WHAT MAKES A PERSON AN EXPERT?

Grades 3-5 (40-60 minutes; each of the 5 steps could be done in sequence but in separate shorter sessions)

To reliably discern between a source that is credible and one that is not, it helps to understand the meaning of "expertise" and how we identify experts. It is also important to understand that expertise in one area does not necessarily make a person an expert in everything.

To explore the concept of expertise, students will analyze ads featuring celebrities by playing an "expert/not an expert" game. The media analysis lessons are intended to lead into traditional information literacy lessons about how to use library resources and/or research skills.

Students will learn
- What it means to be an expert
- How advertisers use our assumptions about expertise
- How/where to find expert-created resources in their library

Students will practice
- Analyzing ads
- Evaluating the criteria that qualify one as an expert
- Research skills
- Discussion & listening skills

Materials: Share, Challenge, Report, Skip handout

Images & Video
Stephen Curry ads – slide #29
Taylor Swift ad / TikTok – slide #30
The Rock ads – slide #31

Step 1
Discuss with students what makes someone an expert. How long and how deep you take this discussion will depend on the students, the time available, and school policy, but as much as possible, help them use personal experience to create a list of things that makes someone an expert. For example, you might ask:

- If you asked an AI source to tell you about a particular topic, does reading or listening to its answer make you an expert? Why or why not?
- If you had a broken arm, would you feel okay about going to doctor who only did a Google search and read the top three results about how to fix your injury?
- If you read one book on a topic, would you be an expert? How about twenty books? (Let them know that people who earn doctorates typically read at least several hundred books on their area of specialization. Consider letting

them know how many books you read to get your degree or how many books you read each year so you can curate your library's collection to make sure students will have what they need). If students have already done the "Is 7 a Lot?" activity, you could pose the question in that form: *If an expert claimed to have read 20 books on a topic, would that be a lot or a little?*

- If you took violin lessons every week for the entire summer, would that make you qualified to lead an orchestra?

- If you were the best free throw shooter on your basketball team and the team won the state championship, are you qualified to serve as an expert shooting coach for a WNBA, NBA, or Olympic basketball team?

Help students understand that even people who are pretty good at something aren't necessarily experts. Expertise requires a special set of skills, experience, and knowledge. Together, generate a list of the things that might be in that list. Here are a few of the criteria that might be named: experts have studied and practiced their specialty for long enough that they have

- earned a license or an advanced degree
- won awards or contests
- published work that has been vetted and approved of by other experts in the field
- gained wisdom through years of experience doing something well over and over and/or have learned to do something well enough do it professionally as a career
- achieved master-level proficiency of a trade and/or are able to teach their specialty to others
    - advanced-level skills, not just an ability to do basic skills well.

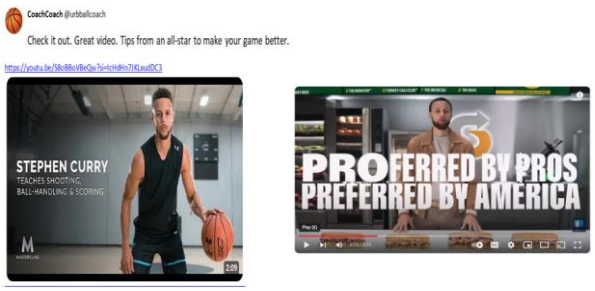
Step 2

Play "expert or not an expert."

The media we use is filled with people claiming to be experts, but are they? Show students the examples below and let them vote on whether the celebrity in the example is an expert or not.

Note: Every example is a video that might show up in a social media feed or as a YouTube recommendation. You do not need to show the videos to do the exercise. In fact, doing so is likely to be distracting from the issue you want to focus on (and in the case of the videos featuring The Rock, the language is not kid-appropriate).

<u>Pair 1</u>



Vote on each slide (expert/not an expert).

Then open the discussion by asking a volunteer to explain who Steph Curry is. (He's not just a pro basketball player. He's a multiyear all-star, champion, and renowned three-point shooter. If no one in the group is familiar, ask students how you could quickly find out and use this as a teachable moment to review basic research techniques).

Both of these are ads. The first is for a subscription to an instructional video series featuring Curry giving basketball tips. The second is an ad for Subway sub sandwiches.

Discuss each ad, starting with the question: *Is Steph Curry an expert in this video?* Be sure to follow-up responses with a prompt for evidence.

Let students know that he is being paid for both. Like most superstar

athletes, he is wealthy, so it isn't likely that receiving a paycheck would change what he would say about good basketball technique. But like most of us, he probably eats a lot of different foods. He's probably not lying about liking Subway subs, but he might recommend something different for dinner if he wasn't being paid by Subway.

Practicing this sort of reasoning and common sense is important, because we often encounter media where we don't or can't know all the answers about a media maker's background or motive, but we always have our own critical thinking skills. Ultimately, the point of emphasis is that we might weigh a recommendation from an expert differently than from someone who is famous, but a stranger and not an expert on the topic.

