Teaching Media Literacy

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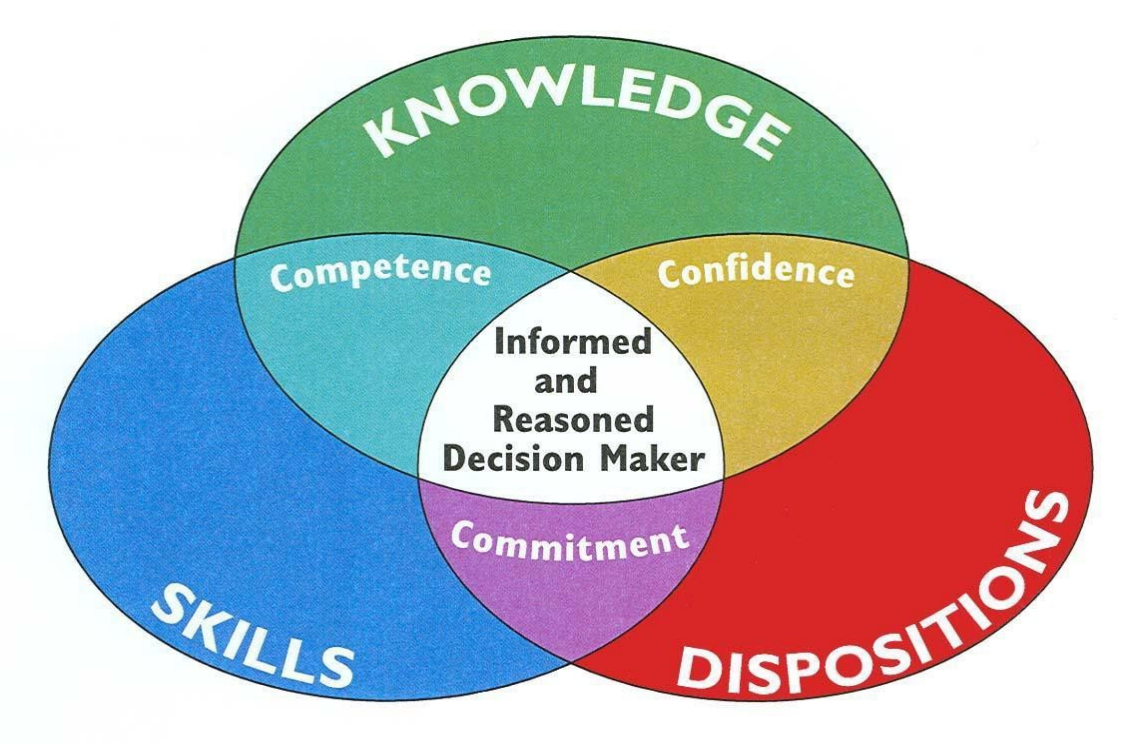
The vision for NJ Student Learning Standards for Social Studies (2020)

An education in social studies fosters a population that:

- Is **civic-minded**, globally aware, and **socially responsible**;
- Exemplifies fundamental **values of democracy and human rights** through active participation in local, state, national, and global communities;
- Makes **informed decisions** about local, state, national, and global events based on inquiry and analysis;
- Considers **multiple perspectives**, values diversity, and promotes cultural understanding;
- Recognizes the **relationships** between people, places, and resources as well as the implications of an interconnected global economy;
- Applies an understanding of **critical media literacy skills** when utilizing technology to learn, communicate, and collaborate with diverse people around the world; and
- Discerns fact from falsehood and **critically analyzes information** for validity and relevance.

How do we help our students to become informed and reasoned decision-makers?



Media Literacy

Lithograph of "The Ruby Amphitheater on the Moon"

"Reporters with Fake News" 1894 by Frederick Burr Oper

On August 21, 1835 *The New York Sun* reported that an astronomer used "hydro-oxygen magnifiers" to find life on the moon.The paper announced it was fake a month later

Where do you get your news/ information?

- Newspapers
- Radio
- Television News
- Television talk shows
- Television “comedy” shows
- Cable television
- Friends and relatives
- Online
- Social Media

Where do your students get news/information?

