



K-12 Curriculum Project Teacher Resource Guide

Fake News! Defining Misinformation

Kristen Landreville, Ph.D.
Department of Communication & Journalism
University of Wyoming

Presentation Summary:

The terms “fake news” and “misinformation” are popular phrases among journalists, fact checkers, politicians, partisans, and social media users. What do these terms actually mean? Do the definitions differ, depending on who is using the term? The video’s central question asks students to develop a clear, simple, and memorable definition of fake news and misinformation. This video first introduces the concepts of fake news and misinformation by relating them to rumors, a concept that students are likely familiar with. Next, a very brief history of fake news is presented, followed by a discussion of why fake news is different today due to social media. Finally, various types of fake news are considered, including satire, false information, and partisan news. The video concludes by asking students to find commonalities among these various sources and write a clear, simple, and memorable definition of fake news and misinformation. The video provides its own scholarly definition on the last slide for students to compare their definitions to.

NOTE: Some concepts in this video may be challenging to initiate discussions about. Kristen Landreville would be happy to talk to teachers before they use this material if they have questions or concerns about the topic.

Targeted Grades: Middle School (6-8)/High School (9-12)

Wyoming Social Studies Standards Lesson Aligns With:

- **SS8.1.2** Explain how to participate in the political process. (i.e., tribal, local, state, and national elections).
- **SS8.6.1** Use and evaluate multiple sources of information in diverse formats and media in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- **SS8.6.2** Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.
- **SS8.6.3** Use digital tools to research, design, and present social studies concepts (e.g., understand how individual responsibility applies in usage of digital media).
- **SS12.1.2** Explain and/or demonstrate how to participate in the political process and form personal opinions. (i.e., tribal, local, state, and national elections).
- **SS12.6.1** Analyze, evaluate, and/or synthesize multiple sources of information in diverse formats and media in order to address a question or solve a problem.
- **SS12.6.2** Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text supports the author's claims.
- **SS12.6.3** Use digital tools to research, design, and present social studies concepts (e.g., understand how individual responsibility applies in usage of digital media).

Suggested Discussion Questions/Activities:

1. What are some other instances of fake news and misinformation throughout our American history?
2. How is the concept of conspiracy theories related to fake news and misinformation?
3. How does the concept of propaganda relate to fake news and misinformation?
4. Consider these questions to ask yourself when evaluating political messages for evidence of propaganda and misinformation:
 - a. Who is communicating?
 - b. How much power does the communicator have?
 - c. What is the purpose of the message (to educate, persuade, judge, inform)?
 - d. What motivations may exist for the message and communicator? Does the communicator have reasons to manipulate or misinform? And are these motivations personally beneficial for the communicator?
 - e. What is the context of the media environment? Is it seen as favorable to the communicator and message? Is the message appearing on the free press?
 - f. What is the historical context of the message and communicator? What events are occurring that may influence the broader understanding of the message?
 - g. What is the public opinion climate like? Is it largely favorable, unfavorable, or perhaps split toward the communicator and current events?
 - h. How does one's personal bias (e.g., dislike or admiration for the communicator) impact the disdain or appreciation for the message?
 - i. Are human rights (i.e., upholding the dignity and value of others) at stake in the message? This makes it even more important to consider given our world's history of being manipulated or actively accepting propaganda that creates hate and violence toward "others by blaming them for problems.
 - j. Using these questions to evaluate political messages, are there any times when government use of misinformation is justified, such as war time? For example, consider the case of Japanese American internment camps during World War II. Wyoming had its own internment camp at Heart Mountain. Search or watch these resources and discuss the link between misinformation and propaganda. Discuss how news media may have played a role in spreading this misinformation.
 - k. Learn more here: <https://www.heartmountain.org/>.
 - l. Watch a video of Milton Eisenhower present government misinformation about Japanese American internment (10 minutes) at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=esVege1SoOE>
 - m. Watch a video of Star Trek actor George Takei discuss his internment during WWII (15 minutes) at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LeBKBfAPwNc>
5. Watch the PBS Frontline documentary "The Facebook Dilemma" about the implications of fake news and misinformation here. This is a deep dive into misinformation, social media, polarization, and microtargeting. This is a two-part series that is two hours long (total). Watch at: <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/film/facebook-dilemma>
Suggested essay assignment questions:
 - a. How were the Arab Spring uprisings connected with Facebook? How did Facebook influence this political activism?
 - b. There were "blind spots" in Facebook's mission to create an "open and more connected" world. Why and how did Facebook fail to notice these burgeoning problems with misinformation? In other words, what incentivized Facebook to ignore concerns with misinformation?
 - c. To what extent is misinformation perpetuated and amplified due to our own US politicians? In other words, what incentives do our own US politicians have at being complacent or worse, promoters, of misinformation?
 - d. How are the concepts of microtargeting, misinformation, and polarization related?
 - e. What are a few of the biggest takeaways of this 2-part series? What do you want to share with others and educate them about Facebook and its consequences on political communication?

