Fact, Opinion, Bias and Fake News: How to orient yourself to the truth

1. Information Literacy Framework: Research as Inquiry: Approach research as open-ended exploration and engagement with information. Tap into your intellectual curiosity, ask questions, and be flexible- ambiguity and an open mind help the research process.
2. Rationale: This lesson plan is important because it orients students to basic definitions and principles that will help guide them in evaluating their own metacognition and evaluation of information.
3. Goals and Objectives:
   1. Instructional goal: Students will recognize the basic definitions of topics influencing the information ecosystem and review examples.
   2. Specific Objective: Students will practice identifying fact, opinion, bias and fake news.
4. Essential Guiding Question: Does the news media have a liberal bias? What is a bias? What is the news media? How can I detect fake news?
5. Procedure:
   1. Lesson Plan introduction:
      1. Ask students to define the following words (no phones, or help from friends)
         1. Bias: Bias is a prejudice (preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience) either for or against a thing, person, or group compared to another that is usually considered unfair.
         2. Opinion:
            1. A belief or conclusion held with confidence but not substantiated by positive knowledge or proof.
            2. The word ‘opinion’ is sometimes used as a synonym in legal and academic circles to a rendered judgement. Be careful to look for evidence when determining if your information is purely opinion based on unsubstantiated evidence or whether the information is truly a rendered judgement based on credible evidence and logic.
         3. Fact: Objective truth or a piece of information used as evidence to support an argument.
         4. Fake News: deliberate publication of hoaxes, propaganda, and/or disinformation.
         5. Confirmation bias: Cognitive dissonance: cognitive bias describing the tendency to weight more heavily information that confirms beliefs that we already hold or a hypothesis one is testing. In order to combat this, we must examine what we already think is true and why we believe it to be so. ***Understand that if it is not based on evidence our opinions may be wrong.***
         6. Stereotypes: A stereotype is a generalization of a category of people on the basis of perceived traits or attributes. These traits attributed to particular groups are based on received, often prejudiced information rather than on personal experience. Stereotypes reduce and exaggerate characteristics of particular groups and often carry negative connotations
   2. Lesson Plan Activity:
      1. Split the class in half and have one side read a FOX News article and the other side read a MSNBC article on the same topic. Example below:
      2. Pass our two articles on Colin Kaepernick protest.
      3. Fox News: <http://www.foxnews.com/sports/2016/08/28/kaepernick-will-sit-through-anthem-until-theres-change.html>
      4. MSNBC: <http://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/49ers-quarterback-colin-kaepernick-defends-national-anthem-protest-n639116>
         1. Have students read their particular article and jot down a list of words that would describe Kaepernick, based on the information in front of them.
         2. Ask for descriptive words from one side of the room only. A fairly uniform picture of Kaepernick will emerge. It will; however, be totally different from the picture with the students on the other side have formed.
         3. This class exercise illustrates how bias or slant operates, by presenting only one side of a story.
         4. Before reading the articles what stereotype did you have of athletes such as football players? What stereotype did you have for protestors? Could these stereotypes have effected how you read the information in each article? As you read the article, did you find yourself gravitated toward the information that confirmed your bias toward or against Kaepernick?
         5. What information did you read that was hard to hear? Why was it hard to hear?
   3. Types of media bias to look out for:
      1. Bias by omission: leaving one side out of an article, or a series of articles over a period of time.
      2. Bias by selection of sources: including more sources that support one view over another.
      3. Bias by story selection: a pattern of highlighting news stories that coincide with the agenda of either the Left or the Right, while ignoring stories that coincide with the opposing view.
      4. Bias in Placement: Bias by placement is where on a website (or newspaper) or in an article or story or even is printed; a pattern of placing news stories so as to downplay information supportive of either conservative views or liberal views.
      5. Bias by labeling: Two forms
         1. Tagging conservative politicians and groups with extreme labels while leaving liberal politicians and groups unlabeled or milder labels (and vice versa).
         2. Labeling that occurs when a reporter not only fails to identify a liberals as a liberal or a conservative as a conservative, but describes the person or group with positive labels such as ‘expert’ or ‘independent consumer group’.
      6. How to avoid bias news.
         1. Step One: Be aware that bias exists and be on the look- out for the aforementioned types of bias. Look up the ‘experts’ and organizations within the article to determine whether they are truly independent.
         2. Step Two: Triangulate your news articles:
            1. Using *at least* three media sites such as BBC, CNN, PBS, NPR, Wall Street Journal, ABC News, NBC News, USA Today, New York Times, and The Washington Post, and then search the same event or person.
6. Beware of Fake News
   1. Watch PBS Video ‘Did Fake News effect the election’ <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/daily_videos/why-is-it-important-for-news-sources-to-be-trustworthy/>
      1. Ask students to answer the following questions:
         1. Do you agree with President Obama’s statement that it is problematic if people can’t distinguish between real news and propaganda? Explain.
         2. How do you think fake news could influence individuals’ beliefs or even presidential elections?
         3. Do you think tech giants like Google and Facebook deserve to be criticized over whether they used insufficient discretion in weeding out fake news?
         4. What should these companies do about fake news sites?
   2. Here is a check list to evaluate whether a story is ‘fake’ news.
      1. <http://www.thenewsliteracyproject.org/sites/default/files/GO-TenQuestionsForFakeNewsFINAL.pdf>
      2. Here is an example of a fake news website that you can evaluate with the class: <http://thoughtcrimeradio.net/2016/11/fbi-agent-suspected-in-hillary-email-leaks-found-dead-in-apparent-murder-suicide/>
   3. Remember fake news comes in many formats:
      1. Hoaxes
      2. Satire (taken seriously)
      3. Propaganda
   4. Freedom of speech doesn’t demand honesty, it is up to you to evaluate your information and keep your own biases in check.