

MEDIA LITERACY & FAKE NEWS DETECTION UNIT

Grades 6–12 | Digital Citizenship & Critical Thinking

What's Inside This Premium Unit:

SIFT Strategy Poster • Media Bias Spectrum Chart

8 Complete Lesson Plans (45–60 min each)

Headline Analysis Activity (Part 1 & Part 2)

SIFT Checkpoint Worksheet • Fact-Check Lab

Media Detective Project Template & Rubric

Full Answer Keys & Teacher Scoring Guide

Source Evaluation • Bias Spotting • SIFT Strategy • Fact-Checking

A Premium Digital Literacy Resource

SIFT Strategy Poster

Print this page on cardstock and display in your classroom or computer lab as a constant reference.

THE SIFT METHOD: 4 MOVES TO FACT-CHECK

S — STOP

Before you share or react, STOP. Ask yourself: Do I know this website? Do I know the reputation of the author? If not, don't read further until you check the other steps.

I — INVESTIGATE THE SOURCE

Take 60 seconds to figure out who is behind the information. Google the publisher or author. What is their expertise? What is their agenda? Skim Wikipedia or another trusted reference to learn about the source before you read further.

F — FIND BETTER COVERAGE

Don't stay on a sketchy site. Search for the claim elsewhere. Are trusted, reputable news organizations reporting the same story? Look for consensus among multiple reliable sources before you accept or share the claim.

T — TRACE CLAIMS TO ORIGINAL CONTEXT

Quotes get taken out of context. Videos get edited. Images get cropped. Trace the claim back to the original source to see what was actually said or done. If you cannot find the original, treat the claim with suspicion.

Tip: The SIFT method was developed by digital literacy expert Mike Caulfield. Encourage students to practice "lateral reading"—opening new tabs to check what other sources say, rather than trusting the page they are on.

8 Lesson Plans

LESSON 1: THE LANDSCAPE OF MISINFORMATION

Duration: 45–60 mins

Objective: Students will define fake news, understand its different types (satire, false context, imposter content), and explain why it spreads.

Essential Question: Why does fake news spread faster than real news?

Warm-Up (5 mins): Show 3 images. One is real, one is photoshopped, one is AI-generated. Can you tell the difference? Have students vote and discuss what clues they used.

Direct Instruction (15 mins): Define misinformation (false info shared without harmful intent) vs. disinformation (false info shared deliberately to deceive). Explain the three main types of fake news: **satire** (humor that can fool readers who miss the joke), **false context** (real image or quote placed in a misleading context), and **imposter content** (sites that impersonate legitimate news outlets). Discuss the financial and political motives behind fake news. Show examples of clickbait headlines.

Core Activity (20 mins): Students complete the “Headline Analysis Activity” **Part 1** (page 9), sorting real vs. fake headlines based on emotional language.

Closure (5 mins): Exit Ticket: Why do people create fake news? List at least two motives.

LESSON 2: THE SIFT METHOD

Duration: 45–60 mins

Objective: Students will learn and apply the SIFT (Stop, Investigate, Find, Trace) method to evaluate digital sources.

Essential Question: How can you verify a claim in 60 seconds or less?

Warm-Up (5 mins): A friend shares a shocking article. What is your first instinct? What should it be? Discuss as a class.

Direct Instruction (15 mins): Introduce the SIFT poster (page 3). Model “Lateral Reading” (opening new tabs to check what others say about the source) vs. “Vertical Reading” (staying on the page and trusting what it says about itself). Walk through one example of SIFT applied to a real claim.

Core Activity (20 mins): Students practice using SIFT on the 3 sample websites provided on the “SIFT Checkpoint Worksheet” (pages 12–15). They complete one worksheet entry per website.

Closure (5 mins): Which step of SIFT do you think people skip the most? Why?

Headline Analysis Activity — Part 1

Instructions: Read each headline below. Based on the emotional language and sensationalism, decide whether the headline is **Likely Real** (factual, measured tone) or **Likely Fake** (exaggerated, impossible claims, or extreme emotional language). Then identify the specific emotional or biased words that influenced your decision. Remember: emotional language alone does not prove a headline is fake, but it is a signal worth investigating further.

Original Headline	Likely Real or Likely Fake?	Emotional / Biased Words You Noticed
SHOCKING New Study Reveals Chocolate Cures All Illnesses!		
Local Mayor Destroys Town Budget in Reckless Spending Spree		
You Won't BELIEVE What Scientists Found on Mars!		
City Council Approves New Funding for Public Library		
Breaking: Politician Caught in Massive Scandal—The Worst in History!		