- f. Where have you, your friends, or your family encountered fake news and misinformation?
6. The 2020 election season brought a plethora of misinformation, often shared by politicians and their supporters.
 - a. Find an example of misinformation that was shared by a politician about the 2020 election. Find a fact-checking article that debunks the misinformation. Some fact-checking websites are <https://apnews.com/hub/ap-fact-check>, <https://www.snopes.com/>, <https://www.politifact.com/>, and <https://www.factcheck.org/>
 - b. Read this news article about how misinformation about the election was shared on TikTok to reach young people and discuss the motivations and implications behind such misinformation: <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2020/nov/05/tiktok-us-election-misinformation>

Sources for Additional Information on the Topic:

Suggested reading

- Learn more about the long history of fake news from Politico Magazine. Soll, Jacob. “The Long and Brutal History of Fake News.” POLITICO Magazine, December 18, 2016. <https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2016/12/fake-news-history-long-violent-214535>.
- Learn more about the long history of fake news from Washington Post. Parkinson, Robert G. “Fake News? That’s a Very Old Story.” The Washington Post. WP Company, November 25, 2016. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/fake-news-thats-a-very-old-story/2016/11/25/c8b1f3d4-b330-11e6-8616-52b15787add0_story.html.
- Read about Trump’s tweet of the satire story from The Babylon Bee. Beer, Tommy. “Trump Tweets Out Fake Story Criticizing Biden From Satirical News Site.” Forbes. Forbes Magazine, October 16, 2020. [Trump Tweets Out Fake Story Criticizing Biden From Satirical News Site \(forbes.com\)](http://www.forbes.com/sites/tommybeer/2020/10/16/trump-tweets-out-fake-story-criticizing-biden-from-satirical-news-site/)
- Read about the fake news story about how Lander, Wyoming, had a coronavirus case back in January [here](#). Learned, Nick. “Heads Up: That Post About Coronavirus in Lander, Wyoming Is Fake.” K2 Radio. K2 Radio, January 29, 2020. <https://k2radio.com/heads-up-that-post-about-coronavirus-in-lander-wyoming-is-fake/>.
- Learn more about the early Black investigative journalist Ida B. Wells [here](#). Little, Becky. “When Ida B. Wells Took on Lynching, Threats Forced Her to Leave Memphis.” History.com. A&E Television Networks, August 2, 2018. <https://www.history.com/news/ida-b-wells-lynching-memphis-chicago>.
- Learn more about American public opinion surrounding misinformation [here](#). Gottfried, Jeffrey, Amy Mitchell, Galen Stocking, Mason Walker, and Sophia Fedeli. “Many Americans Say Made-Up News Is a Critical Problem That Needs To Be Fixed.” Pew Research Center’s Journalism Project, July 5, 2019. <https://www.journalism.org/2019/06/05/many-americans-say-made-up-news-is-a-critical-problem-that-needs-to-be-fixed/>.
- Learn more about American public opinion about facts, democracy, trust, and information [here](#). Dimock, Michael. “An Update on Our Research into Trust, Facts and Democracy.” Pew Research Center. Pew Research Center, June 5, 2019. <https://www.pewresearch.org/2019/06/05/an-update-on-our-research-into-trust-facts-and-democracy/>.

Web Resources

Fact-checking websites:

- “AP Fact Check.” AP NEWS. Accessed January 11, 2021. <https://apnews.com/hub/ap-fact-check>.
- Snopes.com. Accessed January 11, 2021. <https://www.snopes.com/>.
- Politifact.com. Accessed January 11, 2021. <https://www.politifact.com/>
- Factcheck.org. Accessed January 11, 2021. <https://www.factcheck.org/>

- Learn more about media and information literacy at the News Literacy Project [here](https://newslit.org/). Newslit.org. Accessed January 11, 2021. <https://newslit.org/>.
- Learn more about American public opinion surrounding journalism and news [here](https://www.journalism.org/). Journalism.com. Accessed January 11, 2021. <https://www.journalism.org/>
- Learn more about American public opinion surrounding politics [here](https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/). “U.S. Politics and Policy.” Pew Research Center - U.S. Politics & Policy. Pew Research Center. Accessed January 11, 2021. <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/>.

Podcast Resources

- Listen to the Hidden Brain Podcast “Fake News: An Origin Story” (27-minute podcast) [here](https://www.npr.org/2018/06/25/623231337/fake-news-an-origin-story). Vedantam, Shankar, Rhaina Cohen, and Tara Boyle. “Fake News: An Origin Story.” NPR. NPR, June 26, 2018. <https://www.npr.org/2018/06/25/623231337/fake-news-an-origin-story>.
- Listen to a 42-minute Throughline podcast about how conspiracy theories have appeared throughout US history [here](https://www.npr.org/2020/05/19/858812580/conspiracy). “Conspiracy.” NPR. NPR, May 21, 2020. <https://www.npr.org/2020/05/19/858812580/conspiracy>.

Video Resources

- Watch the second video on fake news and misinformation that I created. It’s called “Fake News! Don’t Fall For It” and addresses the psychological biases underlying our tendencies to believe misinformation, rumors, and fake news. Find it in the WyoLearn course: Wallop K-12 Curriculum Project- Social Studies.

Contacting the Wallop Team:

For information on how to schedule a chat-back “Ask Me Anything” session with Kristen Landreville or for more information on this or other modules contact the Wallop Program Team at wallop@uwyo.edu.