- Newspapers
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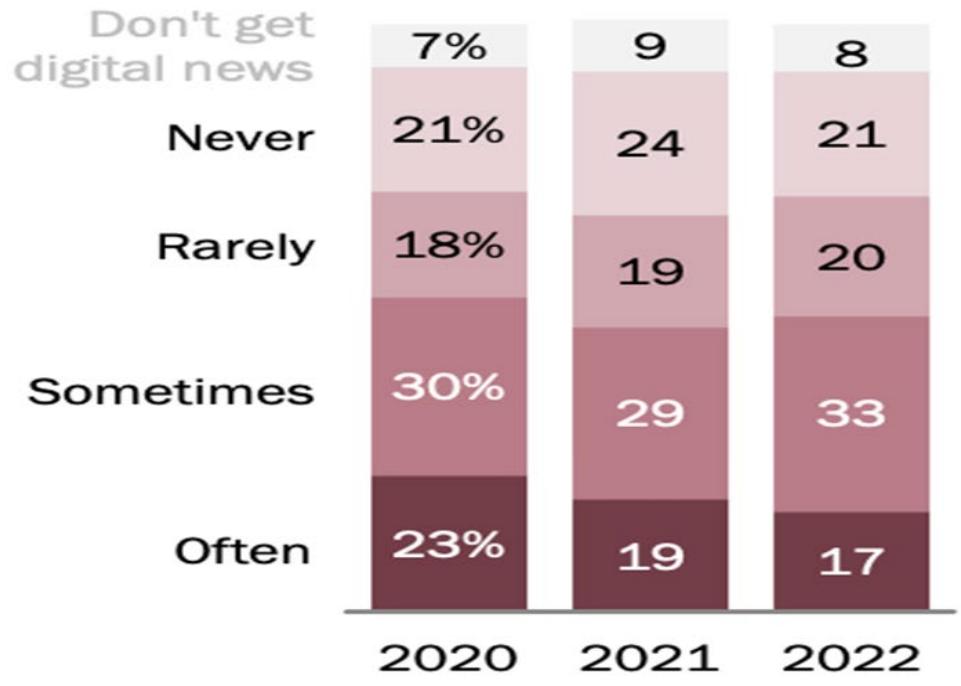
News consumption on social media

