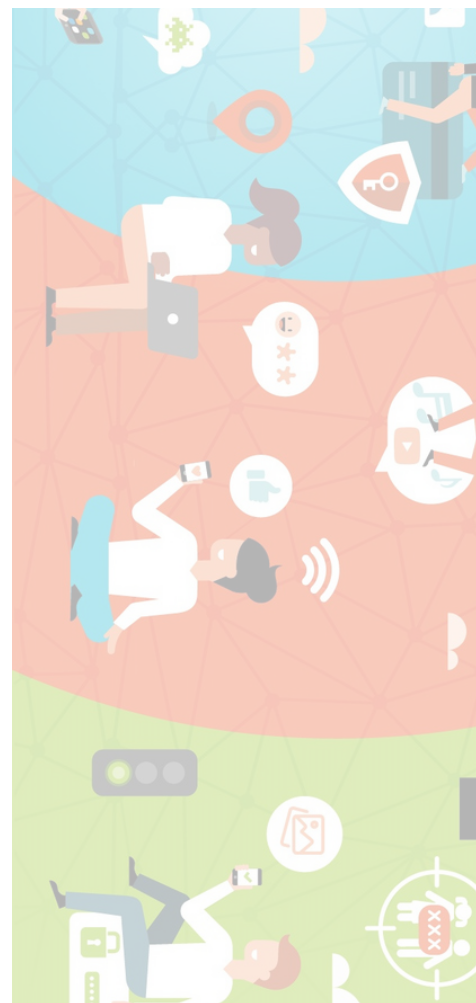


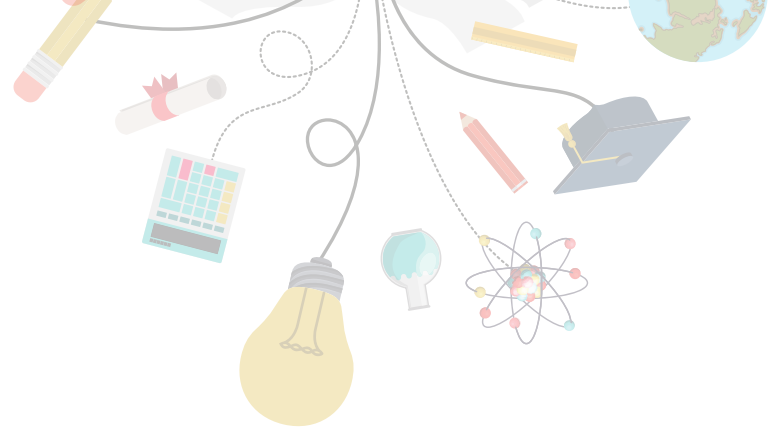
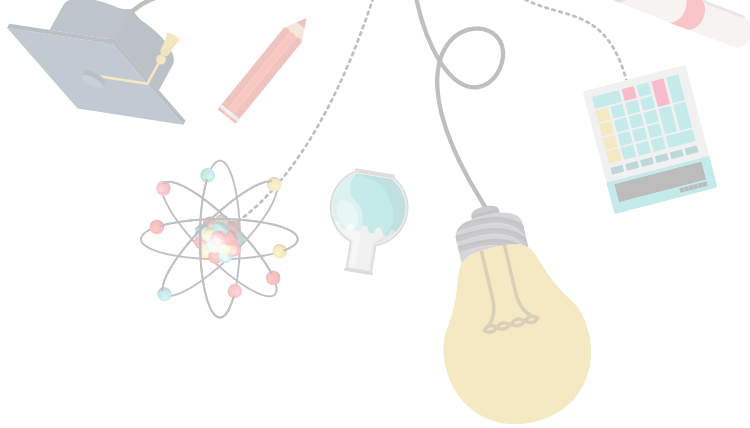
# DISINFORMATION IN A TIME OF CONFLICT



## How do we know what is really going on ?

- In times of war and conflict, disinformation is often the first weapon to be deployed. Constant exposure to disinformation can leave us confused, uncertain about who or what to believe or trust. Uncertainty leads to inaction and compels us to stand aloof at a time when the world most needs our help. Thanks to the speed of the Internet and social media, false and misleading information reaches us faster and more persuasively today than ever before. Therefore, educating young people about role of disinformation in the current world has never been more important.
- This lesson aims to help students understand how disinformation is used in modern warfare through a comparison with the way truth gets manipulated in personal conflicts at school. It looks at different tactics that are used, the motives behind these and the effect they have on those who experience them. This leads naturally into a consideration of how students can recognise disinformation and check for themselves the reliability of the information they see and read.
- The central message of the lesson is that, beyond the mass of confusing information that abounds on the Internet and social media, there is truth, and it is our responsibility to try to find and act on it.





