

# CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? — TEACHING GUIDE

## About the Book

Should we believe everything we read online? Definitely not! And this book will tell you why. This fascinating book explores in depth how real journalism is made, what “fake news” is and, most importantly, how to spot the difference. It’s chock-full of practical advice, thought-provoking examples and tons of relevant information on subjects that range from bylines and credible sources to influencers and clickbait. It gives readers context they can use, such as how bias can creep into news reporting, why celebrity posts may not be truthful and why they should be suspicious of anything that makes them feel supersmart. Young people get most of their information online. This must-read guide helps them decide which information they can trust — and which they can’t.

## About the Author

Joyce Grant is a freelance journalist and children’s author. She owns the popular website TeachingKidsNews.com and gives presentations to students and teachers about journalism and misinformation. She is also the author of the Gabby picture book series and two middle-grade novels. Joyce lives with her family in Hamilton, Ontario.

## About the Illustrator

Kathleen Marcotte is an illustrator from the suburbs of Chicago. She earned her BFA in illustration at the Maryland Institute College of Art. She loves to create playful illustrations that can appeal to both children and adults and has been recognized by the Society of Illustrators, American Illustration and 3x3 Magazine. She lives in Cleveland, Ohio.



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## About this Resource

*Can You Believe It?* is a big book. Rather than reading the whole thing in one sitting, this resource leads you through a series of activities, breaking the book up over several days. You will begin each day’s session by reading one section of the book and then completing one activity based on what you’ve read that day.

**INTRODUCTION**  
Gotcha! Spotting Fake News

**CONCLUSION**  
Critical Thinking Really Is Critical

**Clickbait**  
The worst kind of what happens is when you see a headline that says "Click here to see what happens next!" and you click on it. You're not clicking on a link, you're clicking on a trap. The headline is the bait, and the link is the trap. The headline is the bait, and the link is the trap. The headline is the bait, and the link is the trap.

**Propaganda**  
Propaganda is a type of fake news that is usually about politics or world events and is very misleading. It's often used to get people to do things they don't want to do or to believe things that aren't true. Propaganda is a type of fake news that is usually about politics or world events and is very misleading.

**Deepfake**  
A deepfake is a type of fake news that is usually about politics or world events and is very misleading. It's often used to get people to do things they don't want to do or to believe things that aren't true. Deepfake is a type of fake news that is usually about politics or world events and is very misleading.

**Are You Following a Bot?**  
A bot is a computer program that can do things like follow you on social media and post comments. Bots are often used to spread fake news and to make people think they are popular. A bot is a computer program that can do things like follow you on social media and post comments.



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## Outline of Activities

**Day One:** Read Introduction and Chapter 1  
 Activity: Understanding Illustrations

**Day Two:** Read Chapters 2 and 3  
 Activities: Conduct an Interview or Understanding Points of View

**Day Three:** Read Chapters 4 and 5  
 Activity: Practice Making News

**Day Four:** Read Chapter 6 and Conclusion  
 Activity: Group Discussion & Analysis

## Day One: Read Introduction and Chapter 1

As a large group, read the introduction and first chapter to the class. Make sure students pay close attention to the illustrations as you read.

For instance, after reading pages 6 and 7, point out that the illustrations are linked. Ask students how the content of what the boy reads online on Wednesday is revealed to be false by what's happening in the illustration of Thursday. Since the sun is out, the girl is confused by what she's read. On Friday, the two get together, with the sun shining above them, perhaps to talk about critical thinking and responsible sharing of news.

Finish reading Chapter 1 and then conduct the day's activity.

### ACTIVITY: UNDERSTANDING ILLUSTRATIONS

#### Small Groups

Break students up into three small groups. Assign each group one spread:

- Group 1 will analyze the illustrations on pages 8–9
- Group 2 will analyze the illustrations on pages 10–11
- Group 3 will analyze the illustrations on pages 12–13

Ask students to re-read the content of the pages they're analyzing and then to discuss what they see in the illustrations on those pages. Have one student in each group take notes.

As groups are working, move around the room to ask each group some questions, such as those listed below:

- Questions for Group 1: What about the caption under the ducklings makes you want to click on the image? Is the first image possibly real? What about the second image? Can ducklings dive into money? What is the second illustration trying to teach you, as you read this book, about the purpose of the first illustration and caption?
- Questions for Group 2: Why did the famous chef buy this type of blender? What kind of post is she making about it? What happens when the man in the second illustration buys the blender? How do you think he feels about having listened to the famous chef's recommendation?
- Questions for Group 3: What information is provided in the first illustration? Which illustration on page 13 reflects that information? As the boy with the basketball adds more (false) information to his story, what happens? Why might he want to exaggerate his story?

