What is Fake News?

Table Talk: Family Conversations About Current Events

Topic Summary

There has been a lot of talk lately about “fake news” because it has been prevalent during the recent 2016 Presidential election campaign. According to a recent Pew Research Center study, a majority (62%) of Americans get their news from social media sites and 44% get their news from Facebook. In addition, YouTube, Facebook and Instagram news users are more likely to get their news online mostly “by chance,” while they are online doing other things. A recent study revealed that many teens have difficulty analyzing the news; 82% of middle school
students couldn’t tell the difference between an ad labeled “sponsored content” and a real news story.

What is fake news? Fake news websites publish untrue or fake information in order to drive web traffic to the site. The goal is to mislead readers to believe the stories and to make money through advertising. Social media sites are used to spread the fake news.

Fake news has been very present during the recent 2016 Presidential election campaign. The top Google news link for "final election results" was from a fake-news site called "70 News" which "reported" that Donald Trump had won both the electoral and popular vote. *The Washington Post* pointed out that it isn’t true. New web sites designed to trick and mislead people pop up every day.

Fake news creators make money in very similar ways to how traditional news companies make money—from advertisements. They have display advertising for which they receive a small portion (i.e. a few cents) for every person who visits that page. Their goal is to get the news to go viral (which is why they use social media) so a lot of people will visit; more social shares mean more page views which result in more money.

There are a variety of ways you can determine whether news is real or fake, including:

- Consider the source.
- Read beyond the headlines.
- Triple check news sources.
- Use a few reliable news sources regularly.
- Check the author and the date.
- Look for unusual URLs that can appear real or close to a legitimate news source, but aren’t.

Consider your own “confirmation bias.” (Confirmation bias leads people to trust information that confirms their beliefs and ignores information that doesn’t.)

Assess whether the news article is a joke since there is a great deal of satirical news out there.

If you want to share and discuss examples of fake news, see ADL lesson plan, *Fake News and What We Can Do About It*.

**Age**

11 and up

**Questions to Start the Conversation**

- Where do you see or get your news and what do you like about that news source?
- Have you ever read a piece of fake news? How did you know it was fake?
- How do fake news sites trick or confuse people?
- Why do you think there is fake news?
- What can you do to spot fake news?

**Questions to Dig Deeper**

- How is fake news harmful and damaging for both individuals and society at large?
- How do you usually read news articles and what might you do differently now?
- What can we do to educate others about fake news?
Ideas for Taking Action

Ask: What can we do to help? What actions might make a difference?

- Educate others about fake news and how to spot it by sharing information on social media, having individual conversations with other students or organizing an educational forum in school.
- Write a letter to a social media company to express your point of view and ask that they crack down on fake news.
- Work with other students to conduct a survey about fake news and then develop a public awareness campaign about what can be done about it.

HIGHLIGHTS

- Find out what young people know and use the summary to expand their knowledge. Ask what else they want to know and investigate together to learn more.
- When discussing the topic, ask children open ended questions that deepen the conversation. Do not judge their responses and listen thoughtfully.
- Think together about a child-level action they can take; this can be something they do on their own or something you do together or as a family.