LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 8 to 10
About the Author:	This lesson is based on an online activity created by Ithaca College Librarian, John Henderson.

ICYouSee: A Lesson in Critical Thinking

This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & CREATE: A Digital Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools: http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework.

Overview

In this lesson, students use a web-based activity to help them think critically about how to determine the quality of web resources.

Learning Outcomes

The students will:

- understand the importance of authenticating online resources
- recognize how the source of information may affect the quality of information found on a website
- use a template to authenticate and assess the quality of web sources

Preparation and Materials

- Prior to class, arrange for access to a computer lab. (Depending on the length of your class period, you may need two computer lab sessions to complete this lesson.)

Procedure

Explain to students that an important part of assessing web pages is to understand that the quality of information found online can vary greatly.

Ask students:

- In order to determine the quality of information on a website, what elements do you have to consider?
- What sources of information do you think might be your best sources of information?
- What sources of information do you think might be your weakest sources of information?
- Is it easy to tell the quality of information on a web page?

Activity

- Have students read the handout *ICYouSee: Guide for Critical Thinking*:
  - Give them 15 – 20 minutes to review the first five points on the sheet and visit the sample Web sites that are offered. (Tell them that they are not to go on to the homework section at this point.)
  - As they go through this page, they are to summarize and record the main points. (This includes jot-notes about what they think the quality of information is on each of the Star Trek Web pages.)
  - Once they are done, summarize the main points as a class, and discuss how students determined the quality of information on the Star Trek pages.
  - When this is completed, have students complete the Mayan Calendar homework assignment, applying the questions that have been provided for each site.
  - Students will submit their answers to you.
  - Once assignments have been returned, discuss their findings and answers as a class.

Evaluation

- Completed homework assignments.

ICYou See: Guide to Critical Thinking

Consider the following five suggestions when examining Web pages:

1. **Make sure you are in the right place**.
    Why are you using the Web? Don't use the Web because it is fun and easy; use it when it is the appropriate source for the information you are seeking. An hour on the Web may not answer a question that you could find within two minutes of picking up a reference book. (This is not to say there aren't useful Web sources.) The Web may have been originally designed as a medium to exchange scientific (and military?) research data, but it has become a commercial playground. The research is still there, but it is harder to find, or no longer free, or not easily accessible, or inaccessible.

2. **When in doubt, doubt.**
    Because almost anyone can put up almost anything on the Web, you must be especially careful as you examine each site. Accuracy is not always easy to detect, so you must test one source against another. Try to differentiate fact from opinion. Look for ambiguity and manipulative reasoning and bias. Examine assumptions, including and perhaps especially, your own.Who coined the phrase "Question authority!"? Two different Web sites provide two different answers. One site, which has since disappeared with no forwarding address, attributed the quote to Tim Leary [sic]. Tofa's Quote Collection attributes it to J. Baldwen [sic]. My advice: question the authority of both these sources.

3. **Consider the source**.
    Who are the authors of the Web page? What gives them their expertise? By what authority do they write? Have the authors indicated their research methods or provided any supportive evidence for their conclusions? Have they provided you a means to contact them? Check the URL to see if the domain name includes;.**com** (commercial),.**gov** (governmental),.**org** (non-profit organization),.**net** (network),.**edu** (educational),or a **two letter code** (country of origin)It will give you a good clue about the Web page's author or source. You can't judge a Web site just by its code, however. Not all commercial sites will try to sell you something, but they warrant a different kind of scrutiny than those at a governmental site. Pages found on educational or non-profit organization Web servers can be extraordinarily diverse. Non-profits can be professional associations or seditious societies or silly groups. Educational Web sites range from forums for sophomoric humor to clearinghouses for cutting edge articles on post-partum particle physics (OK, I made that last one up. Who can you trust? And who is the author of this page, anyway?).

4. **Know what's happening**.
    Identify the purpose of the Web Page. Is the main purpose to inform, to persuade, or to sell you something? If you know the motive behind the page's creation, you can better judge its content.For example, an online movie review should be judged on the same merit as a review in the daily newspaper. Make sure what you are looking at is:

    *   [a movie review](), or
    *   [real film criticism]()

However, what you will more likely to find on the Web is

- a blurb about a film supplied by the movie studio producing it, or

- some fan's bubbling praise

5. **Look at details.**
   Although great ideas and great Web design are not necessarily linked, internal clues can tell you much about a Web page. Check for the obvious things, such as good grammar and correct spelling. Note the depth of the material presented. When was the Web item last revised, and how up-to-date are the links? What kind of sources are linked? Are the links evaluated or annotated in any way? Graphics may be great, but do they serve any purpose other than decoration? Just as a magazine with many color advertisements may have a different purpose than a scholarly journal with no illustrations, a Web site with mirthful color and slickness may not be primarily a research site.

Homework Assignment

Using the topic of "The Mayan Calendar," take some time to analyze the following links. Evaluate six of these sites, writing no more than one paragraph for each one. As you look at these sites, keep in mind the following questions:

- Does this site address the specific topic of the Mayan calendar?

- What is the purpose of the site? Who is responsible for the site?

- Does it tell you anything more than you could find out in an encyclopaedia?

- Is the source of the site authoritative, or is the site of dubious value for research purposes?

- Which of the sites are the "best" sites? Why? Why? Why?

   1. The Mayan Calendar: http://www.webexhibits.org/calendars/calendar-mayan.html

   2. Dreamspell Calendar: http://home.earthlink.net/~cosmichand/

   3. Mayan Epigraphic Database Project: http://www2.iath.virginia.edu/med/

   4. Mayan Calendar and Cosmology: http://edj.net/mc2012/mayans.htm

   5. Portals of Destiny: http://www.kachina.net/~alunajoy/96apr.html

   6. Mayan Calendrics: http://www.gunthar.com/maya/mayan_calendrics.html

   7. Mayan Calendar: http://mayacalendar.com/mayacalendar/