**Pamela Johnson**
johnsp@uw.edu
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6492-6310

# "Two Truths and a Lie," Media Literacy Lesson about Fake News for Sixth-Grade Students

This lesson plan introduces six-grade students to the concept of *fake news* based on the game "Two Truths and a Lie." Initially, students test their ability to differentiate real news from fake news using an online game from *The Guardian*, then students learn about the term "fake news," why it exists, and some of the issues associated with false and



By Mike Lester (WPWG 2016)

misleading information. Finally, students practice fact-checking strategies, such as lateral searches on the internet, to identify whether or not their source is credible or not credible--a truth or a lie. This lesson uses gamification, both with the online news game and the "Two Truths and a Lie" game format to create a memorable, engaging lesson.

Some information in this lesson, such as the simple evaluation checklist, comes from the well-written Grade 6 lesson, "Finding Credible News," from Common Sense Education. However, instead of using a made-up hoax, "the dangers of corn"and the "corn tree," this lesson applies the checklist to a humorous hoax available on the internet--the Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus.

**Important:** This lesson uses active links to websites and new sources to help students practice real-world skills. You may need to ensure that the links you plan to use are available to students if your school district has an internet firewall.

Books written by Ammi-Joan Paquette and Laurie Ann Thompson.
Each chapter has two stories that are true and one story that is a lie.
These books promote critical thinking about what students see and read.

This lesson is built around the game "Two Truths and a Lie," which Ammi-Joan Paquette and Laurie Ann Thompson use in their three books to teach students to think critically about what they read and see. This lesson uses a number of sources from the book, *Two Truths and a Lie: It's Alive*, which uses stories based on biology. However, these authors have two other books using sources based on history and forces of nature, which would allow educators to modify this lesson and have students evaluate sources that relate with a unit they are currently teaching.

## Students Need to Know How to Evaluate Sources

By sixth grade, most students know that they shouldn't believe everything they see or read, but that does not mean they know how to identify false or misleading information. A 2016 report by the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) stated, "Our 'digital natives' may be able to flit between Facebook and Twitter while simultaneously uploading a selfie to Instagram and texting a friend. But when it comes to evaluating information that flows through social media channels, they are easily duped (p. 4)." More recently, a research paper published in the peer-reviewed, open access journal, *Social Media + Society*, showed that teens were more likely to share fake news if it supported

their beliefs, came from someone they trusted, and appeared credible (Herrero-Diz et al, 2020). All of this shows that it is critical for educators to guide young students in the strategies of identifying fake news.



By Signe Wilkinson/Philly.com (WPWG 2016)

## Learning Standards

Washington State Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English Language (ELA-Literacy/RI/6/)

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.1

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.6

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.7

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.6.8

    Washington State Common Core State Standards for Social Studies

- SSS2.6-8.2

    International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) Standards

- 2b, 3a, 3b, 3d

## Lesson Timeframe

50 minutes

## Framing Questions

Write these on the classroom whiteboard.

- What is "fake news"?

- How do you know if a source is trustworthy?

- What can cause you to investigate information or a source?

- How can our own feelings affect how we view the information/source?

- What are useful strategies for fact-checking information and sources?

## Learning Objectives

- Learn about "fake news."

- Learn reasons why people and organizations create and spread false and misleading information.

- Learn some of the issues around fake news.

- Learn techniques for evaluating a source to see if it is fake news.

- Learn about trustworthy sources for fact-checking information and sources.

- Practice evaluating the credibility of a source on the internet.

## Tasks

1. Ask students to play an online news game as an introduction to fake news.

2. Introduce the term "fake news" and explain why it exists.

3. Look at a source and walk students through investigating its credibility: review the site, conduct a lateral web search, look at fact-checking sites.

