Why we need information literacy classes for students (751 words)

WORLD AND PRESS

ÜBUNGS-MATERIAL

Oral exam practice

This worksheet and the article are written in American English.

Preliminary explanations

The Watergate scandal (paragraph 1)

Watergate (1972–74) was a major political scandal involving then President Richard Nixon (Republican), which led to his impeachment and finally to his resignation of the presidency.

During the presidential re-election campaign in 1972, the Nixon administration had organized the break-in at the Watergate Office Building (Washington D.C.) where the National Committee of the Democratic Party had its headquarters at the time. In June 1972, five intruders were caught and arrested at Watergate during their attempt to repair wiretapping equipment there. For a long time, the Nixon administration tried to cover up its involvement in these illegal activities against the Democratic Party.

Today, Watergate stands for obstruction of justice, conspiracy, destruction of evidence, and abuse of power whose perpetrators are eventually caught.

For more information:
• <www.archives.gov/education/lessons/watergate-constitution/chronology.html>
• <www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/investigations/watergate.htm>

Assignments

Task 1 – Comprehension

a) Author Victor Shi mentions two political scandals – Nixon's Watergate and Trump's voter fraud scandal. Both scandals involved American presidents and their possible re-elections. They are 50 years apart and had very different outcomes concerning the support the presidents received in the aftermath.

Point out how voters from both sides of the political spectrum reacted to President Richard Nixon after the Watergate scandal. How did voters react to President Donald Trump after the 2020 election that he lost but claimed to have won?

b) Explain why these political repercussions are so fundamentally different.

Task 2 – Comprehension

Gen Z have grown up with unlimited access to unlimited information online from the day they were born. They have a reputation of being media savvy. Point out why, despite their media savvy, they need to be protected from misinformation and what the aims of information literacy classes are.

Task 3 – Evaluation

Beginning in 2014, after Russia had annexed Crimea and supported rebels in eastern Ukraine, Finland was continuously targeted with Russian misinformation and online propaganda campaigns. The country, that shares an 832-mile border with Russia, launched an initiative to teach journalists and politicians as well as residents and students how to identify and counter fake news. In 2016, the initiative teaching information literacy and critical thinking became a part of the national school curriculum designed to be taught across different subjects, for example, mathematics, history, and art. Since the anti-fake news initiative was implemented, Finland has moved to the top of a ranking list of 35 European countries that measures how good citizens of a country are at detecting fake news and manipulation in media.

Discuss whether or not you think that implementing similar curricula in different school subjects, like mathematics and art as Finland has done, might be a more helpful approach than implementing one single "media literacy" subject in the curriculum, which some US states are considering (para. 8).

Tip! For a fact-check and more information about Finland's fake news initiative, you can start with the following links:
- <edition.cnn.com/interactive/2019/05/europe/finland-fake-news-intl/>
- <www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/28/fact-from-fiction-finlands-new-lessons-in-combating-fake-news>
- <finland.fi/life-society/educated-decisions-finnish-media-literacy-deters-disinformation/>

Task 4 – Evaluation

Study the cartoon linked to below. Describe the cartoon, and then state whether or not in your view it illustrates the article that you have read.

Vocabulary: sphere – Kugel

- Cartoon "Fake News & Social Media" by Miguel Morales Madrigal published by *Cartoon Movement*, July 30, 2021
- <cartoonmovement.com/cartoon/fake-news-social-media-0>

Answer key

Assignments

Task 1: Sample answers

a) After the Watergate scandal starting in 1972, both Democratic and Republican voters believed the facts that were being published by the national networks. The networks also agreed on the facts. These meant that Americans, both Democratic and Republican, shared the same view of the truth and were put off by the criminal activities with which the administration of Republican President Nixon tried to remain in power. They lost faith in Nixon and turned their backs on him. It was possible for voters from both parties to agree on and react to a common basis of facts. (para. 1)

In 2020, after President Trump was not re-elected into office, social media, far-right news networks and platforms helped him to spin the story that the election was stolen. He was so successful that a large majority of Republicans believed that Joe Biden was about to become president in an unlawful manner. (para. 3)

b) The main difference between the two scandals concerns how information was transmitted and how people reacted to that information. Back in 1972, the internet and social media did not exist, and there were only three major television networks through which information was broadcasted, helping citizens make up their minds about politics and other matters. At that time, television, radio, and newspapers put facts before opinions and feelings. They aimed at informing the population. It was not difficult to first agree on the truth and then analyze it or form an opinion on it. (para. 1)

Since that time, the media landscape has evolved tremendously. The large number of cable networks, the internet in general, and social media in particular have helped to spread false information. The truth is no longer easily distinguishable from fake news, fiction, or unfounded opinions. Access to all kinds of information and misinformation is almost unlimited, but there is no oversight. It has become difficult to discern what is true and what is fake. It is very easy to stay within one's "opinion" bubble without dealing with opposing views or being encouraged to think critically about the information one reads. (paras. 2, 3)

Task 2: Sample points

Reasons for need of protection

• Members of Gen Z have never lived without the internet and social media and are able to navigate through this virtual world effortlessly. Because social media is a part of their identities, they also tend to feel comfortable with its negative aspects. Some members of this generation even use social media to create and spread fake news to manipulate people. (paras. 4, 6)

• Gen Zers are vulnerable to misinformation because they do not make enough of an effort to use the platforms wisely and determine whether or not what they read or post is true. They often do not check facts or check sources, or search for opposing views. (paras. 2, 3, 6)

• There is no oversight to check if the news being reported is true. (para. 3)

- Because they spend a lot of time online, they encounter a lot of misinformation. The younger they are (and TikTok does have viewers as young as nine years old), the greater the danger that their view of the world becomes one-sided or even distorted. (paras. 6, 7)

- Social media is a free-for-all accessible by everyone; therefore, it does not aim at having high-quality content. Social media platforms are undermoderated. (para. 7)

  ◦ **Background information:** It takes a lot of public pressure to make platforms like Facebook or Instagram intervene and delete toxic posts. They usually only intervene when content is extremely provocative, might cause violence, or is clearly illegal.

