

THINKING CRITICALLY ABOUT NEWS

This week's Teacher's Corner will focus on starting a discussion in your classroom about the importance of thinking critically about the news. Students will reflect on where they get most of their news and consider the characteristics of high-quality and trustworthy news sources.

ACTIVITIES TO GET STUDENTS THINKING CRITICALLY

Time: 10-15 minutes to brainstorm news sources. 45 minutes to read the article "Schools, Universities Teach Students the Truth About Fake News" from Voice of America and discuss the concepts presented. 20 minutes for personal reflections and sharing.

Goals:

- to encourage students to think critically about news
- to listen, speak, read, and write in English in order to gather information from a news article
- to create lists of characteristics of quality news
- to write questions for analyzing news sources

Materials:

- Chalk or whiteboard markers
- Pencils, paper or student notebooks
- Timer or another device for keeping time
- Printed copies of the news story "[Schools, Universities Teach Students the Truth About Fake News](#)" from Voice of America. (Alternatively, you can project the article onto a screen, read it aloud, or play the audio version.)

Preparation:

1. Decide how you will share the news story from Voice of America with your students. Prepare photocopies or prepare how you will project the piece or play the audio for students.
2. Read or listen to the article yourself and decide on the key points you would like to discuss.
 - a. Suggestions include playing the embedded video "Spreading the News" and discussing how news travels quickly. Another idea is to talk about the key questions presented by Howard Schneider in the article. You may also want to talk about the importance of getting news from various sources.

ACTIVITY ONE: BRAINSTORMING NEWS SOURCES

Procedure:

1. Begin by having students gather in small groups of 3-5. On the board, create a thinking map by writing the question *Where do we get news?* inside a circle. Draw one line coming out from the circle and write the name of a news source, such as *newspapers*, at the end of the line.
2. Explain to students that they will have about five minutes to create a thinking map in their groups. They should copy what you have written on the board, and then they should draw more lines and add all of the sources of news that they can think of. Provide each group with one piece of paper and a pencil, or have students create maps in their notebooks. Time the groups for five minutes.
3. Once time is up, ask each group to share one of the sources they listed. Record students' responses by adding them to the thinking map on the board. Continue until all the different sources that each group thought of have been listed on the map.
4. Next, ask students which sources they think are most commonly used in your community. Students can discuss this in groups, or the whole class can discuss it together. Once everyone more or less agrees on the common news sources, circle those sources on the map, or create a separate list on the board. Select between five and eight popular sources and keep this list to use for next week's activity.

ACTIVITY TWO: LEARNING ABOUT FAKE NEWS

Procedure:

1. Begin by asking students if they have ever heard of *fake news* and what it is. If this concept is not familiar to your students, you can play the video "Spreading the News," which is embedded in the Voice of America article.
2. Have students brainstorm a list of possible ways one might know that news is fake or exaggerated. Record these on chart paper.
3. Share the article "Schools, Universities Teach Students the Truth About Fake News" from Voice of America with students. Allow students to read or listen to the whole article once without stopping.
4. Next, have students listen or read again, this time looking or listening for key information. You can write the following questions on the board for students to consider:
 - a. What is fake news? What are some signs that a news story could be fake?

- b. What questions should readers and other consumers of news ask to determine if a news story may be fake? (What does Howard Schneider suggest?)
5. For about ten minutes, allow students to work in small groups to discuss their ideas and responses. Students should record answers in their notebooks.
6. Once everyone has had sufficient time to answer the questions, ask students to share their responses to the questions in Part A (Step 4) with the whole class. To the list on chart paper, add any new possible ways a consumer might know that news is fake or exaggerated.
7. To contrast the list of characteristics of fake news, ask students how a high-quality news story would be different. Ask, “How would a news story that is trustworthy or high quality be different from the list we’ve created about fake news? What things would you see in a reliable news story?” Ideas might include names of sources, recognizable journalists or news outlets, verifiable facts, etc. Record this list on chart paper as well.

ACTIVITY THREE: ASKING QUESTIONS ABOUT THE NEWS

Procedure:

1. Tell students, “Today we learned about some of the characteristics of questionable news as well as characteristics of quality news. Now we need to decide how to think critically and examine the news we see.”
2. Have students open their notebooks again and read the responses they wrote down in their small groups for Part B in Activity Two, Step 4.
3. Once students have reviewed what they wrote down, say, “Now you will write a list of at least five to help you to decide if news is trustworthy or could contain parts that are fake. You have ten minutes to write your list.”
4. Set the timer and move around the room. Monitor students and provide assistance as needed.
5. When the timer goes off, ask students to gather in groups of three to share their lists. Set the timer for five minutes.
6. Once students have shared in small groups, have volunteers tell the class their ideas about how they can determine the quality of news. Using chart paper, record student responses. Keep this list on display in the classroom. You can continue to add any additional ideas that students have or learn about during the rest of the series of media literacy activities.



This week's Teacher's Corner activities ask students to start thinking about commonly used news sources and characteristics of high-quality news. In future activities, students will have a chance to apply this reasoning to examine news from different sources and to reflect on what they observe.