

“The emergence of generative AI marks a massive disruption to an already frenetic and confusing information environment. Cathy Collins provides a clear-eyed assessment of the technology’s impact across key areas of news literacy instruction, including the practice of journalism, the attention economy and the production of low-quality “slop” and viral misinformation. This is an insightful and important book for any educator interested in sharpening their understanding of media literacy education.”

—Peter Adams
Senior Vice President of Research and Design
at The News Literacy Project

“Democracy depends on a generation that knows how to question what they see and hear. Critical thinking is one of the most important skills of the twenty-first century, and Cathy Collins has given us a roadmap for how to think about information in the age of algorithms. This book equips students, teachers and parents with the critical tools they’ll need to uphold truth in an AI-driven world.”

—Safiya U. Noble, Ph.D.
Author, *Algorithms of Oppression*; Professor, UCLA

“Educators are on the front lines of the misinformation crisis. *Teaching News Literacy in the Age of AI* provides them with practical, classroom-ready strategies to help students think critically, verify responsibly, and engage with confidence. Dr. Cathy Collins, with her background as a library media specialist and teacher, is well equipped to take on this vital subject; the result is both excellent and important.”

—Margaret Sullivan
Columnist at the *Guardian* (US edition) and author of
Ghosting the News: Local Journalism and the Crisis of American Democracy

“Teaching News Literacy in the Age of AI stands apart: Media literacy isn’t about telling students what to believe but showing them how to think. Grounded in classroom realities yet attuned to AI’s ethical challenges, this book helps educators cultivate discernment, curiosity, and courage in a noisy information age. Cross-curricular lessons, lateral-reading routines, and bias-aware AI activities are classroom-ready. Checklists and case studies make verification feel doable—even fun. If you want students who are curious, ethical, independent thinkers, you’ll actually use this book in the classroom. A refreshing, deeply principled contribution to the work of teaching critical thinking with integrity.”

—Vanessa E. Greenwood, Ph.D.
Professor, College of Communication & Media,
Montclair State University

“In a media ecosystem dominated by algorithms and AI-generated content, Cathy Collins reminds us that the most powerful tools we can equip students with are discernment, curiosity, and conscience. *Teaching News Literacy in the Age of AI* is both a rallying cry and a roadmap for educators committed to cultivating critical thinkers and informed citizens.”

—Ed Madison, Ph.D.
Associate Professor, University of Oregon;
Executive Director, Journalistic Learning Initiative

“The importance of cultivating engaged news consumers in our digital age cannot be overstated. And our schools need to be active in this work. In her important and timely book, *Teaching News Literacy in the Age of AI*, Dr. Cathy Collins provides an essential set of creative approaches and practical applications to help young people better engage with news, and as a result, a path forward for stronger news systems, more engaged communities, and healthier democracy.”

—Paul Mihailidis
Professor, Civic Media & Journalism, and interim dean,
School of Communication Emerson College

PREFACE

Around the world, today's young people are dealing with an information tidal wave. Technology, including social media platforms, has made it easy for anyone to create and spread false information. Amidst such an abundance of misinformation, it has become critically important to equip our students with strategies, critical-thinking skills and an investigative mindset which will empower them to evaluate, interpret, and synthesize information in today's digital world. We need to push our students beyond the overused concept of "fake news" to a point where they are reading, viewing, and evaluating all the digital content they encounter.

I grew up in the 1960s and 1970s, and I still remember watching the news program *60 Minutes* on the bulky, unattractive beige television in my grandparents' living room. *The New York Times* described the show as "one of the most esteemed news magazines on American television," and all activities and conversation in the house ceased as that weekly broadcast began. Though the content was often too grown-up for me, the serious tone of Morley Safer and Dan Rather's voices told me very important things were happening around the world, including then-President Nixon's Watergate scandal, the war in Vietnam, women's rights demonstrations, and spacecraft journeys.

Likewise, I immersed myself in Long Island's *Newsday*, which our local paperboy tossed onto our

doorstep each morning. Along with a daily dose of *Peanuts*, Erma Bombeck's humor and Ann Landers's no-nonsense domestic advice, I scoured the global and local headlines, wanting to grasp current events and connect myself to the world beyond my hometown. I created scrapbooks with headlines I deemed especially noteworthy, a blossoming historian and archivist intent on chronicling for myself the news of the day. My mother saved these early efforts, which included articles on Anwar Sadat's assassination, Jimmy Carter's election, Nadia Comănești's Olympic gold medal wins, and NASA's first space shuttle. No wonder I chose a career path that led to research, reporting, and eventually school librarianship.

My father was a high school English teacher, poet, and closet philosopher, and words have always mattered to me. They consumed my childhood days as I scanned my father's lovingly organized bookshelves to select a new title from the volumes of books that wallpapered our living room from floor to ceiling. His love of words was connected to an equally large love of images, and he shared his passion for photography with me, explaining how to capture natural light to highlight the delicate wings of a brilliant blue butterfly, or how to measure that same light to perfectly catch a fiery orange and magenta sunset.

I often wonder what my father would have thought of today's deeply divided America, and of the battles that



educators are bravely waging to help their students learn to discern fact from fiction in the news and information they are exposed to each day. Interpreting the world through words and images has become a far trickier business in our digital era, sometimes now alarmingly referred to as a “post-truth” era.

Through the internet, children have access to a world of information, but digital tools have also made it increasingly easy to spread misinformation, and even adults struggle to distinguish fact from fiction online. Students may be digital natives, but that doesn’t mean they understand how online technologies can target, mislead, and exploit them; how the technologies work; the impact of social media platforms’ revenue-driven models; the tactics advertisers use; and the way algorithms filter the information they see. AI has added another layer to the already confusing mix, making our quest for truthful information all the more complicated.

The newsroom of yesterday, like the one where I interned as a young college student with Lois Lane aspirations, was a burst of constant human and machine energy, ranging from the bustling reporters chasing leads, to editors hammering out deadlines, to printing presses rolling. That newsroom has transformed dramatically in the age of AI: Automated writing tools, AI-generated news summaries, and data-driven reporting systems are reshaping how stories are produced and circulated.

