

VAI EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT

Information Literacy: Equip Your Students to Evaluate Informational Sources

Why Is Information Literacy Important?

Here's a question for you: In the Information Age, do you think finding high-quality information is easier or harder than it used to be? You can certainly make a case for either answer. No question there is more information that is more easily accessible than ever before in history. But more isn't always better. Identifying high-quality, credible information amidst the inaccurate or misleading information, might just be more difficult than ever. In fact, in our recent poll of teachers, 67% said it was harder, not easier, to find high-quality information in the Information Age.

We (and our students) are increasingly presented with misinformation, and whether intentional or not, we can all fall victim to spreading misinformation. It's a global issue, and leaders worldwide are taking it seriously. Shigeru Aoyagi, from UNESCO's Division of Basic Education claims, "For all societies, Information Literacy is becoming an increasingly important component of not only literacy policies and strategies, but also of global policies to promote human development." The Curriculum for Excellence writes, "Children and young people not only need to be able to read for information; they also need to be able to work out what trust they should place on the information and to identify when and how people are aiming to persuade or influence them." And the Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts finds, "When citizens fail to understand how information is organized and accessed, they lose the freedom to seek and critically analyze information for themselves, the freedom to make personally informed decisions on political and social issues, and the freedom to make an enlightened contribution to the body of human knowledge."

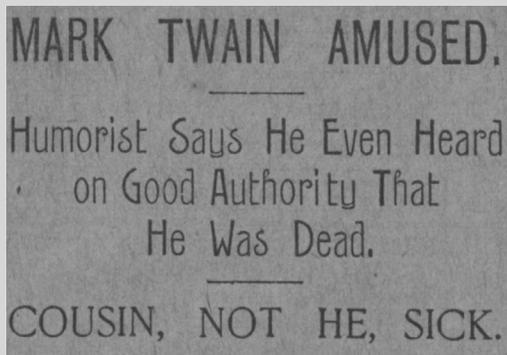
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It's validating to see Information Literacy take a place on such a prominent scale, but as educators, we don't need research to understand how important it is to our students' overall success and well-being. We know that developing information literacy skills:

- Builds problem-solving and critical thinking skills
- Empowers students to learn for themselves
- Improves informed decision-making
- Equips students for success in school, career, and life
- Helps students deal with information overload
- Encourages careful evaluation of sources for bias and inaccuracy
- Fosters successful learners, confident individuals, and effective contributors to society

And the consequences of not addressing information literacy are dire. Both domestically and abroad, misinformation has led not only to mistrust and social angst, but outright violence. Rumors of child-kidnapping leading to lynchings in Mexico; misinformation on WhatsApp resulting in a mob killing in India; and 'fake news' driving an ethno-religious crisis in Nigeria — these are just a few of the disastrous headlines around the world stemming from misguided people who turned to violence based on inaccurate information they believed to be true.

Misinformation may spread faster now than it ever has before, but it is not a new phenomenon. [This Social Historian article](#) presents 10 historical examples of fake news, including a discovery of life on the moon, a report of glycerin being extracted from WWI fallen soldiers to make soap and margarine, and even an inaccurate report that Mark Twain was dead, to which he took upon himself to humorously confirm, writing: "Humorist says he even heard on good authority that he was dead."



Misinformation isn't going away any time soon, and, in fact, it is only getting easier and easier to spread, with more and more disastrous consequences. So, we must safeguard the next generation with the critical thinking skills needed to function as critical members of an information literate society.

Information Literacy Classroom Activities for Teachers

Creating an information literate classroom needn't be boring or time consuming. In fact, here are four activities you can share with your teachers that will not only boost information literacy but have students fully engaged in the process. And the best part is, each of these can be done in 20 minutes or less!

These four activities can be accessed for free at Blue Apple's Timely Topic: [Information Nation: Developing Information Literacy Leaders](#).

Lesson 1: Do You Dare? With this short slideshow, teach students that while on their search for reliable information, first looks can be deceiving.

- Introduce students to an eye-popping image of a man standing precariously at the edge a cliff.
- Ask if they would be willing to try such a daring feat.
- Show them the next three slides of more people tempting fate on this same cliff and encourage discussion.
- Then let them know that things aren't always what they seem.
- Show them the next three slides that take a progressively wider view of the cliff, revealing that it juts out only about 3 feet above solid ground.
- Explain that this is Pedra Do Telgrafia in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, where people wait in line for hours to take this deceiving photo.
- As an extension, use the last slide to boost creativity, inviting students to create their own photographic optical illusions.

Lesson 2: Is This Information CRAAP? Have students use this acronym and their critical thinking skills to guide their information inquiries.

