

## **Project Plan - Conspiracy Theories and Critical Thinking**

### **CLASS DESCRIPTION:**

The Grade 7 classroom we were in consisted of 23 students: 10 females, and 13 males. There were multiple students in the class with designations, and students who struggled with different outputs. The class was very diverse, and very engaging. They are an energetic and passionate group of students, and were always polite and welcoming. The sense of community in the classroom is well developed, and very impressive.

### **PROJECT PLAN RATIONALE:**

- The reasoning behind our project plan was two fold. First we wanted to work with the objective of fostering the students' critical thinking skills, and to give them the opportunity to use these skills to dissect events and theories in the media for themselves. Second, we wanted to engage the students in a subject matter that they had a hand in choosing, and could be excited about learning. This topic was picked by the class through a brainstorming activity. Students were asked to suggest topics to the Teacher Candidates who wrote them on the board. The classroom teacher then picked five of the topics the students had suggested, and from those five chosen, the class voted. Conspiracy theories was the overwhelming winner, with every student but two voting for it in a blind vote.

### **PROJECT PLAN OBJECTIVE:**

- The objective behind this unit was to foster critical thinking skills, and tools that the students could use, and to enhance their ability to critically look at subject matter.

### **RESOURCE CRITIQUE:**

The main critique for the resources for this topic was that it was difficult to find things that were age and school appropriate. We had to ensure that students used safe searches when they used the class laptops, and to do so, we had to make sure they only searched through their school's library website. This was hard to police in this class because they were very much engrossed with the topic, and wanted to use the same resources that they had access to at home. We were unable to find any books, or articles through the school, or UBC library to help the students look at their conspiracy theories, as the information in all of them only had to do with the historical facts surrounding the theories. Having to limit their access to resources made it difficult for us to truly have them test their ability to find reliable resources (something important in critical thinking), as the resources they were directed to eliminated the vast majority of unreliable resources from their searches. However, due to the nature of the topic, and the inappropriate content that come with it, it was a necessary adaptation to make to ensure everything stayed school friendly.

## **LESSON PLANS:**

### **Pre-Lesson Lesson**

How to be Literate in A Fake News Era

**SUBJECT COURSE:** Socials Studies (Grade 7)

**Time Allotment:** 40 mins

**Learning Intention:** I can look at media sources critically and can determine if they are fake news or real news.

#### **BC Ed Core Competencies:**

Critical Thinking, Personal Awareness and Responsibility, Social Responsibility, Communication

#### **BC Ed Curricular Competencies:**

I can access the credibility of multiple sources and the adequacy of evidence used to justify conclusions (evidence)

#### **MATERIALS:**

- Ipads/laptops
- Technology (website link on board) - screen shots
- House Hippo video (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBfi8OEz0rA>)
- Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus website (<http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/>)
- Article Print-outs w/ space for thoughts (PDF file - will need printing/photocopying)

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY AND/OR ASSIGNMENT:**

1. Start with a hook: House Hippo Video and/or Octopus website
2. Discussion questions to lead into concept (explained below) - 15mins
3. Explore the concept of critical thinking. Pose questions as to what critical thinking is. Where we use it. Why is it important? Should we believe everything we see and hear? What does it mean to think critically?
4. Define critical thinking. (Brainstorm?) - Mindmap on board
5. Activity: 5 different topics of fake/real news/partially biased (?) - 15mins
6. Split class into 4 to 5 groups (depending on size), distribute topic/articles. Answer following questions; Is it fake or not? Why? Evidence?
7. Bring the class back to the sharing circle - share answers/observations/etc.

## 8. Debrief activity (10mins)

### **ENACTED LEARNING**

- In groups students will look at the stories given to them to determine whether they are real news or fake news.
- They will be able to enact the steps we described to them in the lesson, such as looking for other articles on the topic, checking sources to see if they are reliable, and looking for aspects of the story that seem iffy.
- During the lesson we will also discuss, and brainstorm why looking at what we read critically is important, and tie things to current events. We also will brainstorm and discuss what can happen when we believe things that aren't real news, and the consequences that can have.

