Information Literacy: Evaluating Online Resources

Source or Scam?

Concept
Learning Skills

Length
20-25 Minutes

Inquiry Prompts
- Is it mostly facts or opinions online?
- What's a good source of factual information?
- How does bias affect a message?
- Why would someone put unreliable information online?

Instructions

In this activity, students work with a partner to evaluate 2 online sources. (Depending on how much time you have, you can limit this activity to 1 unreliable site. You may source your own site for this activity, or check out some hoax sites collected by the Iowa State University Library.)

1. Review the Source or Scam? presentation with your students. The presentation can be printed for your students to reference as it is a series of questions they can use to evaluate online sources for reliability, accuracy, relevance, and bias.

2. Have partners apply the criteria to 2 websites (one more reliable than the other). We suggest:

   - The Burmese Mountain Dog Club of America
   - American Kennel Club

3. Ask students to capture their analyses in the Source of Scam? graphic organizer. In each section, they can record the evidence that the site is accurate/inaccurate, relevant/irrelevant, unbiased/biased, and reliable/unreliable. Encourage them to verify information with other, trustworthy sources before they accept what they read.

Message for students: To get to the truth about something, it's important to think critically, or to ask questions, about what you're reading.

Materials Required
- Source or Scam? presentation
- Source or Scam? graphic organizer
- Pencils, colored pencils, or markers
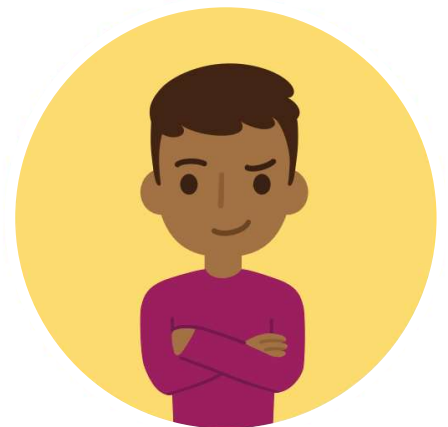- Computers (tablets, phones) with Internet access

Artifacts

Students can upload their graphic organizers to **Storyboard**, where they can reflect on what they learned from the activity.

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Question if the site is **relevant**. Ask yourself:

- How old is the site?

- Does the site specialize in the information you want?

- Does the site go in-depth on a topic?

- Does the site cover a bunch of unrelated topics?

- Is the information useful?

- Is the content high quality?

- Does the site offer new information that can't be found in another source?

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Question if the site is **accurate**. Ask yourself:

- Can I check if this information is true anywhere else?

- What sources are used by the author(s) of the site? (If you don't know, is there a way to contact the site creators to find out?)

- When was the site last updated? (Again, can you contact someone to find out?)

- Are there a lot of spelling mistakes or dead links on the site?

- Is there any outdated or obviously wrong information on the site?

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Question if the site is **unbiased**. Ask yourself:

- What's the purpose of the site?

- Who created or sponsors the site?

- Can anyone add content to the site, or is it controlled?

- Who is the site's target audience?

- Does the site try to present all sides of a story or issue?

- What opinions are expressed on the site?

- How objective is the tone of the author(s)?

- Does the information promote forms of bigotry like racism, sexism, ableism, classism, or homophobia?

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Question if the site is **reliable**. Ask yourself:

- Does the site look like it was made by experts or people who don't know what they're doing?

- Are the authors of the site qualified to give info about the topic? Can you check their credentials?

- What is the site's domain?
    - .edu - educational
    - .gov - government
    - .org - non-profit organization
    - .com - commercial
    - .biz - businesses
    - .info - used by anyone
    - .net - networks

- Is the site trying to sell you something?

- Do other reliable sites cite or link to the page?

Name: _____

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Source or Scam?

Website: _____

What makes you think this site is or isn't: **Accurate**	What makes you think this site is or isn't: **Relevant**

What makes you think this site is or isn't: **Biased**	What makes you think this site is or isn't: **Reliable**

Name: _____

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