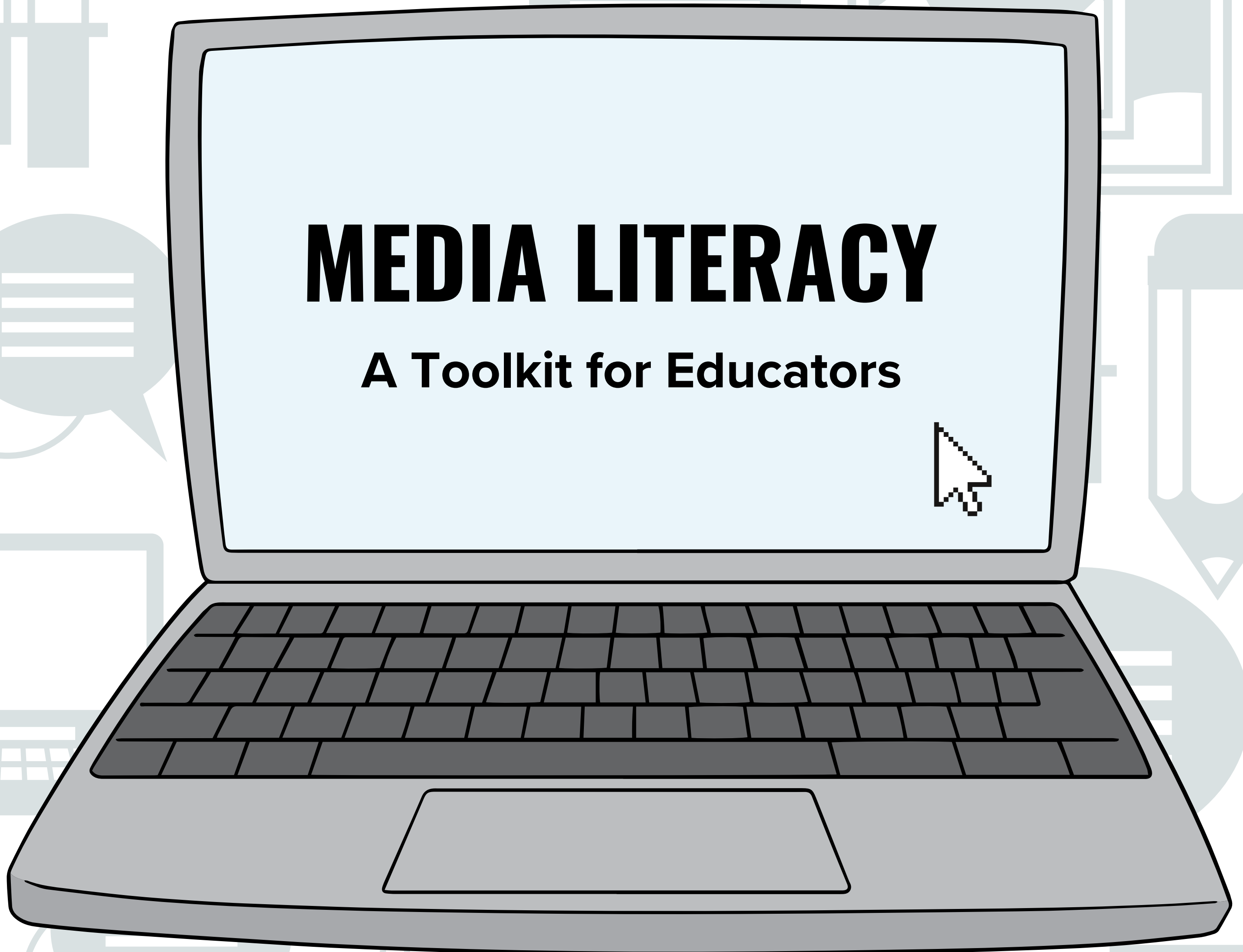


January 2025



Homeland Security
and Emergency Services

About This Toolkit

This toolkit serves as a primer for educators in New York State looking to introduce their students to the concepts of media literacy. It is organized into five sections:

- Overview of the 21st century media landscape
- Introduction to media literacy
- Key questions for analyzing, evaluating, and using media
- Importance of media literacy
- Educator tools/resources

It is the first of a series of resources on media literacy that the New York State Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Services (DHSES) intends to produce. Future products will include age-appropriate, audience-specific materials for educators, parents, and students. **If you are interested in receiving more information on media literacy, or have any related questions/comments, please contact us at:**



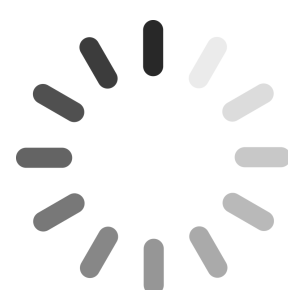
MediaLiteracy@dhses.ny.gov

Who Is This Toolkit Designed For?

We created this toolkit with educators in mind. Educators play a critical role in the effort to grow the next generation of resilient, informed digital citizens. This toolkit provides a series of multi-media resources to support educators as they explore incorporating media literacy into their districts, schools, and/or classrooms. It includes lesson plans, activities, and professional development opportunities, among other tools, for all grade levels.

Why Are We Involved?

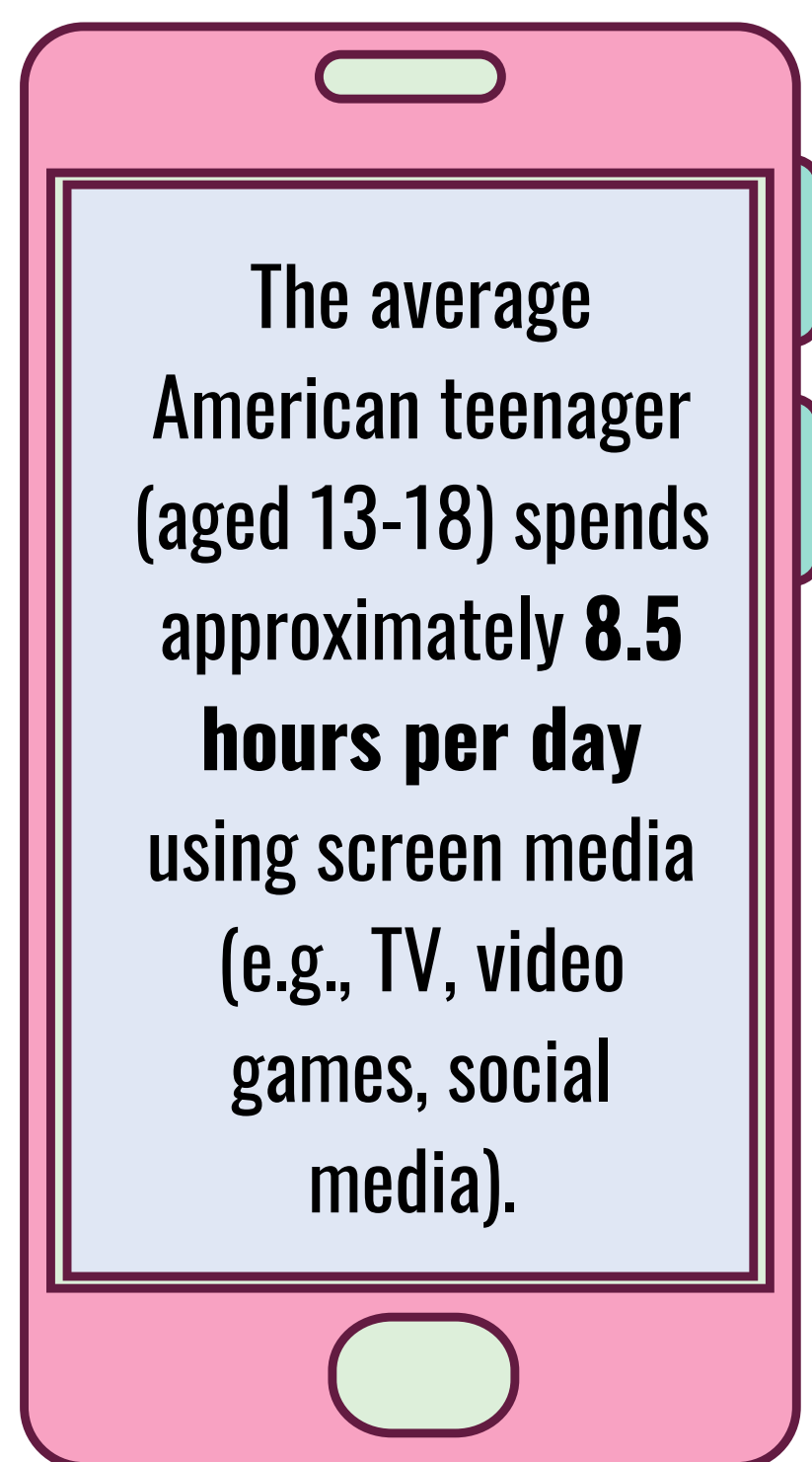
When it comes to media literacy, everyone has a role to play. Our goal is to empower students to think critically about the media they consume in order to protect the next generation from the potential adverse effects of today's (mis)information environment. Media literacy education reaches far beyond the classroom and primes students to become more active, discerning members of civic society. Ultimately, DHSES views media literacy as an investment in the future of American democracy.