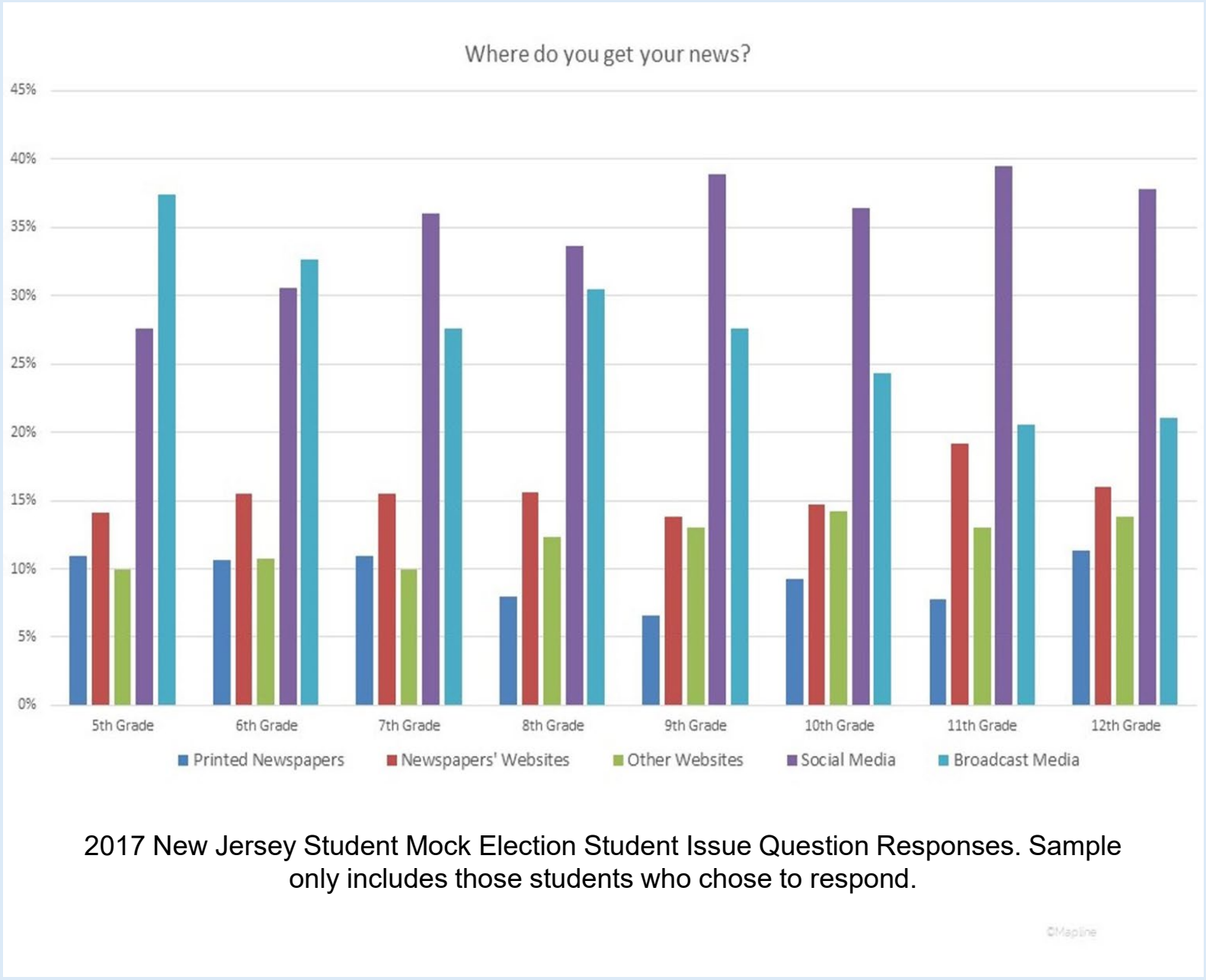
% of U.S. adults who get news from social media ...



Note: Figures may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted July 18-Aug. 21, 2022.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER



2017 New Jersey Student Mock Election Student Issue Question Responses. Sample only includes those students who chose to respond.

Print Media

- We need to develop the skills to be able to separate fact from fake, biased or distracting news.

- Print media is regulated:
  - Print media must clearly separate “News” articles from “Opinion” articles.

  - Print media controls what its reporters write and is responsible (and liable) for the veracity of what it prints.

  - Libel and slander are NOT protected speech. You can sue a publication for defamation if it published a false fact about you and you suffered damage as a result—such as a lost job, a decline in revenue, or a tarnished reputation. If you are an ordinary, private person, you must show that the news outlet was negligent (careless).

Television and Radio

- Broadcast media (not cable) are subject to significant federal regulation because, according to U.S. law, the public owns the airwaves and television and radio broadcasters must get a license.

- For many years a federal “fairness doctrine” required broadcast media to provide fair coverage of political candidates and political opinions. The requirement has been removed but the practice continues, which is why you have so many talking heads with “differing opinions”

- Broadcast media, including cable TV, are subject to liability for falsehoods the same as print media. E.g., Dominion Voting System sued Fox News for defamation for its claims that its voting machines were rigged and that’s why Trump lost in 2020. Fox settled for almost $800 million after discovery that made it clear that Fox knew what it was saying was false.

- Today’s problem is that news has become entertainment and entertainment (e.g., Saturday Night Live, The Daily Show, etc.) has become a source of news.

Digital Media

- Most of our young people get their news, as well as their information for their class assignment, from digital media.
- NOT subject to Federal Communication Commission requirements
- Easy to access and has so much information (and misinformation, thus the problem)
- How can we help our students to identify and use reliable sources of online information?

