7 FACT SHEET
TRICKS USED TO PRODUCE FAKE NEWS

OBJECTIVES OF THE CURRICULUM

DISCIPLINES AND LEVELS CONCERNED

English (Elementary – Cycle 3)

Reading various texts

- Using literary and common texts to develop critical and creative thinking;
- Identifying some characteristics of texts that seek to convince or call to action.

Ethics and Religious Culture (Elementary – Cycle 3)

Ways to develop a point of view:

- Explanation;
- Justification.

TARGETED DIMENSIONS OF THE DIGITAL COMPETENCY

- Exploit the potential of digital technology for learning;
- Develop critical thinking regarding digital information;
- Produce content with digital technology;
- Innovate and show creativity with digital technology;
- Communicate by using digital technology.

SUGGESTED DIGITAL TOOLS

- Produce an infographic: Canva;
- Discuss, compare, survey and get students to react: Wooclap;
- Create a "meme": imgflip.com/memegenerator.

EDUCATIONAL INTENTION OF THE GUIDE

By the end of these activities, students will be able to understand that fake news can take several forms and that certain types of information cannot be fact-checked as easily as others.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITIES

- Demonstrate through an infographic what can make an article fake news;
- Discuss and give their opinion on sharing fake news;
- Compare the reliability of different social media;
- Create a "meme" to make people laugh, but especially to think about the involuntary role students play in spreading fake news.

BEFORE BEGINNING: DISCUSSION

- Ask the students if they believe they have ever been tricked by fake news;

- Ask the students if it would be possible to get them to believe a rumour or something they aren't sure is true or false.

EXERCISE OR DISCUSSION

Situational exercise

Imagine you really love dogs but aren't really into cats. Then a news item appears on your computer: "A study says that dogs are smarter than cats." You'll probably be happy with that. Maybe you won't ask yourself if the study is serious, if the scientists compared a large number of dogs and cats... So you won't do much fact-checking, because this news item confirms exactly what you believe!

That's what people who produce fake news count on. If they say what you want to hear, they know you won't check if their news is true or false.

Teachers could use this example in class. They could also extend it in the form of an exercise: write two different newspaper headlines ("A study says dogs are smarter than cats" and "A study says cats are smarter than dogs"). First present one of these headlines and ask students if they believe it's true. Then show the other headline. This will make students aware that if they already preferred dogs, they were more likely to believe the "dogs" headline. The opposite would be true if they preferred cats.

HEADLINES

On social media, some people share news items with their friends that come from suspicious sites. Sometimes they do this just because they like the headline.

For example, the headline promises that a product can fight a disease or make people look attractive. Or it says something good about their favourite celebrity... or something very bad about a celebrity they don't like!

Here's the first thing to avoid when a headline surprises or shocks you: never, never draw conclusions based on the headline alone. Because fake news often has:

- A surprising or shocking headline;

- A headline that contains superlatives ("it's the best!", "it's the worst!", "it's a miracle solution!", etc.).

THE BODY OF THE TEXT

Let's go beyond the headline and read the body of the text. In our example about dogs and cats, if it's a serious article, the journalist will cite experts on dogs and cats. If a study was done, the journalist will give details. Maybe the journalist will provide nuances, and may say if other scientists agree or disagree with these conclusions.

But if the news item is fake, the author may not give many details, because the whole story is false! Because the author can't cite a real scientist, he may write "according to some scientists". But this information is too vague for readers to fact-check it.

Tips:

If an article seems suspicious, you must return to your basic reflexes (see Fact Sheet #4, *How can you recognize a reliable resource on the Internet?*).

- For example, you can click on the "About us" or "Contact us" button to check who is hiding behind the website or the account;

- You can also run a search on Google to check if a reliable site has published something about the "news" that seems suspicious. If this is an important issue and no serious media has mentioned it, beware.

IMAGE

Unfortunately, it's easy to take an image from the Internet, publish it on Facebook or Instagram and add a caption that claims it means something else. Malicious people often do this to harm individuals or causes they don't like, such as the fight against climate change.

That's what happened after a big climate march held in Montréal in September 2019 (activist Greta Thunberg was there). This march was a big success. However, the next day, a picture of a park full of garbage appeared on social media. The caption claimed this was Mount Royal Park after the marchers passed through. This was supposed to be "proof" they had little respect for the environment.

But this item was false. The picture had been taken in another city several years earlier and had nothing to do with a climate march.

