C.R.A.P. Detection

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The first thing we all need to know about information online is how to detect crap, a technical term for information tainted by ignorance, inept, or deliberate deception. This test, with an acronym that is sure to be remembered, is a great tool for evaluating online information, and for media literacy in general.

Learning Objectives:

Students will:
• Learn the four steps of the C.R.A.P. Detection.
• Apply the C.R.A.P. Detection test to online sources of information.
• Begin to understand the importance of evaluating online information.

Lesson Introduction:

Before students enter the classroom, write C.R.A.P. on the board. As they enter tell them that this is what you will be discussing today. It will be sure to get their attention.

The Lesson:

1. Discuss how the Internet is a mixed bag: full of good information and bad. As they learned last year, it is easy for just about anyone to post information online, therefore we need to learn strategies to effectively evaluate what we find on the Internet. By learning this simple acronym and what it means, students will have a tool that will help them to analyze online information.

2. Learn the acronym. Have the students write the following information in their journals so they can refer to it later:

C.R.A.P. DETECTION

“Every man should have a built-in automatic crap detector operating inside him.”

Ernest Hemingway, 1954

Currency -
• How current is the information?
• How recently has the website been updated?
• Is it current enough for your topic?
The Lesson, continued

Reliability:
• Is the source reliable?
• Is content of the resource primarily opinion? Is is balanced?
• Does the creator provide references or sources for data or quotations?

Authority:
• Who is the creator or author?
• What are their credentials?
• Are they reputable?
• What is the publisher’s interest (if any) in this information?

Purpose/Point of View:
• What is the purpose of the site?
• Is it biased? Opinionated?
• Is the creator/author trying to sell you something?

3. ACTIVITY. In this activity students apply their C.R.A.P. skills to a source of information found online. Assuming the role of a student researching a topic, students evaluate an online article about the artificial sweetener, Aspartame. Have students work in pair to complete this activity. However each student should fill out his or her own worksheet (attached).

4. WRAP-UP by having each group share the results of their C.R.A.P. Detection with the class.

GOAL:
To give students an unforgettable tool for analyzing online information.

References:

http://www.amazon.com/Net-Smart-How-Thrive-Online/dp/0262017458#
Media Smarts, http://mediasmarts.ca
C.R.A.P. DETECTION* CHEAT SHEET

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*FROM “NET SMART: HOW TO THRIVE ONLINE” BY HOWARD RHEINGOLD
USE YOUR C.R.A.P. DETECTION SKILLS TO EVALUATE THIS SITE:
www.rense.com/health/sweetners.htm

Currency: How current is the information, is it current enough for your paper? Explain:
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Reliability: Does this information seem reliable? Does the creator provide references? Explain:
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Authority: Who is the author of this information? Is the author reputable? Explain:
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

Purpose/Point of View: What is the purpose of this site? Does the author seem to have a point of view? Explain:
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________

What Would You Do to Double Check The Reliability of This Website? Explain:
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________________
READ The Deadly Truth About Aspartame ('NutraSweet' - 'Equal' - 'Spoonful', etc)

"...when they remove brain tumors, they have found high levels of aspartame in them".
By Nancy Markie
12-12-98

I have spent several days lecturing at the WORLD ENVIRONMENTAL CONFERENCE on "ASPARTAME marketed as 'NutraSweet', 'Equal', and 'Spoonful'." In the keynote address by the EPA, they announced that there was an epidemic of multiple sclerosis and systemic lupus, and they did not understand what toxin was causing this to be rampant across the United States. I explained that I was there to lecture on exactly that subject.

When the temperature of Aspartame exceeds 86 degrees F, the wood alcohol in ASPARTAME converts to formaldehyde and then to formic acid, which in turn causes metabolic acidosis. (Formic acid is the poison found in the sting of fire ants). The methanol toxicity mimics multiple sclerosis, thus people were being diagnosed with having multiple sclerosis in error. The multiple sclerosis is not a death sentence, where methanol toxicity is.

