Authentication Beyond the Classroom

This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & CREATE: A Digital Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools: http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework.

Overview

In this lesson, students discuss "viral" photos, videos and news stories that spread via social media. They are shown how challenging it is to authenticate these using only their content and are introduced to tools and techniques for gauging their accuracy based on context, with an eye towards making wise and responsible decisions about whether or not to forward them to their friends and family.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Develop habits of skepticism

- Learn strategies and techniques for authenticating online content

- Apply authentication strategies outside of school contexts

- Perform research online

- Present research findings, including a judgment based on research

Preparation and Materials

- Prepare the project slideshow, *Viral Videos: Real or Fake?*

- Photocopy the handouts: *The New 5 Ws* and *Viral News Fact-Check*

- Find four to six recent viral news stories. You can use sites such as:

  ○ *The Washington Post's* "What Was Fake on the Internet This Week" (http://www.washingtonpost.com/newssearch/search.html?st=%22what+was+fake+on+the+internet%22&submit=Submit)

  ○ *The Mirror's* "Viral" page (http://www.mirror.co.uk/all-about/viral)

  ○ NBC's "Viral" page (http://www.nbcnews.com/pop-culture/viral) or

  ○ *BuzzFeed's* News page (http://www.buzzfeed.com/news).

(Not all of the stories have to be fake. Because of the unpredictable content on some of these pages, it's best to curate the stories ahead of time rather than letting students browse for them.)

Procedure

Viral Photos

Begin by asking students how many of them have seen "viral" photos or videos that were passed around on social media. (Most or all hands will go up.) How many have seen a viral photo in the last week? How many have *passed on* viral photos to other people (by sharing them, retweeting them, tagging them, etc.)?

Now ask: How many have ever seen a viral photo that turned out to be a fake? If they have, did they guess that it was a fake? If they did not guess, how did they find out?

Show the first eight slides of the slideshow *Viral Photos: Real or Fake?* Ask students to guess which ones were real and which ones were fake, and to explain how they came to that conclusion.

Next, show slides 9 to 14. Which ones did students get right? Which did they get wrong? How reliable was their reasoning?

Why Does it Matter?

Go to slide 15 and ask: Why does it matter if we're wrong about something like viral videos? Let students discuss the question for a few minutes but don't make them come to any conclusion.

Show slides 16-17 and ask students to spot the difference. (An extra missile was added.) Explain that this is a photo of an Iranian missile test, which was released by the Iranian government to make it look like more of the missiles being tested were launched successfully.

Now show slides 18-19 and ask students to spot the difference. (The women have been removed from the image.) Explain that this was a news photo from a rally in Paris, in which several women – including German chancellor Angela Merkel – were Photoshopped out when it appeared in the conservative Orthodox Israeli newspaper *The Announcer*.

Now show slides 20-21 and ask students to spot the difference. (The text of the sign in the middle has been changed.) Explain that this was a news photo from the protests in Ferguson, Missouri, over the shooting of an unarmed African-American man. This doctored photo was used by racists to try to make the protests seem illegitimate, but wound up being spread by many people.

Point out to students that it's not just photos and videos that are viral: viral rumours, health tips, and news stories – which may be mistakes, hoaxes or malicious disinformation – spread just as easily. Remind students of the media literacy key concepts *Media are constructions* and *Media have social and political implications*. For more information on these concepts, see http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/general-information/digital-media-literacy-fundamentals/media-literacy-fundamentals. If you think your students need a more thorough explanation of these concepts, show them these Media Minute videos:

- Media are constructions
- Media have social and political implications

Authenticating Viral Stories

Tell students that if they doubted *all* the photos, their instincts were good: you shouldn't believe *anything* you see or read through social media until you verify it. Point out how similar the bicycle-in-a-tree and piano-around-a-tree photos in the slideshow were. Was there any way to tell, just from looking at the photos, which was real and which was fake? (Not really.)

