LESSON 6

JUDGING SOURCES

You have seen by now that the internet is full of information - some of it wonderful and some of it garbage. How can we separate the good from the garbage? Unfortunately, there is no simple answer. Fortunately, you can train yourself to become better at choosing good information. Here are 4 basic questions you should ask about every source of information you come across.

1. Is it accurate?
2. Is the author qualified to write it?
3. Are they facts or opinions?
4. What biases might the author have?

Let's explore each question in detail.

Is it accurate?

Since there is so much information available on the internet, sometimes it can get quite confusing to know what is accurate and what is not. Your mom is constantly telling you that eating green vegetables is good for your eyesight. You really don't like eating green vegetables and think that your mom is just making it up to force you to eat green vegetables. The first thing you can do to check whether what she is saying is accurate is to Google it. You find an article that supports what your mom says. But you might still be doubtful.

You should check across multiple sources and see if they mention the same thing. If there are other sources which mention that, this information is accurate. However, as a good digital detective you will have to make sure that the other sources you checked are reliable sources.

Is the author qualified to write it?

There are probably different people in your family you trust more for certain kinds of information. You might trust your elder sister about information on all the latest pop music. Because she listens to music all the time she can be trusted for her expert opinions on pop music. You probably wouldn't trust your father who only listens to music from 30 years ago, would you?

Similarly on the internet there are experts who can be trusted to provide you with reliable information. Would you trust an astrologer about information on earthquake? That may not be a reliable source of information. A geologist can be trusted more when she writes about earthquakes. Let's say you came across an article about regions that are likely to be affected by earthquakes. You see that a geologist has written the article. To check whether the author is qualified to write the article, you can look at where she has worked and if it is a reliable organization like the National Seismological Center. Then you might trust the article more. Similarly you can look at the work she does and how many years of experience she has had working on that topic. Such information will help you understand how reliable the author and the article is.

To discover a person's qualification and history you can Google their name.

Is it fact or opinion?

Can you think of something in the world that is true for everybody? Can you think of something that you believe is right? Maybe you can discuss with your friends and write down in your journal.

Sometimes people are trying to write about the facts or truth of a situation. Other times people are writing to make you believe in something. For example, there is an article online about the Sports Day at your school. The article mentions which sports were played and who played. There is also another article which says that Sports Day at schools are important for students. It is trying to tell you

that more Sports Days are needed. In this case, the former article is presenting facts and the latter one is presenting opinions.

Can you separate articles which are giving you facts from the ones giving you opinions?

You will always find a mix of facts and opinions when you are doing your investigation. When you are reading about facts, you need to investigate if they are accurate. When you are reading opinions, you need to ask yourself if you agree with what is being said.

Sometimes authors really want people to agree with them. Why do you think they want this? They have biases that they want to convince you of. Let's briefly explore what biases mean.

What are biases?

You might like Dairy Milk more than Kit Kat because it is soft. Your friend might like KitKat more because it is crispy. Most people like one thing better than others. This is called having a bias. Biases are not always bad. For personal reasons, we favor some people or ideas over others. We should not dismiss writing just because it has biases. Rather we should understand the biases and keep them in mind when we judge the information.

Your friend was talking about just how good the momos are at a new restaurant in Kathmandu. You later find out that his uncle owns the place. Would you trust your friend fully with the information about the food there? Your friend might be right, but you would probably be a little slower to believe him after knowing that the restaurant belongs to a family member. This is because you would suspect he might have a bias in favor of his uncle. So, you might ask another friend who also went to the restaurant. Or you might go there to try it yourself.

Similarly, if you read or see something online that seems biased. You should be slow to believe it. You should seek out other opinions too.

Lesson Review

In this lesson you learned

- There are sources that provide good information and some sources that don't.
- For every piece of information you come across, you should be aware if they are good or bad sources
- You should check across different sources to make sure the information is accurate.
- You should look at who is writing about the topic and make sure they are qualified to write on the topic.
- You should be aware whether you are reading a fact or someone's opinion.
- Usually people write to convince you of something, so for all the information you find, you should be aware of the biases people have.

SOME NEW VOCABULARY FROM THIS LESSON

ACCURATE   BIASES

QUALIFIED   FACT VS. OPINION

? JOURNAL QUESTIONS

- Why is judging sources before taking information necessary?
- Read a newspaper article. Can you differentiate between facts and opinions in that article?
- Can you think of a few reasons why people have biases?