Reading skills practice: The rise of fake news – exercises

What is fake news? Why is it so hard to disprove? Who creates it, and why? Read this article to find out.

Preparation

Match the vocabulary with the correct definition and write a–h next to the numbers 1–8.

1……..	a liar	a.	not factually correct or true
2……..	false	b.	something which appears to be true or real but actuallyisn't; it is intended to confuse or deceive people
3……..	a conspiracy theory	c.	a person who tells lies
4……..	to claim	d.	a lie, or an incorrect or untrue statement
5……..	fake	e.	a belief that a particular situation or event has been secretly planned and organised by powerful people toserve their own interests
6……..	to denounce something	f.	to say something which is real or correct
7……..	a falsehood	g.	to state that something is true, often without providing any evidence to support the statement
8……..	to tell the truth	h.	to state strongly and publicly that something is incorrect

LIVEWORKSHEETS



In December 2016 Edgar M. Welch drove six hours from his home to Washington DC, where he opened fire in a pizzeria with an assault rifle. He had previously read an online news story about the restaurant being the headquarters of a group of child abusers run by Hillary Clinton. He decided to investigate for himself; fortunately, no one was hurt.

The story about Hillary Clinton is one of the most famous examples of the growing phenomenon dubbed 'fake news'. The conspiracy theory about the pizzeria began to appear on websites and social networks in late October, before the US election. This was quickly denounced by publications such as *The New York Times* and *The Washington Post*. However, many people thought that these papers were themselves lying for political ends and instead of disappearing, the fake story snowballed. Tweets from 'Representative Steven Smith of the 15th District of Georgia' claimed that the mainstream media were telling falsehoods. Even though both this name and district were invented, the message was re-tweeted many times. A YouTube refutation of the *New York Times* article got 250,000 hits.

Fake news stories can be hard to control for several reasons. Many people mistrust established news sources and others just don't read them, so the debunking of a fake story by a serious newspaper or TV channel has limited effect. In addition, the internet is very hard to police. When users are caught misusing one media platform, they simply go to another one or start up a website themselves.

There are also various reasons why people create fake news. Some have political motives, to belittle or incriminate their opponents. Other websites, like The Onion, deliberately publish fake news as satire – humorous comment on society and current affairs. Another group is in it for the profit: many people clicking on entertaining fake news stories can bring in a lot of advertising revenue. One man running fake news sites from Los Angeles said he was making up to US$ 30,000 a month in this way. There are also those, like the small-town teenagers in Macedonia who wrote fake news stories about Donald Trump, who seem to be motivated partly by money and partly by boredom.

So, what can we do to stop fake news spreading? First, make sure that the websites you read are legitimate, for example by looking carefully at the domain name and the About Us section. Check the sources of any quotes or figures given in the story. Remember that amazing stories about famous people will be covered by the mainstream media if they are true. Only share stories you know are true and let your friends know, tactfully, when they unknowingly share fake news. Together we can turn around the post-truth world!

LIVEWORKSHEETS

1. Check your understanding: matching

Match the headings with the correct paragraph and write a–f next to the numbers 1–6.

1……..	Paragraph 1	a.	Why fake news is hard to stop
2……..	Paragraph 2	b.	How we can try and control fake news
3……..	Paragraph 3	c.	Motives for creating fake news
4……..	Paragraph 4	d.	The financial rewards of fake news
5……..	Paragraph 5	e.	An example of a fake news story
6……..	Not used	f.	How a fake news story can grow

2. Check your understanding: multiple choice

Circle the best answer to these questions.

1. Why did Elgar Welch go to the pizzeria?
   a. He was trying to commit robbery.
   b. He hated all supporters of Hillary Clinton.
   c. He was working as a private investigator and investigating a crime.
   d. He had become concerned after reading an untrue news story.
2. Why did many people not believe *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times* when they denounced the pizzeria story?
   a. They checked the facts and found that the articles were incorrect.
   b. They didn't trust anybody.
   c. They thought the newspapers had a political agenda.
   d. They thought the newspapers had not researched the story carefully enough.
3. Who is Steven Smith?
   a. a local politician from Georgia
   b. a journalist on *The New York Times*
   c. a member of the US House of Representatives
   d. a fictitious person, created to attack the media
4. Which reason for the difficulty of controlling fake news stories is not given in the article?
   a. Many people don't read the mainstream media.
   b. Online media platforms don't check stories before publishing them.
   c. People are sceptical of the mainstream media.
   d. Fake news stories can easily switch to other websites and platforms if caught.
5. Which type of motivation for the creation of fake news is not given?
   a. It's a way of making money from people who pay to read the stories.
   b. It's a way of commenting on current affairs.
   c. It's a way of attacking your political opponents.
   d. It's a form of entertainment.

LIVEWORKSHEETS

6. How does the author feel about stopping fake news spreading?

a. cautiously optimistic
b. doubtful
c. positive
d. pessimistic

3. Check your vocabulary: gap fill

Complete the sentences with a word or phrase from the box.

claimed	conspiracy theories	denounces	liar
truth	falsehood	false	fake

1. I know you're lying to me. Just tell me the_____!
2. Let's play a game. I tell you a fact and you have to tell me whether it's true or_____.
3. After John F Kennedy's assassination, there were lots of_____about who killed him and why.
4. Many people prefer to wear_____fur instead of clothes made from real animal fur.
5. The newspaper article is of great importance. It_____human rights abuses all overthe world.
6. She accused him of telling a_____.
7. I swear that's the truth! Are you saying I'm a_____?
8. The website_____that the government has been lying to us, but it didn't presentmuch real evidence.

Discussion
Where do you get your news from?
Do you follow mainstream news media?Do
you think fake news is a problem?

LIVEWORKSHEETS