## Learning Outcomes

- Identify types of disinformation used in times of conflict;
- Explain the different motives behind the spread of these types of disinformation;
- Explain the effect of disinformation on those who receive it
- Check the reliability of different sources of information
- Find information they can trust.

## Preparation

Before the lesson you will need to prepare:

1 Five sets of colour-coded discussion cards: red, blue and yellow. (see next page)

2 A recent example of fake news from the Internet or social media. It should contain text, at least one image, a source, a web address, a recent date and a headline. Good examples can be found on fact-checking sites.

DISINFORMATION	TACTICS	EFFECTS
A compilation of real recordings and realistic video game footage, made to look like a livestream of a heavy rocket attack	Pretend to be stronger than they really are	Discourages resistance
A text with pictures of national celebrations from 10 years ago, creating an impression of popular support for the invasion of another country	Pretend to have lots of support	Divides people
Texts accusing an invaded country of starting the conflict that led to it being invaded	Put the blame on the victim	Ignites hatred towards the victims
A video of soldiers helping families in their own country, creating the impression that they are giving humanitarian aid to the families of their enemies	Deny any harm is being done	Reassures people that no harm is being done
Messaging that enemy fighters will be unharmed if they give up their weapons, while at the same time bombing them	Give out contradictory messages	Confuses people
A fake news report that enemy fighters are deliberately targeting their own people in order to put the blame on the other side	Deny responsibility for the harm	Escape responsibility for their crimes



## The Lesson

### Step 1 Teacher Introduction- 5 min

- Start the lesson with the quotation: “In war, truth is first casualty.”
- Write it up for everyone to see and explain what it means – that in wars people tell so many lies and spread so much misleading information trying to get the advantage over their enemies that,
- before long, no one is completely sure who or what to believe any more.
- Tell students that a good way to understand this process is to compare it with the way bullies behave at school.
- Explain that bullies behave the way they do because they want to be in control. It makes them feel ‘big. If you try to take a stand against them, they will feel threatened because you are stealing their power. They will do anything to maintain their power over the situation, and, before long, will start lying and manipulating the truth to protect themselves.



For example, they might:

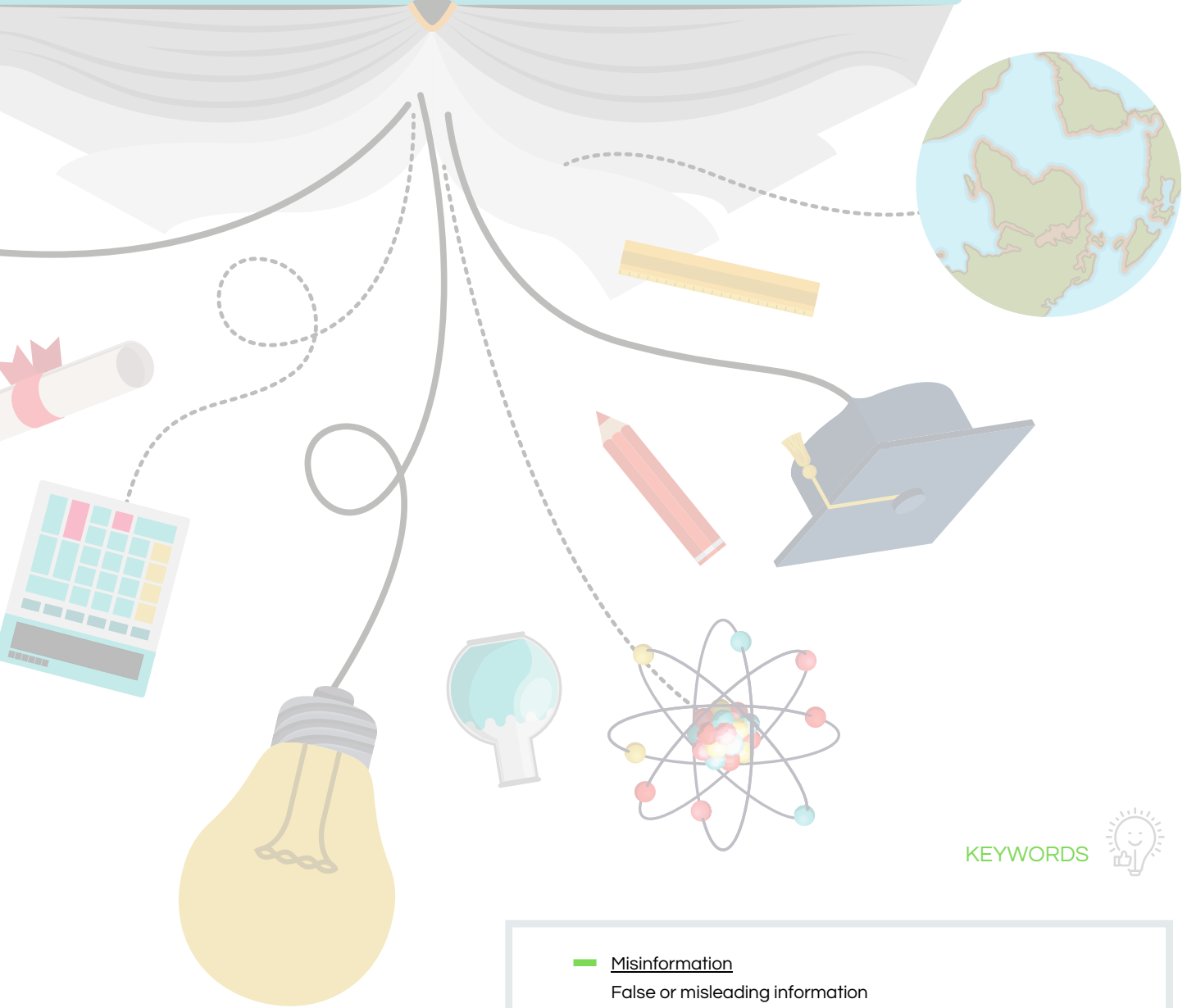
- Pretend to be stronger than they really are, e.g., say they did things they didn't do
- Pretend to have lots of support, e.g., say no one will believe you
- Put the blame on the victim, e.g., say the victim started it
- Deny any harm has been done, e.g., say it is just a bit of fun
- Give out contradictory messages, e.g., say they like you, then in the next breath threaten you
- Deny responsibility for the harm, e.g., say it is someone else that is doing it, not them

And the result? You go along with the lies and don't get involved.

Why? For different reasons ... You might fear what will happen to you. You might give the bully the benefit of the doubt. Or you might just be confused and not know who or what to believe.

and what happens as a result? The bully gets away with it. They keep on bullying. Their bullying gets worse and soon there are more victims.

and all the time you could have done something to stop it!



KEYWORDS



- Misinformation  
False or misleading information
- Disinformation  
False or misleading information intended to cause harm
- Fake news  
News/stories that are deliberately false or misleading



## Step 2 Group Work- 10 min

- Explain that this is what happens in wars. When countries fight for control, one of their main weapons is the truth, and they use exactly the same tactics as bullies in school. It's just that in wars we call the lies disinformation, and countries have access to all kinds of sophisticated technology to help spread their disinformation.
- Tell the students they are now going to do an exercise that will show them some examples of this.
- Divide the students into 5 small groups. Give each group the three sets of colour-coded discussion cards and ask them to put the cards in three separate piles on their table in terms of separate colours. Explain that the objective of the exercise is to match the cards together in rows of three. Each row should contain a red (disinformation), blue (tactic) and yellow (effect) card. The green is the lie, the blue is the technique used, and the pink is the influence it has on people.

## Step 3 Group Presentation- 5 min

- Ask each group in turn to present one of their matches to the class. Each group should present a new match. Briefly discuss any difficulties students experienced in the matching process, or in interpreting the cards.