- Ask students why they think it might be important to determine the credibility of sources, and encourage discussion.
- Introduce students to the CRAAP acronym. You may want to put students in groups and jigsaw them back together to keep them engaged as they learn the protocol.
 - C = currency, how old is the source
 - R = relevance, is it related to your topic
 - A = authority, is the author an expert
 - A = accuracy, do the facts seem correct and supported by other citations
 - P = purpose, is the source intending to sell or persuade
- (If you prefer a less-giggle-worthy acronym, you can replace the C with a T for timely.)
- Have students [apply the CRAAP strategy](#) with the two websites provided to see if they can determine if they are fact or fiction (Hint: they are both fiction).
- Encourage them to apply the protocol to sources they use in their own research for school or at home.

Lesson 3: The Quest for Truth. Take students on an information literacy voyage through this interactive quest.

- Explain that students are on a pirate ship beset with scurvy. The Mistress of Misinformation is spreading lies that put all the crew at risk, so your students must use their information literacy skills to battle her falsehoods.
- Students visit six different quests that are placed around the room. For each quest, they are presented with 2 options (one the informationally literate choice, the other not). They scan the QR code corresponding to their choice. If correct, they get a letter to place on their Quest Map.
- (Don't have access to QR code scanners? No problem, there's a print version of the answers you can use to create a lift-the-flap version of the game.)

- After students have collected all six letters, they can unscramble them to reveal the key to keeping scurvy at bay (LEMONS).
- They can then scan the final treasure map QR code to learn more about scurvy.

Lesson 4: Cases to Crack. Encourage students to exercise critical thinking as they use their information literacy skills to crack the case!

- Select one of the two game scenarios:
 - The Case of the Vase: Who is responsible for the shattered vase? (Ideal for younger students)
 - Sour Flower Power: On an alien planet, can this herbal remedy cure a terrible disease? (Ideal for older students)
- Share the story of the game scenario using the slideshow or the video.
- Assign each student a perspective of someone in the story. (There's a handy excel spreadsheet included — once you enter your students' names it will automatically assign them a perspective link!)
- Have students share their assigned perspective with a partner. Each student should decide which perspective is more credible. If they think their own perspective is stronger, they can keep their perspective. If they find the other person's perspective better, they can scan their partner's QR code, essentially taking on that perspective.
- (Don't have access to QR code scanners? No problem, there's a print version of the perspectives you can use to create a trading card version of the game.)
- Have students repeat this discussion with multiple partners. Whenever someone finds a perspective persuasive, they can scan it so that they can share it with others.
- After about five minutes, ask students to stop and vote. Did Maria shatter the vase? Can the herbal remedy cure the disease? With good reasoning, the best arguments should spread through the classroom. (Conversely, if they don't use good reasoning, rumors and conjecture will spread.)
- Follow up by looking at the Fallacy Chart to see how the different perspectives they took on were examples of common illogical or weak arguments.

Information Literacy Bonus Strategies for Teachers

3-question Protocol: If the CRAAP protocol feels like too much for your students, use this simpler, 3 question protocol. Encourage students to ask themselves these three questions any time they are relying on an informational source.

- Who wrote it?
- Why did they write it?
- What do other sources say about it?

Gut-check: Help students understand that if they have an overly emotional response to information, they are at risk of being manipulated, and should verify the source. Have them consider their source compared to other sources on the same topic. Does this source make them feel:

- More anxious or scared?
- More sad?
- More urgent?
- More dire?
- More optimistic?

If so, they should dig a little deeper to verify the credibility of the source.

Media Bias Chart: Many of us (and our students) get our news from media outlets, so understanding any potential bias from those outlets can help us make more informed opinions. Older students can use [this chart](#) to determine how their favorite media network compares to others in terms of potential political bias as well as approach to coverage (opinion based vs fact reporting.)



When students carefully evaluate informational sources and data, they contribute not only to their own understanding, but to the broader collective of informationally literate society.

Information Literacy and the Big Picture

The ultimate goal of developing information literacy skills is to equip students with an ability to make informed opinions, based on evidence. We want them to use sound reasoning and to advocate their positions respectfully. Support students in this process with a project like [Take a Stand](#). In this project, students take a stand on an issue that matters to them. Through respectful discourse, they construct and articulate well-researched positions and deliver them in the form of an inspirational podcast. Just imagine if all our students could make their voices heard and become the changemakers our world needs!



If you'd like to try this project, check out these resources:

- This [Project Overview](#) provides a lesson by lesson summary of this project.
- Here is a [Recommended Book List](#) of rich, diverse literature on the topic of respectful discourse.
- Check out [K-8 content standard connections](#) for this project.
- To see this project in action, check out the [project video](#).

[Click here](#) if you would like to see a **FREE 30-minute webinar** of this content:

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