While it’s true that some traditional journalism roles are shrinking or changing, that does not mean journalism skills are losing relevance. In fact, the opposite is happening.

Why? Because in a world swirling with AI-generated content, deepfakes, and rapid-fire misinformation, the ability to think like a journalist is essential for everyone—not just media professionals. Journalism skills—including investigative curiosity, critical inquiry, source verification, ethical storytelling, and clear communication—are the human superpowers that AI can’t replace.

Our current job market is evolving at lightning speed, as it did during the industrial revolution. Some roles are fading, others emerging, and the need for human creativity, empathy, and critical thinking continues to soar. Journalism teaches those exact essential skills. It equips students and citizens with the ability to sift through noise, ask meaningful questions, and tell stories that matter, with accuracy and integrity.

Moreover, AI tools can assist journalists by handling routine data analysis or generating initial drafts, freeing human reporters to dive into deeper investigative work, nuance, and context—areas where machines lag behind. Journalism skills empower learners to partner with AI, not compete against it, making news literacy and storytelling more creative and impactful.



In short, journalism skills are the anchor in a sea of AI-driven information change. They train learners to navigate complexity, verify truth, and tell compelling stories that connect communities and fuel democracy. So whether students dream of a media career or simply want to be smart, ethical digital citizens, journalism skills in the age of AI are a must-have tool kit for the future.

Education is the obvious key to overcoming our current misinformation challenge. We need to teach students how to filter all types of harmful information, providing them with the ability to recognize, question, and debunk it.

In this book, I will explore what it means to be news literate in the age of AI, and I will provide historical background and general context. I will share news literacy resources and best practices, along with links to a curated selection of K-12 learning activities from creative, innovative master teachers and nonprofit organizations, as well as Resource Gems that I have found especially useful. Each chapter will end with a set of reflection questions, and the book will conclude with an action plan template to help readers implement what they have learned.

A NOTE ABOUT THE LEARNING ACTIVITIES

The learning activities sprinkled throughout the book are tried and true favorites of mine that I have used successfully with students. Nonetheless, teaching is not a one-size-fits-all business, and any effective teacher knows that adaptability in lesson activities is critically important. Sometimes, despite our best efforts and intentions, a learning activity may not go as planned due to unforeseen circumstances like technology failures, time constraints,

or differing needs and abilities of individual learners. I've found that being prepared for the inevitable hiccups by having a Plan B or C can help me navigate the challenges that come up in the classroom. Keeping one's sense of humor is essential as well!

Teaching is not an exact science, and that is what makes it both interesting and exciting. After implementing a learning activity, take time to consider what went well and what could be improved. Stay flexible and nonjudgmental. Reflect and refine as necessary, making each activity your own and ensuring that the learning activities you choose to incorporate remain dynamic and suited to the evolving needs of your students.

ISTE STANDARDS AND THE TRANSFORMATIONAL LEARNING PRINCIPLES

Reading carefully and thinking critically have always been cornerstones of media literacy, and those skills have become even more vital in the age of social media, citizen journalism, and “fake news.” Critical thinking is vital in discerning misinformation: It allows our students to look beyond the surface of information or misinformation and to question the source, supporting evidence, and overall logic. With a mindset that includes healthy skepticism, they learn how to identify inconsistencies, logical fallacies, and other inaccuracies that are the telltale markers of misinformation.

Those critical-thinking skills are essential tenets of the ISTE Standards and the ISTE+ASCD Transformational Learning Principles, which are intended to help educators make effective use of technology and improve student learning in general. Throughout the book, when I offer learning activities, I will



also mention any ISTE Student Standards and Transformational Learning Principles that the activity supports.

The ISTE Standards

When it comes to teaching news literacy, grounding lessons in the ISTE Student Standards makes a difference. These standards aren't just edu-jargon; they map out the skills students need to thoughtfully and ethically engage with digital information today. (You can see the latest version of the ISTE Standards at iste.org/standards.)

For instance, the **Knowledge Constructor** standard helps students dive deep into researching, evaluating sources, and spotting misinformation—exactly what news literacy demands.

Likewise, the **Digital Citizen** standard guides students to understand their rights and responsibilities online, encouraging safe, ethical behavior while understanding the impact of sharing information. This is hugely important when tackling information, possible misinformation and AI-generated content.

The **Creative Communicator** standard encourages students to not only critique information but also express their understanding and ideas clearly, creatively, and boldly. This kind of active engagement helps them become not just consumers but also creators of original, trustworthy content.

What's really exciting is how these standards fit naturally across subjects from English to social studies, science, math, and more, making news literacy a part of everything students do, thus making learning feel relevant and meaningful.

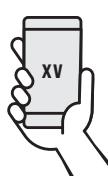
The ISTE Standards prepare students to face a world shaped by AI and a vast array of constantly changing digital tools. They support adaptability, ethical thinking, and innovative problem-solving. These are skills critically needed by our students in order for them to thrive in the future.

So, when teachers align their news literacy work with the ISTE Standards, they get a clear, flexible framework that supports equity, student voice, and real-world skills: a true game-changer for helping learners become savvy, responsible participants in the digital age.

The book's chapters systematically embed ISTE Student Standards—especially around digital citizenship, knowledge construction, creative communication, innovative design, and global collaboration—to cultivate versatile, ethical, and empowered learners prepared for AI-influenced media landscapes and beyond. To help you use this book to take advantage of the ISTE Standards, I've created a chart that shows the themes in each chapter, and the ISTE Standards to which the chapter connects. You can find that in appendix A.

The Transformational Learning Principles

As a member of the ISTE+ASCD Board of Directors, I've had the privilege of serving on the ISTE Standards Committee and was also excited to be part of many meaningful discussions with the ISTE+ASCD Leadership Team, board colleagues, and members-at-large as the new Transformational Learning Principles (TLPs) were crafted. The TLPs are a set of evidence-based practices that have dramatically reshaped how we envision teaching and learning in the digital age. These principles are the result of



decades of research, shifts in societal needs, and a deepening understanding of how humans genuinely learn and thrive.

