2. Critical thinking skills

Video summary

A short classroom film for secondary schools exploring some key critical thinking skills used for navigating online media (for example, checking sources for information seen online and spotting the signs of image manipulation). In the film, presenter and documentary filmmaker James Blake encourages students to critically analyse online content (from social media feeds to news site articles), so that they actively evaluate what they see, stay safer online and become responsible digital citizens.

The film also looks at material that may have been created or manipulated by Artificial Intelligence (AI).

Before watching

Establish a safe learning environment. Remind students not to mock or shame others for believing false information; anyone can be vulnerable to it. Encourage students to focus on general online behaviour rather than sharing sensitive experiences.

In preparation for watching the film in class, ask students where they most often encounter online content (social media, YouTube, AI chatbots, search engines, etc) and whether they've ever seen something online that turned out not to be true or felt "off."

Briefly explain that generative AI tools can create realistic text, images, and videos, and that this content isn't always reliable. Emphasise that the video will explore how to think critically about what they see online.

While watching

There are 'pause points' in the video for students to engage in tasks. You can either pause at these suggested points (you will need to manually pause the video to give your students enough time to complete these tasks) or watch the film through and try the activities afterwards.

Activity 1

The first task challenges students to read several social media posts that are different in tone but are all about the same event.

Students should discuss:

- Which of the voices would they trust? Why?
- What clues do you use to decide if the post is reliable?

Give students a maximum of five minutes for discussion followed up with whole class feedback.

It is not easy to decide which of the posts to trust, as every comment has been created by someone or a computer system that might have a hidden agenda. There are some more obviously unreliable comments, for example:

@Susan.B_CommunityFirst *This is exactly why that skate park was a mistake. It just attracts violence. All these skater kids are the same, a total menace.*

This post is trying to manipulate the reader into thinking the skate park should not exist and that by supporting it you are not putting the community first. It uses exaggerated language and a negative tone.

Activity 2

The second task requires students to look at four images which have either been used out of context or have been generated by AI. They need to consider how to investigate their origin. Remind students that some of these images are AI-generated.

Possible responses might include:

"I could use Google to see where the image first appeared online and check if it's been used before in a different context."

"I would zoom in to see if there are strange shadows, inconsistent lighting, or abnormal edges that don't look natural."

"I could see if credible news outlets or fact-checking websites are reporting the same image and event."

If they didn't guess correctly, let students know that the first two images were in fact AI-generated using Google Gemini for the purposes of this film (the bioluminescent fox and the Victorian child with the tablet).

After watching

Headline and post analysis: provide students with several social media posts and headlines. They must identify signs of exaggeration, emotional manipulation, or misleading framing.

Reflection and personal strategy: ask students to reflect on their own online habits:

- Which strategies from the video will they use to check content?

- How will they verify AI-generated material or sensational posts in the future?

Curriculum notes

This film will be relevant for several curriculum areas:

Citizenship and PSHE Key Stage 3 and 4: understanding the impact of online content on society and individual decision-making; developing skills to participate responsibly and thoughtfully in digital communities; recognising the importance of informed, evidence-based opinions.

Computing Key Stage 3: developing critical thinking skills when interacting with digital content; understanding how AI can generate content and the risks of misinformation; practising safe, responsible, and ethical online behaviour.

English Key Stage 3 and 4: analysing texts and media to evaluate reliability, perspective, and bias; understanding how language, images, and structure can influence meaning; building skills to fact-check, cross-reference, and critically evaluate sourc