Unfortunately, Canadian students are **least** likely to do anything to authenticate information that comes to them from social networks. As well, the **triangle** method – looking for other sources that say the same thing – can lead us astray when it comes to viral content because we often **are** seeing the same story come from several different sources.

Now distribute the handout *The New 5 Ws* and go through it with the class. Now show slides 22-23 to the class and ask: How would you decide whether or not to spread this story?

Discuss with the class for a few minutes, highlighting techniques from *The New 5 Ws* that seem relevant. Show slides 24-32 and talk through them with the class. What's their verdict? (The story appears to be genuine.)

Assessment/Evaluation

Distribute the handout *Viral News Fact-Check* and have students perform the assignment, authenticating a recent viral photo or news story by finding at least three pieces of evidence from different sources that suggest it is either true or false. If you wish to use the assignment for evaluation you can grade it with the *Viral News Fact-Check Rubric*.

THE NEW 5 Ws

What makes a photo or a news story go viral? Research suggests that it's when something engages our emotions, surprises us, gives us a striking image or a personal connection to the story, and provokes our curiosity. Unfortunately, those same things also make us less likely to look critically at something – which means it's easy to be tricked by fake viral content.

So how can you know if something that's spreading is true?

Here's an update to the classic "5 Ws" that you can use.

WHEN should you double-check?

Research shows that students are **least** likely to fact-check news and other things that come to them through social networks like Facebook or Twitter, but these are their **most** common sources of news.

- You don't have to debunk **everything** that comes to you, though. Ask yourself these questions:
- Am I about to share, tag, retweet or forward this?
- Could someone base an important decision (about their health, their career, travel, etc.) on this?
- Is it about a hot or controversial issue?
- Does this seem "too good to be true"?

If the answer to **any** of those is "Yes", double-check it!

So HOW can you find out if something is real or not?

Ask these questions before you share or spread something:

WHAT kinds of fake content should I watch out for?

There are a lot of different kinds of fakes being spread around. Before you believe something (or share it), make sure it isn't one of these:

- *Jokes*: "Fake news" sites like The Onion and The Beaverton publish spoof news stories that look a lot like the real thing – sometimes *too* real, as many have been shared on social media by people who believed they were true.
- *Hoaxes*: The darker side of jokes are hoaxes that are spread on purpose to mislead people. Sometimes these are motivated by various kinds of prejudice; other times they're just done out of malice.
- *Scams*: Sometimes the purpose of a fake is to separate you from your money, to get you to give up your personal information, or to get you to click on a link that will download malware onto your computer.
- *Ads*: Advertisers know that viral content is one of the best ways to get their messages to young people. Some things that are spread around are obviously ads, but others are disguised as "real" content. As with jokes, ads can also be spread by people who don't realize they're ads.

WHY is it being spread around? Is it trying to sell something? To scare you? To make you laugh? To make you angry?

Does it use **emotionally-loaded words or images** to get a rise out of you?

<u>WHO</u> is spreading it? Do they have a good track record for accuracy?

Track it back to the *original* poster. If the person who shared it with you didn't give a source, do a search for it. But **don't** assume that a newspaper, TV network or online news source is the original source – they often run stories that came to **them** over social media, sometimes without doing enough fact checking.

Once you've found the source, find out who they are and why they might be a valid source for what they're spreading:

- If it's a science or health story, are they a real expert? Do a search on their name and see what comes up.
- If it's a photo of something that's happening in a particular place, do they really live there?
- Have they posted on this subject before? If not, be cautious.
- Do they post a lot of spreadable stuff? If so, be cautious.

You can also look at the source's **network**. Are they connected mostly to:

- People and groups who all have similar opinions?
- Advertisers?
- People and groups who have no connection to the thing they're spreading?
- Nobody?

If the answer to any of those is "Yes", be cautious.

<u>WHEN</u> did it start spreading? A lot of things get spread more than once, like some of the photos of flooding that go around every time there's a big storm. Do a search like "shark subway station" to see if it's been around before.

