EMMY AWARD–WINNING JOURNALIST
DR. SEEMA YASMIN

WHAT THE FACT?

FINDING THE TRUTH IN ALL THE NOISE

Curriculum Guide ▶

WHAT THE FACT?
Teaching Guide

Created by the Pulitzer Center,
in Partnership with Dr. Seema Yasmin

FINDING THE TRUTH IN ALL THE NOISE

ABOUT THE BOOK

What the Fact? is the first ever fun, engaging, and fascinating how-to guide for separating fact from fiction. Readers learn how to safely navigate the murky worlds of misinformation and disinformation and use evidence-based tools to "BS-proof" their brains. Written for readers aged twelve and older, What the Fact? uses real-life anecdotes about the weird and wild nuggets of information that spread like wildfire, to explore why lies go viral while the truth is ignored.

From conspiracy theories to satire, from engineered disinformation campaigns to *Oops! I retweeted that because I really thought it was true!* This book takes readers on a bumpy ride through social media algorithms and journalism and into our weird brains, which seem hardwired to like, click, and share the most unbelievable things.

What the Fact? takes readers behind the scenes with news reporters, transporting them into newsrooms where decisions are made about what news is newsworthy and what news is deemed not important enough to publish. Who makes these decisions for us? How do their decisions impact the way we see the world? And what would we put on the front page today if we were news editors?

 Of course, we won't always agree with our classmates, friends, and family about what we should believe, and for that reason, *What the Fact?* includes step-by-step instructions for effectively debunking myths. It also includes scripts that offer a handy guide on how to disagree with friends who hold differing beliefs, but in ways that won't erupt into messy, friendship-ending fights.

 Empowering and entertaining, *What the Fact?* teaches media literacy, digital literacy, and essential critical-thinking skills using examples and anecdotes that engage young readers. The viral spread of lies and half-truths causes real harm in our relationships and to society. While the situation is dire, *What the Fact?* is not a doom-and-gloom book. In fact, it's an uplifting read (or listen, if you tune into the audiobook!) that plunges readers into the emotional networks of the human brain to understand why we believe the things that we believe.

 What the Fact? empowers readers by transforming them into savvy consumers of information. Readers become "stiflers"—the human solution for ending the spread of falsehoods. Armed with a toolkit for spotting lies, *What the Fact!* gives them the power to BS-proof their brains and stop the viral spread of lies.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Seema Yasmin is an Emmy award–winning journalist, disease detective, and author. While serving as an officer in the Epidemic Intelligence Service at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, she noticed that disease was not the only thing that spread during an epidemic—so did rumors, hoaxes, and lies about disease. Fascinated by the contagiousness of information, Dr. Yasmin trained as a journalist and has worked as a health and science reporter for *The Dallas Morning News,* NBC 5, and CNN. She is passionate about using evidence-based tools for debunking misinformation and believes that we can each become the solution for ending the viral spread of falsehoods.

ABOUT THE PULITZER CENTER

The Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting is a nonprofit journalism organization that raises awareness of underreported global issues through direct support for quality journalism across all media platforms and a unique program of education and public outreach. The education program specifically works to cultivate a more curious, informed, empathetic, and engaged public by connecting teachers and students with underreported global news stories and the journalists who cover them.

The Pulitzer Center is proud to partner with Dr. Seema Yasmin, a two-time Center grantee, and with Simon & Schuster to support curriculum development and classroom engagement with this powerful guide to media literacy, digital literacy, and how to have meaningful conversations about the issues that matter to us.

Letter to Educators from Dr. Seema Yasmin

Dear Teacher,

Thank you for bringing *What the Fact?* into your classroom. I hope the book activates and energizes your teaching on critical thinking, media literacy, and digital literacy as they relate to civics, history, journalism, science, math, and English curricula. Thank you for teaching these essential topics!

