



HOW IS INFORMATION CONSTRUCTED?



5

FACT SHEET

WHEN OUR PREJUDICES MAKE US BELIEVE FAKE NEWS

OBJECTIVES OF THE CURRICULUM

DISCIPLINE AND LEVEL CONCERNED

Ethics and Religious Culture
(Elementary 3rd Cycle)

Theme: Members of society

- Content elements: prejudices, generalizations and stereotypes

TARGETED DIMENSIONS OF THE DIGITAL COMPETENCY

- Create content with digital technology;
- Develop and mobilize information literacy;
- Communicate with digital technology.

SUGGESTED DIGITAL TOOLS

- Drawing app such as Paper or Autodesk Sketchbook
- Mind mapping app such as Popplet or Miro.

EDUCATIONAL INTENTION OF THE GUIDE

By the end of these activities, the students will take a critical look at how generalizations, stereotypes and prejudices can affect certain members of society.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITIES

- Produce a sketch note to illustrate the concept of "bubble".
- Create a mind map to think about the causes and effects of prejudice.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: QUESTIONNAIRE

- Ask the students to identify a celebrity they like and admire;
- In a second stage, show the students a true positive news item and a true negative news item about one of these celebrities. The teacher is invited to ask students if they think one of these news items is false.

This section will help students understand that they probably are prejudiced in favour of their favourite celebrity. The opposite exercise, with a celebrity they don't like, would also be interesting. The concepts of favourable and unfavourable prejudices will be explained later in this fact sheet.

This document is a simplified version of the "Confirmation Bias" fact sheet intended for adolescents. Favourable and unfavourable prejudices represent confirmation bias, a significant negative bias in spreading fake news.

DEFINITION: PREJUDICE

Prejudice is a judgment or opinion people form about somebody or something before knowing or obtaining information about that person or thing. Our prejudices influence our attitude and our choices.

Prejudice may be favourable, meaning that our opinion will be positive, despite the absence of information at our disposal. It may also be unfavourable, and we then talk about a negative judgment.

We could also talk about received ideas, biases or preconceptions.

HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO FAKE NEWS?

The human brain is an ultra-sophisticated machine, capable of processing large quantities of information every second. But to do this, it must also take shortcuts. Our brain simplifies the task according to our preferences, values and opinions. Often, this is practical, as when we have to prioritize information for a school project. But sometimes this pushes us to believe news that suits us and

reject news we don't like. So we're less inclined to check if positive news about one of our favourable prejudices is true or false.

Prejudice therefore plays a major role in the spread of fake news. That's because most fake news is designed to be consumed by people who are already favourable to the subject addressed.

In other words, those who create fake news want to make us fall into their trap and mislead us by using our prejudices against us.

Here are some examples:

Catherine is a big fan of Céline Dion:

- She sees a fake news item claiming the singer bought 5, 400 homes for homeless people. Because Catherine is prejudiced in favour of her idol, she won't think of fact-checking this item.
- The next day, Catherine stumbles on a fake article claiming that Céline Dion has never sung live and that she has lip synched for her entire career. Catherine will make an effort to check this claim, because it goes against her favourable prejudice.

For the past five years, Carlos has been involved in environmental causes. In his opinion, no governments are doing enough to save the planet.

- He shares a news item with his friends that turns out to be fake. It claims that the United States is shipping all its waste to James Bay. This news confirms his negative prejudice against governments. So he doesn't check it before passing it on.
- However, Carlos fact-checks a fake news item claiming that hundreds of thousands of climate demonstrators polluted downtown Ottawa during their last rally.

IN THE BUBBLE

Our prejudices don't come out of thin air. We owe some of them to our family and friends. For example, our family has instilled us with its values, as well as its preconceptions. Our friends often share our enthusiasms, cultural preferences, political opinions... and prejudices. This is normal. We like to be surrounded by people who think like us.

But this also puts us in a bubble where everyone prefers the same information and ignores whatever doesn't suit them. It then becomes difficult to have a realistic picture of what's happening around us!

This may seem trivial when everyone likes the same pop star and never sees negative news about that person. But when health or politics is involved, it's important to have accurate information and be aware of news that confirms our prejudices. That news may be false! Even worse, when certain news items encourage violent and xenophobic prejudices (racist, sexist, homophobic), they can be very harmful to the communities concerned.

WHEN THE INTERNET REINFORCES OUR BUBBLE

Social media and online platforms, such as YouTube, TikTok, Instagram or Facebook, know their users very well. Thanks to algorithms that collect data about us (age, origin, favourite subjects, interactions with posts), they can sort videos, posts, photos and ads according to our interests.

If we mainly see posts by our friends and close family, that's because the algorithm knows they're likely to interest us. The algorithm also knows what could offend us, and hides whatever doesn't reflect our values, opinions, beliefs and prejudices.

HOW TO GET AROUND OUR PREJUDICES AND BE BETTER INFORMED

Everyone has prejudices. That's a fact! But when it's time to get informed, it's important to set them aside and have an accurate picture of reality. The good news is that, with a little effort, we can get around our prejudices and be better informed.

Here are some tips:

Be aware of our prejudices

The first tip is simple: we must accept the fact we have prejudices, even if we believe we don't. For example, we can make a short mental list of subjects on which we have a favourable or unfavourable opinion.

Identify the news that angers us... and the news that reassures us

After making a list, it may be interesting to note the subjects of the articles and videos that make us react strongly, as well as those we share systematically without checking them.

Take time to read what we share

Those who create fake news know how to manipulate us. They say exactly what we want to hear, even if it isn't true. Knowing that a large proportion of people share articles without even reading them is the essential starting point to know the facts!

EXERCISES

EXERCISE 1

Draw your bubble

Ask the students to draw their “bubble”, including the people it contains and the information that circulates inside it.

EXERCISE 2

Prejudice

The teacher asks students to explain in their own words why fake news strengthens prejudices.