Tip:

Of all the fake news mentioned in this Fact Sheet, this one is the easiest to check, even for children. Simply save the image on your computer. Then go to Google Images and drag it to the search box. Google then provides links to all the pages where it found this image. In some cases, by looking at the publication dates, you can find where this image was published for the very first time.
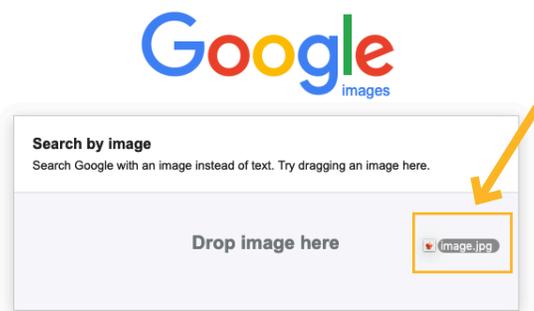
Note on manipulated videos

In the past few years there's been plenty of talk about "deep fakes". These are videos that make people say things they never said. It's unlikely that children watch such videos, but they may have heard about the possibility of faking a video. In this case, it may be important to remind them that the technology is still far from perfect. However, if this kind of video is circulating, they could do the same thing we mentioned previously: search on Google, Facebook or Twitter if a serious site has already denounced the scam.

MEMES

A meme is a simple document, often composed of an image and a very short text. Sometimes they can be very funny or very shocking. But we have to be just as careful with memes as with images. There's nothing easier than taking an image and adding text!

When in doubt, if a meme contains a claim that seems shocking, never jump to conclusions. Generally a meme doesn't cite sources and doesn't give hyperlinks. So it's impossible to check if it's true.

Tips:

- Does the text accompanying the image contain a reference to any credible media? (On this issue, see *Fact Sheet #1 – What are information media?*)
- Can we check in Google if any credible media confirmed this claim?

DO THEY HAVE THE RIGHT?

This is the question students seem to ask most often: why isn't it illegal to publish fake news?

Here's the answer: we live in a country where freedom of expression is a fundamental right. This means we don't want to risk censoring opinions just because we disagree with them.

It's hard to determine if people who published fake news lied deliberately, or if they shared it just because they believed it was true.

However, one thing is forbidden: publishing false information that damages another person's reputation. For example, falsely claiming that someone committed a crime.

Note to the teacher:

You'll understand this is a question that may deserve in-depth discussion: the concept of **freedom of expression**, the difficulty of determining the **intention** of a person who publishes a falsehood, and the harm that can be done to individuals by saying false things about them. However, these discussions would require longer preparation and go beyond the theme covered in this fact sheet.

YOU MUST REMEMBER THAT:

- **Unfortunately, it's easy to manufacture fake news.** Contrary to true news, there's no need to check the facts or do research. Certainly this means the authors will have no credibility when it's discovered that everything they said is false. But authors of fake news don't care about their reputation or credibility. They just want to attract attention. Sometimes they're also seeking to make money.

- **If this works so well,** it's because many people don't do any basic fact-checking on a news item before sharing it. Sometimes it's very easy to realize this is fake news!

- **Mixing truth and falsehood helps.** Even the most unlikely conspiracy theory will contain a tiny grain of truth. That doesn't mean the rest of it is true!

- **For fake news to work, it must generate emotion (surprise, fear, anger or disgust).** That's why disinformers so often use subjects that are shocking or surprising. They strike a sensitive chord.

EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1

In teams or individually, the students will have to work on a news item the teacher knows is false. Then they'll have to explain how to prove it's false.

Some students are already more skilled than others at using Google. To avoid using news already debunked by Canadian fact-checkers, the teacher could draw on fake news checked by the American website Snopes (www.snopes.com, which has operated since the 1990s). The goal of the exercise shouldn't be to get the students to prove why the item is false, but to describe their approach.

Suggestion: This activity can take the form of an infographic. On a platform like Canva, the students could develop the approach that allowed them to decipher the articles provided by the teachers. Each step could therefore be accompanied by an image and an example taken from the fake news in question.

EXERCISES

Discussion or practical work on circulation of fake news.

a) What explains why a person publishes fake news?

b) What role should platforms like Facebook, YouTube or TikTok play regarding fake news?

c) What distinguishes these platforms from the media on whether or not fake news is published?

* Choices b and c assume that the teacher checked in advance whether the students use a social media outlet and, if so, which one.

Suggestion: This activity is the opportunity to use Wooclap to discuss and get the students to respond. Write each of your questions on this interactive platform and propose a different way to give the answers. (word cloud, brainstorming, survey, open question, multiple choice questions, etc.).

EXERCISE 3

Discussion or practical work: compare the reliability of the different social media they use.

a) Which social media outlet is the most reliable? Which is the least reliable Why?

* Here again, the exercise will depend on the students' level of use of social media.

Suggestion: DUse Wooclap to survey the students about their favourite social media. You can use "survey" mode to recover the answers. Based on the results obtained, question the students on which social media outlets they think are the most reliable and least reliable. To display their answers, propose the "open question" form so that they have enough space to justify their choices. Is there a difference between their favourite social media outlet and the one they consider most reliable? Finally, you can redo a document on Wooclap in "survey" mode. This will present the most reliable social media and compare the results with the ranking done in advance (on favourite social media).

EXERCISE 4

Discussion or practical work on the students' involuntary role in spreading fake news. Here are some examples of questions to ask them:

a) How do you check a person's identity on Instagram? On TikTok? On WhatsApp? On Reddit? On your favourite social media?

a) Have you ever shared a news item, a message, a photo or a video without knowing who the author was?

a) If so, what is your contribution to disseminating fake news?