This teaching guide contains chapter summaries and classroom activities that bring to life the concepts and anecdotes you'll discover in *What the Fact?* With exercises that put readers in the hot seat as social media bosses and newsroom editors, this guide helps explore the impact of social media algorithms and investigate the way our biases impact our beliefs. It also offers step-by-step instructions for effectively debunking myths. There are games that build mental resilience and protection against falling for false information so that we can "BS-proof" our brains.

I hope this teaching guide proves fun and useful. In addition, you can contact the Pulitzer Center education team to request a free virtual class visit from one of their journalists who can further explore these topics with your students. Please visit **www.pulitzercenter.org/journalist-visits** for more information.

Thank you for being our frontline defense against the viral spread of misinformation and disinformation. I and the teams at Simon & Schuster and the Pulitzer Center hope that you enjoy teaching *What the Fact?*

Seema

WHY TEACH THIS BOOK?

Welcome, educator. Because you have arrived at this teaching guide, you probably already know why we need an engaging, accessible guide to media literacy like *What the Fact?*

Maybe you have students in your classroom who have fallen for some of the myriad hoaxes and conspiracies that aim to lure young people. Here you'll find tools to help them avoid future traps.

Maybe your students have heard so much about bias and misinformation in the media that they've become disillusioned with seeking out news altogether. Here, you'll find a spark to reengage them.

Maybe your students are asking you smart questions about how to sort fact from fiction, be a critical and open-minded thinker in an ever-expanding sea of information, and debunk the myths they encounter at home, online, and beyond. Here you'll find language, context, and evidence to support you in responding to their needs.

Studies show that young people feel smart, knowledgeable, and better equipped to take action in their communities when they engage with the news But there are significant barriers to doing so. News often leaves students feeling sad, angry, or fearful, and they may feel that their communities and the issues they care about are under- or misrepresented in media.

Moreover, a growing body of research suggests that students have difficulty identifying false information, evaluating source bias and credibility, and distinguishing among news, opinion, and advertising online. For example, when asked to assess the credibility of a climate change website, fewer than 4 percent of high school students participating in a Stanford study went beyond surface level features like website domain and aesthetics to consider the organization's major funding sources: in this case, the fossil fuel industry. Students aren't alone. Navigating the constantly shifting landscape of news, social media, and information bombardment is a daily challenge for us all.

We hope this guide will support you in using *What the Fact?* to answer your questions and those of your students, and to spark new lines of inquiry that ultimately result in classrooms full of curious and critical truth-seekers and truth-tellers. We also hope this guide will help you identify how the text fits into your learning goals, curriculum, and standards. There's something here for everyone.

How can this book support me if I'm a . . .

1. **Language arts or journalism educator?** *What the Fact?* is a testament to the power of language and storytelling to shape our minds and our world. This book is on a mission to turn us all into critical thinkers and expert communicators. It makes text analysis and communication skills immediately relevant by offering practical tools for responsibly navigating the ideas students encounter every day in news media and online articles, social media posts, and conversations with the people in their lives.

   In addition to supporting myriad language arts learning goals around text and multimedia analysis, the book provides an illuminating look into journalism from Dr. Yasmin's perspective as a longtime reporter. Journalism students will learn about the history of Western journalism and the evolution of its norms, the structure of newsrooms, and how editorial decisions get made.

   While encouraging students to be critical, What theFact? discourages cynicism and overarching skepticism (such as the annoying and depressing advice: "Just don't believe anything you see, hear, or read!"). Instead, this book challenges students not to shut down when faced with a complex landscape of bias and (mis)information, but to actively seek out truth and to maintain a curious and open mind. While engaging with this content, students can also analyze Dr. Yasmin's writing to evaluate the purpose, structure, and tone of the book.

2. **A social studies educator?** By equipping students with strong media literacy and digital literacy skills, you

are preparing them to act as empowered members of their communities and informed participants in democracy. Every tip and guide in this book (and there are many!) strengthens civic competence.

