



TEACHING MEDIA LITERACY: A GUIDE FOR LIBRARIANS TO COMBAT DISINFORMATION

This toolkit contains resources to help librarians and educators combat disinformation and equip patrons with media literacy tools. Here is a summary of what to expect:

- PART I: The History and Effect of Disinformation**
- PART II: Applying Media Literacy to Combat Disinformation**
- PART III: What Librarians Can Do Before the 2020 Election**
- PART IV: Sample Activities for Workshops**
- PART V: Additional Resources**

“You all are the keepers of the gateway to the truth.”

-Sally Yates, former Acting U.S. Attorney General,
2018 Public Library Association conference in Philadelphia



INTRODUCTION

This guide provides key principles and topics that librarians and other educators may use in media literacy workshops and trainings with library constituents and others in your community. The final pages of this guide include three interactive activities to explore with your participants.

We know that librarians play a crucial role in civic engagement and in keeping the public equipped with accurate information. In the lead-up to the 2020 election, we hope you all will consider ways to help keep your patrons informed of critical resources on voter engagement and electoral processes.

“To date, some of the best, grassroots responses to the tide of fake and misleading news have come from the library community.” *Forbes*, 2018

What Librarians Can Do this Election Season, a Non-Exhaustive List

(see more in Part III of this guide)

1. Learn about the threat of disinformation on our election & key Election Day information.
2. Use this guide to host your own media literacy session for your patrons
3. For Election Day: know what to expect & where to point voters for credible information

PART I: The History and Effect of Disinformation

Why Media Literacy Matters: A Solution to Combating Disinformation

Disinformation poses a dangerous threat to all aspects of democratic engagement, but it's not a new phenomenon. It's helpful to ground this lesson in history to help participants understand the urgency in addressing disinformation. It's also effective, as an educator, to admit that even you have fallen prey to fraudulent news, instilling a sense of togetherness in this fight.

- Faking the News: Fraudulent News and the Fight for Truth (PEN America's report)

- There are countless examples of “fake news” throughout history to draw from for your lessons, including medieval Europe, the Cold War, even early American newspaper days in which reporting was rife with lies.

The Effects of Disinformation On Elections & Democratic Discourse

Providing practical, current examples will drive your point home. Relate the threat to your participants’ daily lives online. Use the latest, most contemporary examples you can find. Providing Context for why media literacy skills are important in your new role as salesman for media literacy.

We encourage you to share PEN America’s 2019 report, [Truth on the Ballot: Fraudulent News, the Midterm Elections, and Prospects for 2020](#), as part of this lesson.

Some likely sources of disinformation in the context of the past couple U.S. elections, for example, include:

- Foreign actors’ fake social media accounts/bots
- Hyper-partisan websites
- Domestic agents peddling conspiracy theories
- Misleading political advertisements
- Spreading Election Day misinformation

Encourage participants to spend some time reflecting on the pivotal role that social media sites and tech giants play in the spread of disinformation online. Encourage them to question the level of transparency in companies like Twitter and Facebook.

Encourage people to take control of their news feeds and think critically about WHERE they get their news. (**Activity 1, below**)

A distinction between disinformation and misinformation:

Disinformation - demonstrably false information created with the intent to deceive the public

Misinformation - false information that has been created and/or shared in error

Why We're Susceptible to Disinformation

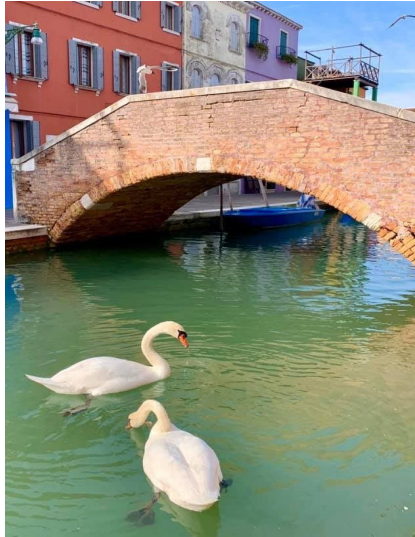
Emotions	Emotions are manipulated, particularly fear and anger, and capitalization and exclamation points suggest urgency Our emotions are HEIGHTENED - disinfo thrives in urgency
A 'patina' of credibility	In other words, the post or tweet or meme 'kinda' looks real with names of fake organizations that appear familiar, real people's names are slightly misspelled, references to people and events are in credible news
Bots	Bots are computer generated and designed to appear to be users on social media, particularly Twitter
Illusory Truth Effect	The more we encounter something, the more we believe it
Confirmation bias	Confirmation bias refers to our human tendency to seek out sources of information from sources which support our own beliefs

Examples of manipulated images and content

Again, we highly encourage media literacy educators to include the most recent and local **examples** of manipulated content when teaching these workshops, as these will be most effective in driving your point home.