## Step 4 Teacher Input- 5 min

- Help students to understand that – whether it is war or bullying - behind all the lies and misleading information there is always truth. And we can find it if we try. In fact, we have a responsibility to try to find the truth. If we do nothing and just go along with lies, then we not only let the bullies get away with their crimes, we give them the confidence to think they can get away with worse ones.
- Tell them the good news that there are things they can do to check whether the information is likely to be true or fake. They will find out about some of these in the next exercise.

## Step 5 Group Work- 15 min

- Divide students into small groups and give each group a copy of the Checklist.



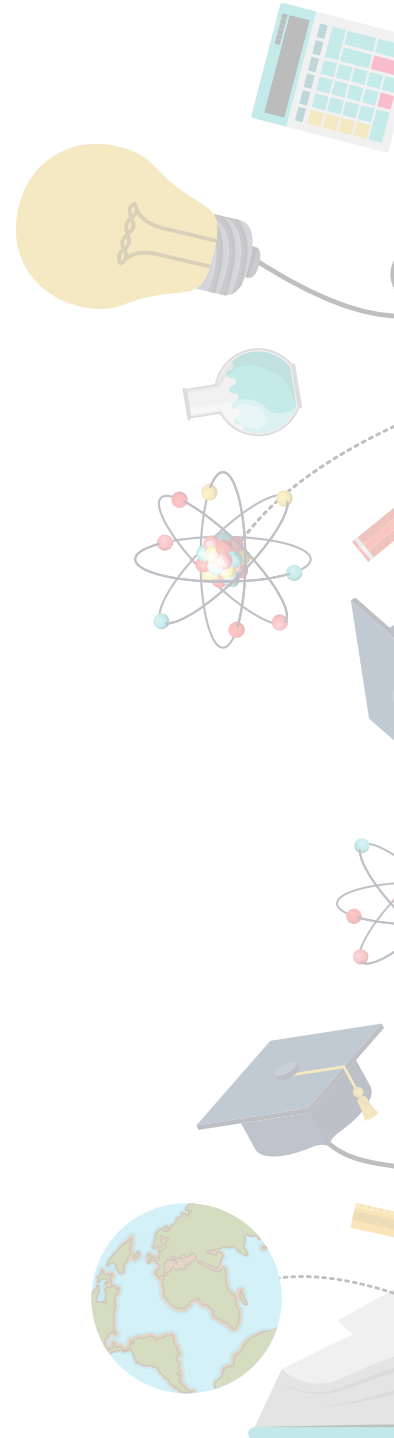
## Checklist

### Do you really know the source of the information?

- Do you know it is a source you can trust?
- Is the Internet address genuine?
- Does the heading fit with the content?
- Is the language, style and grammar legitimate/appropriate and adequate?
- Do the visuals (pictures, videos, graphics) belong to the content?
- Does the content really depict things happening now?
- Is the author clear, and a real person you can trust?
- Can you say that it is not trying to frighten you, or make you feel angry or disgusted?
- Are there facts, or is it just blaming, accusing or mocking someone or something?

Next give each group an example of fake news – without revealing it is fake. Make sure it has all the features described in the Preparation section above.

Explain that their task is to ask themselves the 10 questions in the Checklist about the piece of information they have just been given. For each question they should write the answer YES, NO or DON'T KNOW.





## Step 6 Group Presentations- 5 min

- Ask a representative from each group to share their answers with the class, and anything else they would like to say about the exercise. They have one minute each to do this.

## Step 7 Conclusions and Wrapping-up- 5 min

- Tell students if they answered YES ten times the information would most certainly be true, but if they answered NO or DON'T KNOW twice or more they are most probably dealing with disinformation.
- Explain that learning to ask questions like these is just the beginning. There are other important things they can learn to do to check the truth of information.

### For example:

- Checking to see if the same information appears in other sources
- Asking an expert for their opinion
- Using a fact-checking website, e.g., [fullfact.org](http://fullfact.org)
- Sharing their concerns with someone they trust.

## FOLLOW-UP

While this is intended in the first instance to be a stand-alone lesson, it is recommended that, where possible, it should be followed up with further learning activities designed to reinforce and build on the learning it stimulates – whether in class or at home.

It would be useful, for example, for students to have more practice using the checklist on other examples of fake news. Following this, it would be valuable to have experience using fact-checking websites and considering in more detail who might be regarded as an 'expert' in this situation and the kinds of sources that are generally most reliable.