In addition to addressing the nature of modern-day misinformation, What the Fact? is also deeply rooted in history. Dr. Yasmin shows how the spread of falsehoods has persisted in many forms over time, from outlandish myths in seventeenth-century Europe to racist pseudoscience that was used to justify enslavement, to information warfare and government propaganda deployed in the Cold War.

This fundamentally interdisciplinary text explores elements of psychology (How do we develop biases, and how do they influence our behavior?), economics (How do advertisers and consumer demands shape the production of news?), law (What is the relationship between the First Amendment and social media regulation?), and so much more.

3. **A STEM educator?** A medical doctor and epidemiologist, Dr. Yasmin is always evidence-based in her approach to media literacy. Students can learn about science, math, and technology through the content in the book, which details the brain science that makes us susceptible to falsehoods, how mathematics can be leveraged to misrepresent data, and how social media algorithms are engineered to exploit our brain's dopamine reward pathways. At the same time, students can learn how to communicate scientific knowledge to a public audience by observing how Dr. Yasmin makes complex and often technical subject matter fun to read and easy to understand. What the Fact? encourages students to be the best kind of scientists: those who constantly, enthusiastically question the world around them and their own perceptions, biases, and beliefs.

PREREADING ACTIVITY

What Do You Know, and How Do You Know It? A lesson to introduce this book.

Step 1. Choose an object, any object, in your classroom. Ask students individually to make a list of five pieces of information that they know about this object.

Next, ask students to review their list and assign a value representing how certain they are that each piece of information is true (1=not at all sure, 10=completely sure).

Invite students to share items from their lists aloud until you have a strong class list recorded on a whiteboard, poster, Google Doc, or other shared space.

Step 2. Go through the list one by one as a class and discuss:

- If you believe this to be true, where does that belief come from?
- If you do not believe this to be true, where does that belief come from?
- What are some factors that could cause someone's beliefs about this to differ from your own?
- What would have to happen for you to raise your certainty about this belief to a 10? What would have to happen for you to lower your certainty to a 1?

Guide students in looking deeply at how they know what they know, and how others' beliefs and perceptions could differ. For example, if they are certain that the object is a particular color because they can see it with their eyes, could someone's belief differ if they are color blind? If they were to see the object in a different light? If their language has more or fewer words for colors?

Step 3. Repeat the activity, this time using a somewhat more controversial subject—preferably something you have discussed in your classroom recently. (For example: a law, a world leader or historical figure, a scientific innovation, etc.)

Step 4. After completing both exercises, discuss as a class:

- Did you find your certainty was stronger when listing information the first or second time? Why do you think that is?
- Did you learn anything new from the discussion or change any of your previous beliefs?

Step 5. Introduce *What the Fact?* to students by reading the About the Book and About the Author sections in this guide. While this book is about separating fact from fiction, doing so means we have to determine: What is a fact? Where do facts come from? And how do we know one when we see one? Reading this book will provide some answers, and a lot more questions.

Closing. Having read an overview of What the Fact?, ask students to fill out the graphic organizer below as an exit ticket or as homework. Collect students' responses. These can be used to structure future class warm-ups and discussions, and to identify sections of the book that may be especially relevant to your students' questions.

What the Fact? prereading activity	
Where have you seen false information before? List three places.	1. 2. 3.
Where do you go to get information you can trust? List three places.	1. 2. 3.
What questions do you have about finding true information and distinguishing it from false information? List three questions.	1. 2. 3.

Introduction

Summary	The introduction outlines the purpose of this book: not to tell us what to think, but to explain where misinformation comes from, how it travels, and how our brains react to it—and what we can do to critically process and share information.
Media Literacy Vocabulary *Note: The booksupplies definitions for most key terms within the text.*	• Bias • Myth • Hoax • Conspiracy • Source • Debunk • Information ecosystem • Disinformation • Misinformation
Discussion Questions	• Do you consider yourself a freethinker? How has this introduction challenged, expanded, or reinforced your ideas related to freethinking? • Can you think of times when you or someone close to you unknowingly shared false information? How might someone make this mistake? • What does Dr. Yasmin state as the purpose of this book? How do you think this book could be useful to you and to people you know?