### **FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT:**

- Good discussion during debrief
- Active teamwork during activity
- How activity process is applicable to their own daily lives
- Understanding the “how” and “why” = after effect of the lesson - “What next?” ideas. Discussion of why thinking critically of what we hear and are told is important.
- Listening to student's responses during the debrief of why they thought their news was fake or real. We will look for aspects of critical thinking, and research they were able to do.
- Possible tool for formative assessment: Exit slip (one thing they learned from the activity and lesson)

### **RESOURCES:**

- House Hippo (False advertisement):  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NBfi8OEz0rA>
- Pacific Northwest Octopus: <http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/>
- BC Ed Curricular Competencies: Grade 7 Social Studies:  
<https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/curriculum/social-studies/7>
- BC Ed Core Competencies: <https://curriculum.gov.bc.ca/competencies>
- Assortment of News Articles: (for activity)

- NHL Warns Hockey Fans:  
<http://www.theonion.com/article/nhl-warns-hockey-fans-banging-glass-scares-players-57112>
- Donkey Owners:  
<http://www.torontosun.com/2017/09/28/donkey-owners-ordered-to-pony-up-for-chomped-sports-car>
- Disneyland Comes to Squamish:  
<http://dailyhive.com/vancouver/disney-ski-resort-squamish-vancouver-canada>
- H2-No!:  
<http://nypost.com/2017/09/21/gatorade-banned-and-fined-300k-for-bad-mouthing-water/>

## **Lesson Plan 1a and 1b**

### Introduction to Conspiracy Theories and Create Your Own Conspiracy Theory

**SUBJECT COURSE:** Socials Studies (Grade 7)

**Time Allotment:** 40 mins

#### **Learning Intention:**

To help students to understand what a conspiracy theory is, and why it is a conspiracy theory, and not a fact. To help students identify critical thinking tools that will allow them to look at conspiracy theories critically.

#### **BC Ed Core Competencies:**

Critical thinking, Communication, Personal Awareness and Social Responsibility, Creative thinking

#### **BC Ed Curricular Competencies:**

Big Ideas: Religious and cultural ideas that emerged during this period have endured and continue to influence people.

Curricular Competencies: Perspective, Evidence, Significance

#### **Learning Standards in Student Language (I can):**

I can define what a conspiracy theory is. I can identify which critical thinking tools will help me explain if something is a conspiracy theory vs. a fact.

#### **MATERIALS:**

- Poster board in the shape of a tool box
- Black Sharpie
- Example of a make your own conspiracy theory
- Work sheet with scenario

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY AND/OR ASSIGNMENT:**

- Reintroduce the idea of critical thinking ... Have them go into small groups and ask them what tools of critical thinking they can come up with. Give the groups a few minutes to do so, and then come back together, and have a representative from each group give an example of a tool in turn, until we have filled our tool box. **(10 min)**

- Introduce our topic of conspiracy theories. Define it to the class: noun  
-a theory that explains an event as being the result of a plot by a covert group or organization; a belief that a particular unexplained event was caused by such a group.
- After we define it ask them if they like the definition, or think that things should be added or taken out.
- Pick out the components of a conspiracy theory, and make them known on the board
  - Explains an event that is largely unexplained, or somewhat questioned
  - Offers us a different version of events, or reason for the event taking place
  - Result of a covert group or operation
  - Goes against what people commonly believe.
  - Might have some backing in fact, but has holes in its story, or requires people to deny certain accepted facts for it to be true. **(10 min)**
- Describe the activity to students. **(5 min)**
- Students work in pairs (allow them to pick).
- They need to read the simple scenario on their sheet, and come up with a conspiracy theory to explain what happened.
- Give them an example of a possible conspiracy theory for a different scenario.
- Remind them to remain appropriate, and to think outside the box.
- Give students **15 minutes** to work on them, and then collect them. If we have time or it is needed, allow them to share outwardly with their tables.

### **ENACTED LEARNING:**

Stimulating a recount of what they remember from our previous lesson helps students to revisit ideas and the purpose of our fake news' activity, would segway into our lesson theme on conspiracy theories. In discussing the definition of what makes up a conspiracy theory and making the tool kit, we will be connecting relevant, day to day things, that the students use and experience. Students have to take the concept of conspiracy theories, and apply them to a real life scenario for themselves. This allows them to see how conspiracy theories can develop.

**FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT:**

We are looking for students to be able to come up with tools for the toolkit. This will be an illustration that they remember and can identify the uses of the tools we talked about in our previous lessons. We will also be looking for students to be able to connect conspiracy theories to critical thinking, and for them to demonstrate critical thinking while we look at examples.

We are looking for the components of a conspiracy theory in their stories. We are trying to identify that they understand the concept, and if they do not, what aspect of the concept are not being picked up. The tool for this assessment is the worksheet the groups fill in with their new conspiracy theory.