4. Have students practice evaluating a source using the strategies demonstrated in class.

## Lesson: Introduction to Fake News (20 min)

1. Nasa is installing internet on the moon



○ Real

○ Fake

**Reveal**

1. Ask students to take the online quiz, "Fake or Real? The all-new NewsWise headlines quiz!" created by *The Guardian* to help parents teach their children about fake news. The quiz has 8 questions. Students should answer each question, then click Reveal to see if they guessed the question correctly and then read the explanation.



✓ Real
This is really happening! Nasa will be building a 4G network on the moon, enabling them to control lunar robots. This story was reported by Newsround, The Independent, and several other sites.

Fake

**Reveal**

**Extension for students**: *The Guardian* has another 8-question quiz that students can take at "The NewsWise fake or real headlines quiz!"

2. Invite students to share how they did with the quiz, and what they learned. What were some of the fake headlines that "fooled" them and why?

3. Write "Fake News" on the board and ask students to help write a definition. Guide students to include information provided in the definition below.

> *Fake News* is generally defined as information that has a degree of falsehood. It can be entirely made up, with no verifiable facts, or based on partial facts. Sometimes Fake News is created as a source of satire, but it may be fiction written to mislead the reader and change the reader's thinking about a topic, or cause the reader to click a link.

4. Play the video, "How to Spot Fake News" (3:22) recommended by Common Sense and produced by FactCheck.

If time is an issue, consider using this shorter alternative, "What is fake news - explained"

(2:19) which was created by CBC Kids News, a Canadian PBS station.



5. Review the following terms mentioned in the Common Sense video to ensure students

   understand them.

   a. Satire or parody: information or site that makes fun of a subject and is meant to be

      humorous; often includes untrue statements (think *Mad* magazine).

   b. Hoax: information or site that is meant to fool readers into believing something that

      isn't true by trying to sound and look as realistic as possible.

   c. Editorials: information or blog written to persuade readers to agree or believe in the

      author's point of view, which may include bias and leave out important information.

   d. Confirmation Bias: people are more likely to believe information that supports their

      beliefs and disregard information that conflicts with them, even if that information is

      based on established fact.

   e. Clickbait: misleading headlines that draw our attention, which are designed to get

      people to click on links and make money for a website.

6. Ask students why it's important that they know about fake news. What are some of the issues with fake news? Brainstorm with students and write their ideas down on the board. Here are points you want to make sure are covered:

- **Students who use fake news can get poor grades**. Using credible, reliable sources is important for school research assignments and papers.