Chapter 1: Contagious Information

Summary	Dr. Yasmin demonstrates how information can spread like a contagious virus. This chapter makes a case for how using precise language can equip us to recognize and respond to misleading information and introduces an expanded vocabulary for doing so.
Media Literacy Vocabulary *Note: The book supplies definitions for most key terms within the text.*	Information ecosystem vocabulary: • Viral spread of information • Bots • Trolls • Fake news • Misinformation • Disinformation • Malinformation • Satire • Misleading content • Imposter content • Manipulated content • Fabricated content • Logical fallacy • Straw man argument • Cherry-picking • Conspiracy theory
Discussion Questions	• Why is it important to consider the intent behind the construction and sharing of false or misleading information? • How can knowing about the key techniques used to spread lies help you spot false and misleading information? • Why is precise language important in recognizing and combating the spread of false or misleading information?

Chapter 2: Bias, Beliefs, and Why We Fall for BS

Summary: 1–2 sentences describing the high-level theme(s) of the chapter.	This chapter examines different types of bias, the social and biological factors underlying them, and how unexamined bias can lead to the spread of misinformation. It also delves into how storytelling interacts with the brain and communicates information effectively.
Media Literacy Vocabulary *Note: The book supplies definitions for most key terms within the text.*	• Implicit bias/unconscious bias • Heuristics • Confirmation bias • Assimilation bias • Dunning-Kruger effect • Polarization • Inductive reasoning • Deductive reasoning • Skepticism • Stereotypes
Discussion Questions	• What makes information compelling to you? Think about what kinds of media you like to engage with, who you trust, and why. • Dr. Yasmin writes that "presenting only the facts is not enough to shift a person's perspective on the world." Why is that? What else do you think is necessary? • How can strategic storytelling influence our beliefs and actions? • Why is it important to acknowledge our biases? • How are your beliefs connected to your sense of belonging and community?

Chapter 3: News, Noise, and Nonsense

| Summary | Dr. Yasmin traces the history of the US press to its roots in partisan pamphlets, the commercialized Penny Press, and the professionalization of journalism. Special attention is paid to the rise of objectivity as a central value in reporting, and how people who belong to groups long marginalized in the journalism industry have argued against the concept of neutral journalism, which can function to maintain the status quo. |

Media Literacy Vocabulary *Note: The book supplies definitions for most key terms within the text.*	• Propaganda • Satire • Penny Press • Clickbait • Partisan • The First Amendment • The Pony Express • Telegraph • Inverted pyramid structure • Agenda setting • Gatekeeping • News judgment • News aggregation • Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) • News desert • News budget • Framing • Selective exposure • Hallin's spheres • Editorial • Op-ed • Bothsidesism • Movement journalism • Media diet
Discussion Questions	• What is one thing you learned from this chapter about journalism in the past or present that you didn't know before? • Should access to credible news be looked at as a public good or a commodity? What are the implications of each perspective? • What do you believe should be the relationship between objectivity and journalism? • Why is it important for reporters and leadership in the journalism industry to include people with diverse identities and experiences, both in their newsrooms and in their news stories? • What makes a news diet healthy? What are three questions you think are important to ask yourself about the news you consume? (Feel free to draw on Dr. Yasmin's suggested questions, or come up with your own.)

Chapter 4: Social Media

Summary	This chapter explores the power of social media to (dis)connect and (mis)inform. It explains how the brain responds to social media, the way algorithms work, and how well-intentioned scrolling can lead to disturbing content and radicalization.
Media Literacy Vocabulary *Note: The book supplies definitions for most key terms within the text.*	• Algorithm • Dopamine • Neuroplasticity • Radicalization • Extremism
Discussion Questions	• What are some strategies you can use to check whether information you see on social media is true? How often do you use these strategies? • Do you think that any content should be banned on social media? If so, what content, and who should get to decide? • What are some steps people can take to have control of their own social media experiences?