In the case of systemic lupus, we are finding it has become almost as rampant as multiple sclerosis, especially Diet Coke and Diet Pepsi drinkers. Also, with methanol toxicity, the victim usually drinks three to four 12 oz. cans of them per day, some even more. In the cases of systemic lupus, which is triggered by ASPARTAME, the victim usually does not know that the aspartame is the culprit. The victim continues its use aggravating the lupus to such a degree, that sometimes it becomes life threatening. When we get people off the aspartame, those with systemic lupus usually become asymptomatic. Unfortunately, we cannot reverse this disease.

On the other hand, in the case of those diagnosed with Multiple Sclerosis (when in reality, the disease is methanol toxicity), most of the symptoms disappear. We have seen cases where their vision has returned and even their hearing has returned. This also applies to cases of tinnitus.

During a lecture I said "If you are using ASPARTAME (NutraSweet, Equal, Spoonful, etc) and you suffer from fibromyalgia symptoms, spasms, shooting pains, numbness in your legs, cramps, vertigo, dizziness, headaches, tinnitus, joint pain, depression, anxiety attacks, slurred speech, blurred vision, or memory loss -- you probably have ASPARTAME DISEASE!" People were jumping up during the lecture saying, "I've got this, is it reversible?" It is rampant. Some of the speakers at my lecture even were suffering from these symptoms. In one lecture attended by the Ambassador of Uganda, he told us that their sugar industry is asking aspartame! He continued by saying that one of the industry leader's son could no longer walk - due in part by product usage!

We have a very serious problem. Even a stranger came up to Dr. Hessets (one of my speakers) and myself and said, "Could you tell me why so many people seem to be coming down with MS?" During a visit to a hospice, a nurse said that six of her friends, who were heavy Diet Coke addicts, had all been diagnosed with MS. This is beyond coincidence.
Currency: How current is the information, is it current enough for your paper?
Questions surrounding the currency of this information bring up some interesting points. The original Web page where this information was found dated the article December 12, 1998. A further search reveals that this document is "...a copy of an email sent to a group of doctors following the 1995 World Environmental Conference."

Reliability: Does this information seem reliable? Does the creator provide references?
Let's check the statements for bias:
“...people were jumping up during the lecture saying 'I've got this [aspartame disease], is it reversible?;”

The author uses emotional language to persuade her audience and to create a sense of urgency about spreading this message to a largely unsuspecting public. She makes strong assertions, but does so using vague language and anonymous sources. She implies that Aspartame causes multiple sclerosis.

Authority: Who is the author of this information? Is the author reputable?
No contact or background information about the author or the conference she attended appears on this Web page. However, a search can be used to dig a little deeper. The most surprising result of the search is that there is no Nancy Markle. It turns out that the original source of this "presentation" was actually a message posted to newsgroup by a woman named Betty Martini. Betty Martini, who is not a medical professional, believes that there is a conspiracy between the industry creating Aspartame, and the American Food and Drug Administration. She has founded an organization called "Mission Possible International," whose Web site houses an archive of anti-Aspartame literature. Information on the "World Environmental Conference on Aspartame" is also sketchy. If you search the Keynote Address archives of the American Environmental Protection Agency site — the organization that was supposed to have presented the keynote address at this conference — there is no reference to a conference by that name.

Purpose/Point of View: What is the purpose of this site? Does the author seem to have a point of view? Explain:
This article contains an abundance of unsubstantiated, anecdotal information, but very little factual evidence to substantiate claims. Ms. Martini blames Aspartame for almost every illness known to mankind, including brain tumors, blindness and Alzheimer's disease. Yet she offers no links to medical studies that might support her claims. A critical reader might wonder why, if Aspartame is responsible for so many serious health problems, why haven't medical associations raised the alarm.

Where else might you turn to for reliable information about Aspartame?
Information about Aspartame was found at www.rense.com/health/sweetners.htm. By paring this URL down to its domain name, www.rense.com/, we are able to learn more about the nature of the Web site hosting this information. We discover that "rense.com" is the supporting Web page for the Jeff Rense radio show. Both the radio show and the Web site are dedicated to issues that don't make the mainstream news.

*From: Media Awareness Network (now Media Smarts): http://mediasmarts.ca