- **Fake news causes confusion about important social and political issues.** Because many people struggle to differentiate fake news from real news, getting communities to work together to solve real-world problems such as homelessness and poverty becomes even more difficult. Consider sharing this bar chart from Statista.
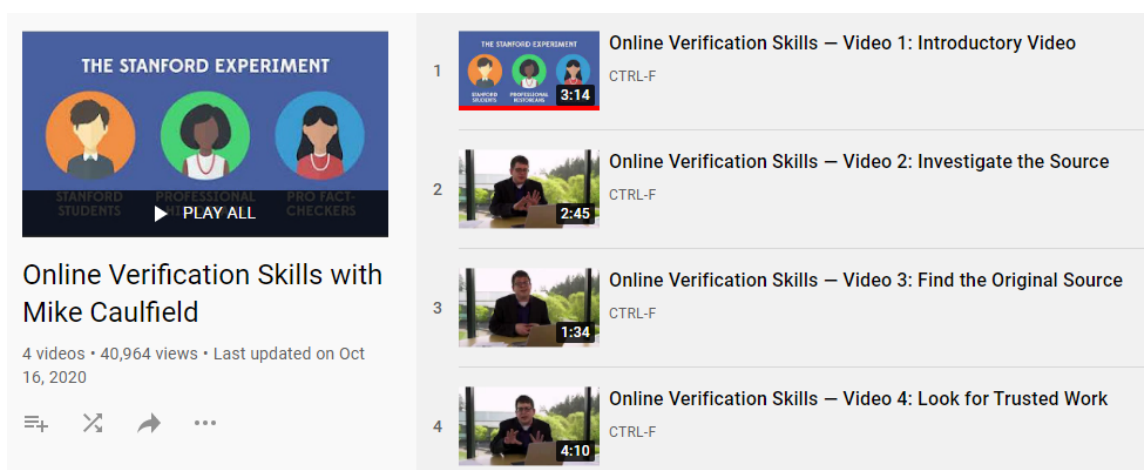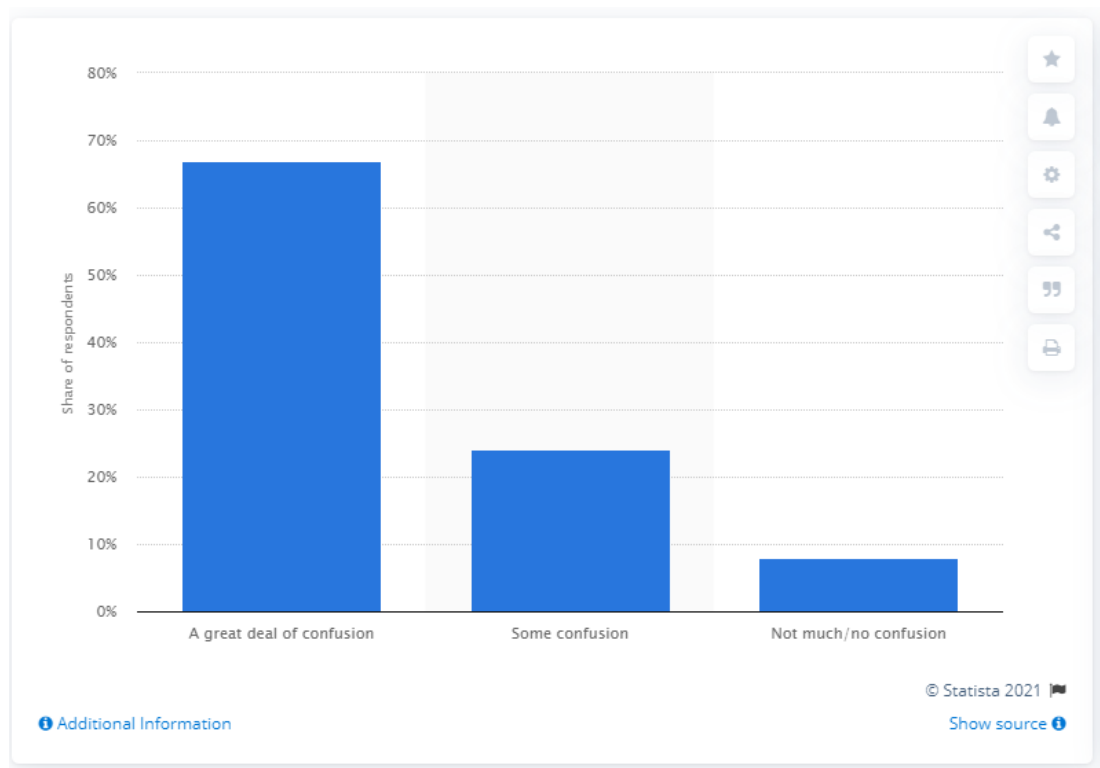


- **Fake news affects people's ability to know who to trust,** including credible sources such as well-established newspapers (*The New York Times, AP News,* and *Reuters),* as well as peer-reviewed journals and research.

- **Some people think that fake news is making society more polarized.** Because people have begun to doubt even well-established newspapers, people are getting their news from alternative sources such as Social Media and YouTube where "gatekeepers," such as news editors, do not exist to ensure the reliability of the information. People can also create "echo chambers," where they receive only the information that supports their beliefs and biases.

- **People can act on the false information**, harming themselves and others. Examples include Pizzagate, where a man walked into a pizza restaurant with a gun because of an online conspiracy theory, and early in the pandemic where people thought COVID-19 was a hoax and did not take recommended steps to protect themselves.