Chapter 5: How to Debunk and Disagree

Summary	This chapter offers tools for having productive conversations about misinformation. It discusses how to have disagreements that center close listening, avoid high conflict, and are more likely to lead to empathy and common ground. It also provides tips for how to respond when others initiate such conversations with us.
Media Literacy Vocabulary *Note: The book supplies definitions for most key terms within the text.*	• Cognitive immunology • Prebunking • Debunking • Looping • Principle of charity • Deep canvassing • Groupthink
Discussion Questions	• When can conflict be good? What examples of good conflict have you seen or experienced? • Think about a time when you realized you were wrong about something and changed your mind. How did it feel? Who or what caused you to update your beliefs, and how? • This chapter describes looping and other deep listening techniques. What is the value of being listened to? What can people do to make you feel heard? Can you use these practices when listening to others?

After reading *What the Fact?*, use these extension activities to deepen students' engagement with the text through hands-on activities and independent projects.

Activity One. You're in Charge: Agenda-setting and editorial judgment

Inform students that they have been put in charge of a news organization as editors, and it is their job to make the final call about what stories make it onto their website, pages, or airwaves. For this activity, students can work independently or in small groups as editorial teams.

First, provide students with information about their news organization. (Where are they located? How often do they publish? Do they focus on local, national, and/or international news? Do they have a topical focus?)

Second, provide students with four news events taking place that day. (Consider curating these events from multiple publications with different profiles. Be sure to include events that center the experiences and needs of different communities. For a free archive of underreported stories published by hundreds of local, national, and international news organizations, visit the Pulitzer Center website at www.pulitzercenter.org/stories.)

Students work to choose two out of the four news events that they will publish, and prepare to explain why, verbally or in writing. Questions students should be able to answer include:

- On which communities does their editorial judgment center, and which does it exclude?
- What does their editorial judgment say about the purpose and audience of their news organization?

Activity Two. What's Your Angle? News framing and subjectivity in journalism

Dr. Yasmin defines framing as "decisions about which angle the story will be told from and whose voices it will feature" that "can change the entire story and the audience's perception of the issues the story explores." (Chapter three) Framing can shape how audiences think about the people, places, and events that news stories explore.

To give students hands-on experience with the power of framing, provide them with a news story, stripped of its headline. (You can choose a story related to topics you've recently covered in class, one from yesterday's local newspaper, or from the Pulitzer Center's archive of underreported stories at www.pulitzercenter.org/stories.)

Working independently or in small groups, ask students to read the story closely. After they finish reading, students should write down . . .

- A short summary of the main news event covered in this story, trying to stick to the most basic facts
- What they think the journalist wants the reader to think or feel about these events, and evidence from the story for their answer

Time permitting, have students swap summaries with at least two other students/groups, and compare and contrast. Did other students include different information in their summaries? Did they use different language that changes how the people, places, or events in the story might be perceived?

As a class, discuss: What do you think is the framing of this story? Consider the language used, the people quoted, the photos included, and more. (For more on classic types of news frames, see *What theFact?* chapter three: News, Noise, and Nonsense. Students can also discuss more generally the perspectives they see in action in the story.)

Finally, have students generate 3–5 different headlines for the news story. Each headline should offer a different frame/interpretation. Collect different headlines in a centralized location such as a Google Doc, poster, or whiteboard, and conclude by discussing: Which headline would students choose if they were the story editor, and why?

Activity Three. What Does the Data Say? Science, math, and misinformation

Introduce this activity by discussing as a class: Do you think science and mathematics are objective or neutral? Why or why not?

