets?	<b>Does not appear in any accredited news sources</b>
Does the example hyperlink to other quality sources?	No
Can you confirm, using a reverse image search, that any images in your example are authentic?	No
If you searched for this example on a fact-checking site such as Snopes.com, FactCheck.org or PolitiFact.com, is there a fact-check that labels it as less than true?	<b>No information found on the story</b>

*“Trump Reports World Record 39 Under Par, 12 Holes-in-One, During Golf Outing with Japanese Prime Minister” (National Report)*

A major red flag for the [“Trump Reports World Record 39 Under Par, 12 Holes-in-One, During Golf Outing with Japanese Prime Minister”](#) article is the source of the story. Despite appearing as an accredited news website, *National Report* is not a very reputable nor well-known news source. Because of this, readers should be cautious of what they read and look for additional articles regarding the same story.

Teacher’s Answers to [“Ten Questions For Fake News Detection”](#) for this article:

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Is it strong? Are you angry? Are you intensely hoping that the information turns out to be true? False?	Subjective question
Was it promoted on a website? Did it show up in a social media feed? Was it sent to you by someone you know?	No, this article was given as an example
Does it use excessive punctuation (!!) or ALL CAPS for emphasis?	No
Does it make a claim about containing a secret or telling you something that “the media” doesn’t want you to know?	No
Is this information designed for easy sharing, like a meme?	<b>Yes, there is a sidebar for readers to share on social media</b>
Is it a well-known source?	<b>No</b>
Is there a byline (an author’s name) attached to this piece?	Yes
Go to the website’s “About” section: Does the site describe itself as a “fantasy news” or “satirical news” site?	<b>Yes</b>
Does the person or organization that produced the information have any editorial standards?	<b>No</b>
Does the “contact us” section include an email address that matches the domain?	<b>No contact information provided</b>
Does a quick search for the name of the website raise any suspicions?	<b>Yes</b>
Does the example you’re evaluating have a current date on it?	Yes
Does the example cite a variety of sources, including official and expert sources? Does the information this example provides appear in reports from (other) news outlets?	<b>No</b>
Does the example hyperlink to other quality sources? In other words, they haven’t been altered or taken from another context?	<b>No</b>
Can you confirm, using a reverse image search,	<b>No</b>

that any images in your example are authentic?	
If you searched for this example on a fact-checking site such as Snopes.com, FactCheck.org or PolitiFact.com, is there a fact-check that labels it as less than true?	<b>No information found on the story</b>

### Reputable and Reliable Sources

The primary way to get accurate information from the internet is by using sources which you know are reputable and reliable. The “Accurate News Articles” provided are from well-known media, CNN and ABC News. Reading the accurate news articles using “Ten Questions For Fake News Detection,” few or no red flags arise.

Joohee Cho’s [“Kim Jong Un's half-brother killed in Malaysia, sources report”](#) (ABC News)

Is it strong? Are you angry? Are you intensely hoping that the information turns out to be true? False?	Subjective question
Was it promoted on a website? Did it show up in a social media feed? Was it sent to you by someone you know?	No, this article was given as an example
Does it use excessive punctuation (!!) or ALL CAPS for emphasis?	No
Does it make a claim about containing a secret or telling you something that “the media” doesn’t want you to know?	No
Is this information designed for easy sharing, like a meme?	No
Is it a well-known source?	Yes
Is there a byline (an author’s name) attached to this piece?	Yes
Does the site describe itself as a “fantasy news” or “satirical news” site?	No
Does the person or organization that produced the information have any editorial standards?	Yes
Does the “contact us” section include an email	Yes

address that matches the domain?	
Does a quick search for the name of the website raise any suspicions?	No
Does the example you're evaluating have a current date on it?	Yes
Does the example cite a variety of sources, including official and expert sources? Does the information this example provides appear in reports from (other) news outlets?	Yes
Does the example hyperlink to other quality sources?	No
Can you confirm, using a reverse image search, that any images in your example are authentic?	Yes
If you searched for this example on a fact-checking site such as Snopes.com, FactCheck.org or PolitiFact.com, is there a fact-check that labels it as less than true?	No

Lauren Del Valle's "[Lawsuit alleges sixth death linked to Pittsburgh hospital mold outbreak](#)" (CNN)

Is it strong? Are you angry? Are you intensely hoping that the information turns out to be true? False?	Subjective question
Was it promoted on a website? Did it show up in a social media feed? Was it sent to you by someone you know?	No, this article was given as an example
Does it use excessive punctuation (!!) or ALL CAPS for emphasis?	No
Does it make a claim about containing a secret or telling you something that "the media" doesn't want you to know?	No
Is this information designed for easy sharing, like a meme?	No
Is it a well-known source?	Yes

Is there a byline (an author's name) attached to this piece?	Yes
Does the site describe itself as a "fantasy news" or "satirical news" site?	No
Does the person or organization that produced the information have any editorial standards?	Yes
Does the "contact us" section include an email address that matches the domain?	Yes
Does a quick search for the name of the website raise any suspicions?	No
Does the example you're evaluating have a current date on it?	Yes
Does the example cite a variety of sources, including official and expert sources? Does the information this example provides appear in reports from (other) news outlets?	Yes
Does the example hyperlink to other quality sources?	<b>No</b>
Can you confirm, using a reverse image search, that any images in your example are authentic?	No images provided
If you searched for this example on a fact-checking site such as Snopes.com, FactCheck.org or PolitiFact.com, is there a fact-check that labels it as less than true?	<b>No</b>

**Assignment:** Using Microsoft Word, Google Docs, etc., have the students create their own “fake news” story. This will allow students to understand how easy it is for a fake news story to be created.

**Discussion:** How does fake news affect our society? How does it affect you personally? Should there be laws regulating the media?