



Digital Literacies:
Pacific Northwest Tree Octopus
Lesson Plan



Aim: *Students analyse and learn about spoof websites.*

Evaluating the reliability of online information is a key part of information literacy. This activity asks students to analyse a number of spoof versus authentic websites, and shows them how focusing on content, layout and style can provide clues to the veracity or otherwise of websites.

Literacy: Information literacy

Topic: Endangered animals (and others)

Aim: To raise awareness of the importance of evaluating the veracity, reliability and source of information on websites, by visiting a number of spoof websites

Level: Intermediate +

Time: 60 minutes

Procedure

1. Show students an image of an octopus and elicit what they know about it as a species. Tell students they are going to learn about one particularly endangered species of octopus – the Pacific Northwest tree octopus. Try to do this as seriously as possible, to get students to believe that this species really exists.
2. Ask students in pairs to visit the Pacific Northwest tree octopus site (<http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus>), and to find the answers to section 1 in the worksheet (below). If students don't have access to computers, you could print out the home page of the website, and give it to each pair. Alternatively, if you have one computer in the classroom, you can show the website homepage, giving students time in their pairs to read and note down the information they find. Give feedback on the questions, and check that everybody found the same information.
3. Ask students whether they think the Pacific Northwest tree octopus really exists. Even if they have realised that the site is a spoof (explain this word), ask students to carefully analyse what makes this site convincing at first. Ask them to discuss the questions in part 2 of the worksheet for this.
4. In feedback on this activity, highlight for learners how some elements on this website make it more credible (such as links to real websites, or the images and layout), while there are also carefully laid clues that show it to be a spoof. The overall objective of the site is to make people laugh by seeming credible. It doesn't try to completely fool the reader, or to get the reader to donate money for example.

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5. Divide your students into pairs and allocate each pair a number from 1 to 7 (if you have more than 14 students, simply have more than one pair looking at the same sites). Tell students that in pairs they are going to visit two websites on one topic: one of the sites is real, and the other is a spoof. Can they spot which is which? Give each pair their two sites' names and web addresses - either send students to the online worksheet including the site URLs (high-tech version), or put each pair's two website URL on a card and hand them out (low-tech version). If you have no access to computers, give students print-outs of the homepages of their allocated sites. Students should use the checklist in section 2 of the worksheet to analyse each of their allocated sites:

Pair 1: Chemistry

Dihydrogen Monoxide Research Division <http://www.dhmo.org/>
Carbon Monoxide <http://www.carbonmonoxidekills.com/>

Pair 2: Birth and genetics

Genochoice <http://www.genochoice.com/>
Gender Prediction Kits http://www.babyzone.com/pregnancy/fetal_development/genetics_gender/article/gender-prediction-kits

Pair 3: Food

The Ova Prima Foundation <http://www.ovaprima.org/>
NZ Nutrition Foundation <http://www.nutritionfoundation.org.nz/nutrition-facts/nutrition-a-z/Eggs>

Pair 4: Water

Dehydrated Water <http://www.buydehydratedwater.com/>
International Water Association <http://www.iwahq.org/1nb/home.html>

Pair 5: Endangered animals

Save the Guinea Worm <http://www.deadlysins.com/guineaworm/index.htm>
Endangered species: Vaquita <http://www.worldwildlife.org/species/finder/vaquita/vaquita.html>

Pair 6: Cloning

Clones <http://www.d-b.net/dti/>
Cloning Fact Sheet http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/elsi/cloning.shtml

Pair 7: Museums

The Museum of Jurassic Technology <http://www.mjt.org/>
The Virtual Museum of Bacteria <http://bacteriamuseum.org/cms/>

Note: The first of each site above is the spoof site, but some of them are very convincing.

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6. Get feedback from each pair on their two sites. If you have a computer and projector, show each of the sites, as the pairs tell the class how they decided which was the spoof site, and which was real. Point out to learners that none of these websites intend to exploit or defraud the reader - but there are some that do, so it's important to know how to evaluate a website for veracity.

Worksheet
PART 1

The Pacific Northwest tree octopus

Visit a website about the endangered Pacific Northwest tree octopus (<http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus>) to find out more about it. Make notes in the grid below:

Geographical location	
Habitat	
Average size	
Use of tentacles	
Usual skin colour	
Reproductive cycle	
Predators	
Other tree octopus species	
Choose one way you can help save the species	



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Worksheet
PART 2

The website

Look carefully at the Northwest Pacific tree octopus site. It is a good example of a spoof site that is very well put together. Look especially at the following elements, and discuss with your partner how they make the site more or less convincing:

Style & Layout:

- the web address (or 'URL' - 'uniform resource locator')
- the title of the homepage
- the layout, font and colours
- the images and map
- the use of hyperlinks
- links to other research
- the style of the language and vocabulary used

Content:

- content in the tabs (the sections under the title, e.g. FAQs - Frequently Asked Questions; Sightings; Media; Activities)
- the 'scientific' information on the homepage
- content in the News and Blog entries (in the column on the left)
- links to the webpages of organisations such as the World Conservation Union, the World Wildlife Fund, and the UNEP World Conservation Monitoring Centre (all in the last paragraph on the homepage)
- the quotes in the top right corner of the homepage

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