The TLPs provide a holistic guide, urging educators to build learning experiences that are inclusive, relevant, challenging, and empowering. In essence, they represent an inspiring evolution from education as a delivery system of facts, to education as a transformative, student-centered experience that respects the whole learner, prepares them for an unpredictable future, and invites them to be cocreators of knowledge.

At the risk of sounding like a complete “edu-nerd,” I must share that I truly embrace these TLPs as educational truths that guide my teaching on a daily basis. Being student-centered, the TLPs are also heart-centered and lead to genuinely amazing teaching and learning experiences!

To learn more and see the most current version of the Transformational Learning Principles, please visit iste-ascd.org/tlps.

MY GOAL FOR THIS BOOK

In this book, I hope to provide educators both in the US and abroad with solid teaching strategies that can be applied across grade levels and subject areas to teach students the news literacy skills they need to be active consumers, curators, and creators of news and information, as well as empowered, engaged global citizens.

Nothing less than a hero’s journey is involved in educating our students on how to recognize trustworthy information, locate trustworthy sources, identify false information and to develop, create, and resolve local and global challenges. With student truth-finding and evaluation skills as our noble quest, if I can serve as a trusted Merlin or Gandalf figure by providing sound curricular guidance, useful resources, and teaching strategies to K-12 educators across subject areas, I will have met my goal.

It’s my sincere hope that all who read this book will find value in its pages and be able to immediately implement some of the strategies and resources included for the benefit of students across the globe.



CHAPTER 1

WHAT IS NEWS LITERACY?

In a world where algorithms quietly shape the news stories students see, becoming news-savvy is no longer optional—it's essential. This chapter opens your journey by defining what it means to be news literate today and highlights how AI transforms our relationship with information across every subject area. We'll explore how to equip students not just to consume news but to question, analyze, and navigate complex digital landscapes, laying the foundation for thoughtful, resilient learners and digital citizens.

Chapter 1 will:

- define news literacy
- define AI
- connect the dots between AI literacy, news literacy, and other K–12 subjects



News literacy is an essential life skill. People who know how to separate fact from fiction, and how to identify what they can trust, share, and act on, are more likely to become informed and engaged participants in civic life, as well as global problem-solvers.

It starts with the basics, which involves knowing which sources to trust and how to best utilize those sources to analyze information and solve problems. Many years ago, when I was a college student, I went to a car repair shop and helped my mechanic use the index of an automotive reference manual to find the correct new tires to order for my battered old orange Plymouth Duster (which my friends and I affectionately referred to as “The Pumpkin Mobile”). These were the days before smartphones, and I have no doubt that if I’d been able to access the internet from a device in my pocket, I would have instead looked for the answer through a quick web search. I would have had to navigate my way through countless tire links, many of which would likely have been advertisements. Some of those ads might have been disguised with a layout resembling an editorial page, perhaps including a quote from a purported “expert” describing the scientific rationale behind the exceedingly high performance of a particular brand of tire.

Though the digital world offers endless roads of possibility, it also includes complicated mazes leading to information dead ends. Wrong way signals and potholes of misinformation and disinformation abound, making it critically important for us as educators and parents to teach our students the news literacy skills they need to navigate safely.

NEWS LITERACY, MEDIA LITERACY, AND DIGITAL LITERACY

But what, exactly, is news literacy? And how does it differ from media literacy and digital literacy? Academics debate the differences, but here are some basic definitions:

- **News literacy** is the ability to tell the trustworthiness of news and other journalistic content. It includes the capacity and awareness necessary to distinguish different types of information and to use the standards of fact-based journalism to decide what to trust, share, and act on (News Literacy Project).
- **Media literacy** is more broadly defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication (National Association for Media Literacy Education).



- **Digital literacy** is the ability to use information and communication devices, tools, and other technologies to locate, assess, create, and share information (American Library Association).

The News Literacy Project (NLP), a nonpartisan education nonprofit that provides programs and resources for educators and the public, further defines news literacy as characterized by:

- a pedagogy that seeks to teach learners how to think about their news and information and not what to think about any particular source
- an emphasis on developing healthy skepticism about news and information without becoming cynical
- a dedication to the First Amendment and the conviction that a free press is a cornerstone of democracy
- a nonpartisan focus on specific, clear learning standards

News literacy goes beyond teaching young people which sources of information are credible. It involves teaching them to recognize what credibility means and how to identify it in the age of AI. News literacy is a combination of skills, knowledge, and habits that students can apply throughout their lives to become informed, proactive citizens. News literacy skills integrate digital citizenship, media literacy, and creativity in authentic, meaningful ways. Instead of learning these topics in isolation, students discover the ideas and skills as they engage in inquiry, research, content curation, creation, and publishing. News literacy education empowers our students to take responsibility for their information and digital habits and helps combat the spread of misinformation to the benefit of all of us.

WHAT IS AI?

Now that we've defined news literacy, it's time to define AI. We hear this term all around us, practically 24/7, and it dominates conference topics and book lists, both in and out of the education realms; but what, exactly, does it mean, for those of us who shamelessly prefer camping on a lake in an area without cell service to partaking in mainstream conversational topics? Artificial intelligence (AI) refers to computer systems or programs designed to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence. These tasks include learning from data, recognizing patterns, making decisions, understanding natural language, and even generating content.

Unlike simple automation, AI adapts and improves over time by analyzing vast amounts of information. Examples range from virtual assistants like Siri to sophisticated tools that recommend videos or help diagnose diseases. AI is both a powerful tool and a complex influence across education, journalism, news literacy, and beyond. It expands possibilities by personalizing learning and accelerating information production but also introduces new challenges related to bias, ethics, and information overload. Embracing AI's benefits while fostering critical human judgment is key to helping learners successfully navigate today's and tomorrow's digital landscapes.

EVOLUTION OF JOURNALISM

Before we discuss the current and future status of news literacy education in the age of AI, it's important to understand where we are in the history



of journalism and communications. In the words of one of my favorite bands, Talking Heads, “How Did We Get Here?”