How long has the original poster's account been around? If an account is new, be cautious.

And don't forget to be extra-careful about anything that's posted on April 1st!

<u>WHERE</u> else can I find out if something is real?

- Do a search for the subject with the words "hoax" or "scam", as in "shark subway station hoax"
- For pictures, you can do a search at TinEye (www.tineye.com). That will tell you where else the picture has appeared, and also show you *similar* pictures (which is a good way to find out if a picture has been photoshopped.) TinEye can also be installed as a browser plugin, so you can check a picture just by right-clicking it.
- Search hoax-busting sites like Snopes. You can go to www.snopes.com or do a site search, like this: "shark subway station site:www.snopes.com"

Viral News Fact-Check

1. Think of a recent viral news story, photo or video that was shared with you through social media (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Tumblr, etc.)

    • To count as viral, it must have been shared by at least two people you know.

    • You must not know for sure whether it was true or false.

    • If you can't think of anything, ask me and I will assign you a recent story.

2. Use the techniques we studied in class to determine whether it is **likely** to be true or false. (You may not be able to reach a definite answer.) Make sure to use **at least three** different techniques.

3. Make a **graphic representation** (poster, slideshow, video, etc.) that shows the steps you took in researching this item, your findings, and your **final conclusion** on whether or not you would share it.

Task Assessment: Viral News Fact-Check Rubric

|	*Learning Expectations*	*Achievement*
Use Skills and competencies that fall under "use" range from basic technical know-how – using computer programs such as word processors, web browsers, email, and other communication tools – to the more sophisticated abilities for accessing and using knowledge resources, such as search engines and online databases, and emerging technologies such as cloud computing.	use information technology-related vocabulary in context acquire information from electronic sources	Insufficient (R) Beginning (1) Developing (2) Competent (3) Confident (4)
Understand Understand includes recognizing how networked technology affects our behaviour and our perceptions, beliefs and feelings about the world around us. Understand also prepares us for a knowledge economy as we develop information management skills for finding, evaluating and effectively using information to communicate, collaborate and solve problems.	demonstrate understanding that anyone can publish on the Web, so not all sites are equally trustworthy judge the validity of content found on the Internet, how to find appropriate material, and what sources can be trusted use overt and implied messages to draw inferences and construct meaning in media texts understand that anyone can publish on the Web, so not all sites are equally trustworthy understand the different purposes and contexts of digital image editing understand both the benefits and drawbacks of using collective intelligence (crowdsourcing), in different contexts	Insufficient (R) Beginning (1) Developing (2) Competent (3) Confident (4)
Create Create is the ability to produce content and effectively communicate through a variety of digital media tools. It includes being able to adapt what we produce for various contexts and audiences; to create and communicate using rich media such as images, video and sound; and to effectively and responsibly engage with user-generated content such as blogs and discussion forums, video and photo sharing, social gaming and other forms of social media. The ability to create using digital media ensures that Canadians are active contributors to digital society.	communicate ideas and information in a variety of oral, print and other media texts, such as short reports, talks and posters identify conventions and techniques appropriate to the form chosen for a media text they plan to create produce media texts for specific purposes and audiences, using a few simple media forms and appropriate conventions and techniques remix different existing digital content into something new understand how meaning is produced through multimedia (text, images, audio, video) and how culture is produced through the Internet and social media in particular	Insufficient (R) Beginning (1) Developing (2) Competent (3) Confident (4)