To get you going, here are some ideas:

- 1) Joe Exotic & coronavirus: Joe Exotic was rumored to have coronavirus. This has been debunked and proven false. You can discuss with constituents how it was researched and how the false news spread online.
- 2) Images that are altered or misattributed to incorrect contexts. Take this example, of swans swimming in the Venice canals, which was thought to be unheard of before COVID-19. Fake stories proliferated online that this was a "silver lining" of humans being quarantine and that animal life was thriving. The photo was not manipulated, but it was taken out of context and led people to believe something that was untrue:



This part of the lesson is an opportune time to guide participants through the lifecycle of a fake news story, from the way it can be created (a headline, a fake image, even a mis-captioned video), to the way it spreads online. When we share content that we don't realize is disinformation, even if we have good intentions, we become creators and spreaders of misinformation. You can encourage your patrons to think of themselves as ambassadors of truth as well, and their hard work to verify content could be the difference between someone else seeing and believing misleading content...and not.

PART II: Applying Media Literacy to Combat Disinformation

The Basics of Journalism & Standards of Reporting

Integral to media literacy is understanding how the news gets made and what constitutes responsible journalism. Ethics, Quality, Standards:

Responsible journalism

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Ethics:

- Accuracy
- Seek contrary viewpoints and perspectives
- Follow a story no matter the outcome
- Fairness
- Objectivity

Quality:

- Retract, correct, apologize for mistakes
- Correct misinformation *quickly*
- Thoroughness
- Fact-checking
- Challenge quoted sources

Standards:

- Maintain calmness; avoid emotion
- Identify sources
- Use accepted data to verify information
- Pursue evidence

Sources: *Colombia Review of Journalism*, 23 Feb., 2017;
Society of Professional Journalists

PEN AMERICA

The Freedom to Write

How the News Gets Made

If there's an opportunity to speak with a local journalist or visit a local newsroom, we highly encourage this as part of the media literacy training experience. This can be a companion event, or it can be embedded within a workshop setting.

A crucial hallmark of responsible journalism is accuracy. As stewards of public trust, responsible journalists are in pursuit of truth based on evidence. Incumbent on this is thorough research, fact-checking statistics with accredited agencies, and making sure to quote and/or cite sources. Should mistakes occur, a professional news organization will acknowledge and correct them. Quickly. This stands in contrast to peddlers of disinformation who purposefully blur the lines between accuracy and falsehood.

Cynicism and discrediting of mainstream media has grown with charges of bias. A clever disinformation tactic is the creation of false local news outlets, usually websites that have a masthead and seem like a reputable local newspaper. Maybe it's called "The Local Gazette" or "Chesapeake Bay Times" -- you might even fall prey to reading stories on these sites and frankly, they're not real. They're fake news outlets masquerading as purveyors of news.

Responsible journalism ideally pursues the truth. Purveyors of disinformation intentionally misquote or misattribute, elevate conspiracies, and follow up false stories with more disinformation instead of retracting and correcting.

Media Literacy Toolkit

Better to equip people with tools to assess information and discern truth than it is to suppress free speech.

A 2018 Gallup survey found that more than 60% of U.S. adults said they were less likely to share stories from sites labeled as unreliable. And in 2019, a study conducted by the University of California found that *labels are effective, at least in some capacity*. This means that when users get some flag that information might be false, this notification or label can help reduce the sharing of false news by diminishing the credibility of misleading information for users.

Much of this can rest in our hands to take control of our news feeds and more carefully think about our digital experiences so we become publishers in our own right, deciding what we read and what we share. To help with this, encourage patrons to follow a few simple steps:

1. **Take Control** of your digital experience by conducting a scan of how and where you consume information
2. **Take a Step Back** and question your reactions to things you see online. Disinformation outlets thrive on engagements—likes and shares—on social media platforms. They're writing headlines designed to encourage you to disseminate their posts, even if they're false or misleading. Before taking the bait, question what you see.
3. **Understand What You're Seeing** - Distinguish between news and opinion. Some stories look like news but are actually opinion pieces. Is it news? Is it an opinion piece? Before hitting share or forward, consider the type of content first.