Read the excerpt below aloud as a class (Chapter 2):

Science is not neutral, and scientists are not unbiased robots conducting experiments in a vacuum away from the cruel realities of the world. Acknowledging scientists' human biases helps us interpret their results with deeper understanding. And it helps us grapple with the problem of pessimistic meta-induction, the idea that because science has messed up in the past, it will mess up again. And not only science. Pessimistic meta-induction applies to economics, law, medicine, and politics. All these fields have murky pasts (and presents) replete with biases and mistakes.

Diligent scientists think carefully about this. They swim around in uncertainty, semicomfortable that the experiments they run and the data they produce inch us closer to some version of the truth—a truth that can be disproved at any time.

Discuss as a class:

- How does this passage challenge, expand, or reinforce your ideas about objectivity in science and math?
- Can you think of any examples of how science or math have been used to mislead people? (Explore chapter two in full for more examples.)

Next, present students with a piece of data or a data set pulled from a news story or academic paper. Consider using data related to a topic or scientific/mathematical model you have discussed in class. Here are some examples:

Independently or in small groups, students should study the data and come up with:

- At least three inferences they can make by looking at the data (*if* students explore raw data instead of descriptive statistics)
- Three different potential explanations for the data
- At least three questions they have in response to the data

After students develop inferences and questions, share an excerpt from the news article or academic paper with students that contextualizes the data. (If possible, present students with two authors' explanations of the same data.) As a class, discuss:

- How do the author's inferences and explanations compare with your own?
- Did the excerpt answer any of the questions you posed?
- Did the excerpt generate any new questions for you?
- What does your class's ability to come up with differing inferences and explanations based on the same data set say about neutrality in STEM? What do you think might account for these differences?

Here are some examples of data:

- "Nearly 85% of the COVID-19 vaccine doses administered to date have gone to people in high-income and upper middle-income countries. The countries with the lowest gross domestic product per capita only have 0.3%." (Source: "Rich Countries Cornered COVID-19 Vaccine Doses. Four Strategies to Right a 'Scandalous Inequity'" by Jon Cohen and Kai Kupferschmidt for *Science* / Note: Article contains a graph that can be used in place of this text.)
- "Nearly 50% of Richmond's population is Black, and the pre-pandemic eviction rate was just over 11%. Buchanan and Dickenson counties have nearly the same poverty rate as the city of Richmond, yet their eviction rates have been below 1%. Both counties' populations are also more than 95% white."

(Source: "In Richmond, VA, Eviction Burden Weighs Heavier on Black and Brown Residents" by Brian Palmer for *PBS NewsHour*)

- "About 230,000 women and girls are incarcerated [in the US], an increase of more than 700% since 1980." (Source: "No Choice but to Do It: How Women Are Criminalized for Surviving" by Justine van der Leun for *The Appeal* / Content notes: this story discusses sexual violence, domestic violence, and experiences of incarceration.)
- "[The Indonesian Elephant Conservation Forum's] unreleased 2019–2029 elephant conservation plan . . . reports that the population of Sumatran elephants now stands at an estimated 924-1,359 individuals—a drop of 52-62% over the 2007 figure." (Source: "Saving Sumatran Elephants Starts with Counting Them. Indonesia Won't Say How Many Are Left" by Dyna Rochmyaningsih for *Mongabay*)

Activity Four. Social Media Challenge: Fact-checking your newsfeed

Assign students a topic or allow them to choose a topic trending on social media, and challenge them to fact-check ten posts about this issue. (Ideally, students should fact-check posts they encounter organically. However, they can also use search tools on social platforms to find past posts.) Offer this guide to students:

Step 1. Create a spreadsheet or another document that contains the post link, the post author, and a list of factual claims made in the post. (Note: You do not need to include opinions in your list of claims, as these are subjective. An opinion may be formed on the basis of true information or misinformation, but it is not true information or misinformation itself.)

Step 2. Research the post authors. (Is the author a journalist? Doctor? Activist? Member of the public? Are they affiliated with any organizations? What comes up when you search for their name online?) Note who the author is, and any important affiliations, in your document.

