

Conspiracy theories assert a covert scheme behind an event or situation and are resistant to falsification. These forms of disinformation manipulate existing stereotypes, biases, and fears, and are often politically or culturally motivated.



Rothschild Conspiracy

- A pamphlet alleged that Nathan Rothschild witnessed the Battle of Waterloo, returned to London before news of the outcome, and manipulated investors to believe the British had lost, making him incredibly wealthy.
- This started a swath of conspiracy theories involving the Rothschilds, and eventually Jewish people as a whole: war profiteering, controlling markets, and manipulating governments, to name a few.



Lincoln "Miscegenation" Hoax

- Sought to dissuade potential Lincoln voters in the 1864 election and promote opposition to racial equality
- To accomplish this, the pamphlet advocates for interracial relationships, falsely claiming Lincoln to also be supportive of this goal. It coined the term "miscegenation", a derogatory term used to describe interracial marriage and reproduction.



When using historical examples of disinformation to teach information literacy skills, we not only highlight the essential nature of primary source interaction, but allow students to identify exactly how and why disinformation spreads. This understanding is yet another tool in their arsenal when analyzing the validity of information. By grounding this idea of hoaxes in real-world examples, we reinforce the knowledge that we are not immune to disinformation and that information literacy is an active practice, not a passive one.

Sample one-shot lesson plan

• Learning Outcomes •

- Students will be able to confidently use the SIFT method to analyze and verify sources in an assigned text.
- Students will be able to draw comparisons between historical and current primary sources

1. Introduce Context

- What is information/misinformation?
- What is information literacy?
- What are conspiracies?

2. Introduce SIFT

- What is its purpose?
- How do we use it?

3. Group Activity

- Divide provided texts amongst students
- Half will receive historical texts, half will receive a present-day equivalent
- Apply SIFT in groups
- Share findings with the class

4. Analysis and Wrap Up

- What is similar/different?
- How can we use these skills in the future?



Feel free to take a complete lesson plan, including sample slides!

THE SIFT METHOD

STOP



Before reading the primary source, be aware of the emotional response you have to the information. Ask yourself: do I know this source? What is its reputation? What is this source trying to convey to me?

INVESTIGATE



Take some time to investigate the primary source. What can you find out about the author(s)? Do/did they have any vested interests? Do/did they have legitimate authority on the topic?

FIND



Find better coverage. What information is available on the topic? Scan multiple sources to see what the consensus is. You can also perform in-depth research on the primary source to ensure its information is accurate!

TRACE



Trace to the original context. Navigate through links, bibliographies, and websites to find the origin of the information. Was that information fair and unbiased?

The SIFT method is especially useful for primary sources because it can help us contextualize historical content, investigate the validity of the primary source's claims, and guide us in the right direction to find other information relevant to the primary source.

To view our bibliography, access our materials, and learn more, scan the QR code!

