

AN INTRODUCTION TO LATERAL READING

Grade 5 (10 minutes)

Students are not quite ready to fully venture out on the Internet by themselves, so they aren't quite ready for the full version of lateral reading (opening multiple tabs, searching to see what others say and knowing which of those other voices to trust, etc.), but they can be introduced to the strategy.

In this activity, students will be presented with something that appears to be a newspaper. They'll try to identify clues that could confirm or disprove that the paper is authentic.

Point is to begin to develop the habit of looking past format.

Is an influencer real or AI?

Students will learn that

- It is easy to make media that appears to be something it's not, so it is important to look past surface level appearance or format before accepting a source as authentic or sharing that source with others.
- One way to check a source is to see what other credible sources say about it.
- One technique used by people trying to mislead is intentional spelling errors, especially using spellings that are close, but not exactly like the real thing

Students will practice

- Making careful observations
- Discussion & listening skills
- Linking answers to evidence

Materials: a chart or digital board tool with three columns: yes, no, maybe; student access (via hard copies or in a digital format) to a copy of [The Daylee Planet](https://projectlooksharp.org/act/o-Home_page_materials/ACT_handout_DAYLEE_PLANET.pdf) (https://projectlooksharp.org/act/o-Home_page_materials/ACT_handout_DAYLEE_PLANET.pdf)

Step 1

Give students copies of the Labor Day newspaper. Instead of looking for a simple yes/no answer to the question "Is this real?", pose the question: *What clues could you use to tell if this is a real newspaper?*



As a whole class or with students working in pairs or small groups, ask

students to make a worksheet version of the large yes/no/maybe. This could involve logging in to a shared digital space or using scratch paper. Ask them to list the evidence they notice that makes the newspaper appear to be real or fake and record responses in the corresponding column. Give them 2-3 minutes to examine the document (so they don't have time to read every story). Then list the things they notice that indicate that the paper is real or not.

Your chart might look something like the chart at the end of these instructions.

Step 2

Review student responses, discussing which clues provide valid evidence.

Tell students the quickest way to check a source is to do a quick online search of its name. Walk them through the process, demonstrating a live search if possible.

If you Google “Daylee Planet” you’ll see that the search engine offers you a variety of choices with the correct spelling for “Daily.” That’s the first clue there might be something fishy about this source.

As Google’s AI summary will tell you, *The Daily Planet* is from Superman. Students familiar with the superhero may already know that. However, we know that AI makes a lot of mistakes, so students may not want to rely only on an AI summary. If they take another 5 seconds and click on “Daily Planet” they’ll immediately find out that it’s a newspaper, but fictional.

Academics call this “lateral reading” – determining authenticity or credibility by seeing what other sources say about the source in question. Students don’t need to know the term, just how to do it.

End the lesson with a reminder that, especially in a world with AI, it’s easy to make something look like a newspaper, but that’s just surface level appearance. If you want to be sure that a source is authentic, search the source to see what others have said about it.

You might also tell students that this newspaper is not real, but everything in it is factual. It was created specifically to help them learn information literacy skills.

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YES	NO	MAYBE
It looks like a newspaper (meaning its graphic layout is like a paper, with columns, a masthead, a headline, etc.)	The name doesn't seem right – Daylee should be spelled Daily. Daily is spelled wrong. (Tell them that misspelling is a common technique used by people trying to mislead. The “error” allows them to look like the real thing and they’re relying on a lot of people not noticing the error. So it pays to learn how to spell and not just rely on a spell checker!)	It’s published by a family foundation, not a news organization (note: they’d have to be exceptional observant to notice this detail)
It includes typical newspaper content: stories, weather, advertising, opinion	The Daily Planet is from Superman – This may come up if students are familiar with the superhero.	It’s free

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Review other common uses of intentional misspellings to deceive, e.g., store names or university names that are close to a famous respected entity or url’s that fool people into thinking they are going to a mainstream news site but actually link to a spoof or fraudulent phishing site. [digital literacy]

Look at a real newspaper and let students check the clues they could use to verify that it is real. [current events]

For students who have already learned the Share, Report, Challenge, Skip options, discuss which option they would choose if they came across an issue of a newspaper or story from a news source that they discovered was fake. What if it was a humor site? Would that change their decision? How could sharing a humor site contribute to the spread of misinformation? What could they do to make sure people understood that it was humor, not misinformation? [civics, information literacy]

AASL Standards Correlations

A. II. 2. Adopting a discerning stance toward points of view and opinions expressed in information resources and learning products.

A. VI. 2. Understanding the ethical use of information technology and media.

A. VI. 3. Evaluating information for accuracy, validity, social and cultural context, and appropriateness for need.

C. I. 1. Interacting with content presented by others.

D. I. 3. Enacting new understanding through real world connections.

D. III. 1. Actively contributing to group discussions.

D. VI. 3. Inspiring others to engage in safe, responsible ethical and legal information behaviors.