4. **Before you share: 2 Steps**

FIRST: Check the credibility of the source - local news is important!

THEN: Fact-check what you're reading.

No matter what context we're considering, we all still have the power to be publishers in some ways. We can choose what we share and we

can begin making proactive choices about how and what we consume information and news.

5. **REVERSE IMAGE SEARCH:** Extra credit! Learn how to do a reverse image search on Google to confirm the origins of an image or even the first clip of a video.

PEN America Guides and Tipsheets

We encourage you to share these guides with your workshop participants. Though they were designed with specific themes in mind, the tips outlined can be applied more generally.

- [How to Talk to Friends and Family Who Share Misinformation](#)
- [PEN America's Guide on COVID-19 and Disinformation](#)
- [PEN America's Guide for Combating Protest Disinformation](#)

Fact-Checking Resources

- [PolitiFact.com](#) by The Poynter Institute or Washington Post's Factchecker both fact-check political content.
- [Fact Check](#), through the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania, in non-partisan and monitors for political accuracy.
- NewsGuard has a [Coronavirus Misinformation Tracking Center](#). It's a great place to comb through if you want to see the breadth of misinformation about the pandemic.
- [All Sides](#) offers perspectives on topical news stories from the left, center, and from the right. They also offer a 'media bias rating.'
- [Snopes.com](#) has been around since 1994 and fact-checks internet content.
- [Reporterslab.org](#) is a database of both national and global fact-checking resources.

Share these resources with your constituents. You should take time to review the websites and resources yourselves, so you're confident and adept at using them.

Consider embedding a news literacy quiz into your workshop as well. It is fun, engaging, and informative for each of us! (**Activity 2, below**).

PART III: What Librarians Can Do Before the 2020 Election

Librarians have a powerful role to play this election season - and beyond!



American Library Association

- 1) **Take stock of the landscape** of disinformation right now. There are examples which abound in the pandemic context as well as about protests and civil unrest -- and of course, we're seeing more and more election-related disinformation. Please start reading about these examples, from fact-checking websites that we provide to other lateral reading. As Election Day nears, the threats and proliferation of this content will only rise. And librarians can be a powerful stopgap to educate their patrons and community about these ills.
- 2) **Host your own session!** You can take our resources, including this packet and our disinformation tip sheets as a starting place to adapt curriculum for your community's needs. Maybe it's just a 30 minute virtual session with patrons about the history and examples of disinformation. Maybe it's a flyer with resources about your local and state election process. Please be proactive, be a resource for voters to help maximize voters understanding the content they see and engaging in our democratic process.

- 3) **Be a nonpartisan, trusted source for patrons:** On Election Day, know what to expect from your local and state officials. Learn about deadlines for mail-in ballots, voter registration, and when results might be coming in after Election Night. Given the unprecedented election season amid a pandemic, we are likely to see delays in results coming in. This isn't necessarily a sign of something bad, it means that election officials are doing their job and counting ballots! Help your patrons by serving as a nonpartisan resource. You can help educate them about what to expect this election season and about knowing where to turn for election resources.

Please keep in touch! We'd love to hear how your media literacy sessions are going in your community. We are available to support you in tailoring this content, co-sponsoring or facilitating workshops with your communities, or building more materials.

Contact PEN America at medialiteracy@pen.org to learn more.

PART IV: Sample Activities

KNOWING THE NEWS: ACTIVITY 1

Personal News Consumption Checklist

Think about your news sources and assess what organizations provide you with the news and how often do you find yourself checking it. Jot down specific publications and companies under 'type of media.'

Type of media: jot down the specific publications and media companies you consume	Access 1-10x/day	Access 10-20x/day	Access 20-30x/day or more	Access once a week	Access once a month
National or international newspaper(s)					
Local newspaper(s)					
News magazine(s)					
Professional journal(s)					
TV: Network news					
TV: Cable news					
TV: Cable opinion					
Radio: Talk/opinion					
Radio: News					
Curated smartphone news feed:					
Digital media: (ex: BuzzFeed, Vox, TheSkimm)					
Documentary(ies):					
Social media platforms (ex: Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, Snapchat, LinkedIn)					

Read the following questions and circle 'true' if the statement applies to you or 'false' if it does not. Select 'not applicable' if necessary.