**RESOURCES:**

- Critical Thinking Toolkit



## **SSINQ Lesson Plan 2**

### The Mandela Effect, and Its Effects on Memory

**SUBJECT COURSE:** Socials Studies (Grade 7)

**Time Allotment:** 40 mins

**Learning Intention:** To have students understand that false memory can be an group phenomena. To have students connect the concept of memory, and false memory to the development of conspiracy theories.

**BC Ed Core Competencies:** Critical Thinking, Communication

**BC Ed Curricular Competencies:** Perspective, Evidence, Significance

**Learning Standards in Student Language (I can):**

I can identify examples of false memory. I can understand how false memory can affect Conspiracy Theories.

#### **MATERIALS:**

- Mandela Effect Quiz

#### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY AND/OR ASSIGNMENT:**

- Describe the Mandela Effect and false memory (**5 min**)
- Hand out and do the Quiz (have students do it by themselves and do it quietly) (**5 min**)
- Read out Answers
- Ask students how they did, revealing that there really are no wrong answers, because if you got it wrong you are part of the vast majority of people. (**5 min**)
- Think pair share about what the Mandela Effect shows us about memory. Report back to the group ideas that they came up with in their think pair share. Discuss how the Mandala Effect shows us that our memory, or the memory of others is not always reliable. If we think something is true, and so do many others it can become reality for us. (**10 min**)
- Do a psychological discussion of the Mandela Effect, explaining it to students on that level. (**5 min**)

- Tie it back to Conspiracy theories and why it is important. As the students for their ideas, and reveal extras if they don't identify everything. **(10 min)**

### **ENACTED LEARNING:**

When doing the Mandela Effect quiz, students will get to see the Mandela Effect's effect on themselves.

### **FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT:**

We are looking for examples of the understanding of the pliability of memory when students share out, and also for understandings of how the misremembering seen in the Mandela Effect can relate back to Conspiracy theories. This will be looked for through group, and class discussion.

### **RESOURCES:**

- Can you pass this Mandela Effect Quiz?:  
[https://www.buzzfeed.com/christopherhudspeth/can-you-pass-this-mandela-effect-memory-test?utm\\_term=.ydQLazMOX#.ivngKArDJ](https://www.buzzfeed.com/christopherhudspeth/can-you-pass-this-mandela-effect-memory-test?utm_term=.ydQLazMOX#.ivngKArDJ)
- <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/09/20/are-you-living-in-an-alternate-reality-welcome-to-the-wacky-world/>



**KIT-KAT**

**OR**

**KIT KAT**



**LOONEY TOONS**

**OR**

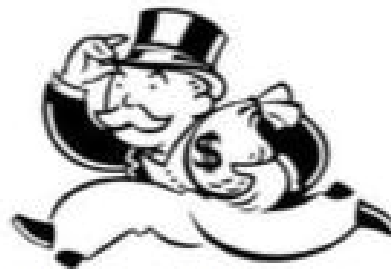
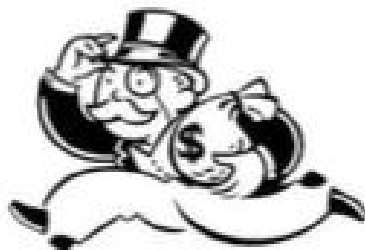
**LOONEY TUNES**



**COCA-COLA**

**OR**

**COCA COLA**



**WHICH MONOPOLY MAN IS RIGHT?**

Febreze. Febreeze.

FEBREZE

OR

FEBREEZE



WHICH PIKACHU IS RIGHT?



BERENSTAIN BEARS OR

BERENSTEIN BEARS



FROOT LOOPS

OR



FRUIT LOOPS

## **Lesson Plan 3 & 4**

Why is this a Conspiracy Theory Intro and Group Work Time

**SUBJECT COURSE:** Socials Studies (Grade 7)

**Time Allotment:** 80 mins (40 minutes in two blocks)

**Learning Intention:** To enhance students' abilities to critically think and use appropriate sources.

**BC Ed Core Competencies:** Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Communication

**BC Ed Curricular Competencies:**

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to — ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Identify what the creators of accounts, narratives, maps, or texts have determined is significant (significance)
- Assess the credibility of multiple sources and the adequacy of evidence used to justify conclusions
- Explain different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, or events, and compare the values, worldviews, and beliefs of human cultures and societies in different times and places (perspective)

**Learning Standards in Student Language (I can):**

I can identify critical thinking tools and use these tools to determine the validity of sources and information.

**MATERIALS:**

- iPads
- Poster Paper
- Art Supplies
- Digital / Powerpoint / etc.

**DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY AND/OR ASSIGNMENT:**

- Recap what we learned last week. What makes a conspiracy theory. Consider the points written on the toolkit.

- Describe the activity. Outline the criteria, and ideas for presenting information. Let them know they will be presenting on these. Make sure they are aware how much time they have to work on the activity (rest of the class as well as the afternoon)
- Talk about resources they can use. Use the laptop to show them how to access acceptable sites. Make sure to note that YouTube is not to be used.
- Briefly describe each topic.
- Place the students into their groups, and give them their topic.
- Let them get to work.

### **ENACTED LEARNING:**

Students will get to delve into specific conspiracy theories, and use their critical thinking tools to examine why these versions of events are theories, and not accepted fact.

### **FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT:**

- Looking for good recall of tools, and concepts we discussed last week, when we do our review.
- Tool: Use popsicle sticks to give all students an equal chance to answer questions.
- Look for engagement and examples of critical thinking during group activity work.
- Tool: We will walk around the class, as they work, and discuss their findings, and presentations with each group.

### **RESOURCES:**

- Cougar Canyon News Sites for Kids:  
<https://deltalearns.ca/cclibrary/news-sites-for-kids/>
- Cougar Canyon Library Research Links:  
<https://deltalearns.ca/cclibrary/research-links/>

## **Lesson Plan 5 and 6**

Why is this a Conspiracy Theory Class Presentations and Wrap Up

**SUBJECT COURSE:** Socials Studies (Grade 7)

**Time Allotment:** 80 min (40 minutes in two periods)

### **Learning Intention:**

I can learn from my peers and actively participate in giving constructive feedback. I can use my critical thinking skills to research, and present information in a creative and engaging way.

**BC Ed Core Competencies:** Critical Thinking, Creative Thinking, Communication

### **BC Ed Curricular Competencies:**

- Use Social Studies inquiry processes and skills to — ask questions; gather, interpret, and analyze ideas; and communicate findings and decisions
- Identify what the creators of accounts, narratives, maps, or texts have determined is significant (significance)
- Assess the credibility of multiple sources and the adequacy of evidence used to justify conclusions
- Explain different perspectives on past or present people, places, issues, or events, and compare the values, worldviews, and beliefs of human cultures and societies in different times and places (perspective)

### **MATERIALS:**

- Two Stars and a Wish Sheets
- Presentation Assessment Sheets

### **DESCRIPTION OF ACTIVITY AND/OR ASSIGNMENT:**

- For the first twenty minutes of class, students will wrap up their assignments, and get ready for their presentations. **(20 mins)**
- Students will present on their topics (give students the choice of presenting order, if not then will be administered by chance) **(45 mins)**
- Time for questions and wrap up. Discuss the importance of critical thinking, and how that helped us looking at conspiracy theories. Where will this be useful in our everyday lives? **(15mins)**

### **ENACTED LEARNING:**

- Students will have to apply the critical thinking skills we have discussed in class (can review points made in toolkit) to their own conspiracy theories. Students have to act as experts in educating the rest of the class about their theories. We will bring the subject and purpose of it back to how it is applicable to everyday life, in our final discussion.

### **FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT:**

- **Exit Slip:** Reflect and give us an example of how you used critical thinking to look at conspiracy theories and how you can apply it to your own lives. In the exit slips, we will be looking for examples of the tools we discussed in class, and their applications. We will also look for an understanding of the concept of critical thinking as a whole, and how it is a useful skill to develop.
- **Presentation Assessment Sheet:** We will look for an understanding of the concept of their assigned conspiracy theories in their presentations. They will be assessed on how well they meet the criteria given to them the previous week.

### **RESOURCES:**

<b>GROUP ____</b>	<b>TWO STARS AND A WISH</b>
<b>STAR</b>	
<b>STAR</b>	
<b>WISH</b>	

<b>GROUP ____</b>	<b>TWO STARS AND A WISH</b>
<b>STAR</b>	
<b>STAR</b>	
<b>WISH</b>	

**PRESENTATION ASSESSMENT**

**GROUP :** \_\_\_\_\_

**ASSESSED BY:** \_\_\_\_\_

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>Comments</b>
Tell us the accepted factual belief.		
Tell us one or more conspiracy theories that offer an alternative explanation.		
Explain how this theory meets the definition of a conspiracy theory.		
Use critical thinking skills to show us why it is a theory, and not an accepted fact.		
Create a bibliography		
Additional Comments		

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