Stanford History: Civic Online Reasoning

Offers a series of free, online lessons for you and your students to help assess the reliability of online resources at [Home | Civic Online Reasoning (stanford.edu)]

Search Smarter: Exercise
"Click Restraint"

- Too often students click on the first "hit" in any Internet search. This may not be the best source but could be a sponsored item or misinformation.
- Teach students to carefully investigate the list of potential sites before choosing to click.
- https://cor.stanford.edu/videos/better-info-click-restraint

Use Wikipedia Wisely

- Wikipedia can be a good starting point for gathering information **if you use it wisely.**
- Check the sources in the footnotes and follow them.
- Go to https://cor.stanford.edu/videos/how-to-use-wikipedia-wisely

Lateral Reading

To help determine the reliability of a source, read laterally rather than simple reading down the page.

- https://cor.stanford.edu/videos/lateral-reading-video

Climate Change: Which sources are reliable?

- The Institute for Energy Research https://www.instituteforenergyresearch.org/about/
- Journal of Climate Resilience and Climate Justice at MIT https://direct.mit.edu/crcj
- Yale Program on Climate Change Communication https://climatecommunication.yale.edu/for-educators/?gclid=Cj0KCQjwy5maBhDdARIsAMxrkw0LKoqjpbc0MqS_EFB3K8xIK9PlqH7l9UEe51gZGj6WNqVE4Ihl6sgaAsDZEALw_wcB
- Heartland Institute climateataglance.com
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change https://www.ipcc.ch/

Criteria for Reading Laterally

Climate Change: Which sources are reliable?

- What is the source?
- What is the mission?
- Where does the funding come from?
- Who is the author? Check the bio or other publications
- Is it peer reviewed?
- Does it make sense?

Read Laterally

Climate Change: Which sources are reliable?

- The Institute for Energy Research
- Journal of Climate Resilience and Climate Justice at MIT
- Yale Program on Climate Change Communication
- The Heartland Institute
- Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

Social Media

- Sec. 230 of the Communications Act of 1996 provides immunity to online platforms from civil liability based on third-party content (with exceptions, such as federal crimes): "No provider or user of an interactive computer service shall be treated as the publisher or speaker of any information provided by another information content provider".

- E.g., If you or I or *The New York Times* puts an article on Facebook, you or I or *The New York Times* is responsible for its veracity, not Facebook
- Social media earn large profits from their platforms and websites

- Large internet platforms use sophisticated opaque algorithms to determine the content their users see—to maximize the amount of time spent on platforms–help to spread false claims, some promoting violence, to millions of people.

- Social media sites (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, TikTok, Snapchat, Reddit, and other online platforms) are free to set their own practices and rules on what can be posted and spread.

Social media is the main source of news for today's students

- What problems with social media have you encountered with your students?
- How can we help students navigate this unregulated area?
- Have students practice click restraint, identify the source, check a variety of sources, and use critical thinking skills with social media
- Teach students "don't amplify until you verify"

Critical Thinking:

Logical Fallacies

Errors in reasoning that invalidate the argument

Media Literacy: A Little Logic

"In a republican nation, whose citizens are to be led by reason and persuasion and not by force, the art of reasoning becomes of first importance."

Thomas Jefferson

Why Teach Logical Fallacies?

- A little logic probably doesn't seem like a social studies or media literacy topic, but there is a good reason for doing this.
- Critical thinking about statements provides a means for addressing some problematic statements that may be stated in classroom discussions. It allows critiques according to *structure*, rather than *content*. It also helps avoid the problem of *"vulgar relativity"*.
- Logic is a key part of media literacy and critical thinking, which are essential for addressing controversial issues.
- Logical fallacies are committed by politicians and partisan pundits, either with the intent to deceive or as a result of sloppy thinking, leading to false conclusions and untrue positions. Students need the tools to recognize this.
- Similar to other media literacy skills, this can also help students become better consumers and protect their financial security.

Ad Hominem

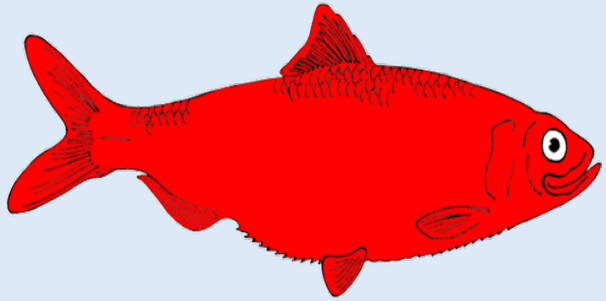
- This is when the statement falsely directs attention from claim evidence to the person making the claim.
- Candidate X attempts to discredit Candidate Y's economic policies by describing her as a career politician.