According to journalist and media consultant Eric Newton, the history of communications has had four distinct phases:

Evolution of Human Communication, new categories			
Age	Human capacity	Date (c.)	Concept of time
Visual	Curiosity	1-2 m BC	Natural
Language	Orality	100,000 BC	Cyclical
Mass media	Literacy	1450 AD	Linear
Digital	Fluency	1991 AD	Multi

Source: Various

Newton provides an entertaining description of the earliest days of “news”:

In the beginning, more than a million years ago, before language, protohumans wandered the earth. We don’t know when the first news story occurred. But we can guess the news report went something like this: “Aaaaaaaa!” You can recreate the first news report by standing up, pointing a finger at whatever is about to eat your family and repeating the headline: “Aaaaaaaa!” (Newton 2013)

Though specifics may have changed, every American generation has grown up with a new rising form of media. In the United States, media evolved from pamphlets to colonial newspapers and then weekly papers created mainly for an elite audience. Those weeklies were easily distributed thanks to low postal rates. One generation later, daily newspapers known as “the penny press” arrived on the scene. These papers were revolutionary in that they were available to everyone, not just the privileged. The next innovation arrived with the invention of the telegraph, which allowed news to become available immediately to papers all over the country through the Associated Press. Telegraph usage faded as radio became popularized; at the same time radio was being developed, the telephone became the fastest way to communicate long-distance person-to-person. Television followed and eventually became the dominant form of mass communication technology; the internet came next, making newspapers, radio, telephones, and television available in digital form. Now, with the growth of generative AI, alongside the continued expansion of and gravitation toward social



media platforms, we once again find ourselves in the middle of a technological shift.

There is a stark difference between a newspaper tossed on the front porch every morning and our current 24/7 news cycle, but for our students who are digital natives, 24/7 access is all they have ever known. Nonetheless, appearances can be deceiving. Though they may not appear to want our help, our young people do most certainly need it.

NEWS ILLITERACY

A study by the Stanford History Education Group revealed that a majority of middle school, high school, and college students were functionally news illiterate. According to the survey, 82% of middle school learners were unable to tell the difference between advertising labeled as “sponsored content” and an authentic news article on the same website. A Facebook post purporting to be from Fox News was deemed more dependable by over 30% of high school pupils than a genuine Fox News post. Furthermore, despite a website’s affiliation with a lobbying business in Washington, DC—easily discoverable through a Google search—more than 80% of college students thought it was a reliable source of unbiased news.

The study shows that most young adults are completely unprepared to be responsible news consumers in the internet age, according to study co-author Sam Wineburg, a Stanford education professor. “What we need to think about educationally is a way that we cultivate, irrespective of which side of the political aisle we fall on in our educational system, a commitment to accuracy” (Wineburg et al., 2016).

Another study from the Stanford History Education Group was referenced by Jay Caspian Kang, in a

2022 *New York Times* opinion piece (tinyurl.com/fightingdis). According to Kang, the study showed that American high school students were failing basic media literacy and disinformation-spotting tests—and class, race, and parental education all had large effects on students’ abilities to evaluate evidence. Poorer students fared worse than rich ones; Black students, worse than white, Asian, and multiracial students; students who qualified for free or reduced lunch worse than others; students whose mothers had not finished high school worse than those whose mothers had an advanced degree. Kang wrote, “What all this suggests, then, is that America’s disinformation problem isn’t all that much different from pretty much every other educational problem in this country.... We live in a country where profound inequality affects nearly every part of a person’s life. Why would we expect disinformation resistance to be any different?” (Kang, 2022).

Hope on the US Horizon: Mandatory Media Literacy Education?

Fortunately, many US states are now passing legislation on media literacy for K-12 schools. The organization Media Literacy Now is a nonprofit that tracks the status of media literacy education laws around the country; in their annual report from April 2024 (tinyurl.com/mlnpolicyreport), they reported that 19 state legislatures have taken some sort of action, and they also noted that a CivixNow survey found that 75% of state education agencies acknowledge the importance of media literacy in social studies and civics education. According to Media Literacy Now, the state of California—which has largest K-12 population in the country—has taken some of the strongest action, with a comprehensive media literacy law.



Other states that have taken significant legislative steps include Delaware, Florida, New Jersey, Ohio, Texas, and Washington (Media Literacy Now, 2024).

Journalist Ahmed Baba, in his column, “More States Mandate Media Literacy Education in Schools. This What Democracy Needs,” describes it this way: “Debunking every lie we see is like playing disinformation Whac-A-Mole. Media literacy education in K-12 schools is the long-term solution we need” (Baba, 2023). Certainly, legislation to require media literacy instruction is an important part of the solution to misinformation.

ROLE OF SCHOOL LIBRARIANS IN NEWS LITERACY AND BEYOND

Librarians, whose official title in many schools is “Library Media Specialist,” play an essential role in the teaching of news and media literacy. It’s our responsibility not just to share access to media and resources, but to help educate school community in recognizing false or harmful information. We love partnering with classroom teachers to equip all students to verify information, determine its validity, and understand the angles of any given topic.

Many resources are available to help school library media specialists and educators across subject areas learn how to collaborate to ensure consistency in teaching news and media literacy. The Future Ready Librarian coalition (tinyurl.com/all4edfrlhub), state association partners, the American Association of School Librarians (AASL), and professional learning communities, such as the ISTE Librarians Network and K12Leaders, all provide opportunities for creating high quality learning opportunities for all students.

In the state where I work, Massachusetts Computer Using Educators (MassCUE) and Massachusetts School Library Association (MSLA) joined forces with public radio station WGBH for many years to offer an annual “Better Together” conference that gave us the opportunity to focus specifically on news and media literacy. Keynote addresses by experts in the journalism field, such as Andrew Metz, Managing Editor for *FRONTLINE*, were followed by breakout sessions planned by librarians, instructional technology specialists, and classroom teachers. Events such as these, and similar events hosted by the News Literacy Project, offer meaningful opportunities for school library media specialists, educators across subject areas, and journalists to share our passion for journalism and media literacy along with best practices, teaching strategies, and fresh ideas.



