



**FAKE
INVADERS**

[HIT ME TO START]

**Fake & Real
a Webinar Series on
Propaganda and Fake News**

Online | 10 November to 01 December 2021

CONCEPT NOTE



EuroClio
Inspiring History
and Citizenship Education

Why this topic? Why now?

One of the grand challenges for today's societies

In 2017, BBC launched a special series on the [grand challenges we face in the 21st Century](#). In this series, a panel of experts was asked to indicate what they believed were the biggest obstacles faced or to be faced by modern societies. Many of them mentioned “the breakdown of trusted sources of information”¹ as one of the most urgent challenges. They argued that, while the need to figure out which source of information is reliable has been constant throughout history, what magnifies the size of this challenge today is the sheer amount of available information, as well as how people access it. To this we should add the fact that, as Kevin Kelly (co-founder of Wired magazine and tech author) said to BBC in the 2017 series: “Truth is no longer dictated by authorities, but is networked by peers. For every fact there is a counter fact. All those counter facts and facts look identical online, which is confusing to most people”. And even when mistakes are spotted, “corrections do not spread very well” (Paul Resnick, University of Michigan).

This can be said for a variety of topics, including history, current affairs, or sensitive and controversial issues. Today, it is no longer only a matter of who is ‘right’ and who is ‘wrong’. It is first and foremost a matter of what is ‘fake’ and what is ‘real’².

This very question is all the most relevant for our pupils, who may arrive at school with preconceived ideas about history that have little root in research, but were gathered on social media, by watching videos or on ‘disputable’ websites, which our students might accept at face value.

Discerning facts from fiction

In the past few years, multiple studies have analysed (secondary school) students’ approach to information, highlighting how students “have difficulty discerning fact from fiction”³, lacking the tools and competences to evaluate how reliable is information found online. Among these studies, the Stanford History Education Group & Gibson Consulting report on “Students’ Civic Online Reasoning” of 2019⁴ asked a sample of more than 3400 students in the United States to evaluate various types of information, assessing (among other things) the credibility of the sources (p.10). The study did not go well. In fact, fewer than 3% of the students completed all six tasks successfully (p.14).

At the same time, in Europe:

- Two thirds of EU citizens report coming across fake news at least once a week.⁵
- Over 80% of EU citizens say they see fake news both as an issue for their country and for democracy in general⁶.

¹ <https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20170301-lies-propaganda-and-fake-news-a-grand-challenge-of-our-age>

² Andrea Mork, in Mork, A. and Ryan, T. (Eds) (2020), Fake (F)or Real, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2020, pp. 11-19

³ Stanford Graduate School for Education, via <https://news.stanford.edu/2019/11/18/high-school-students-unequipped-spot-fake-news/>

⁴ Breakstone, J., Smith, M., Wineburg, S., Rapaport, A., Carle, J., Garland, M., & Saavedra, A. (2019). Students’ civic online reasoning: A national portrait. Stanford History Education Group & Gibson Consulting. <https://purl.stanford.edu/gf151tb4868>

⁵ Flash Eurobarometer 464, 2018

⁶ Ibid.

- Half of EU citizens aged 15-30 say they need critical thinking and information skills to help them combat fake news and extremism in society⁷

So, what can we do to tackle these uninspiring results? How can we equip our students with tools that help them navigate the ever-growing stream of (fake) news? How can we prepare them to be savviest consumers of news⁸, more resilient to the effects of propaganda, and active citizens in the democratic space?

Luckily, there are many resources and methodologies out there that can help us develop lesson plans that foster media literacy and critical thinking⁹. During this webinar series, we will present some that we and the members of our community have tried, discussing with you their positive aspects, as well as potential pitfalls.

Key Questions

During this webinar series, we will tackle the following questions:

- How do we define fake news and propaganda, and how can we best understand their effect on our pupils?
- What tools can we give our students to help them navigate the stream of information they are constantly exposed to?
- How facts, techniques and emotions may be blended in different media to manipulate the reader?

The House of European History

This training is developed in collaboration with the House of European History.