Strawman

- This is replacing the original claim with an extreme or exaggerated version. When a candidate cannot refute the opponent's original claim, he/she may attack an extreme version easier to knock down, as a strawman would be easier to knock down.
- Candidate Y criticizes a particular (unpopular) treaty. Candidate X claims Candidate Y will rip up **all** of the nation's security treaties endangering the nation.

Red Herring

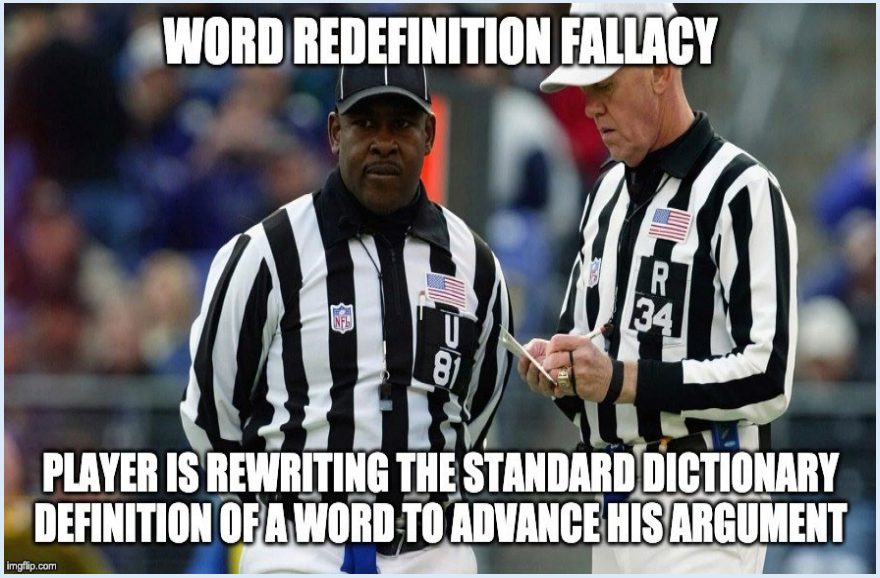
- These are intentional diversions to redirect the conversation away from an argument the candidate doesn't want to address.
- During a debate, Candidate X identifies potential conflicts of interest on the part of Candidate Y. Candidate Y starts talking about the age of Candidate X.



Slippery Slope

- A slippery slope is when the candidate ***falsely*** posits a sequence leading to an unfavorable outcome.
- Candidate X says if we pass regulations prohibiting dumping in rivers, the chemical industry will go bankrupt. If the chemical industry goes bankrupt, the economy will collapse. If the economy collapses, America will be weak and conquered by enemies. Therefore, we should not pass regulations prohibiting dumping in rivers.
- This one is tricky. Our example was preposterous to make it easy to understand. However, in the “real world” if one can show evidence that a sequence does lead to unfavorable consequences, a slippery slope doesn’t occur.

Question Begging Definition



- The candidate attempts to redefine terms to rule out contrary views.
- Candidate X asserts that no “true American” can support a peace treaty. Candidate Y points out that Person W, an American war hero and diplomat, does support a peace treaty. Candidate X states that this just goes to show that Person W is not a “true American”.