RESOURCE GEM The AASL has created a framework with three sets of standards (Learner, School Librarian, and School Library) that offer a comprehensive view of teaching and learning, plus a deeper insight into the potential role of the librarian. These include a helpful crosswalk to ISTE Standards for Students and Educators.

- **Framework for Learners Standards Pamphlet** [tinyurl.com/AASLFrameworks]
- **National School Library Standards crosswalk with Future Ready Librarians** [tinyurl.com/AASLCrosswalk]
- **National School Library Standards crosswalk with ISTE Standards for Students and Educators** [tinyurl.com/AASLISTECrosswalk]
- **AASL Standards, Second Edition** [alastore.ala.org/AASLstandards2] ■



THE CONNECTION BETWEEN NEWS LITERACY AND CIVICS

News literacy can also help foster student engagement: A 2016 Pew Research Center study (tinyurl.com/pew-civic) noted that people who read, watch, and value local news tend to vote regularly in local elections and to have stronger connections to their communities. The news literacy skills needed to become informed, knowledgeable, and critical are also the foundational skills for civic engagement (Barthel et al. 2016)

Helping Our Students to Dive Deeper

We have become a world of channel flippers and cell phone scrollers, quickly scanning headlines, too often falling victim to “clickbait” and not taking the time to question, focus, and dive more deeply into topics we genuinely care about. I love my CNN “What Matters” news alerts, which give me the headlines and summaries I need to feel just informed enough during busy week days. I am just as guilty as the next person of stopping short of digging deeper in the rush to get through my to-do list. It is a constant battle to keep up in depth with the news of interest to me.

What about our students, who are just forming their own viewing and reading habits? Are there ways to help them (and us) learn to focus more deeply on topics that interest them? It’s not that we don’t care about what’s happening, but rather that we’re creatures of habit, who have learned to rush through news headlines and scan only at the surface level. Like all bad habits, we do have the power to replace them with better ones. By providing time for regular, meaningful discussion and reflection on

current events topics, and by asking probing questions about the news, we can help ignite student curiosity to delve more deeply into subjects. Instead of asking, “Have you heard about this in the news?” we can ask, “What do you think about topic X? How does it make you feel?” Instead of downplaying social media platforms, we can meet our students where they are and take advantage of those quick and accessible headlines as starting points that can inspire exploration.

Taking it a step further, we can then have them use their newfound knowledge to advocate for what they believe in, through activities such as spreading awareness through content creation about issues or volunteering or fundraising for a nonprofit. Their resulting sense of accomplishment and the connections they experience through their advocacy efforts might spark even more efforts and enthusiasm.

THE ROLE OF AI IN STUDENTS’ NEWS AND INFORMATION-SEEKING HABITS

AI is reshaping the ways our students encounter and interact with information every day. Picture a middle schooler scrolling through social media or doing some quick research for a project: Behind the scenes, AI algorithms determine what content pops up on their feed. These algorithms are sorting, prioritizing, and sometimes even personalizing news stories and videos based on the student’s previous behavior. This isn’t just about convenience; it profoundly influences what they see and, more critically, what they believe.

AI-driven recommendation engines curate information streams that are seemingly tailored for each individual. But here’s the catch: These algorithms



learn from patterns in data that can amplify bias or reinforce existing views rather than challenge them. This makes news literacy—knowing how to question sources, cross-check facts, and recognize AI's role—more essential than ever.

Moreover, AI tools themselves are becoming news creators. They can generate headlines, synthesize reports, or even craft narratives, blurring lines between human and machine-produced content. Think about how a student might use an AI writing assistant: It offers quick drafts and ideas, but as students are learning—sometimes the hard way—the output of AI needs critical human evaluation. The future of informed citizenship is less about passively consuming information and much more about actively interrogating it.

In the classroom, this means we have an incredible opportunity as well as a responsibility to teach students how to navigate these digital landscapes with curiosity and skepticism. They're not just consumers but emerging digital citizens, interpreting AI-processed information daily. By helping them understand how AI guides their information habits, we can empower them to become thoughtful learners and participants in an AI-infused world. As educators, we're not just teaching facts. We're teaching learners how to think in new and critical ways about information shaped by AI.

Algorithms and FOMO: The Student Mental Health Toll

Behind every one of our students' clicks on their personal devices, a recommendation algorithm is quietly working as an invisible "Big Brother," learning from what the student watches, likes, or lingers

on. Its goal is to keep them engaged by serving up more of what they seem to want. Although that might sound helpful, these algorithms often create "echo chambers," or online bubbles where students mostly see information that mirrors their existing beliefs or interests. Over time, this results in fewer chances to encounter diverse perspectives. This insulated environment can limit critical thinking and reinforce biases.

On the mental health front, this unrelenting personalization can fuel anxiety, FOMO (fear of missing out), and lowered self-esteem. When algorithms prioritize sensational or emotionally charged content simply because it drives clicks and shares, students can find themselves caught in cycles of negative or extreme material. This affects how they feel about themselves and the world around them. The emotional toll is real, especially for younger learners still developing resilience and self-regulation.

And then there's attention span. Speaking for myself as a grown adult, I can't count the number of times I've been swayed by a *New York Times* or CNN article to take a quick peak at a favorite advertiser's Memorial Day shoe sale or to view a quick, *Enquirer*-style celebrity article instead of the news article I was originally reading. By continuously offering bite-sized, instantly gratifying content, these algorithms encourage rapid switching from one topic to another, fragmenting focus. All of us, and students especially, become accustomed to quick hits of information rather than sustained engagement.

What does this mean for us as educators? We have a vital role in helping students recognize these unseen forces shaping their online habits. Teaching



them to question what they see, seek diverse viewpoints, and practice self-regulated attention is more important than ever. It's not about demonizing technology but rather understanding its impact—and guiding students to use it mindfully, preserving their mental health and sharpening their critical thinking.

Recommendation algorithms are more than just neutral background processes. They are, in fact, powerful influencers of what and how students think and feel. By shining a light on these effects, we can empower learners to break out of echo chambers, nurture well-being, and cultivate deep, sustained learning in an AI-infused world.