The House of European History is a forum for learning, reflection and debate, open to audiences from all generations and backgrounds. Its primary mission is to enhance understanding of European history in all its complexity, to encourage the exchange of ideas and to question assumptions.

The House presents Europe's history in a way that raises awareness about the multiplicity of perspectives and interpretations. It preserves shared and dividing memories. It exhibits and collects the history of European integration and its foundations. Being a project of the European Parliament and part of its visitor offer, the House of European History is academically independent.

During the webinar series, participants will have the possibility to get to know the educational programme of the House of European History linked to the Permanent and Temporary exhibition “Fake (F)or Real”.

⁷ Flash Eurobarometer 455, 2018

⁸ <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2019-12-27-fighting-fake-news-in-the-classroom>

⁹ Chris Link, who oversees the development and implementation of educational products and services for the Global STEM Alliance at the New York Academy of Sciences, lists some in this article on EdSurge: <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2019-12-27-fighting-fake-news-in-the-classroom>.

Fake (F)or Real: a History of Forgery and Falsification

Temporary Exhibition until 30.01.2022

In the routine of daily life, the sensational, spectacular and supernatural are sweet seduction. They allow us to escape the ordinary. But the game of deception is only fun when we have agreed to it. When we are deliberately deceived, we are on the losing side in many regards, losing our money, credibility, integrity or even our existence.

While the current quantity of (dis)information is unprecedented, the problem is an ancient one. History is filled with countless examples of fake masquerading as real. The Trojan Horse, a mythological archetype of deception, symbolically links ancient history to very contemporary problems of the internet-dominated world.

From the lessons of the past, a roadmap can be pieced together: one that lets us wander into the realm of the fantastical and fabricated when we want to, while providing an exit strategy for when we are ready to return to reality.

During the webinar series, a workshop will allow participants to get to know more about the intentions behind falsifications throughout history. They will be initiated to ready-to-use exercises to successfully teach Media Literacy to students aged 12 to 18. They will be invited to play a Forgery Quiz hosted by the famous forger, Han Van Meegeren, and Explore, Practise & Reflect on disinformation and on Snap Judgement. Along with the Fake (F)or Real exhibition, this workshop aims to raise awareness about how facts, techniques and emotions may be blended to influence our worldviews, in the past and present.

The design of the webinar series

The webinar series will begin with a keynote lecture dedicated to defining fake news, propaganda, the relationship between the two. During the keynote, we will also discuss what is the impact of fake news on students, and how we as educators can equip them with the tools necessary to navigate and evaluate the information they are exposed to.

The keynote will help us set the tone for the remaining sessions, and will be followed by two active workshops. In the first workshop, we will discuss how media content can be purposefully developed to manipulate the reader, and how we can help students spot manipulation and become resilient to it. In the second workshop, we will focus on how to help students deconstruct (historical) examples of propaganda, how it works, and what is its effect on society.

The webinar series will conclude with a fourth session, during which participants will have the possibility to discuss their own approaches to propaganda and fake news in the classroom. The fourth session will include also an official, festive, closing in the form of an educational game.

Aims of the webinar series

- To engage in a dialogue about Fake-News, Propaganda, and their impact on (history) education.
- To give a historical perspective to the notion of Fake in Europe.
- To share educational initiatives and equip teachers with ready-to-use material and methodologies which contribute in teaching media literacy and promoting students' critical thinking
- To equip students with tools to help them navigate the stream of information they are constantly exposed to, become more resilient to the effects of propaganda, and grow into active citizens in the democratic space
- To exchange innovative tools, methods, and professional knowledge with other educators in Europe and beyond
- To introduce history and citizenship educators to the educational material developed by the House of European History, as well as available on Historiana.eu

Expected outcomes

- Increased dialogue about the Fake News and Propaganda within the European community of history, heritage, and citizenship educators
- Increased understanding of how are Fake News created and spread
- Access to innovative history education tools with a focus on promoting critical thinking and media literacy
- Recognition of developed competences in history education through lifelong learning in the international context
- Dissemination of Educational Materials developed by EuroClio, its partners, and the House of European History
- Improved (English) language competence through facilitated and engaged dialogues

References

To prepare this Concept Note, we have used the following online sources:

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