

How Fake News Goes Viral: Lesson Plan

Topic	
Fake news is false information intentionally presented as factual news with an intent to deceive. It's a force that is changing the way people around the world relate to their communities, their governments, and even to themselves. While fake news has existed for a long time, only recently has it been able to spread at incredibly fast rates and go viral to millions of people.	
Possible subjects/classes	Time needed
Political Science, US History, Media Communications, Social Studies	45-60 minutes
Video link:	
https://academy4sc.org/topic/how-fake-news-goes-viral-when-fyi-becomes-tmi/	
Objective: <i>What will students know/be able to do at the end of class?</i>	
Students will be able to... <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Explain what contributes to fake news going viral in today's media environment.• Investigate news to decipher whether or not it is fake.• Describe why fake news will continue to be an important factor in society.	
Key Concepts & Vocabulary	
Viral, Bot Accounts, Political Polarization	
Materials Needed	
Worksheet, Pen and Paper, Labeled pieces of paper, Student Internet Access	
Before you watch	

Think-pair-share: Have students talk with a partner about if they watch or read the news. If they do, where do they normally find their news? Do they ever see stories they don't believe are true?

While you watch

1. What makes fake news different from an honest mistake made by the news source?
2. How much faster does fake news spread than real news?
3. Who is responsible for nearly half of all fake news on the internet?
4. What technology will continue to make fake news a more important issue than ever?

After you watch/discussion questions

1. Where should the responsibility for addressing fake news fall? On the individuals, media platforms, governments, or someone else entirely?
2. Do you believe there is a difference between the right to free speech and the right to a platform to spread that speech? Why or why not?
3. What are examples of fake news you've seen recently? How did you discern it was fake news?

Activity Ideas

- Have students break into small teams of about 3 or 4. Each team will visit <http://factitious.augamestudio.com/#/> and play one round of the game, attempting to decide if a story is fake news or not. After the first round, check-in and see how each team scored. Proceed to play two more rounds and then play the hardest round together as a class.
- Hand out a slip of paper (face down) to each student saying either "fake news" or "real news". There should be about 70% fake news and 30% real news. Then have students search for an example of either a fake news story or real news story depending on which slip they got (other students should not know whether those around them have fake or real news slips). After picking an article, have each student come to the front of the room and read only the headline. The class will then vote if they think the article

is real or fake. Have the student who picked the article mark the result of the vote down but not tell the class yet if it was real or fake news. Then have all the class go again, but this time, read the article for 30 seconds, share the author, and the website they found it on. After each article, have the class vote again to see if it is real or fake news. See if your class was able to identify more fake news stories with the added time reading the article and checking the source and author. Debrief why or why not with the class after the activity.

- Set up a game of [Heads Up 7 Up](#) with three students initially selected to be "it". Secretly tell two of the three students they are spreading "fake news" and the other student they are spreading "real news". In the first round, have each student tap only one other student. After the students look up again, the students who were tapped will join the initial three students at the front. Instead of guessing who tapped them, the entire class will now make one guess as to who they think is "real news" via a vote. Whoever they guess can now tap two people each round instead of one. Have the game continue until the whole class has been tapped - the goal is to spread as much real news as possible. At the end, ask the students how many of them even know if they are spreading real or fake news (only the initial three students will know) and help illustrate how once information begins spreading, the spreaders rarely consider if the news is real or fake. Play the game a second time. In this version, after the first round of taps, go up to one student who was tapped by fake news and whisper to them to go tap 20 more people instead of one. When the class looks up, they will see the impact of a "super spreader". Continue the game as normal until finished. Play the game a third time. This time, the first two fake news spreaders must tap their players twice instead of once so that they know it is fake news. The real news player can also tell the class in voting who one of the fake news players is; if the class votes that person, they can no longer spread information. Play the game out as before and observe if students who know they are fake news decide to spread their information anyway. Likely, some fake news will still be spread, but controlling misinformation will be much easier and more real news will hopefully spread.

Sources/places to learn more

1. Braun, Joshua A., and Jessica L. Eklund. "Fake news, real money: Ad tech platforms, profit-driven hoaxes, and the business of journalism." *Digital Journalism* 7, no. 1 (2019): 1-21.
2. Tandoc Jr, Edson C., Zheng Wei Lim, and Richard Ling. "Defining "fake news" A typology of scholarly definitions." *Digital journalism* 6, no. 2 (2018): 137-153.
3. Maheshwari, Sapna. "How Fake News Goes Viral: A Case Study." The New York Times. The New York Times, November 20, 2016.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2016/11/20/business/media/how-fake-news-spreads.html>.
4. Vosoughi, Soroush, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral. "The spread of true and false news online." *Science* 359, no. 6380 (2018): 1146-1151.
5. Trammell III, Travis Ira. *Fake News Risk: Modeling Management Decisions to Combat Disinformation*. Stanford University, 2020.