1. I find myself doing follow-up research after encountering a news story. True/False/Not applicable
2. I consider myself a 'news-junkie.' True/False/Not applicable
3. I educate myself from a wide range of publications with diverse editorial views. True/False/Not applicable
4. I have gotten into conflict with a friend or family member about the reportage of a news story. True/False/Not applicable
5. I have followed the imprisonment of journalists, abroad, or the online harassment of journalists in the U.S. True/False/Not applicable
6. I have been reluctant to share my perspective on a news story with friends and/or family. True/False/Not applicable
7. I read some of the same publications, watch the same networks, or listen to the same radio programs as my parents or as my children. True/False/Not applicable
8. My source of news is similar to my friends' source of news. True/False/Not applicable
9. I feel different news organizations have a bias. True/False/Not applicable
10. I find local news stories more credible than national and international news stories. True/False/Not applicable
11. I find I don't have enough time to delve deeply into news coverage. True/False/Not applicable
12. I have found a correlation between my mood and my depth of awareness of the news. True/False/Not applicable
13. I am familiar with fact checking websites like: snopes.com, politifact.com, factcheck.org? True/False/Not applicable
14. I am familiar with the policies and practices that make a news organization transparent and credible? True/False/Not applicable

KNOWING THE NEWS: ACTIVITY 2

What is factual news? What is fraudulent news?

Instructions: Determine which of the following is a credible news article and what is fraudulent news?

1. Pelosi Stops Bill to Make English the Official Language of the U.S.
2. 'The ducks have won': French court says they may keep on quacking
3. Bill Nye the Science Guy Arrested for Manufacturing and Selling Illegal Drugs
4. Social media post: Ukranian head of Burisma has been indicted and records reveal Hunter Biden & partners received up to \$165 million for their services



[Source: [Posted on 'The Ferguson Show' Facebook page, 20 November, 2019](#)]

5. Cat placed in "solitary confinement" for "repeatedly" breaking feline friends out of shelter

KNOWING THE NEWS: ACTIVITY 3

How 'news literate' are we?

Task: Review your group's responses on *News Literacy Project's* quiz with the following discussion questions:

1. What is the chief difference between a reporter and a columnist?
2. Are you often able to differentiate between pieces you may read online if it's a reported article or if it's an opinion piece?
3. In the news sources you consume, do you know the editorial board's political positions?
4. Were you able to successfully identify all of the advertisements in this exercise?
5. Why do ads appear on news sites? Why are they often tricky to identify?
6. Why might it be problematic that news organizations and websites are subsidized by advertising?
7. What type of sources do you think are the most credible when evaluating a news article?
8. Why do you think trustworthy news organizations avoid the use of anonymous sources?
9. Do you think that news organizations should be obligated to offer equal coverage to a diversity of viewpoints, even if they are not substantiated?
10. Were you surprised to learn the international ranking of how free is the United States' press?

Libraries *and* Voter Engagement



Voting is one of the greatest privileges and responsibilities of citizenship in the United States. Yet, turnout in national elections is consistently lower than two-thirds of eligible voters. Participation rates among certain demographic groups and in state or local elections are often lower still. There is frequent talk about the critical role of libraries in our democracy. What does that look like in practice?

Libraries are nonpartisan, but they are not indifferent. As institutions that provide access to information, resources, programs, and public spaces for all members of a community, libraries are a cornerstone for civic engagement.

Across the country, many libraries:

- provide information about voting and voter registration.
- offer services for voters and registrants, such as hosting polling places.
- convene candidate forums and debates.
- deliver resources and educational programs that increase civic and information literacy.

This guide provides information and examples of how libraries of any type, in any community, can meet their communities' needs for information related to voting and encourage full participation in our democratic processes, with a focus on the upcoming 2020 elections.

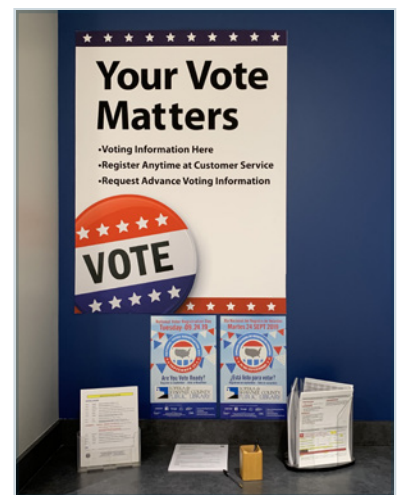
GET STARTED

State and local voting laws vary considerably across the United States. Can your library host a voter registration event, polling location, or ballot drop-off site? It depends on your local laws.

