

## Facing Fake News and Information

Article

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We've been trying to help students learn how to think for themselves for decades now. Our focus has taken many forms over the years, from learning to distinguish fact from fiction, to thinking critically and analytically, to developing information literacy, to evaluating web-based information sources, and now to assessing the authenticity of news and information sources. Joyce Valenza reminds us about the term "news literacy" to describe "the ability to use critical thinking skills to judge the reliability and credibility of news reports, whether they come via print, television, or the Internet." In her recent *School Library Journal* article, "Truth, Truthiness, Triangulation: A News Literacy Toolkit for a 'Post-Truth' World," Valenza reminds us that this phenomenon of "fake news" is not new, "but its potential for virality is." And Apple CEO Tim Cook acknowledges that "social media amplifies these stories" giving them further exposure and implied credibility. He recommends a "bottom-up educational strategy"—"teaching kids to evaluate news's trustworthiness by asking questions about where articles get their facts or what their bias is." Cook observed, "It's almost as if a new course is required for the modern kid, for the digital kid."

So, how do we do that?

### From the Situational to the Generalizable

In a recent article in *Texas Standard* entitled, "Librarians Are on the Front Lines in the Fight against Fake News," Beth Cortez-Neavel reports on the efforts of Julie Todaro, dean of library services at Austin Community College and current president of the American Library Association. Todaro says, "It's always been in a librarian's wheelhouse to teach media literacy and critical thinking.... [but now] We really have to flip this conversation.... We have to talk about authority today and we have to have them not make the authority decision without the set of other facts like accuracy and currency." She suggests a practical approach using individual situations and decision making and then showing how that can work on a mass scale. For example, she says, "If you can take something as simple as buying a used car – if in taking one news source and seeing a car advertised and then comparing to another news source or ad or piece of information or story and then you show people how the incorrect information can lead you to a decision that is costly and incorrect and ultimately a bad life decision for you." That sets the stage for showing how this same process can work for bigger issues too.

### Literacy Toolkit for a "Post-Truth" World

Don't miss Joyce Valenza's "literacy toolkit for a 'post-truth' world," because it is chock-full of excellent resources including:

- TedEd Damon Brown talk videoclip link
- Rules of thumb for checking news sources
- News literacy vocabulary
- Resources for a post truth teaching toolkit (ACRL Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education: Authority Is Constructed and Contextual, skills and strategies, sample lesson plans, the Center for News Literacy resources, and so much more)
- Resources for building a news literacy toolkit (such as links to FactCheck.org, PolitiFact.com; Snopes; Hoax-Slayer, and more)

### Graphics and Visuals and Poetry

In our quest to guide students to be more critical consumers of information, we use every tool at our disposal. Look for these graphics for helpful visuals too:

Library Girl's "Tips for Spotting Fake News" created by Jennifer LaGarde : <https://lezarklit.files.wordpress.com/2017/01/tips-for-spotting-fake-news-1.pdf>

"How to Spot Fake News" provided by IFLA and available in multiple languages : <http://www.ifla.org/files/assets/hq/topics/info-society/images/how-to-spot-fake-news.pdf>

Finally, for one more way to approach this construct of "fake news," consider sharing this poem to set the stage for healthy discussion and skill-building.

### Fake News

By Janet Wong

How do we know  
if something's a lie?  
Start wondering  
why someone might try

to pass off a lie as a piece of truth—  
and keep your eyes open  
for plenty of proof.

People play games,  
fracturing facts.  
They'll borrow bits  
of this and that  
to create convincing/confusing news.  
Look for the clues that a story's *not* true.

How can you know  
if the news is real?  
Read, read, read,  
read, read, and read.  
Search, ask questions, think out loud  
and don't be afraid to  
stand out from the crowd.

Stand up with *your* crowd.  
Ask yourself why  
someone might want to pass off a lie.

[From: Vardell, Sylvia. and Wong, Janet. 2017. *Here We Go: A Poetry Friday Power Book*. Pomelo Books, p. 86. Used with permission.]

Facing the complicated information landscape with students who are still developing their own cognitive capacities and individual identities isn't easy. And it never really ends either. Valenza reminds us, "As the landscape continues to shift, librarians must update our own skill sets and toolkits to guide students in navigating a growingly nuanced universe of news. We must also examine and recognize our own biases so that we are open to contrary and conflicting ideas." Technology tools can take us far, but we also need to use our human capacity for self-examination, critical thinking, and for connection.

#### **Works Cited:**

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