CRISIS & CONSPIRACIES

Child-led learning resource
ABOUT

This activity helps you to think about why people believe conspiracy theories and how they spread.

You will be able to explore interesting questions like:

- What is a conspiracy theory?
- How do conspiracy theories spread?
- Who is responsible for stopping the spread of conspiracy theories?

You can give this a go on your own, but if there’s someone at home who can join you, why not work together? You could also connect with someone by telephone or video.

We'll practise some critical-thinking skills which are important for understanding and discussing the news.

Ready? Let's go!
News doesn’t always come from newspapers or television. Where else can you get your news from?

• Which one would you trust the most?
• Which would you trust the least?
• How do you know when you can trust a conversation about the news?

For more information about spotting untrustworthy news, look here: bit.ly/trustworthy-news
What is a conspiracy theory?

A conspiracy theory is when someone falsely believes that a particular group of people are hiding the truth about how an event happened. For example, that the government lied and people didn’t really land on the moon.

When conspiracy theories are spread, they become fake news.

• What problems could conspiracy theories cause?
• How could you tell if something is a conspiracy theory?
What is a *scapegoat*?

A scapegoat is a person or group of people who get the blame for something that they didn’t do. They are often treated unfairly. Scapegoats have been used throughout history. For example, Jewish people have been targeted for centuries. Hitler blamed Jews for, among other things, Germany losing World War One and started a hate campaign against them.

- What problems could making someone a scapegoat cause?
- How could you tell if someone was being used as a scapegoat?

Look back at how the conversations about the news could start. How might a conversation about a conspiracy theory start? How might a conversation that makes someone a scapegoat start?
CONSPIRACIES DURING A CRISIS

Imagine you are a farmer and your sheep keep disappearing from their fields at night.

There is no evidence for what has happened. How would you feel? Try to think of five questions that you would ask to find out what has happened to your sheep.

Now imagine nobody can give you answers to your questions. Nobody is sure what has happened. How would you feel? Would you accept the situation or would you begin to come up with your own ideas about what might have happened? Would you blame someone else?

• How might people feel during a time of crisis?
• Why might this make them more likely to believe a conspiracy theory?
• Why might this make them more likely to look for a scapegoat?
CONSPIRACIES DURING A CRISIS

During a crisis, people are more likely to feel powerless or anxious.

Conspiracy theories and scapegoats are common during times of crisis because they give people answers about why something might be happening.

Having more information (even if it is incorrect) makes people feel safer and more in control.
HOW DO CONSPIRACY THEORIES SPREAD?

Imagine **one person** shares a conspiracy theory **with 20 people**…

Then this pattern happens **three more times**.

How many people do you think would hear about the original conspiracy theory?

a) 10,000  

b) 1,000,000  

c) 3,000,000  

How much would you trust something that you heard from:
- someone you didn’t know well?
- a friend?
- lots of people?

How would people react if a celebrity shared something?
FAKE NEWS

Fake news is news or stories that are intentionally false and have been deliberately shared.
Fake news makes more people believe in conspiracy theories because it spreads false information.

Why might someone share fake news?

• Do people share real news for the same reasons? Why / why not?
• Do people always know when they’re sharing fake news?
• What’s the worst reason for sharing fake news?
• Which reason do you think is the most common?

CHALLENGE: Why might politicians share fake news? Learn more here: bbc.co.uk/newsround/38906931
CORONAVIRUS CONSPIRACY THEORIES

Look at these examples of conspiracy theories that have been spread during the coronavirus pandemic.

A video was shared showing Muslims gathering at a mosque with the story that they had broken lockdown and were spreading coronavirus. Conspiracy theorists thought they were getting special treatment by the police. **The video was old.**

Conspiracy theorists spread the rumour that radio waves from 5G masts caused coronavirus. They thought that the people who owned the masts did it to control everyone. **This is not true.**

Conspiracy theorists spread the rumour that China created coronavirus and spread it on purpose to attack other countries. **This was based on no evidence.**
CORONAVIRUS CONSPIRACY THEORIES

What are the dangers of sharing these conspiracy theories?

• How do these examples show prejudice? How do these examples show racism?
• How does fake news make a person or a group of people a scapegoat?
• How does fake news add power to conspiracy theories?
• What should the consequence be for someone who shares these conspiracy theories?
Social media platforms are under more pressure than ever to stop the spread of fake news or dangerous advice. Look at these examples of what has been done:

A man called David Icke has been banned from several social-media platforms because he spread racist conspiracy theories about coronavirus.

- Was it right that he was banned?
- Are some conspiracy theories worse than others? Why / why not?
SOCIAL MEDIA

Twitter flagged one of Donald Trump’s tweets as “manipulated media” because he shared a video that had been edited so it didn’t tell the truth.

• Was it right that this was flagged?
• Should leaders be held to higher standards for what they share online? Why / why not?
SOCIAL MEDIA

Facebook has put 90 million warning labels on fake news posts about coronavirus.

• Is putting a warning label on fake news enough?
• What else could social-media platforms do?

Who should be held responsible for spreading fake news on social media? The social-media platform, the individuals who share the fake news or someone else?
Super-Reflection

- Do people who spread conspiracy theories always intend to cause harm?
- Is it ever right to restrict what people read on social media and see on the news?
- What could you do to stop the spread of conspiracy theories?
SUPER-REFLECTION

NOW...

Do some research
Find out more about how fake news spreads here: bbc.co.uk/newsround/52537443

Have a discussion
Talk to someone else about the issues covered in these activities

Become the teacher!
See if you can go through these activities again, as the teacher, with somebody else in your household

We’d like to thank StandUp Education for their help with this resource. For more information about conspiracy theories, look here: standupeducation.org/post/the-wembley-stadium-lasagne