



Toolkit for History Classes: Debunking Fake News and Fostering Critical Thinking

Background

Students learn in different contexts. Beyond classrooms and education systems, social media and other contents both offline and online shape their view of the world. These can be easily prone to disinformation, manipulation, fake news and propaganda disguised as objective or factual analysis. It thus becomes crucial that students are equipped to think critically and that they are able to identify red flags related to content presented in such contexts.

What does the Toolkit contain?

The “**Toolkit for history classes: Debunking Fake News and Fostering Critical Thinking**” developed by the [HISTOLAB Joint Project of the European Union and the Council of Europe](#), in cooperation with the University of Murcia consists of 11 activities designed to support secondary history teachers equip students with the skills to evaluate the reliability of historical sources online and offline.

The activities are centered around a few major historical topics such as the boycott of the 1936 Berlin Olympic Games, Brexit, slavery, the Great Purge (Stalin), the Holocaust (including the Roma Holocaust), the Spanish flu, the suffragette movement, wartime propaganda, refugees and migrations. These moments in modern history are supported by historical sources analysed through a multiperspective approach, with the intention to tackle the following topics: narratives fostering war engagement, anti-feminism, blaming the other, antigypsyism, and manipulation in totalitarian states, among others.

The toolkit’s methodology is based on the “[Civic Online Reasoning](#)” and “[Reading like a historian](#)” approaches developed by the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG), now the [Digital Inquiry Group](#). This implies promoting lateral reading as an essential skill for students’ capacity for critical



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thinking online. Furthermore, the toolkit not only enhances students' ability to think historically but also cultivates a deeper understanding of narratives and biases.

When will the Toolkit be available ?

The Toolkit was piloted in winter 2023 - 2024 by the University of Murcia with a sample of teachers and students. Selected secondary school teachers underwent a training course in November – December 2023 enabling them to understand its content and methodology. Subsequently, over 200 students were engaged in the Toolkit activities, guided through three main steps:

- Answering questions about a contemporary issue (propaganda in wartime, racism, gender prejudice, sexual diversity and combatting anti-LGBTQI+ violence);
- Analysing historical documents relevant to these topics;
- Reassessing the initial issue in light of newfound insights and new historical awareness.

Currently, the results of the implementation phase are being collected and already reveal that the students develop critical thinking skills by using the Toolkit.

The Toolkit for History Classes will become available to the public in Autumn 2024, on the [HISTOLAB website](#).