Media in the 21st Century

What comes to mind when you think of the word media? Perhaps the news, your favorite TV show, or a book? What about a Facebook post, a picture on Instagram, or a Tweet? Memes, infographics, or advertisements?

Media refers to all channels of communication, be it to inform, entertain, or communicate.¹ In other words, it is any way in which data is distributed to an audience. And whether it's browsing the local newspaper or reposting videos on TikTok, media plays a pivotal role in our everyday lives. It molds our very culture and identity, impacting our thoughts, attitudes, and behaviors – for better or for worse.



As a society, we are spending more time interacting with media, particularly online. With the advent of the Internet and smartphones, media is more accessible now than ever. Statistics show that **American teens are spending upwards of a third of their day online.**² While having the world at your fingertips can be both educational and exciting, it also poses new challenges and risks.

Today, consumers are bombarded with overwhelming amounts of information, often with blurred lines between fact, fiction, and opinion. Scholars refer to this phenomenon as “information disorder,” a term that encompasses the various categories of **misinformation, disinformation, and malinformation (MDM)** that pollute our media landscape.³ Examples of MDM include conspiracy theories, propaganda, and hyper-partisan content.⁴ Modern technology and the proliferation of social media has not only made MDM more potent, but more difficult to identify. On a global scale, we are witnessing the increased weaponization of information, which has major implications for American democracy.⁵

In response, experts suggest a revitalization of how we approach literacy. **One piece of the puzzle: media literacy.** While traditional literacy refers to the ability to read and write, media literacy is literacy of the modern age. It recognizes the need to protect the next generation from the potential negative effects of media, enabling students to become active participants in today's digital society, rather than passive consumers.

In this effort, educators play a fundamental role. By incorporating elements of media literacy into schools across New York State, educators can help their students become wiser, more responsible digital citizens, preparing them for lifetime of healthy media consumption.

Misinformation is false, but not created/shared with ill intent.

Disinformation is created with the intention to mislead, harm, or manipulate.

Malinformation is based in fact, but used out of context to mislead or harm.

Source: [Center for Prevention Programs and Partnerships](#)

What is Media Literacy?