- Certain TV channels like Fox News spread misinformation and extreme views to cater to and retain their audience (para. 7) and thus do not try to avoid political bias.

Aims of information literacy classes

- Because it has become very difficult to agree on basic truths and because "alternative facts" have almost become socially acceptable, several states have decided to fight misinformation by teaching students to be much more critical of news. Students need to learn what misinformation is and how to detect it. Information literacy classes are being established to help students learn to interpret and evaluate information, distinguish between true and fake news, and be able to conduct fact-checks. (paras. 7–9)

Task 3: Sample points

In favor of the single-subject approach

- A single subject allows a concentrated focus on the matter and gives adequate room to discuss it. Teachers can go into depth, and it is easier for them to teach basics first and lay the foundation for the subject. This might help students develop an effective skill set in a shorter period of time.

- This approach would give the subject a more prominent role in the curriculum and highlight its importance to students. It would allow teachers to use exams, tests, presentations, etc. that concentrate only on it. It would also be easier to schedule the subject. Otherwise, teachers would need to find ways and time to integrate it into their usual lessons.

- Cross-subject learning can be included in the lessons. Examples from different areas (art, history, mathematics) can be used to show the breadth of the problem.

In favor of the holistic approach

- When media literacy is limited as a single subject, students might treat it like other school subjects, which they like or don't like, are interested in or not, take seriously or don't take seriously. A single subject might only grant them the skills to checking the media for misinformation in a narrow way or for just one type of misinformation.

- If media literacy is taught in connection with different subjects, students learn to address and think critically about misinformation on a broader, more comprehensive basis. It teaches them to draw links and see the size of the problem. Art lessons might teach them the power of pictures and how images can be manipulated. History lessons might teach them about political propaganda that was applied successfully in the past and will make students more immune to propaganda being spread around them. Language lessons might make them more aware of

how language can be used to thwart ideas and deceive people. Music teachers might teach students about hidden messages in song lyrics. Mathematics might show how statistics can be manipulated to show things that are not really true.

• A more holistic approach would probably provide a more substantial basis for raising students' skills in detecting misinformation and manipulation and being able to fight against them.

Task 4: Sample points

Cartoon analysis

• The cartoon shows a conveyor belt on which round objects are worked on and being moved to the right. These round objects represent the truth about certain news items, as suggested by the first sphere that bears the inscription "TRUTH."

• As the spheres move right, they are being altered by three different figures representing social media platforms. The figures look similar because they are wearing the same outfit and carrying tools that they use on the spheres. Their heads have been replaced by the logos of the social media platform they stand for (from left to right: Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter).

  ◦ The first figure on the left has a paintbrush and covers the gray sphere with blue paint. This is when "TRUTH" gets the first smear. The "TRUTH" has been entirely covered by blue paint by the time it reaches the second person.

  ◦ The second figure in the middle has a handful of red spikes that it inserts into the sphere at regular intervals. The sphere has now become the representation of the coronavirus that is known all over the world.

  ◦ The sphere then moves to the third figure on the right that is holding a brown stamp. With this tool it stamps "FAKE NEWS" on the sphere. By the time the sphere arrives at the end of the conveyor belt, the truth has been perverted into a lie.

• According to the cartoon, social networks have brought about these changes. The figures personify social media giants and can also easily stand for social media in general and its power to twist the truth. In the cartoonist's view, social networks are responsible for creating and spreading misinformation.

• It is also worth noting that the conveyer belt and the process of turning the truth into fake news is moving towards the right. The right is where conservatives are on the political spectrum. Researchers have shown that conservatives are less able than liberals to identify fake news and that the most shared fake news supports conservative positions. (For more information, see "Conservatives' susceptibility to political misperceptions," by R. Kelly Garrett and Robert M. Bond, published by *Science*, June 2, 2021, <www.science.org/doi/10.1126/sciadv.abf1234>)

Links to the article

• Although the newspaper article mentions TikTok instead of the social media platforms shown in the cartoon, the cartoon corresponds to what the article says about social media being not only agents of change but also disseminators of misinformation and manipulation. The perception of the coronavirus pandemic varies widely between people who are well-informed and take precautions on the one hand and people who deny the existence and the danger of the virus or adhere to conspiracy theories on the other hand. In the US, it was observed that

views of the coronavirus are often split along party lines, with Democrats tending to be more concerned than Republicans. Therefore, the coronavirus is a relevant example of an area in which fake news can have a devastating effect on society.

• Even though the cartoon lacks a direct reference to Generation Z and their lack of immunity to manipulation through the media, it can nevertheless be considered as illustrating the newspaper article at least partly because it depicts the power of social media and its dangerous role regarding the creation and spread of misinformation.

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