Discussion prompt: Which headline was hardest to classify? What additional information would you need to be more confident in your judgment?

Fact-Check Lab Worksheet

Instructions: Use professional fact-checking websites (Snopes.com, PolitiFact.com, FactCheck.org) to verify each of the four claims below. For each claim, record: (1) which fact-checking site you used, (2) the verdict, and (3) one piece of evidence the fact-checker cited. The answer key is on page 17.

Claim 1: Vaccines cause autism.

Fact-checking site used:	
Verdict (True / False / Mixed / Unproven):	
Evidence cited by the fact-checker (1–2 sentences):	

Claim 2: Humans only use 10% of their brains.

Fact-checking site used:	
Verdict (True / False / Mixed / Unproven):	
Evidence cited by the fact-checker (1–2 sentences):	

Claim 3: A penny dropped from the top of the Empire State Building can kill a person on the sidewalk below.

Fact-checking site used:	
Verdict (True / False / Mixed / Unproven):	
Evidence cited by the fact-checker (1–2 sentences):	

Claim 4: Cracking your knuckles causes arthritis.

Fact-checking site used:	
Verdict (True / False / Mixed / Unproven):	
Evidence cited by the fact-checker (1–2 sentences):	

Media Detective Project Rubric

Score each of the four categories using the 4-point scale below. The total possible score is 16 points. A scoring guide for converting points to grades appears below the rubric.

Category	4 — Exemplary	3 — Proficient	2 — Developing	1 — Emerging
SIFT Application	Expertly applies all 4 steps of SIFT; lateral reading is evident and thorough.	Applies most SIFT steps; investigation is somewhat thorough but misses minor details.	Attempts to apply SIFT but relies on vertical reading; investigation is surface-level.	Does not use SIFT method; claims are unsupported.
Evidence of Fact-Checking	Uses multiple reliable fact-checking sites and credible news outlets to verify claims.	Uses at least one fact-checking site or outside source to verify claims.	Attempts to fact-check but uses unreliable or biased sources.	No evidence of fact-checking; verdict is based on personal opinion.
Tracing Context	Successfully traces the claim to its original context, identifying specific manipulations.	Traces back to a source but misses the specific manipulation or context shift.	Attempts to trace back but gets lost or cannot find the original source.	Makes no attempt to trace the claim to its origin.
Final Verdict & Presentation	Verdict is logically sound and clearly justified with evidence. Presentation is professional.	Verdict is logical and mostly justified. Presentation is clear.	Verdict is stated but justification is weak or lacks evidence.	Verdict is missing or entirely contradicted by the evidence presented.

Scoring Guide

Add the four category scores for a total out of 16 points. Convert to a percentage and letter grade using the table below.

Total Points (out of 16)	Percentage	Letter Grade	Performance Level
15–16	94–100%	A	Exemplary — ready to teach others
13–14	81–93%	B	Proficient — solid skills demonstrated
11–12	69–80%	C	Developing — skills emerging, needs practice
8–10	50–68%	D	Emerging — significant gaps; re-teach recommended
Below 8	Below 50%	F	Insufficient — project incomplete or off-task

What's Inside This PREMIUM UNIT

Media Literacy & Fake News Detection • Grades 6–12

#	Component	What Teachers & Students Get	Pages
1	SIFT Strategy Poster	A printable classroom poster outlining the 4 moves to fact-check any claim (Stop, Investigate, Find, Trace).	3
2	Media Bias Spectrum Chart	A visual reference showing how left, lean-left, center, lean-right, and right outlets frame the same story.	4
3	8 Complete Lesson Plans	Full 45–60 minute lesson plans with objectives, essential questions, warm-ups, direct instruction, core activities, and closures.	5–8
4	Headline Analysis Activity	Part 1: Sort real vs. fake headlines. Part 2: Rewrite clickbait into neutral headlines. Includes full teacher answer key.	9–11
5	SIFT Checkpoint Worksheet	Guided student practice applying all 4 SIFT moves to 3 sample websites. Includes teacher answer key with verdicts.	12–15
6	Fact-Check Lab Worksheet	Students verify 4 real-world claims using Snopes, PolitiFact, and FactCheck.org. Includes a detailed answer key.	16–17
7	Media Detective Project Template	A step-by-step student investigation template covering all 4 SIFT steps and a final verdict with evidence.	18–19
8	Project Rubric & Scoring Guide	A 4-criteria, 4-point rubric (16 points total) with a grade conversion table for easy grading.	20