Media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication, from the printed word to the Internet.⁶

More broadly, media literacy is an interdisciplinary approach to navigating the complexities of the 21st century information environment. Over the last twenty years, the way we read, write, learn, understand, and communicate has completely transformed. Today, the classification and transmission of media is far more complex, requiring the development of a broader set of literacy skills that enable us to both understand the messages we receive, as well as effectively create and disseminate our own.⁷ **At its core, media literacy:**⁸

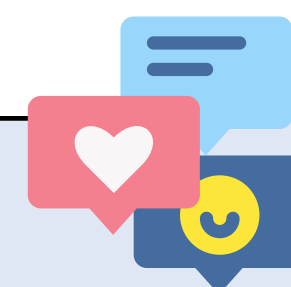
- ◆ **Encourages** curious, open-minded inquiry, while emphasizing reason, logic, and evidence.
- ◆ **Emphasizes** critical thinking skills while evaluating all types of content.
- ◆ **Strengthens** the ability to evaluate the credibility of information from multiple sources.
- ◆ **Promotes** recognition of the media's influence on beliefs, attitudes, values, behaviors, and the democratic process.

Media literacy is the fundamental ability to critically consume and create information. It empowers students to play an active role in their media experiences, maintaining a critical sense of autonomy in a world of influence.

Further, media literacy is about facilitating a conversation about the media we interact with every day. Ask questions. Reflect on your answers. Challenge your own bias. It is about opening the floor to discussion and encouraging the exchange of different thoughts, ideas, and opinions.

The purpose of media literacy education is not to teach people what to think. It is designed to facilitate an understanding of media and its role, as well as develop the skillset necessary to become “*critical thinkers, thoughtful and effective communicators, and informed and responsible members of society.*”¹⁰

Did You Know?



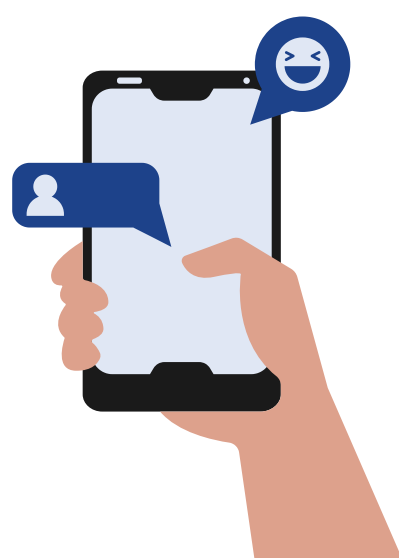
While many perceive younger generations as inherently more “media savvy” than others, research proves otherwise. Between 2015 and 2016, the Stanford History Education Group evaluated student ability to judge the credibility of online information. The study found:⁹

- **More than 80%** of middle school students could not differentiate between a news story and an advertisement.
- **More than 80%** of high school students could not effectively distinguish between legitimate and dubious sources of information.
- **Nearly 70%** of undergraduate students could not effectively explain how the political agendas of different organizations might influence the content of tweets.

Key Questions for Media Literacy

To begin your media literacy journey, review the graphic below, derived from the Center for Media Literacy.¹¹ It encompasses the core questions and their respective concepts that students might explore while evaluating all types of content, whether it's a journal article or a meme on social media. When answering each question, remember to challenge your own assumptions. Ask yourself: *What is my evidence?* and *Why do I think that?*

Key Questions	Key Concepts
Authorship	
Who created this message?	All media is created by authors who have particular goals and interests.
Format	
What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?	Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.
Audience	
How might different people understand this message differently than me?	Different people experience the same media message differently.
Content	
What information, attitudes, or points of view are represented in, or omitted from, this message?	Media has embedded values. Evaluating the different perspectives and evidence helps to determine reliability.
Purpose	
Why is this message being sent?	Some media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power; others seek to inform or educate.



Why is Media Literacy Important?