Step 3. Research each factual claim made in the posts. These guiding questions may help:

- Is the information attributed to any source? If so, are they an appropriate, knowledgeable source?
- Do news stories, organizations' websites, or peer-reviewed articles support the factual claims you identified? Can you find any sources that contradict the claims?
- Record in your document: Is the claim true, false, or unverified (i.e., you could not find enough information to make a judgment)?

Step 4. Write a one- to two-page reflection on what you learned from analyzing social media posts on this topic for a day.

Activity Five. Be a Media Literacy Superspreader

Students will come away from *What the Fact?* with a wealth of tips on media literacy, digital literacy, and communication. Not only will they be equipped with the tools to be more critical of sources and arguments, more open to questioning their own assumptions, and more effective in sharing their ideas with others, but they will also understand how these skills can improve their lives and their communities. Dr. Yasmin explains that misinformation has a nasty tendency to spread like a virus. But students can build a healthier news ecosystem by sharing their new and strengthened knowledge and mental immunity against lies with others.

Charge students with identifying their top five to ten tips from *What the Fact?* and finding an engaging and accessible way of sharing them with others, keeping their intended audience and the best way to reach them in mind. Here are some ideas:

- Create a series of infographics combining the text of the tips with appealing images using a free design software such as Canva. Post the images as a carousel on Instagram, a thread on Twitter, or on another class/school social media account.

- Collaborate with your classmates to put together a presentation highlighting several media literacy tips, and offer to present it to other classes at your school. Be sure to include interactive elements so that you can engage your peers' preexisting knowledge and give them some hands-on practice with the tips you share.

- In chapter two, Dr. Yasmin explains how strategic storytelling can help people remember and internalize information better than a list of facts. Choose one tip from your list, and write a short story that illustrates its importance. You can write a fictionalized story (you might use the story about a mother and her daughter's disagreement about the causes of gun violence in chapter five as a model), or a nonfiction story (you might use the story about Onesimus and the invention of the smallpox vaccine, from the same chapter, as a model).

Bonus Activity: Invite a Journalist to Speak with Your Class

Extend your students' learning by giving them the opportunity to hear directly from a journalist about how they handle questions of bias, news judgment, representation, objectivity, and more. Students can get their questions about the reporting process and navigating the news answered, while learning about the systemic issues journalists cover and careers in the industry.

The Pulitzer Center offers free virtual visits with journalists to classrooms, afterschool programs, and education programs in jails, prisons, and juvenile detention facilities. Visit www.pulitzercenter.org/journalist-visits to learn more and request a guest speaker.

KEY TAKEAWAYS: TEN MEDIA LITERACY TIPS

We hope this teaching guide has sparked ideas for how *What the Fact?* can support your students' needs, and your curricular standards. This book is chock-full of step-by-step guides to bolstering your critical thinking, media literacy, and digital literacy skills. To point you toward some of the key strategies laid out in this book and where to find them, here are ten media literacy tips. Consider asking your students to make their own list of media literacy tips they want to use and share while they read!

1. Use precise language. Terms like *fake news* obscure how misinformation really spreads, and who benefits. Recognizing the full spectrum of false and misleading information and determining which you're dealing with can help you avoid falling for falsehoods that take less obvious forms and better understand how to stop their spread. *For more advice on using precise language, see chapter one.*

"Specific terms are not only going to make us sound much smarter but they can help us better understand who created the false information, who was spreading it, and why."

2. Recognize common strategies used to spread misinformation. Scholars have developed a classification system for techniques of science denial and the spread of disinformation called the FLICC taxonomy. FLICC stands for **f**ake experts, **l**ogical fallacies, **i**mpossible expectations, **c**herry-picking, and **c**onspiracy theories. Learning about these techniques is the first step to debunking disinformation. *For more advice on using the FLICC taxonomy, see chapter two.*

"Digging into five key techniques used to make us believe lies helps us have those essential Aha! moments when we spot these techniques in action."