**WHICH ARE
FAKE?**

**WHICH ARE
REAL?**

**HOW DO YOU
KNOW?**

This is a real alligator, photographed on a golf course in Florida.
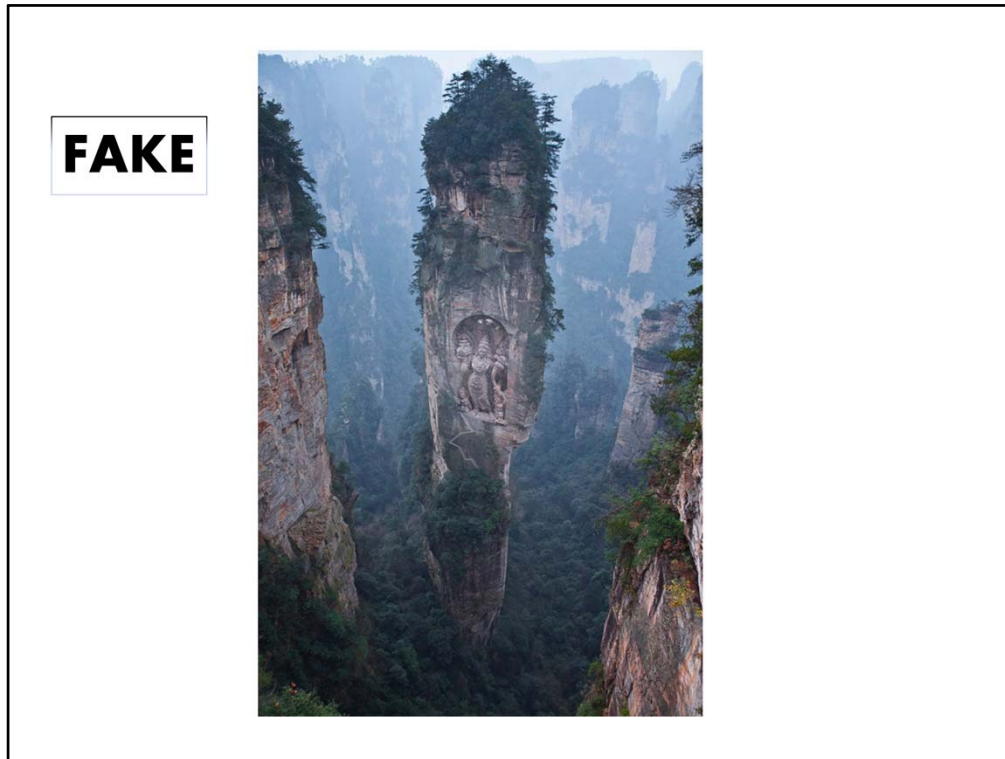
This mountain is real, but the statue was added by Photoshop.

This photo is entirely staged, with the bear added by Photoshop.

This really is a bicycle that got stuck in a tree that grew around it, in Washington state. However, many people mistakenly claim that it has been there since World War I: in fact it was left there around 1954.

The tree and the piano are real – but the piano was taken apart and re-assembled around the tree by an artist.
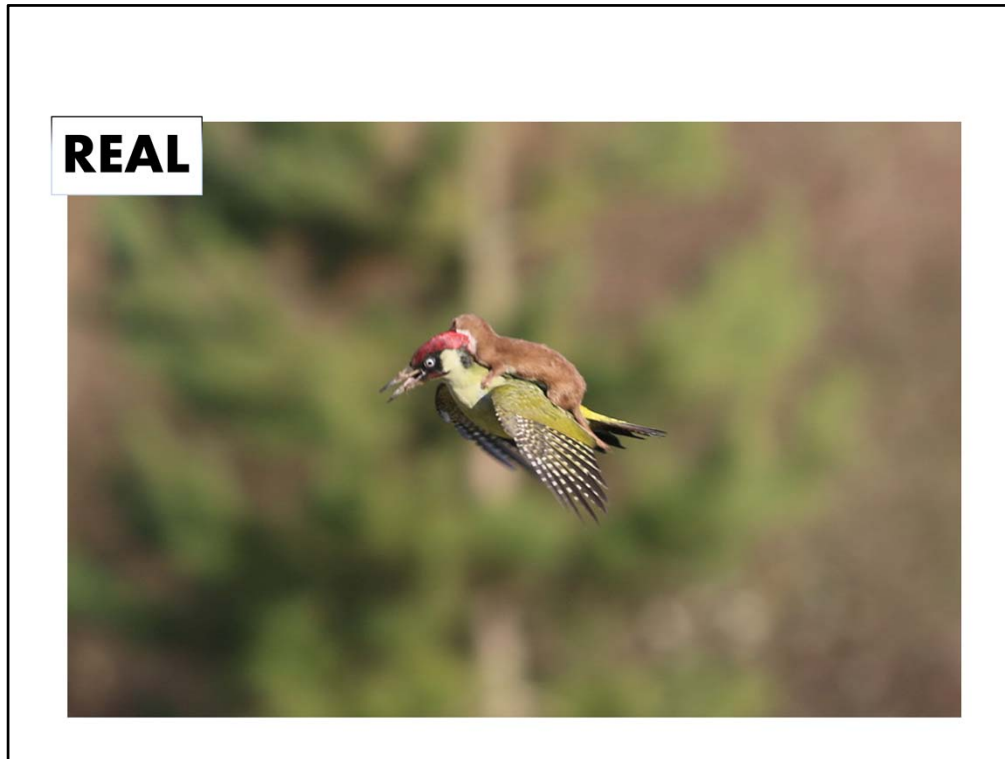
This photo really does capture a weasel riding on the back of a woodpecker – probably in an attempt to kill it. The woodpecker threw the weasel off moments later and escaped.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