Over the last decade, American society has experienced a dangerous shift known as **Truth Decay**. According to the RAND Corporation, Truth Decay encompasses four interrelated trends:¹²

- ◆ **Increasing disagreement** about facts and data
- ◆ **Blurring lines** between fact and opinion
- ◆ **Increasing volume and influence** of opinion over fact
- ◆ **Declining trust** in formerly respected sources of factual information

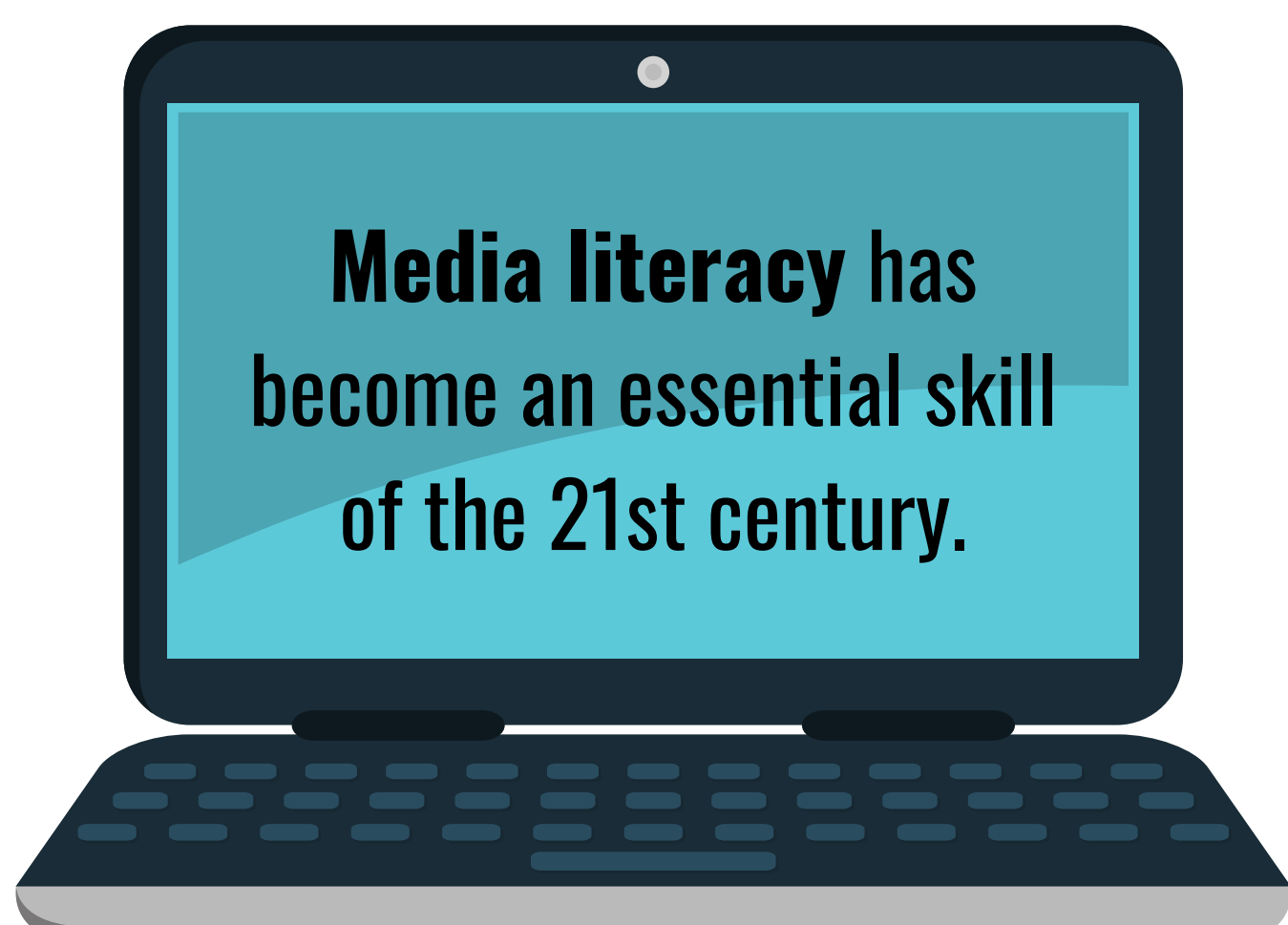
Put simply, the truth is losing its value – and rapidly. Part of this change can be attributed to the transformation of the information system.¹⁴ Thanks to social media, not only does information travel faster, but it has invited millions of users to chime in on the latest news, causing opinion to overwhelm fact. Further, social media algorithms can amplify MDM.¹⁵ Algorithms are designed to boost user engagement, selecting which messages we see based on previous interests. This can facilitate an environment of divisive, inflammatory, and/or inaccurate content, as well as create a media echo chamber, in which users only consume a singular point of view.¹⁶ As individuals thoughtlessly consume, share, and create content, they inadvertently provide the algorithm with data on what type of content they like, regardless of whether it is true or trustworthy.