As time allows, you might want to ask students what they notice about these two examples. The first one looks like a social media post, but it's sharing a promo for a product. The second is identified as an ad – can they spot the clue (the word "sponsored")? You might also ask why the ad campaign uses the word "proferred," which is not a real word. They're trying to combine "pro" with preferred. And making up a new word is more memorable than using regular vocabulary.

What's the implication? Does it really matter if pro basketball players prefer one particular sandwich over another, especially if you know they're being paid for the endorsement?

Ask: *Why do you think advertisers pay celebrities to appear in their commercials?* If students don't raise the issue, share that the primary reason that advertisers' most difficult challenge is to get and keep our attention. They use celebrities to get us to stop and watch, not necessarily because they believe we'll just do whatever the celebrity tells us.

<u>Pair 2</u>

To practice, show students the next pair, check to make sure that everyone knows who the celebrity is and what she's known for. Take the expert/not expert vote. The first is a Diet Coke ad with an invitation to participate in a sweepstakes. The second is Swift demonstrating her vocal warm-up routine.

Review results: In which of these is Taylor Swift giving a recommendation as an expert? Be sure to follow-up responses with prompts for evidence. If needed, remind students that their analysis is not based on whether they are a fan of the celebrity; they're only looking at what makes someone an expert.

<u>Pair 3</u>

As time allows, repeat the process with the pair from The Rock. The first is the actor (former wrestler) sharing his workout routine. The second is an ad for Ford trucks.

Add a layer of complexity by inviting students to consider whether they should copy The Rock's workout. It's true that he is an expert, but he's also at a much more advanced and adult level that is not appropriate for children. Just because someone is an expert doesn't mean you should copy them or that the advice they give is right for you.

To review, briefly ask students to consider why they might listen to a celebrity about their area of expertise, but not other things and give a few other examples or let students invent some (e.g., a chef might be a cooking expert but maybe not a great source on which animals make great pets; an oceanographer might know a lot about sea life or boats, but not the U.S. Constitution; an army general might be an expert on gun safety but not an expert on how to teach reading).

Step 3

To check that students understand the concept of expertise and can identify the characteristics of an expert, follow-up by playing a quick "game" of "Who would be a better source for…" The leader (which could be you or a student) verbally offers a choice between believing one person or another, where one is clearly the expert and the other might know some things, but is probably not an expert.

Some examples are below, but the game will be more fun if you invent pairs that are directly relevant to the lives of your students and/or if students make up their own pairs.

Start every sentence with "If you need facts about _____ (fill in topic), who would be a better source…" Quickly poll the class and briefly talk about the answers and their evidence. Ramp up the fun by mixing in silly examples with the serious.

- skin care… a family member's dermatologist or a mother/daughter team on TikTok sponsored by a skin cream company?
- school bus safety…a professional bus driver or Mo Willem's Pigeon?
- water safety… a lifeguard or SpongeBob?
- school rules… the principal or your friend's older brother who attended your school but is in middle school now

Step 4

Review each example in the Step 1 pairs and ask: If this showed up in your social media feed or as a recommendation, would you share, challenge, report, or skip.

As time allows, discuss their choices and if they would share, what message could they include to let people know why: "Even though the person isn't an expert, I thought it was worth sharing because…"

Step 5

Segue to introducing students to various types of expertise available in your library resources. Use the inquiry method to ask students where they would find different types of sources: e.g., Where would you find a biography? How could you find information for a report on volcanoes? As needed, provide direct instruction on how to use things like databases.

Note: The assumption is that students will already know how to use many library resources, like where to find books by a favorite author. The opportunity in this lesson is to help them think more deeply about the different types of sources and which are the best for factual or expert information, and also to learn to use databases or other computer-based resources that might be new to them.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Invite students to bring in examples they encounter outside of school of people who are experts in one area giving advice on something that is not their specialty. Perhaps create a display of the examples with explanations and a student-generated list of what makes an expert an expert.

Invite teachers to talk about the different skill sets of different types of experts. What criteria are used for physical education or art, scientists or historians, writers or computer specialists, etc.

AASL Standards Correlations

A. I. 1. Formulating questions about a personal interest or curricular topic
A. II. 2. Adopting a discerning stance toward points of view and opinions expressed in information resources and learning products
A. IV. 3 Making choices about information sources to use
A. VI. 3. Evaluating information for accuracy, validity, social and cultural context, and appropriateness for need.

B. I. 1. Using evidence to investigate questions.

C. II. 1. Engaging in informed conversation and active debate.

D. I. 2. Engaging in sustained inquiry.
D. I. 3. Enacting new understanding through real world connections.
D. I. 4. Using reflection to guide informed decisions.
D. III. 1. Actively contributing to group discussions.
D. IV. 1. Performing ongoing analysis of and reflection on the quality, usefulness, and accuracy of curated resources.
D. VI. 2. Reflecting on the process of ethical generation of knowledge.
D. VI. 3. Inspiring others to engage in safe, responsible ethical and legal information behaviors.