## Lesson: Strategies for Evaluating Online Information (15 min)

**Important:** If you feel uncomfortable with this part of the lesson, you can learn some tricks for evaluating websites by watching this video by Common Sense, "Help Your Students Fact-Check the Web Like Professionals." You might also consider watching Mike Caulfield's series of videos (about 13 minutes), which demonstrates how fact-checkers evaluate sites.

1. Tell the students, "Identifying fake news can be tricky. Now we are going to learn strategies evaluating information to determine if it is true or false." Explain that you will model how to evaluate a source, then students will have an opportunity to practice.

2. Share this simple checklist from Common Sense with students.

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**Internet Investigator Checklist**

✓ **Read closely.** *Does it make sense? Is it believable?*

Identify the main idea by analyzing the text features and webpage and by reading the text. Take note of anything that is surprising or hard to believe or that gives you a strong emotional reaction.

✓ **Analyze the source.** *Does it come from a credible, unbiased source?*

Find out information about the site owner and author by exploring the site and searching the web.

✓ **Look for corroboration.** *Do other credible sources say the same thing?*

See if the main idea and key points of the article are also reported by other credible sites.

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3. Provide students with some recommended fact-checking sites useful for corroboration:

   ○ Wikipedia.org: [Wikipedia.org](Wikipedia.org)

   ○ Snopes.com: [https://www.snopes.com/](https://www.snopes.com/)

   ○ Politifact.com: [https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/](https://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/)

   ○ FactCheck.org: [https://www.factcheck.org/](https://www.factcheck.org/)

   ○ APFactCheck: [https://apnews.com/hub/ap-fact-check](https://apnews.com/hub/ap-fact-check)

   ○ All Sides.com: [https://www.allsides.com/unbiased-balanced-news](https://www.allsides.com/unbiased-balanced-news)

   **Important**: Professional fact-checkers consider [Wikipedia.org](Wikipedia.org) a valuable resource for evaluating websites, but it is typically only one part of the evaluation. Wikipedia offers a number of benefits to fact-checkers, including a basic introduction to a topic, suggestions for keywords that can be used in internet searches, and the citations listed in the References section, which allow fact-checkers to dig deeper on a subject and refer to primary sources.

4. Click the link to "Help Save the Endangered Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus." This site is suggested in "[Sample of Fake Websites for Educators](#)" on the Media Literacy Clearinghouse.
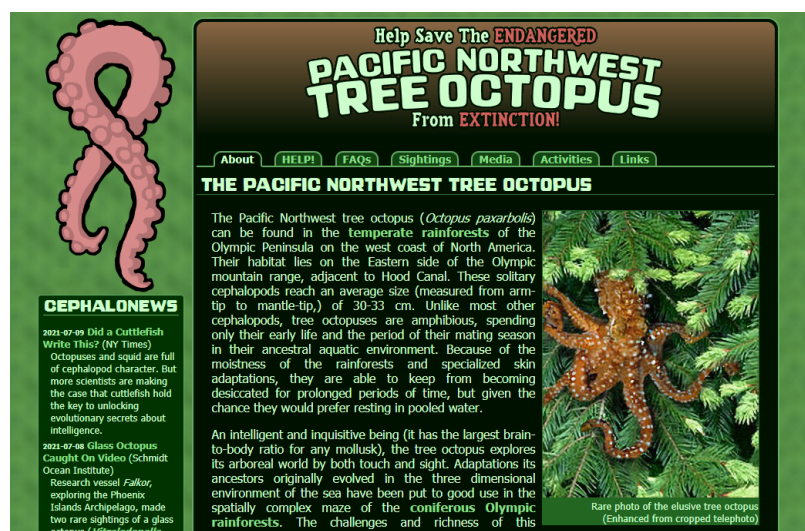


**Important:** [Appendix A](#) offers an alternative website to evaluate if you prefer to evaluate a source that looks more like a news story.

5. Follow the checklist. Talk aloud to the students as you model the steps for evaluating a site.

   ○ Read the first paragraph aloud. Does it make sense? Anything hard to believe?