MDM can have major real-world consequences. In times of disaster, MDM can cause confusion, waste resources, and risk lives.¹⁷ Social media technologies are critical tools for emergency management, with public safety professionals increasingly relying on them to provide timely information to citizens during crisis.¹⁸ However, the rapid spread of MDM can impede first responders' ability to communicate critical instructions, as well as conduct rescue and relief operations.¹⁹ Similarly, MDM can also inspire people to commit deadly acts of violence. Social media platforms and the Internet are increasingly being used to radicalize and mobilize people to violent extremism, likely due to the greater circulation and visibility of conspiracy theories, hate speech, and other extremist rhetoric.²⁰ Finally, MDM presents a grave threat to the health of American democracy. Much of the democratic process relies on the validity of facts and data. Should the truth lose its value, it may cause the continued deterioration of healthy civil discourse, heightened political polarization, and erosion of faith in civic institutions.²¹

Did You Know?



According to a 2018 MIT analysis of Twitter (X) data, falsehoods diffused “*farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly*” than the truth, by almost every known metric. Overall, mis- and disinformation were approximately **70% more likely** to be retweeted than the truth.¹³



As a result, media literacy has become an essential skill of the 21st century. Although there is no perfect solution for defeating MDM, media literacy education offers a long-term strategy for increasing individual and societal resilience to its adverse impacts. By encouraging students to strengthen their critical thinking skills while engaging with media, we can reduce the likelihood that the next generation will fall victim to the pitfalls of today's information environment. In doing so, we are not only building wiser digital citizens, but investing in the strength of civic society.

Getting Started: Media Literacy Tools/Resources

Provided below is a list of multimedia tools/resources for educators on media literacy, including lesson plans, online courses, games, activities, exercises, and more. These resources are an excellent starting point for educators to begin incorporating the fundamentals of media literacy into classrooms. Topics include the classification of different media types, investigating source reliability, identification of MDM, good media hygiene, and online safety. Content ranges across all grade levels, from kindergarten to undergraduate students. All resources are free unless otherwise stated.

Resource	Description
<p>NewseumED: Fact Finder: Your Foolproof Guide to Media Literacy Other NewseumED Resources</p>	<p>Newseum’s <i>Fact Finder</i> encompasses 11 interactive, multi-media lesson plans designed to introduce students to the core concepts of media literacy. Topics include how to identify and define different types of online content; how to detect bias in news stories; and how to implement effective search strategies.</p> <p>Audience: Grades 6 - 12, College/University</p>
<p>KQED Teach: Evaluating Online Sources: Checking Facts & Identifying Misinformation Analyzing Media Messages: Bias, Motivation, & Production Choices</p>	<p>KQED Teach offers free, self-paced online courses, including interactive videos and activities, on building media literacy skills. These courses provide K-12 educators the necessary skillset to teach students to determine the reliability of sources and critically evaluate media messages.</p> <p>Audience: Grades K - 12</p>
<p>Common Sense: Digital Citizenship Curriculum Other Common Sense Resources</p>	<p>Common Sense’s digital citizenship curriculum is a series of interactive lessons and activities encouraging students to take ownership of their digital lives. Topics include news and media literacy; media balance and well-being; and cyberbullying, digital drama, and hate speech.</p> <p>Audience: Grades K - 12</p>
<p>Cyber Civics: Level 1: Digital Citizenship Level 2: Information Literacy Level 3: Media Literacy for Positive Participation</p>	<p>Cyber Civics offers a series of lessons and activities designed to prepare students to be ethical, safe, and productive digital citizens. It includes three levels of weekly, 50-minute lessons on digital citizenship, information literacy, and media literacy. <u>This resource requires a subscription.</u></p> <p>Audience: Grades 7 - 8</p>

