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# Lesson Plan: Lateral Reading

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# Lesson Plan: **Lateral Reading**

**Overview:** Jennifer Connell was called the "Worst Aunt Ever" on Twitter after she sued her cousin's son over a broken wrist. The story, full of misinformation and inaccuracies, went viral. This video and accompanying lesson plan helps students learn how to fact-check a sensational story using a technique called lateral reading.

**Subjects:**
English/Language Arts, Social Studies or Humanities

**Grade Level:**
6-12

**Lesson Duration:**
- One class period

**Essential Questions:**
- What is lateral reading, and how can this skill be used to evaluate articles and information found online?
  - What steps are necessary to engage in lateral reading?
  - What complementary skills are necessary for verifying information?

**Lesson Objectives:**
Students will:
- Explain how people can be misled by online information, and describe the consequences of misinformation.
- Practice lateral reading skills and describe the process as applied to the provided examples.
- Evaluate sources of digital information and provide a rationale for whether the information is misleading or not.

**Materials:**
- Internet access for the links below:
  - Retro Report video "Can You Spot Misinformation?"
  - Example images on social media sites:
    - California Legalizes Composting Human Bodies | Futurism
    - Harambe Received More Than 15,000 Votes for President
    - Capital Letters Banned by University Because They Could Upset Students | Off the Grid News

**Procedure:**
1. Begin by having students view the "Can You Spot Misinformation?" video. This can be done by students on their own or as a full class.
   a. Have students answer the comprehension questions that accompany the video.
   b. The second and third questions are perfect for class discussion and brainstorming. Students will benefit from hearing the ideas of their peers. Answers to the third question can be derived from both the video and other media literacy lessons that students have completed.

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   c. The teacher may also want to define “misleading” in the context of the course of study. Distinguishing between misinformation, disinformation and other terms may be helpful for students. Additional resources listed below:
      i. News: Fake News, Misinformation & Disinformation | University of Washington Bothell & Cascadia College
      ii. Fake News, Misleading Information, and Evaluating Sources | University of New Hampshire Library
2. The next portion of the activity asks students to practice lateral reading using the articles provided. This skill should be modeled by the teacher as well.
3. Students will examine three news articles. Additional information about each article is provided below.
   a. California Legalizes Composting Human Bodies
      i. The majority of this information in this article is correct. California passed a law changing regulations related to cadavers in September of 2022.
      ii. The website, Futurism, is a media company based in New York City. A large portion of their news coverage is about the tech industry.
      iii. The author of the article, Noor Al-Sibai. They have a byline and a number of recent stories. This should lead students to believe the source is possibly credible.
      iv. The links contained in this article will bring students to reputable sources like the Los Angeles Times and The Guardian.
   b. Harambe Received More Than 15,000 Votes for President
      i. Students evaluating the site Coed.com will learn that it is a digital magazine that caters to college-age men. The author of the article is listed only as “Danny G,” who has written only 15 articles in total.
      ii. The article has one link to an equally questionable source, Daily Snark. The article also contains screenshots of Twitter posts, but none are from a reputable source.
      iii. Upon further investigation, students will find no corroborating evidence that this story is accurate.
   c. Capital Letters Banned by University Because They Could Upset Students
      i. This article provides no name for an author. In addition, it may be difficult for students to find information about the source site.
      ii. The article itself has few links, but they do connect to other news articles, including some from more reputable sources.
      iii. If students conduct a search using keywords or names and locations from this article, they will discover that the memo referenced in the article does exist, but that the reporting is misleading. This is a case where the writing makes the story sound more sensational than it really is.
4. The final portion of the activity asks students to reflect on the process and explain how they evaluated the photos. This is a great place to have students incorporate other academic vocabulary and skills that they may have learned in a Media Literacy unit.
5. The teacher should feel free to add additional examples or have students conduct this process using stories and headlines that they find on social media.
6. Because this process may be new to students, it is a good idea to debrief them and ask students to share the techniques they used in this activity. Consider the following discussion questions:

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a. What were the hardest parts of this process? What clues or information made analyzing a story easier or harder?
b. What were the biggest clues to whether the story you were reading was misleading or not?

**Additional Resources:**
This video was produced in partnership with the Stanford History Education Group, the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Center for Information, Technology, and Public Life and the M.I.T. Teaching Systems Lab. For additional resources related to reverse image searches and other media literacy skills, please visit the Civic Online Reasoning portal. In particular, check out these resources:

- COR For the History Classroom Collection
- Teaching Lateral Reading
- Lateral Reading with News Stories

**Relevant Standards:**

**Common Core Standards:**

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1: Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.2: Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.4: Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including vocabulary describing political, social, or economic aspects of history/social science.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.5: Analyze how a text uses structure to emphasize key points or advance an explanation or analysis.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.8: Assess the extent to which the reasoning and evidence in a text support the author's claims.

**C-3 Framework Standards for Social Studies:**

- D1.4.9-12. Explain how supporting questions contribute to an inquiry and how, through engaging source work, new compelling and supporting questions emerge.
- D1.5.9-12. Determine the kinds of sources that will be helpful in answering compelling and supporting questions, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential uses of the sources.
- D2.His.12.9-12. Use questions generated about multiple historical sources to pursue further inquiry and investigate additional sources.
- D3.1.9-12. Gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection.
- D3.3.9-12. Identify evidence that draws information directly and substantively from multiple sources to detect inconsistencies in evidence in order to revise or strengthen claims.
- D4.4.9-12. Critique the use of claims and evidence in arguments for credibility.

**About the Author:**
David Olson is the Director of Education for Retro Report. Prior to joining Retro Report, David was an award-winning teacher of U.S. History, A.P. U.S. Government and Politics, and Criminal Justice at a public high school in Madison, Wisc.

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