This doctored photo of an Iranian missile test was released by the Iranian government.

All the women – including German chancellor Angela Merkel – were removed from this photo when it was printed in the conservative Orthodox Israeli paper *The Announcer*.

FACT-CHECK IT!

BuzzFeed NEWS

When a wee critter is rescued from the wild, a snug place to stay can make them feel better.

That's where Katie Deline-Ray comes in.

The 39-year-old Ontarian runs Wildlife Rescue Nests, a project that sends crocheted and knitted nests to wildlife rescue and rehabilitation centres.

Questions:

1. **Does it use loaded language?**

2. **Are they trying to get me to buy or believe something?**

3. **Who is spreading it?**

4. **Is there a source given?**

5. **Does it seem "too good to be true"?**

1. Does it use loaded language?

A. No. The story is cute but the language is fairly plain.

The 39-year-old Ontarian runs Wildlife Rescue Nests, a project that sends crocheted and knitted nests to wildlife rescue and rehabilitation centres.

Deline-Ray told BuzzFeed Canada she started the project in 2013 after seeing a similar initiative in the U.S.

"The key to making the nests is tension on the yarn," said Deline-Ray.

"The tension must be kept tight on the yarn so there are no loops or loose sections. This is to help avoid any claws or little toes getting caught."

2. **Are they trying to get me to buy or believe something?**

A. No. There's a link to a knitting pattern in the story, but it's free.

3. **Who is spreading it?**

BuzzFeed NEWS

BuzzFeed – a legitimate site that has a history of spreading "news" stories without fact-checking.

4. **Is there a source given?**

A. Yes: The *Wildlife Rescue Nests* Facebook page, which leads to a webpage. Neither one has contact information.

4. Does it seem "too good to be true"?

A. Kind of...

And the results are *ohmygoshsocute!*

Wildlife Rescue Nests
Cause · 3,413 Likes · June 8 at 8:23am ·

[f] Profile

Thanks to Monika at Woodlands Wildlife Sanctuary for this cute pic of a baby mink ☺

24 Likes · 2 Comments · 1 Share

Let's dig a little deeper...

Searches:

"wildlife rescue nests" hoax

"wildlife rescue nests" site:www.snopes.com

"katie deline-ray"

**No relevant results for
"wildlife rescue nests" hoax**

**No results for "wildlife rescue nests"
site:www.snopes.com**

**Many results from different
sources for "katie deline-ray"
that confirm the story**

VIRAL PHOTOS: REAL OR FAKE?

WHICH ARE FAKE?

WHICH ARE REAL?

HOW DO YOU KNOW?

REAL

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

REAL

FAKE

REAL

FAKE

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