Suggestion: This activity is the opportunity for students to create an educational "meme". To do this, the *imgflip.com/memegenerator* platform offers a simple way to produce "memes" by providing a bank of images. We can easily add text. The objective is to make students aware of good practices to avoid spreading fake news. The students may therefore choose to discuss proper uses of TikTok and produce a "meme" that makes people laugh, but especially gets them to thank.

ANSWER KEY

2

a)

- Defend an ideology or a cause they care about;

- Harm someone (a political opponent, for example);

- Raise doubt in part of the population: a candidate isn't as honest as you believe, a cause or a company is suspicious, etc.;

- Make money (the more clicks they attract, the more advertising revenue they can expect).

b)

Open question: should governments impose more regulation of false information that circulates or allow users total freedom of speech? Here you can consider the role that platforms played in the recent elections, or the spreading of false information during the COVID-19 pandemic.

c)

Among other possible answers:

- The serious media are subject to rules of ethics and codes of conduct that forbid them to publish falsehoods (see Fact Sheet #1 - *What are information media?*);

- The media can also be held liable in court if they authorized the publication of fake news that harmed a person's reputation.

4

a)

- Regardless of the social media outlet mentioned, the basic formula is the same. It applies to all scientific or other information. Click on the author's name, or on any option the platform offers to go to the author's "bio" (biography). This option may be called "Contact us" or "Who are we?", but the idea is to find something that lets us know who is behind this account.

- **A downside:** Even if you find the information it's possible there isn't much. The goal of the exercise is to develop the student's reflex to check the identity of an author (or a website) before sharing information on social media.

b)

- **Useful reminder:** Students may have already shared a news item sent to them by a friend, but the friend wasn't the original author of this news. You can take the opportunity to remind students that this is also how fake news is spread: a friend shares it with a friend who shares it with another friend, and so on …

c)

- Return to the initial discussion about dogs and cats. Most people who share fake news do so because they want to be heard. **Students mustn't feel incompetent:** all of us, including adults, like to read first what confirms our opinions. Statistics show that everyone is at risk of sharing false or doubtful information. We must therefore develop our critical skills and learn to do basic fact-checking (see Fact Sheet #4 - *How can you recognize a reliable resource on the Internet?*).

THE QUEBEC SUN

A study says cats are smarter than dogs

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nullam non feugiat lacus, sed commodo tellus. Integer quis tellus vel justo tristique fringilla id eget mauris. Maecenas porttitor blandit hendrerit. Morbi at tortor quis lacus efficitur tincidunt aliquam ac turpis. In imperdiet lobortis ultricies. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis eges-

licitudin ullamcorper libero. Suspendisse porta orci ut nisl posuere pellentesque. Ut suscipit tellus vitae ligula aliquet cursus. Nullam vel pellentesque neque.

Integer faucibus, metus eget venenatis facilisis, nulla sapien feugiat urna, nec vehicula turpis magna sit amet elit. Sed pulvinar neque eget arcu dapibus sollicitudin. Aliquam ultricies nec neque sodales pellentesque. Morbi porta purus ut gravida ullamcorper. Cras blandit varius fe-

Integer faucibus, metus eget venenatis facilisis, nulla sapien feugiat urna, nec vehicula turpis magna sit amet elit. Sed pulvinar neque eget arcu dapibus sollicitudin. Aliquam ultricies nec neque sodales pellentesque. Morbi porta purus ut gravida ullamcorper. Cras blandit varius fe-

THE QUEBEC SUN

A study says cats are smarter than dogs

Lorem ipsum dolor sit amet, consectetur adipiscing elit. Nullam non feugiat lacus, sed commodo tellus. Integer quis tellus vel justo tristique fringilla id eget mauris. Maecenas porttitor blandit hendrerit. Morbi at tortor quis lacus efficitur tincidunt aliquam ac turpis. In imperdiet lobortis ultricies. Pellentesque habitant morbi tristique senectus et netus et malesuada fames ac turpis eges-

licitudin ullamcorper libero. Suspendisse porta orci ut nisl posuere pellentesque. Ut suscipit tellus vitae ligula aliquet cursus. Nullam vel pellentesque neque.

Integer faucibus, metus eget venenatis facilisis, nulla sapien feugiat urna, nec vehicula turpis magna sit amet elit. Sed pulvinar neque eget arcu dapibus sollicitudin. Aliquam ultricies nec neque sodales pellentesque. Morbi porta purus ut gravida ullamcorper. Cras blandit varius fe-

Integer faucibus, metus eget venenatis facilisis, nulla sapien feugiat urna, nec vehicula turpis magna sit amet elit. Sed pulvinar neque eget arcu dapibus sollicitudin. Aliquam ultricies nec neque sodales pellentesque. Morbi porta purus ut gravida ullamcorper. Cras blandit varius fe-