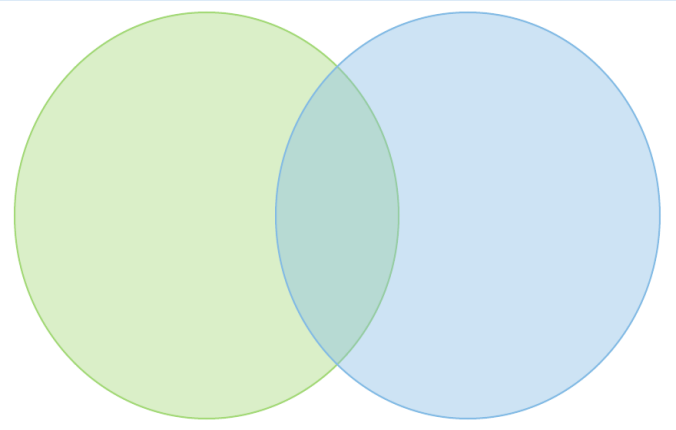
Appeal To Fear

- This fallacy occurs when the candidate, in the absence of evidence or reason, plays upon people's fears to damage an opponent or discredit a policy.
- Candidate X asserts that "if we continue the past administration's immigration policies terrorists will be ravaging our streets and taking citizens hostage."

Bandwagon

- This is the fallacy of basing the truth of a position on a large number of followers.
- Candidate X says that his policy of printing lots of extra money is sound because many people say so.

False Disjunct



- In our deeply divided partisan era, this one is especially problematic.
- This is the fallacy of claiming that a combination of possibilities cannot occur. While some options are indeed mutually exclusive, that is not always the case.
- You're either with us or against us.
- You're voting for either Republican or Democratic candidates.
- Candidate X is either on the side of the police or Black Lives Matters.
- This fallacy is used by those who disdain compromise and may profit from exploiting wedge issues.

NOW LET'S TRY A FEW

- Go to the Google folder and locate the logical fallacies document
- Take a few minutes to discuss them with your table. Identify the fallacy. Be prepared to explain your reasoning.
- We will reconvene to briefly discuss them and compare notes.

- During a discussion of anti-Semitic chants by neo-Nazi marchers in Charlottesville, a student says “what about the yelling and looting during the Newark riots in the ‘60s?”
- What is wrong with this statement?
- This fallacy is . . .

Red Herring

- Of course the student council president is in favor of a reduced homework policy, she's a student.
- What is wrong with this statement?
- This fallacy is . . .

Ad Hominem

- During a party policy conference, a Republican states that it is the belief of Republicans that the 2020 election was fraudulently stolen and there should be tighter restrictions on voting. Someone points out that a former Bush administration official stated the election was fair, without widespread fraud, and that the GOP should increase voter rights to attract diverse voter groups. The Republican then states "That just proves he's a RINO (Republican In Name Only)"
- What is wrong with this statement?
- The fallacy is . . .

Question Begging Definition

- President Biden announces his pledge to have the United States reduce carbon emissions, part of which may suggest a reduction in meat production. A right-wing media commentator announces "America has to stop eating meat" and a colleague says the "elites will mandate a 90% meat reduction, limiting Americans to one burger per month." (based on a true scenario).

- What is wrong with this statement?

- This fallacy is . . .

Strawman

- "Recreational drug use should be legal because it's completely harmless. I know lots of kids who say so."
- What is wrong with this statement?
- The fallacy is . . .

Bandwagon

- "If bakeries have to make cakes for LGBQT couples, it will destroy the institution of marriage as we know it. If marriage is destroyed, families will fall apart across America. If families fall apart, society will collapse and the United States will cease to exist."
- What is wrong with this statement?
- This fallacy is . . .

Slippery Slope

- "Why are we discussing whether a protester has the right to kneel during the national anthem? You're either a patriot for this country and its policies or against it."
- What is wrong with this statement?
- This fallacy is . . .

False Disjunct

- "We shouldn't be discussing gun control. Crime is out of control and people need to defend themselves. Criminals are emboldened and out to get us! Do you want to be the victim of a home invasion?"
- What is wrong with this statement?
- This fallacy is . . .

Appeal to Fear

There are many more logical fallacies

- This is only small sample to give you the idea of how to evaluate some statements you may hear from students.
  - Other fallacies include:
  - False Alternatives
  - False Analogy
  - Weasel Words
  - Circular Arguments, including Question-Begging Definitions
  - ...and many more.
- If you are interested, the Center can design a workshop on this topic.

The bottom line: Help your students develop and use their critical thinking skills!

These are life skills they will need as consumers of media and other products and as citizens who need to make reasoned decision-makers in elections.

- Break
- Next Up – Zoom with *News Literacy Project - Checkology*!