AI is now customizing not only our entertainment but also the news itself. An example is how AI curates breaking news alerts during major events such as climate crises or elections; by selecting which stories trend, AI influences public perception and engagement worldwide.

In classrooms, this calls for teaching students to develop healthy skepticism and a questioning mindset. For instance, students might analyze how news recommendations differ between users and explore underlying algorithmic factors, strengthening skills critical for news literacy and digital citizenship across English Language Arts (ELA), social studies, science, and even math (data literacy). Engaging learning activities that emphasize the role of AI can help foster student curiosity and agency—key Transformational Learning Principles—preparing students to become empowered, thoughtful consumers and creators of news.

NEWS LITERACY AS PATHWAY TO HEART-CENTERED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

For some students, the COVID-19 pandemic took a toll on mental health and on social skills, especially in interactions with peers and rates of depression. Since the pandemic, student apathy has been at an all-time high, not only in terms of academics but also of civic involvement. And yet some young people are finding their voices and taking a highly active role as local and global changemakers. As educators, how can we help all students to feel confident expressing their viewpoints and to wake up to their potential role as activists?

One of my classmates at Endicott College was Elizabeth M. Petersen, who is now an arts integration specialist, SEL consultant, and creator of the *Enjoy Teaching Again* podcast. She has a favorite saying she often shared during our grad school days: “What feeds your fire?” By asking our students that question and providing meaningful creative opportunities, we can help light a spark of passion in them.

AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CRITICAL THINKING

When a story dominates the news cycle, “it’s generally a good idea to be proactive,” says digital literacy expert Matthew Johnson. Asking if students have heard about a particular news event allows us as educators to address and clear up misconceptions. Johnson, director of education for the Ottawa-based organization MediaSmarts, says, “That also gives you an opportunity to help them deal with any frightening images or stories that they may have encountered, either directly through



media—whether it's seeing it on TV or hearing about it on the radio—[or] whether it's seeing it in social media, which we know is often a situation where kids are exposed to disturbing content" (Wong, 2023).

Meaningful classroom discussion can lead students to do research, write, find out how they can get involved, solve problems, and work to make things better for those negatively impacted by an event. It's also a great opportunity to teach news literacy skills by tapping into natural student engagement about current events.

RESOURCE GEM “NEWSROOM TO CLASSROOM”

Invite broadcast journalists, reporters, and editors to your classroom by taking advantage of NLP's wonderful “Newsroom to Classroom” program: get.checkology.org/newsroom-to-classroom. More than 150 journalist volunteers listed in their directory provide an opportunity for K-12 students to gain news literacy instruction directly from experts on a wide variety of topics, from the standards of quality journalism to press freedoms around the world, the First Amendment, AI algorithms, and more. Their helpful planning document can be found at this URL: tinyurl.com/NewsClassroom. ■

THE VALUE OF STARTING YOUNG WITH NEWS LITERACY

Our youngest learners in the elementary grades are exposed to news too, though they may not know the source of the news or whether the information they are finding or hearing about is truly news. By opening conversations about their news sources, we can lay the foundation for later news literacy skills development.

Basic concepts to cover with young students include:

- helping them understand the difference between fact and opinion, as well as human-generated versus AI-generated content
- getting them in the habit of considering source and context by asking them, “What type of item is this?” and “What do you think you know about this event?”
- exposing them to maps, graphs, charts, and infographics, so that they are comfortable with numbers, data, and other sources of visual information

These discussions can be enhanced with other basic news literacy activities. For example, after sharing an article or media post, we can teach students how to read laterally across multiple stories to determine the credibility of the information they encounter.



Articles from Newsela (newsela.com), *TIME for Kids* (timeforkids.com) or podcasts like *KidNuz* (kidnuz.org) and *ABC KIDS News Time* (tinyurl.com/abckidsnews-time) break down the news into easy-to-understand, age-appropriate content. Outside of school, students may encounter other sources of news and information, but not all students will have equal access to reliable sources. If we encourage students to read multiple articles on any given topic, and to get in the habit of looking for the tip-offs that show something might be unreliable and/or AI-generated, these lessons will eventually stick with our students as they immerse themselves in content outside of school.

By leading our youngest students to a greater understanding of the importance of news and its various forms and functions, we establish building blocks for news literacy skills that can be further developed through middle and high school, and on into adulthood.

INFORMATION OVERLOAD

Students today have access to more reliable, credible information than ever before, and many of us agree that there is a benefit to the quick and endless flow of information in society. But at the same time, the stream of news from an increasing number of sources can be overwhelming, a problem exacerbated by social media and smartphone applications. When the amount of information available exceeds a person's ability to comprehend and process it all, information overload can occur (Palfrey & Gasser, 2016). Overload can lead to fatigue, which can lead in turn to false assumptions. To prevent this, where

do we start when teaching students to search for something online? For tweens and teens feeling anxious around digital content and searching, we can help by showing them how to develop strong skills through the application of news literacy strategies—skills that will be discussed throughout this book.

AI and Cognitive Load

Cognitive load theory, pioneered by John Sweller, explains that working memory has limited capacity—it can only hold a small amount of information at a time. Effective learning occurs when instructional design reduces unnecessary strain on working memory (extraneous load) and builds on prior knowledge held in long-term memory. The brain organizes knowledge into schemas, structured mental frameworks stored in long-term memory, that help learners efficiently process and understand new information (Sweller, 2011).

News literacy builds heavily on this interplay. To critically analyze news, especially in today's complex, AI-influenced information environment, students must integrate new data with existing schemas about media, bias, credibility, and source evaluation. When learning materials or the news environment overwhelm working memory with fragmented, contradictory, or excessive information (think overwhelming social media feeds or AI-generated content), students struggle to make sense of what's true or trustworthy.