3. Acknowledge your bias. The work of identifying bias in the information we encounter starts with interrogating our own biases. Everyone has biases, and they can even serve useful purposes! However, unacknowledged biases can make us much more susceptible to misinformation, and lead to harmful results for ourselves and others. Be mindful of questioning information that confirms your beliefs as often as you question information that surprises

you. *For more advice on acknowledging bias, see chapter two.*

"Understanding and acknowledging our biases can protect us from falling into traps of simplistic thinking."

4. Do your own fact-checking. When you learn something new, ask where that information came from, and try to trace it as far back as you can. Developing a fact-checking habit will help you identify where your knowledge and beliefs are coming from, and can strengthen your confidence in your ability to sort fact from fiction. *For more advice on fact-checking, see chapter three.*

"Every chunk of data has its own origin story."

5. Build an intentional news diet. Consider what you want to get out of the news, and how you can do that. Lean into sources you trust, while also seeking out other voices to avoid an echo chamber. *For more advice on healthy news consumption, see chapter three.*

"Designing your own media diet gives you nourishing doses of information and entertainment and puts a lid on distractions so that you're not as tempted to tap every time your phone pings or an alert pops up on some screen somewhere. It also means your worldview is challenged, because you are designing a diet that exposes you to different perspectives, and this can gently guide you out of your comfort zone."

6. Pay attention to who is telling the stories in your news diet. The journalism industry, and especially its leaders, are disproportionately white, cisgender, heterosexual, male, and able-bodied. Journalists' identities and experiences shape which stories get told, and how. Seek out a diversity of storytellers to get a more well-rounded perspective. *For more information on diversity and representation in journalism, see chapter three.*

"We all experience the world a certain way, are treated in different ways, and have varied backgrounds and life experiences, and if many different lived experiences were represented in the rooms where news decisions are made, journalism would better reflect the lives of the people who consume it."

7. Pull back the curtain on social media. Be mindful of how social media algorithms work, who designs them, how they profit, and how your mental health, privacy, and community are affected as a result. Major tech companies like to keep their practices and algorithmic details secret, but remembering that there are human beings and companies with their own set of interests curating your online experience can lead you to ask questions about the content that appears before you, and what perspectives might be missing. *For more advice on navigating social media platforms, see chapter four.*

"[An] algorithm might run on a machine, but it was programmed by people who coded it to decide how to order content by the likelihood that you'll enjoy and engage with it and stay on the platform for hours."

8. Take control of your social media experience. Pay attention to how much time you spend on different social media platforms, and how they make you feel. Make a plan to budget your time on social media based on your observations, and consider exploring platforms beyond the biggest, most profit-hungry ones. *For more advice on controlling your social media experience, see chapter four.*

"Social media has firmly planted its feet in our lives. It's not going anywhere, and it offers amazing connections and information, but it's important that you control its effects on your time, mood, and health."

9. Practice active listening techniques. If you want to debunk misinformation or engage with a person who disagrees with you about a controversial issue, listening is one of the most powerful things you can do. It gives you a better chance of understanding where they're coming from, encourages them to identify inconsistencies in their own thinking, and preserves your relationship in the face of conflict. *For more advice on having healthy disagreements and debunking misinformation in conversation, see chapter five.*

"Over time, broad questions and deep listening can help soften tension and help people understand that they are not under attack."

10. Remember that you are the solution. In the face of the many forms of false information and bias swirling around in the world and in our brains, it can be tempting to tune out and become a total skeptic. With so many pitfalls lying in wait, why venture forth into the sea of information? But keep in mind that good information is out there for trained truth seekers! In fact, researchers estimate that only 0.15 percent of the news that people in the US consume is actually fake (chapter three). Armed with your critical-thinking skills and an open mind, you will be able to make better decisions, understand other people more deeply, and engage in your community more effectively. Every time you use and share these skills, you are combating falsehoods and stereotypes in your online and IRL communities, and creating a healthier information ecosystem for us all.