Resource	Description
<p>News Literacy Project: Checkology Resource Library</p>	<p><i>Checkology</i> is an e-learning platform that empowers students to safely navigate the current information landscape. It consists of multiple lessons that cover topics like news media bias, misinformation, and conspiratorial thinking. The <i>Resource Library</i> is a repository of other classroom resources, to include lesson plans, activities, posters, infographics, quizzes, and more.</p> <p>Audience: Grades 4 - 12</p>
<p>University of Cambridge Social Decision-Making Lab Bad News Harmony Square Cat Park</p>	<p><i>Bad News</i>, <i>Harmony Square</i>, and <i>Cat Park</i> are interactive media literacy games in which players use common manipulation techniques to dupe the public. By stepping into the shoes of the “bad guy,” players learn the necessary skills to identify and reject mis/disinformation.</p> <p>Audience: Grades 7 - 12</p>
<p>Media Smarts: USE, UNDERSTAND, & ENGAGE: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools Grades K -3 Grades 4 - 6 Grades 7 - 8 Grades 9 - 12</p>	<p>Media Smarts provides a framework for studying digital media literacy, consisting of a repository of resources and lesson plans for educators on all things digital media literacy. It draws on nine framework topics of digital media literacy, including reading media, media representation, media health, and finding and verifying.</p> <p>Audience: Grades K - 12</p>
<p>CRTL-F: Digital Media Literacy Resources</p>	<p>CRTL-F provides a repository of resources designed to improve student digital literacy skills. Altogether, the lessons, videos, and workshops consist of approximately 7 hours of material.</p> <p>Audience: Grades 7 - 12</p>
<p>Project Look Sharp: Lessons & Kits</p>	<p>Project Look Sharp provides a repository of more than 500 free lessons and kits encompassing a variety of topics pertaining to media literacy, at all different grade levels.</p> <p>Audience: Grades K - 12, College/University</p>

Resource	Description
<p>Digital Inquiry Group: Civic Online Reasoning Curriculum</p>	<p>Civic Online Reasoning provides free access to a series of lessons, assessments, and collections on how to effectively search for, evaluate, and verify social and political information online.</p> <p>Audience: Grades 7 - 12</p>
<p>Crash Course: Media Literacy</p>	<p>Crash Course’s Media Literacy web series is a 12-episode introduction to media literacy and how to become more media savvy. By the end of the course, students should be able to describe what media literacy is, understand the impact of media on audiences, and be able to critically create media.</p> <p>Audience: Grades 7 - 12</p>
<p>BrainPOP: Digital Citizenship</p>	<p>BrainPOP’s Digital Citizenship curriculum consists of 20 topics on how to build and strengthen critical thinking and literacy skills every student needs in today’s online environment. Topics include media literacy, online safety, digital etiquette, and more. <u>This resource requires a subscription.</u></p> <p>Audience: Grades K - 8</p>
<p>Center for News Literacy: Digital Resource Center</p>	<p>The Digital Resource Center offers a collection of resources on news literacy, which is updated daily with new material. Materials include sample syllabi, tests, ready-to-use lectures, and weekly class lesson plans. Additionally, the center offers a full library of classroom videos demonstrating how others use the material.</p> <p>Audience: Grades 6 - 12</p>
<p>PBS Learning Media: News and Media Literacy</p>	<p>PBS Learning Media provides a collection of resources that helps students identify, analyze, and investigate online news and information. It includes videos, blog articles, student handouts, lesson plans, and tip sheets for families, and covers topics ranging from fact-checking to safely navigating the web.</p> <p>Audience: Grades 6 - 12</p>

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