AI tools profoundly shape how news is curated and presented, often personalizing (and sometimes overwhelming) information streams in ways that increase cognitive load:

- **Information Overload and Fragmentation.** AI algorithms continuously feed students curated but abundant content, making it difficult to filter relevant from irrelevant information. This overload taxes working memory and can hinder deep processing, leading to superficial understanding of news stories (Sweller, 2011).
- **AI-Generated Content Complexity.** AI-produced articles or deepfakes present new challenges—for instance, discerning synthetic from human-authored content adds layers to verification tasks, increasing extraneous cognitive load unless students are equipped with explicit strategies and scaffolds.
- **Reduced Attention and Critical Engagement.** The rapid-fire pace of AI-driven news feeds encourages quick scanning over sustained, reflective thinking. That can undermine the consolidation of new knowledge into long-term memory, limiting schema development critical for fluent news literacy (Sweller, 2011).

Instructional Implications: Designing News Literacy with Cognitive Load and AI in Mind

To counteract these challenges, educators can apply principles from cognitive load theory, fused with AI awareness, to design effective news literacy instruction:

- **Chunking & Scaffolded Learning.** Break news literacy tasks into manageable steps—identifying source credibility, fact-checking claims, and detecting bias—allowing students to build one schema at a time. Pair these with opportunities to apply AI-powered tools (e.g., fact-checkers) that reduce extraneous load by automating cumbersome checks.
- **Integrating Prior Knowledge.** Link new AI concepts (like recommendation algorithms or AI-generated content) to what students already know about news, bias, and evidence. This helps embed new facts into existing long-term memory frameworks, strengthening retention and transfer.
- **Use of AI to Reduce Cognitive Load.** When used thoughtfully, AI tools such as read-aloud features, personalized learning assistants, or curated news summaries can offload low-level processing tasks, freeing working memory for higher-order critical thinking and analysis.



■ **Encouraging Metacognition and Reflection.**

Explicitly teach students to be mindful of how AI shapes their news exposure and cognitive effort, fostering strategies to manage distractions, seek diverse sources, and engage deeply with content beyond surface-level scanning.

Why This Eduspeak Matters

As AI reshapes how news is produced and consumed, combining cognitive load theory with news literacy instruction prepares students to navigate information wisely. By aligning teaching with how the brain efficiently processes and stores knowledge, educators can help learners build robust mental models to critically evaluate complex, AI-influenced news environments—with less frustration and more confidence.



REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- What are the broader implications of news literacy beyond helping students to identify credible sources?
- How does news literacy empower young people to be proactive citizens?
- How have evolving technologies, and AI specifically, transformed the landscape of news and media?



LEARNING ACTIVITY: NEWS AUDIT STUDENT CHALLENGE

Source: The Learning Network (from *The New York Times*); Katherine Schulten and Jihii Jolly

Grade Level: Secondary

Description: To help students understand their own news consumption, have them try the following learning activity, which was created as part of a *New York Times* student learning challenge. By engaging in this activity, students will not only develop a deeper understanding of the role of news in their lives but also hone their skills as critical thinkers, reflective learners, and responsible consumers of information.

You can find the challenge here: [tinyurl.com/](http://tinyurl.com/NYTimes-Lesson)
NYTimes-Lesson

Adaptation for Younger Learners: Begin by explaining what news is and why it is important. Use simple terms and examples they can relate to, such as stories from children's news programs or simplified versions of current events. Introduce students to kid-friendly news sources like TIME for Kids (timeforkids.com), News-O-Matic (newsomatic.org), or *KidNuz* (kidnuz.org), and challenge them to add one new source of news to their routine. Wrap up the activity by emphasizing the importance of being curious and informed about the world. Encourage them to keep exploring new news sources and to talk about news topics with family and friends.

continues





LEARNING ACTIVITY (continued)

ISTE Standards and Transformational Learning Principles

- **1.1. Empowered Learner:** 1.1.b (Customized Learning Environments), 1.1.c (Feedback to Improve Practice). *Connection:* Students reflect on their news consumption goals and adapt their habits using technology to track and share insight.
- **1.2. Digital Citizen:** 1.2.a (Digital Footprint), 1.2.b (Online Interactions). *Connection:* Students responsibly evaluate news sources and understand the ethical sharing of information.
- **1.3. Knowledge Constructor:** 1.3.b (Evaluate Information), 1.3.c (Curate Information). *Connection:* Students analyze news sources to determine trustworthiness and build a personalized, credible news repertoire.
- **Transformational Learning Principles:** Nurture > Connect Learning to the Learner. Guide > Spark Curiosity; Develop Expertise; Elevate Reflection. Empower > Prioritize Authentic Experiences; Ignite Agency

Cross-Curricular Examples

English Language Arts (ELA):

- Analyze news articles for main ideas and bias.
- Write persuasive pieces reflecting on news impact.
- Compare viewpoints across news sources.

Social Studies:

- Explore the role of news in democracy and civic engagement.
- Examine how different communities and cultures report and receive news.
- Investigate historical context of news media development.

Math:

- Analyze statistical data reported in news stories (e.g., polls, surveys, or election results).
- Create graphs or charts representing news data trends.
- Evaluate numerical claims critically (e.g., percentages, probabilities) in news coverage.

Science:

- Critically assess scientific claims in news, distinguishing between credible research and misinformation.
- Explore the role of science journalism and how scientific findings are communicated to the public.
- Investigate case studies of current events involving science (climate change, health breakthroughs) and examine data sources.

Technology Integration:

- Use tools like Wakelet or Padlet for collecting and sharing curated news items.
- Create multimedia presentations to report on selected news topics.



APPENDIX A

CHAPTER THEMES AND CONNECTIONS TO ISTE STUDENT STANDARDS

CHAPTER 1

What Is News Literacy?

ISTE Standards:

- **1.2 Digital Citizen.** 1.2.a (Digital Footprint), 1.2.c (Safeguard Well-being), 1.2.d (Digital Privacy)
- **1.3 Knowledge Constructor.** 1.3.a (Effective Research Strategies), 1.3.b (Evaluate Information), 1.3.d (Explore Real-World Issues)

Summary: Establishes foundational critical thinking about AI and news, nurturing ethical, reflective learners who research and discern trustworthy information across disciplines.

CHAPTER 2

What Makes Something “News”?