   ○ Click around the website. Some of the links are circular, which means they return back to the website and do not offer outside corroboration.

   ○ Look for an About section or Home page to find out more about who created the page. If you click "**ZPi**" in the top left or "**Lyle Zapato**" at the bottom, you go to the Home page. Reading parts of the home page allows you to demonstrate that this site offers humor and satire.

   ○ Open a tab and do a lateral search on easy-to-search keywords, such as the "Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus" or the Latin name "Octopus paxarbolis" or "Lyle Zapato." Lateral search results show a number of sites that indicate this site is a hoax: [Snopes](#), [Library of Congress](#), and [Wikipedia](#).

○ Snopes.com is one of the recommended fact-checking sites, so open Snopes.com and read what it says.

○ Ask students if this site is "Truth" or a "Lie." The answer is "Lie"; it is fake news.

○ Remind students that fact-checking this site didn't take very long, and if you had started with a lateral search or using a fact-checking site initially, you would have identified the site as a hoax even more quickly.

## Lesson: Students Practice Evaluating a Site (15 min)

1. Provide students with a source to evaluate from the table below. You can break students into pairs to work together, or have students work independently. Many of these sources come from the book, *Two Truths and a Lie: It's Alive.*

   **Important:** When you provide the links to students, do not indicate if the source is "Truth" or a "Lie"; students need to evaluate the source and determine this themselves.

| Truth or Lie? | Website | Truth/Lie |
|---|---|---|
| Zombie Fungus | https://www.livescience.com/47751-zombie-fungus-picky-about-ant-brains.html | Truth |
| Save the Guinea Worm Foundation | http://www.deadlysins.com/guinea-worm | Lie, Hoax |
| Dihydrogen Monoxide website | http://descy.50megs.com/descy/webcred/webcred/dhmo.html | Lie, Hoax |
| Can we reverse the ageing process by putting young blood into older people? | https://www.theguardian.com/science/2015/aug/04/can-we-reverse-ageing-process-young-blood-older-people | Truth |
| Aluminum Foil Deflector Beanie | http://zapatopi.net/afdb/ | Lie, Hoax |
| Burmese Mountain Dog | http://descy.50megs.com/akcj3/bmd.html | Lie, Hoax |
| Corpse Flower | https://www.livescience.com/51947-corpse-flower-facts-about-the-smelly-plant.html | Truth |

| Buy Dehydrated Water | https://buydehydratedwatercom.weebly.com/ | Lie, Hoax |
|---|---|---|
| Feline Reactions to Bearded Men | https://www.improbable.com/airchives/classical/cat/cat.html | Lie, Hoax |
| The Slyrking ("Walking Moss) | http://www.santharia.com/bestiary/slyrking_moss.htm | Truth |
| The Jackalope Conspiracy | http://www.sudftw.com/jackcon.htm | Lie, Hoax |
| Strawberry Pop-Tart Blow Torches | http://www.pmichaud.com/toast/ | Lie, Hoax |
| Homer Simpson look-alike found buried in the ground in China | https://www.nydailynews.com/news/world/homer-simpson-look-alike-plant-dug-china-article-1.1344828 | Truth |
| Mother Plants Tell Their Seeds When to Sprout | https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/mother-plants-tell-their-seeds-when-to-sprout/ | Truth |

2. Ask students to use the form in Appendix B to evaluate their source. At the end of the form, they will be asked to indicate if they thought their source was "truth" or a "lie."

3. (Optional) Depending on time, ask students to share what they discovered about the site they evaluated.