Now gather the class and ask each small group to make a presentation on the illustrations they analyzed. Ask: How did your illustrations help you understand the content on those pages? Did any illustration add new content that wasn't presented in the text? If so, how did that affect your understanding of what you read?





# CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? — TEACHING GUIDE

## Day Two: Read Chapters 2 and 3

As a large group, read Chapters 2 and 3 to the class. Remind students to pay close attention to the illustrations as you read, and to use the analytic tools you practiced on Day One to add to their understanding of the text.

### ACTIVITY: CONDUCT AN INTERVIEW

#### Partner Work

Instruct everyone to read page 21 to understand a reporter's role. Then have them look at page 21 and review the content of the box labeled "Reporters Are Curious." Explain that today, each of them will become a reporter.

After reading the text box, each student should think about a topic they want to interview someone about. Some possibilities include:

- Something that really bugs the other student
- The weirdest thing that ever happened to the other student
- What the other student wants to achieve when they grow up
- How the other student feels about school lunches
- An important school issue the other student feels strongly about

Instruct students to work independently to choose a topic and write a list of questions in a notebook or on a computer. Students may need your help to think of a good topic, but they shouldn't discuss it with other students.

Remind students to write open-ended questions, not questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no." Return to page 21 for ideas.

Encourage students to be ready to ask follow-up questions that they hadn't planned on. For example, if one student asks about the weirdest thing that ever happened to them, and the answer is, "I once found one of my mom's earrings on the playground, years after she lost it!" some follow-up questions might be: *What did the earring look like? Was it broken? How did your mom respond when you showed it to her? Did she still have the other earring? How do you feel when she wears them now?*

\*Note that some follow-up questions are intended to add detail, and therefore can be yes/no questions.



Re-read pages 26–27 to remind students to try to ask unbiased questions. Make sure students understand that they will hear some opinions during their interviews, but as long as they take good notes and can quote the other student's opinion directly, then opinions — properly quoted! — are good material.

Now pair students together to take turns being the interviewer and the interviewee. After 15 or 20 minutes, the pairs should switch. Once the interviews are over, have students take notes or add to the notes they took during the interview, so they don't forget anything important. (Students will use these notes during Day Three!)

### ALTERNATE ACTIVITY: UNDERSTANDING POINTS OF VIEW (POV)

#### Independent Work

Have students read page 25 on POV: "Why Are Points of View Left Out?"

# CAN YOU BELIEVE IT? — TEACHING GUIDE

Instruct them to research at least three major news outlets that provide headshots of the contributors: editors, columnists and/or reporters.

- Count the total number of contributors.
- How many people of color, people with disabilities, women and nonbinary people are represented?
- What information may not be revealed in a photo or a byline?

Which news outlets do students think are the most representative of diverse points of view? Which are the least? Why?

## Day Three: Read Chapters 4 and 5

As a large group, read Chapters 4 and 5 to the class. Remind students to pay close attention to the illustrations as you read, and to think about the interviews they conducted on Day Two.

### ACTIVITY: PRACTICE MAKING NEWS

#### Independent Work

As a large group, re-read pages 34–35. Instruct students to make a “Just the Facts” list based on their interviews from Day Two. Then ask them to write some short pieces similar to those on these pages. Every student should write at least three different types of pieces from this list:

- A short news article
- An opinion piece
- A headline designed as “clickbait”
- An advertisement
- An “influencer” post

As students work, circulate to answer questions and help them shape their material. Have students share their work and talk about how it felt to write “news” versus how it felt to write “fake news.”

## Day Four: Read Chapter 6 and Conclusion

As a large group, read Chapter 6 and the conclusion to the class.

### ACTIVITY: DISCUSSION & ANALYSIS

#### Group Discussion

Talk with the class about what you have all learned this week about the internet and “fake news.” Encourage students to talk about their experiences conducting interviews and then shaping the material into different types of stories. How did *Can You Believe It?* help them become more critical consumers of online information?

### ACTIVITY: ANALYZE A CURRENT ARTICLE

Present a current online article or look for one together as a group.

As a group, analyze the article using the information on pages 50–51 “Is It Fake or Real? You Decide.”