ISTE Standards:

- **1.2 Digital Citizen.** 1.2.c (Safeguard Well-being)
- **1.3 Knowledge Constructor.** 1.3.b (Evaluate Information), 1.3.d (Explore Real-World Issues)
- **1.4 Innovative Designer.** 1.4.c (Prototypes)

Summary: Anchors understanding of news types, AI algorithms, and their influence on information flows, developing media literacy informed by ethical digital citizenship and systems thinking.

CHAPTER 3

Misinformation, Disinformation, and “Fake News”

ISTE Standards:

- **1.2 Digital Citizen.** 1.2.a (Digital Footprint), 1.2.c (Safeguard Well-being)
- **1.3 Knowledge Constructor.** 1.3.a (Effective Research Strategies), 1.3.b (Evaluate Information), 1.3.d (Explore Real-World Issues)

Summary: Focuses on verification tactics using AI tools, improving students' ability to research and fact-check across content areas.

CHAPTER 4

News Literacy in the Age of AI

ISTE Standards:

- **1.2 Digital Citizen.** 1.2.a (Digital Footprint), 1.2.c (Safeguard Well-being)
- **1.3 Knowledge Constructor.** 1.3.b (Evaluate Information), 1.3.d (Explore Real-World Issues)
- **1.6 Creative Communicator.** 1.6.a (Choose Platforms or Tools), 1.6.b (Original and Remixed Works)

Summary: Empowers students to utilize technology to detect and counter misinformation, enhancing media literacy and ethical communication.



CHAPTER 5

Bias, Beliefs, and Conspiracy Theories

ISTE Standards:

- **1.2 Digital Citizen.** 1.2.a (Digital Footprint), 1.2.c (Safeguard Well-being)
- **1.6 Creative Communicator.** 1.6.c (Communicate Complex Ideas)
- **1.7 Global Collaborator.** 1.7.a (Global Connections), 1.7.b (Multiple Viewpoints)

Summary: Addresses critical analysis of bias and perspectives, fostering empathy and collaborative discourse essential for balanced, ethical communication in diverse digital environments.

CHAPTER 6

News Literacy, STEM, and Global Competence

ISTE Standards:

- **1.3 Knowledge Constructor.** 1.3.d (Explore Real-World Issues)
- **1.4 Innovative Designer.** 1.4.a (Design Process), 1.4.c (Prototypes)
- **1.7 Global Collaborator.** 1.7.a (Global Connections), 1.7.b (Multiple Viewpoints)

Summary: Integrates interdisciplinary STEM, civics, and global issues into news literacy, leveraging collaboration and innovative design thinking for authentic learning.

CHAPTER 7

Emerging Careers in Journalism, Media, and AI

ISTE Standards:

- **1.1 Empowered Learner.** 1.1.b (Customized Learning Environments), 1.1.c (Feedback to Improve Practice)
- **1.3 Knowledge Constructor.** 1.3.b (Evaluate Information)
- **1.4 Innovative Designer.** 1.4.a (Design Process)
- **1.7 Global Collaborator.** 1.7.a (Global Connections), 1.7.b (Multiple Viewpoints)

Summary: Encourages student agency and reflection on career opportunities at the intersection of media, AI, and STEM, guided by empathy and real-world problem solving.

CHAPTER 8

Integrating News Literacy in Every Classroom

ISTE Standards:

- **1.2 Digital Citizen.** 1.2.d (Digital Privacy)
- **1.3 Knowledge Constructor.** 1.3.a (Effective Research Strategies), 1.3.b (Evaluate Information), 1.3.d (Explore Real-World Issues)
- **1.6 Creative Communicator.** 1.6.a (Choose Platforms or Tools), 1.6.c (Communicate Complex Ideas)
- **1.7 Global Collaborator.** 1.7.a (Global Connections), 1.7.b (Multiple Viewpoints)

Summary: Provides educators with tools and strategies to weave news literacy and AI into authentic, cross-disciplinary learning experiences, empowering students for lifelong digital citizenship and innovation.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Cathy Collins is a Library Media Specialist at Sharon Schools in Sharon, Massachusetts, with over 25 years of experience spanning public, private, and international schools. Her journey into education began in an unexpected place—newsrooms. As a journalist covering business, arts, and education, she discovered a deeper calling while interviewing a school headmaster. That conversation sparked a realization that she wanted to bring her passion for research, writing, and creativity into education.

Cathy's work centers on empowering students to think critically and act ethically in an increasingly complex digital world. A strong advocate for STEM/STEAM, media literacy, and global education, she designs project-based learning experiences that connect the classroom to the real world. Her teaching is rooted in the belief that news literacy is not optional—it's essential.

She has contributed to the News Literacy Project and consulted on *Searchlights and Sunglasses: Journalism in the Digital Age*. A frequent national speaker and podcast guest, she also writes for professional journals and platforms including *Library Media Connection*, *NEA Today*, *Knowledge Quest*, and the ALA Intellectual Freedom Blog. Cathy is a National Board Certified Teacher and an ISTE Certified Educator.

When she's not championing digital literacy, she enjoys reading, traveling, bird-watching, and practicing yoga, pursuits that help her stay grounded and inspired.

This book reflects her commitment to equipping educators and students alike with the tools to navigate and shape the information landscape of today and tomorrow.

Awards & Recognition: Tech & Learning Innovative Leader Award; MSLA Virtual Influencer; MSLA Super Librarian; AASL Intellectual Freedom Award; Fulbright/TGC Fellow; Reynolds Institute for High School Journalism Fellow; MSLA Pathfinder Award; Teacher of the Year Award for Excellence in Teaching About China, (Primary Source).

Professional Activities: Doctorate in Education, Northeastern University; ISTE+ASCD Board of Directors; News Literacy Project Ambassador; ALA Literacy Committee; Past PD Chair and Board Member, MassCUE; Past Executive Board Member, MSLA; ALA Intellectual Freedom Roundtable blogger; AASL Publications Advisory Committee.

Credentials: Supervisor/Director; Library Media Specialist; Instructional Technology Specialist; Digital Literacy & Computer Science.

