WHAT TO DO WITH CLICKBAIT

Grades 4-5 (60 minutes that can be easily divided into three shorter sessions: Step 1, Step 2, and Steps 3 & 4)

Clickbait is one of the most frequent forms of advertising online. Mostly it is annoying, but it can also lead to scams and misinformation, so this activity teaches students ways to spot clickbait and helps them to understand why it is rarely trustworthy. It also helps students consider what they could do when they encounter it. By preparing them with options ahead of time, we increase the chances that they'll choose to avoid it.

Students will learn
- What "clickbait" is, it's economic function, how to spot it, and that it is frequently deceptive
- How exaggeration is used as a tactic
- Why media makers who want to deceive try to trigger us to respond emotionally
- How to do a reverse image search
- Options for action when they encounter clickbait

Students will practice
- Asking the questions: Who made this? What does this want me to do and why would they want me to do that?
- Deciding what to do when they encounter clickbait online.

Images
Puppies – slide #24
Puppies in clickbait format – slide #25
Man with giant strawberry – slide #26
Titanic clickbait – slide #27 (optional for practice)
Materials: Share, Challenge, Report, Skip Handout

Step 1
Show students this image of puppies (slide #24).

If anyone smiled or sighed (awww, how cute!), note the emotional reaction and how it can short circuit our logic skills. Explain that, in this case, the image tugs at our heartstrings. In other cases people use different emotions to get us to stop thinking. These might include anger, fear, our desire to be liked, etc. The idea is to tempt us to click or share without stopping to consider if it is wise. Emotional reactions, especially if they are strong, are clues to watch out for. Someone might be trying to trigger our emotions so that we don't ask questions or use our thinking skills.

Then guide students through an analysis:

a. Ask: *What questions do you have about the image?* Highlight any media analysis questions.

   b. Pick a question and ask: how could we find the answer? At this point, you could choose to pursue the students' interests or pose/choose the question: *Is it real?*

   c. Teach students to do a reverse image search (using Google, Tineye.com, or whatever tool you have available) to find out where else the image has been posted and whether they can find the original source.

      If the tool you're using offer the option of showing the images in order from oldest to newest, use it. Note that the oldest posted example might be the original source or might cite the original source.

      For most students, provide scaffolding by walking them through every step of this process, projecting your screen so everyone can see. For students who can handle some independence, you might have them work in pairs and make it a game to see who can find the source first.

Segue to Step 2 by telling students that one of the things that makes engaging with online content complex is that analysis can't just stop after determining whether something is real or fake. Fake images can be fun, entertaining, or used for a good cause. And real images can be used to achieve unethical goals. That's why we also ask: Should I Share, Challenge, Report, or Skip?

   Explain the Share, Challenge, Report, or Skip options. See the handout for explanations, but don't share the handout just yet.

Step 2

After explaining the response options, **ask students what they would want to know before making a decision** to share, report, skip or challenge it. If no student mentions it, add that one important thing to know is what happens if you click on the image. Where does it take you?
Ask, *Does anyone know what "clickbait" is?* and *"Why do you think they call it 'clickbait'?"* End the brief exchange when everyone understands what clickbait is and notices that it includes the word "bait," like a fishing lure that attracts fish to bite on a fish hook.

You'll never believe what people did to these puppies!
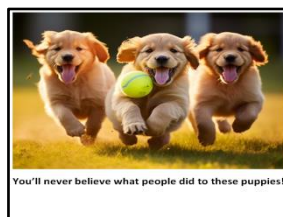
Show the image (slide #25) in context. Now the puppies are part of a common form of clickbait, including the use of an exaggerated, tempting tag line.

To start the process of helping everyone understand the purpose of clickbait and why it is an especially unreliable source of information, lead a "What if…" discussion.

   Acknowledge that many of us would want to know what happened, so we might click. If we chose to share it, other people might click, too.

Set up this scenario: *Pretend that you knew the image was real.* Would you share it if you also knew that clicking on it would lead people to:
(pause after each option to discuss pros and cons of sharing)

- An SPCA website encouraging people to adopt pets from shelters
- An offer of more pictures like this for free if you just fill out a form asking for personal information (email, name, age, location, whether your family includes a dog)

   Discuss the reasons to be wary of sharing personal information with strangers

and that once you share, it's impossible to take it back (like trying to unpop popcorn).

- A screen that asks, "Want to connect with people who share your love of animals? Click here to chat with members of the Doolittle Community."

  Note that students don't know anything about the Doolittle Community. (It's actually not a real thing so they can't possibly know anything about it, but those who are familiar with the fictional character, Doctor Doolittle might associate the name with caring for animals). Let them know that cults, hate groups, and other people who might harm them often use this technique to (phish for and) reel in new recruits.

