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Alien Babies and Angelina Jolie:

Evaluating Sources Using Tabloids with a Taste of News Literacy

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NUTRITION INFORMATION

The following activity is meant to demonstrate the concepts of authorship and authority to first-year writing students. Students will use their prior knowledge and everyday experiences with subpar information and/or misinformation to draw parallels between evaluating academic, news, and popular sources.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

- Students will be able to define evaluation criteria for evaluating information.
- Students will be able to clarify the terminology we use when evaluating information and discuss what they mean/ why they're important.
- Students will activate their prior knowledge to critically and metacognitively develop strategies for evaluating information that can be applied in multiple contexts and for various information needs.
- Students will be able to apply evaluation criteria to their information need.
- Students will differentiate between popular sources and news sources.
- Students will be able to transfer their knowledge about evaluating popular and news sources to evaluating academic sources and vice versa.

COOKING TIME

50–60 minutes

NUMBER SERVED

10–40 students

DIETARY GUIDELINES

Authority is Constructed and Contextual (*Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*)

This constructivist recipe helps activate students' prior knowledge about concepts of authority and credibility in a low-stakes context with which they have familiarity and requires them to think intentionally and metacognitively about evaluating information in ways that are transferable to more complex and nuanced contexts. It could form the foundation for further scaffolded, student-driven critical examination of authority within other information needs and situations, both academic and personal.

INGREDIENTS AND EQUIPMENT

- Digital scans of print sources to use during discussion (optional)
- Whiteboard with markers
- "Evaluating Information" handout. Consider using one of the following:

- ◇ Paul-Elder Universal Intellectual Standards (<https://www.criticalthinking.org/pages/universal-intellectual-standards/527>)
- ◇ *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education* (http://www.ala.org/acrl/sites/ala.org.acrl/files/content/issues/infolit/Framework_ILHE.pdf)
- ◇ CRAPP (http://pauluslibrary.weebly.com/uploads/6/1/1/6/6116739/crapp_test.pdf)

PREPARATION

Gather several print drugstore checkout-line tabloids, such as *Star Magazine*, *OK Magazine*, *The Sun*, or *In Touch Weekly*. You may also consider curating a list of articles from online tabloids, such as *Weekly World News*, *National Enquirer*, or *The Globe*.

COOKING METHOD

1. Introduction: We all instinctively know that tabloids are not good sources of information; in fact, we laugh about how crazy they are when we see them in the checkout line or even online.
2. Group think-pair-share: Look through the tabloids you have in front of you and identify three specific reasons that we find them laughable, non-credible, and untrustworthy. Be as specific as possible.

- a. Give students time to work in small groups/pairs (5–7 minutes).
 - b. Ask groups/pairs to share their reasons why their article is non-credible or untrustworthy.
 - c. As students to talk, then record answers on the board.
3. Group think-pair-share: Imagine you're your favorite celebrity and you saw an article like this written about you.
 - a. How would you refute erroneous gossip that is published about you?
 - Responses like: Find other articles that contradict the gossip.
 - b. What journalistic guidelines would you want in place and why?
 4. Discussion to chew on: So, what makes information “good?” Alternatively, what makes news “good?”
 - a. As students talk, map answers to the board—bad information versus evaluation criteria.
 - b. Point out that students have good instincts—they know a “bad source” when they see it, and their criteria maps to criteria by “professionals.”
 - As groups share, consider mapping student answers to your library's evaluation criteria, *Framework for Information Literacy for Higher Education*, and/or the discipline/dept.'s criteria (e.g., the CRAPP principles).
 - Pass out the “Evaluating Information” handout and compare student responses to the criteria by “professionals.”
 - Discuss how the things they identified could be applied to any information source.

- c. Ask, “Why is it important to think critically about sources, especially in current times?”

ALLERGY WARNING

- Some answers may veer off topic; be prepared to steer the conversation back to what matters.
- Students are thrown by the sometimes shocking and outrageous articles found in *Weekly World News*. The authors recommend the facilitator find fun and lighthearted material to evaluate but not so much that it distracts participants.
- Examples:
 - ◇ Good: “Millions of Stingrays Wash Ashore”
 - ◇ Bad: “Leprechauns Attack!”
- Depending on your goals for the session and the type of discussion you wish to elicit, you may choose to use articles that have to do with politics, or you may wish to avoid politics altogether because of the potential for conversations to become heated. If political articles are used, do so intentionally and carefully, and proceed with caution.

CHEF'S NOTES

This lesson is a revision of a standard evaluating information session. It has been revamped to include material that students/participants come across every day. Using popular sources to introduce criteria for evaluating information is an easy way to get students to understand that you can evaluate research in the same way you would

evaluate the material you come across every day. Consider using headlines/articles found/shared on social media and comparing how one would evaluate those materials to how one might evaluate an article from a scholarly journal or news publication.