## Rubric

| Mastery | Student accurately identifies that a site is true or false. Evidence from evaluation supports reasoning, including lateral searches and use of a fact-checking site. |
|---|---|
| Emerging | Student may inaccurately identify that a site is true or false. Student does not provide enough strong evidence based on evaluation to support reasoning. Student may not have done lateral searches, including using a fact-checking site. |
| Beginning | Student inaccurately identifies that a site is true or false. Uses incorrect or confused reasoning. Does not show that lateral searches were done, including using a fact-checking site. |

## Appendix A. Alternate Website Evaluation

If you want an alternative website to evaluate with your students, consider using this example suggested in "Sample of Fake Websites for Educators." However, important for you to know is that scrolling down the page shows, "Fappy the Anti-Masturbation Dolphin," which is another indication that this is fake news. But, you may want to avoid showing this part of the page if you are concerned about this content with sixth graders. You can prove this is fake news without showing this text.



President Obama, seen here signing an Executive Order today which bans the Pledge of Allegiance in all public schools around the country. (AP Photo / Dennis System)

Follow the checklist. Talk aloud to the students as you walk through evaluating the site.

1. Scan the text features of the article (headline, subheadings, byline, pictures, captions, bolded words, graphics, and so on).

2. Read the first paragraph aloud. Does it make sense? Anything hard to believe?

3. Look at the URL for the website. Note the ".co" at the end of the website address--an immediate indication of a site faking a real website, ABC News.

4.  Open a tab and open the ABC News website ([https://abcnews.go.com/](https://abcnews.go.com/)). Compare the logos on both sites; the fake website is similar but not quite right. Another indication that this is a fake news story.

5.  Open a tab and search on "Jimmy Rustling" and review the results. "Hoax" appears next to the name.

6.  Open Snopes.com and search on "Obama and pledge" and read what it says ([link to results](#)).

7.  Ask students if this site is "Truth" or a "Lie." The answer is "Lie."

8.  Remind students that fact-checking this site didn't take very long, and if you had started with a lateral search or using a fact-checking site initially, you would have identified the site as a hoax even more quickly.

## Appendix B. Evaluation Form

NAME _____     DATE _____

# "Two Truths and a Lie," Evaluating Sources

**Instructions**: You have been assigned the following source to evaluate:

_____

Use this checklist from Common Sense to evaluate the online source for credibility:

### Internet Investigator Checklist🔍

✓ **Read closely.** *Does it make sense? Is it believable?*

   Identify the main idea by analyzing the text features and webpage and by reading the text. Take note of anything that is surprising or hard to believe or that gives you a strong emotional reaction.

✓ **Analyze the source.** *Does it come from a credible, unbiased source?*

   Find out information about the site owner and author by exploring the site and searching the web.

✓ **Look for corroboration.** *Do other credible sources say the same thing?*

   See if the main idea and key points of the article are also reported by other credible sites.

| Source Name | Read Closely | Analyze the Source | Corroboration |
|---|---|---|---|
|  |  |  |  |

Some useful fact-checking sites are listed below.

Wikipedia.org: Wikipedia.org
Snopes.com: https://www.snopes.com/
FactCheck.org: https://www.factcheck.org/

Circle one. Do you consider the source:     Truth (Credible)     Lie (Fake News)     Not sure

Explain your answer: _____

_____

_____

## Appendix C. Additional Resources

Your students might enjoy playing additional games to improve their fact-checking skills. The 2021 Poynter article "Want to Be a Better Fact-Checker? Play a Game," lists seven games to consider, including Google's Interland: Reality River. Common Sense also offers the game Digital Compass, which includes teaching students about fake news in the Far-Fetched Facts storyline.

A fun site you might enjoy exploring with your students is the Museum of Hoaxes.

In addition, you might show your students some early hoaxes using the Library of Congress. Here are a few you might consider exploring:



"The Fossil Man of Sussex,"news of the "discovery" of the Piltdown skull as it was reported in the United States press. Dakota County Herald. (Dakota City, Neb.) February 14, 1913, p. 2.

- Belief, Legend, and the Great Moon Hoax

- Folklore, Belief, and the Piltdown Man Hoax

- The Hoax Is on You: A Short Question About a Tall Tale (Cardiff Giant)

- The Great Buchanan Inheritance Hoax

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