Digital Citizenship Lesson Plan

Hoax Sites

General Topic (as defined in the Digital Literacy Framework)	RA1
Research and Information a) Information Literacy	
Applicable Grade Range	
K-9	
Outcome(s) to be Addressed	
The student understands that anyone can publish on the web, so not all sites are equally trustworthy.	
Importance / Significance of Lesson	
It is important for students to realize that all information on the internet is not created equally, nor is it all truthful. Anyone can create a website and post any sort of information that they wish. Students (and others) are generally trustworthy of information found on the internet and believe it to be true without considering how the information they are reading fits in to what they already know about a subject. This lesson aims to encourage students to look at what they find on the internet with a critical eye and determine whether the information they are reading fits with what they know to be true.	
Duration	
45 mins (may choose multiple sites for multiple lessons)	
Overview	
Prior to implementing this lesson, teachers will have to choose a specific website or sites to use and tailor their lesson appropriately. It is suggested that teachers read through the site in order to understand the subject material and be prepared to debate its validity before presenting it to their class. Teachers will try to convince their students that what they are looking at is a worthy cause, explore the site with their class and then encourage students to question the content before revealing that it is a hoax. The lesson will be followed by a discussion detailing tips and tricks to discern whether a website provides real information.	

Required Resources
Computer hooked up to a projector Class set of laptops/access to the computer lab OR class set of iPads/iPods

Lesson Plan and Extension Activities

This lesson has been developed using http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/ (Save the Endangered Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus), but can be adapted to match any site of your choosing.

1) Tell your students that you have recently been made aware of a cause that is located close to your school and would like to share with them some information about it.

2) Using a projector, bring up the website for the whole class to discuss and explore. Look through the information (note that some of it is very academic and hard to read or confusing), watch the videos provided on the site, look at some of the pictures and lead a discussion on what you see on the site. Note the detailed amount of information, including the names of the octopus in different languages, videos that seem to support the idea even though they don't necessarily link directly into the topic of an endangered tree octopus, up to date news items linked to the site, pictures that look real and convincing (could have been taken in or out of water, could include a 'toy' octopus or could be photoshopped), listings of a variety of books and resources with information and stories about the tree octopus and a fairly thorough and well put-together website.

3) A student (or you) might ponder aloud, "I know that an octopus lives in water, how can this one live in a tree?" Note that in the first paragraph in the 'About' tab it states that "Unlike most other cephalopods, tree octopuses are amphibious, spending only their early life and the period of their mating season in their ancestral aquatic environment. Because of the moistness of the rainforests and specialized skin adaptations, they are able to keep from becoming desiccated for prolonged periods of time, but given the chance they would prefer resting in pooled water." This reasoning seems to answer the biggest question students might have, however it uses language that is above most students and therefore might convince them simply because it is confusing or sounds real in adult terms.

4) Now that some doubt has been recognized, start to further question things that don't quite fit, for instance:

a) why is there a disclaimer at the bottom that reads "The author of this article and its subsections is Lyle Zapato. This site is not associated with any school or educational organization, other than the Kelvinic University branch of the Wild Haggis Conservation Society." A quick search of either will come up with links that suggest it is not to be believed.

b) look closer at the pictures and videos on the site and question if they look real or photoshopped, if they could be taken out of context, how they could have been made if you were trying to trick someone into believing it.

c) what makes this site seem believable? Video evidence, academic language, links to news items, etc.

d) what calls this site into question? Stop motion video, blurry pictures and videos, academic language, questionable links to university research

5) It's time to reveal the truth. After exploring the site together and discussing many aspects of it, tell your students that it is, in fact, a hoax. Take them to the following wiki: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_Northwest_tree_octopus and then discuss why someone would want to create a website like this:

- to trick people

- to raise money under false pretenses

- to identify how people will believe in something if they want to, while not trusting their first instincts.

- to study how gullible people can be (there is a link on the Wikipedia page to a study where 24 out of 25 grade 7 students believed it to be true – careful of the advertising on the page, though)

6) Further discuss some tips and tricks to help guide students to become critical thinkers when it comes to believing internet sources:

Tips:

- Check multiple sources to see if they provide similar information.
- Ask yourself – is this plausible? Does it make sense? What facts do I know about the subject and how do they fit with this new information I've just found?
- Look for the source of the information – is the website developed by a company (.com), a government body (.gov), an educational institution (.edu) or a non-profit group (.org)? – does it include credible sources of information or indicate who authored the site? – does it ask you to donate your time or money and, if so, have a secure way of contacting the site owners? Information from some sources are reliable but other sources can be biased to convince people to believe in or support a cause.
- If it seems too good to be true, or too weird to fit in with your previous knowledge, question and dig deeper to see what more you can find out.
- Still don't believe it? Google it, search it in Wikipedia or look it up on Snopes.com

Adaptations

Different websites will be used depending on the age or subject of your class.

This can be a guided lesson for younger students or a more independent study of multiple sites for older students.

Additional Resources

Websites to choose from:

http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/

www.thedogisland.com

www.deadlysins.com/guineaworm/index.htm

Listings of other hoax sites:

www.shsu.edu/lis_mah/documents/TCEA/hoaxtable.html

www.philb.com/fakesites.htm

Cross-curricular Outcomes Also Addressed
Social Studies – researching topics and evaluating sources for credibility
Science – habitats, sea life
Language Arts – improve vocabulary and comprehension skills

~developed by Kristin Sward, 2014