This guide presents ideas that can be used by many types of libraries, but not every idea may be appropriate for your

community. As best practice before undertaking activities related to voting, we recommend that you:

- check your local voting laws. A good place to start is Nonprofit Vote's state-by-state resource: nonprofitvote.org/voting-in-your-state/.
- ensure that all staff and volunteers are aware of local voting laws as they relate to library activities, and keep your board/administration apprised of programs and activities.
- communicate with your local election authorities. They may be able to advise or partner with you. To find your state or local election office, visit usa.gov/election-office.
- coordinate with local nonpartisan civic engagement organizations, such as the League of Women Voters. They may be able to share information about other activities in the community or contribute to the library's efforts.



National Voter Registration Day at Topeka Shawnee Public Library in Kansas

“At a time when we are searching everywhere for community, for connection, for a sense of belonging, for the engines of democracy that will revitalize our civic life, we have . . . the most amazing social infrastructure that designers could ever build and it’s called the library.” —Eric Klinenberg, professor, author

TIMELINE

Nationally, the 2020 United States elections will take place on November 3, 2020. However, in many places, important deadlines and activities take place well prior to November. There are many opportunities for libraries to inform and serve voters throughout the year. For 2020, here are some key deadlines that may apply in your state:

Primary elections: Many states will hold primary elections in early and mid-2020. To vote in these elections, voters must have met applicable registration deadlines and requirements.

Voter registration: Many states have deadlines to register to vote or update a voter registration (e.g. if a previously regis-

tered voter has moved, changed their name, or regained eligibility to vote). To vote in the 2020 general elections, these deadlines are generally in early October.

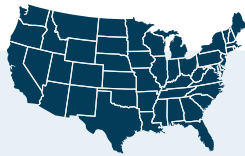


National Voter Registration Day is an unofficial holiday that takes place the fourth Tuesday of September when many communities and organizations promote voter registration. ALA is pleased to partner with National Voter Registration Day to encourage libraries to support voter registration efforts in states where that is appropriate. Learn more at nationalvoterregistrationday.org.

Absentee voting: In some places, there is a deadline to request an absentee or mail ballot if the voter will need one.

Early and mail-in voting: Many states offer some form of early, absentee, or mail-in voting, which begins in some places more than a month prior to Election Day.

Election Day: November 3, 2020.



Visit vote.org's state-by-state list of deadlines:

vote.org/voter-registration-deadlines/

HOW LIBRARIES CAN SUPPORT VOTER ENGAGEMENT

Publish Virtual Resources



- Link to your local and state election offices from the library's home page and include reminders of key dates on the home page banner.
- Curate an electronic collection of resources on voting, democracy, or key campaign issues.
- Create a LibGuide or website that connects your community to key voter information such as registration information, candidate pages, news outlets, and election dates and locations. Be sure to include early and regular voting sites, as well as documentation requirements for registration and for voting.
- Develop a community resource page that links to local organizations working on voter engagement.
- Use social media to keep your community informed about key dates and events.



Developed by librarians Nate Gass and Haley Samuelson, Be a Voter is an online voter education resource offered by Cook Memorial Public Library District in Illinois.

Visit: cooklib.org/be-a-voter/.

“The Civic & Community Engagement Team hosts Meet & Greet the Candidates nights, which feature all candidates in a space open to all residents. The programs are extremely popular with candidates and voters alike.”

—Jean Canosa Albano, Springfield City Library, MA



Create Displays

Create a voter information area in your library and publicize its availability to the community. Include information from local election agencies and nonpartisan organizations, and post key dates such as voter registration deadlines, primary elections, early voting, and general election.

With the approach of the 100th anniversary of passage of the 19th amendment, granting women the right to vote, create a voting timeline that includes major milestones in U.S. voting history, from the drafting of the Constitution and the passage of the Voting Rights Act to the change in voting age.

Build a display of books by candidates, or books about voting, our democratic system, or major issues in the election.



Make sure that voting information is visible and available during other library events.

Live stream events on Facebook or another platform so that they are accessible to an even wider audience.

Spread the Word

Educate library staff and volunteers about issues that will impact libraries and encourage them to ask questions of candidates about those issues.



Have one of your library champions (director, trustee, volunteer) write a letter to the editor about the resources the library offers, and how important libraries are to an informed and engaged electorate.