- Takes you to a file of pictures from your aunt & uncle's dog making friends with the new neighbor's dogs

  This is probably innocuous, but you might want to advise students to check in with adults in their family before they share. Hackers can steal the identities of your contacts and use them to fool people, so if you get something from someone you know that seems out of character for them, don't click on it. Instead, separately contact the person you know and ask if they sent it.

- Connects to an unrelated site selling a gadget that says it can keep your phone safe from hackers

  Explain that clickbait uses pictures and captions to get your attention. Once they have it they take you to

what they want you to see, which can be completely unrelated.

Begin to wrap-up this step by pointing out that none of the options actually explains what people did with the dogs. This is common for clickbait. And in this case, we know this is an AI-generated image, which means the dogs aren't real. People couldn't have done anything to them.

Observe that there's no way to tell without clicking where they'll end up, and because the clickbait form of media is usually untrustworthy, they may not want to click on it at all, ever. And, of course, if they think they shouldn't click, then probably others shouldn't click either, so they wouldn't want to share the image, even if it is cute.

Together, review the definition of misinformation: information that is inaccurate, false, or misleading for any reason, though not typically honest mistakes. Remind students that spreading misinformation can hurt people, so if we care about them, we stop to think about the potential consequences before we share. (If we care, we think before we share.)

Reinforcement: Share the [Share, Challenge, Report, Skip Handout](#) so students can review their options and learn them well enough not to need prompts from you or from a piece of paper.

Step 3
To underscore the point, show this image and let students apply the reverse image search skills they've just learned (perhaps by directing you to go to a certain site). They'll find that it is fake:

Be aware that discovering a fake (i.e., that they were fooled) can leave some students feeling angry or upset. They may blame the person in the picture. It's important to tell them that

- It is possible for someone to download and Photoshop nearly any photo that is posted anywhere on the Internet.
- The man in the photo may have no idea that his picture was used in this way or any idea about who produced the fake.
- That's why we always try to identify the source, not just the people in the photo. We ask, *Who made this? What do they want me to do or think and why would they want me to do or think that? What might happen if I did it (or If I did it, would my family be proud of*

> Note: In addition to the reverse image search, you could help students notice the farmer's feet (which don't seem to be in the right place in relation to his body) and the fuzziness at the bottom and edges of the strawberry (which is a telltale sign of Photoshop). These are also quick ways to spot a fake, but we don't spend much time on teaching such clues because the technology is improving nearly every week. It is likely that by the time your students reach high school, it will not be possible to discern between real and faked simply by looking at it. That's why teaching students to pause, reflect, and think critically is so important.

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Discuss: *It's common for clickbait to use images that make us stop and go "whoa." Who would want us to do that?* Be sure that students understand that people pay to show clickbait online. So who would be motivated enough to pay to attract their attention with a faked image? It's more likely to be someone who could harm them than someone who is acting in students' best interests.

End this step by asking, *Knowing what you know about this image, lets vote with our feet.* (Designate four corners of the room, one each to match the four response options (share, challenge, report, skip). *Move to the spot that corresponds with what you would do with this image.* Invite a few students from each spot to share the reasons for their choice.

If time allows and you want to offer additional practice analyzing clickbait, show and discuss the Titanic Photo ([slide #27](#)). See slide for possible questions.

Step 4
End by asking students if they've ever encountered common clickbait phrases…

> *You may be in danger…*
> *The easiest trick*
> *Success every time…*
> *The top ten best hacks* to…
> *Secrets* revealed…
> *Shocking…*
> *Get rich (or lose weight) + easy* (or *no effort*)…
> *Surprising / Might Surprise You…*

These are all clues for media that are almost always untrustworthy. That's why they should ignore posts or pop-ups that

- claim to reveal a secret (it's on the Internet–how secret could it be?!?),
- promise an easy solution to a difficult challenge (if it seems too good to be true, it probably is),
- make promises that would be difficult to keep (e.g., never get sick again or get rich without working)
- try to scare them (if you're not doing this, you may be in danger…)

And now, students know how to spot those clues!

As time allows, invite students to add to the list any words or phrases they've spotted that indicate "clickbait, stay away."

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Find clickbait examples that use superlatives for a language arts lesson designed to help students understand what a superlative is. Compare and contrast the clickbait examples to less deceptive uses of superlatives.

Offer students an opportunity to reflect by using the topic of clickbait as a writing prompt: What makes it so tempting to click on clickbait is...   or   The last clickbait example I saw was... I decided to...

AASL Standards Correlations

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.
B. 1. 2. Devising and implementing a plan to fill knowledge gaps

D. I. 2. Engaging in sustained inquiry.
D. III. 1. Actively contributing to group discussions.
D. VI. 3. Inspiring others to engage in safe, responsible ethical and legal information behaviors