Create a bookmark or giveaway that includes key dates and highlights the library's election-related programs and resources.

Work with local or student news outlets to publicize events and resources.

Host Events

If your state and local laws allow, host voter registration at the library. Have the academic or school library serve as a voter registration site. In schools, offer voter registration during open houses or parent teacher conferences.



Host a candidate forum. Be sure that all candidates on the ballot are invited and a nonpartisan facilitator is selected.

Host a debate or forum about a local or national issue and include speakers on all sides of the issue.

Invite a local expert to give a talk on voting, elections, or local issues. Include a question and answer session after the talk.

Host an event for community members or students to watch a campaign debate. Follow with a facilitated discussion.

Host a movie night featuring a film about U.S. politics and invite a local expert to moderate a discussion after the film.

Sponsor a mock election for youth who are not yet eligible to vote. In school settings, partner with a social studies teacher and precede the vote with a mock debate.

Partner with Other Organizations

Many opportunities exist to collaborate with national and local organizations to register voters, educate the community about issues and candidates, host events, and share information.



Reach out to nonpartisan groups such as the League of Women Voters, Rotary, chamber of commerce, student government, Parent Teacher Association, and others. Some have national websites that offer resources and can connect you with local affiliates.

ALA is pleased to partner with organizations that engage voters in all stages of the electoral process, including **Democracy Class**, **National Voter Registration Day, 22x20**, and **Purple Project for Democracy**.

RESOURCES

Community Conversations

ala.org/LTC > ALA's Libraries Transforming Communities (LTC) website offers a variety of free dialogue and deliberation training and resources to help libraries engage their communities.

lww.org/elections/educating-voters > The League of Women Voters partners with organizations across the country to educate voters via forums, debates, and other programs.

Voter Registration and Information

fvap.gov > For service members and Americans living overseas, the Federal Voting Assistance Program provides critical information for voting absentee.

nationalvoterregistrationday.org > National Voter Registration Day provides training and resources for any organization that wishes to host a voter registration effort. NVRD is celebrated on the fourth Tuesday of September.

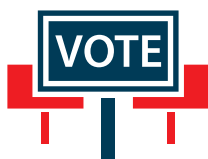
nonprofitvote.org > Nonprofit Vote is a consortium of nonpartisan, nonprofit organizations seeking to provide information and resources in order to increase voter participation in elections. It includes state-by-state voting information.

turbovote.org > Turbo Vote offers English and Spanish language resources, including a mobile app, to facilitate greater participation in elections with voter registration, filing for absentee ballots, voting information, and deadline reminders.

vote.gov > This federal website connects visitors to online voter registration and provides additional registration information, including for those voting from overseas.

vote411.org > A project of the League of Women Voters, Vote 411 offers voter registration information, including deadlines, and allows voters to see what will appear on their ballot.

whenweallvote.org > When We All Vote is focused on increasing participation in elections at every level of government, particularly among young voters.



Candidate and Election Information



ballotpedia.org > Ballotpedia is a nonpartisan information source that allows voters to see what will be on their ballots.

campuselect.org > Campus Election Engagement Project is designed for faculty, staff, and students at colleges and universities, and includes both state and national elections.

fec.gov > The Federal Elections Commission includes campaign filing information for candidates as well as a searchable database for voters.

govtrack.us > GovTrack allows users to track federal legislation or see the voting and bill sponsorship records of Representatives and Senators.

votesmart.org > Vote Smart includes search tools that allow you to research candidates and elected officials, voting records, and issues. They also offer a mobile app.

Fact Checking Tools



factcheck.org > Fact Check is a project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center and focuses on national politics.

politifact.com > Founded by the Tampa Bay Times and now operated by the Poynter Institute, PolitiFact is a nonpartisan fact checking organization that focuses on national political figures.

For Children and Youth



20x20.org > A partner of YALSA and ALA, 22x20 builds youth media literacy skills as a path to informed civic engagement.

bensguide.gpo.gov > Sponsored by the Government Printing Office and an official partner of AASL, this resource is dedicated to educating children of different age levels about the workings of federal government.

kidsvotingusa.org > Kids Voting USA offers nonpartisan information for kids and resources for educators.

rockthevote.org > A nonprofit founded by members of the recording industry, Rock the Vote is geared towards younger voters and includes information on issues and voting, as well as **Democracy Class**—lesson plans for teachers and education partners working with high school students.