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Lesson Plan: The Truth Sleuth Challenge

Materials Needed:

- Computer or tablet with internet access
- Printer (optional)
- Notebook or several sheets of paper
- Pencils, pens, or markers
- "Top Secret: Case Files" folder (a simple manila folder you can label)
- Pre-selected media examples (links provided below)

1. Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- **Identify** the difference between a fact, an opinion, and misinformation in a piece of media.
- **Apply** a simple checklist to evaluate the trustworthiness of an online source.
- **Create** three short media examples (one factual, one biased, one false) to demonstrate understanding of how information can be presented differently.
- **Explain** how spreading misinformation online is similar to spreading gossip at school and why both can be harmful.

2. Alignment with Standards and Curriculum

This lesson aligns with common 4th-5th grade standards for English Language Arts and Digital Literacy, focusing on:

- **Reading Informational Text:** Distinguishing between fact and opinion; explaining how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points.
- **Writing:** Writing informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas and information clearly.
- **Digital Citizenship:** Recognizing the rights, responsibilities, and opportunities of living, learning, and working in an interconnected digital world.

3. Instructional Strategies & Lesson Flow (Approx. 60-75 minutes)

Part 1: The Case of the Missing Cookies (10 minutes)

Goal: To introduce the topic using a relatable, low-stakes example.

1. **The Hook:** Start with a story. "Imagine this: You come into the kitchen and see cookie crumbs on your brother's shirt. Your mom asks, 'Who ate the last cookie?' What's the first thing you think?" (*Student will likely say the brother did it.*)
2. **Introducing Evidence:** "That's a good guess! But what if you found out your dog, Fido, also loves cookies and was just in the kitchen? And what if your brother says he was just wrestling with Fido? The crumbs are a clue, but they don't tell the whole story. Jumping to a conclusion without all the facts is how gossip starts at school, right? Someone sees one thing, makes up a story, and

suddenly everyone believes something that isn't true."

3. **The Connection:** "Today, you're going to become a **Truth Sleuth**. Your job is to look at information online the same way a detective looks at a crime scene—by gathering all the clues before deciding what's true. The internet is like a giant school playground; some things you hear are true, some are just gossip, and some are made up to cause trouble."

Part 2: Detective Training - The C.A.S.E. File Method (15 minutes)

Goal: To provide a memorable and practical tool for evaluating information.

1. Introduce the "C.A.S.E. File" method for checking information. Write this down in the notebook for the student to keep.
2. **C - Creator:** Who made this? Are they an expert? Can you trust them? (e.g., A doctor vs. a random blog)
3. **A - Aim:** Why was this made? Was it to inform you (like a news report), to persuade you (like an ad), or to entertain you (like a cartoon)? Sometimes, the aim is to trick you.
4. **S - Support:** What evidence or proof does it have? Does it link to other trustworthy sources? Does it use real facts and quotes, or just opinions and strong emotional words?
5. **E - Emotion:** How does this make you feel? Does it make you angry, scared, or overly excited? Information designed to cause a strong emotional reaction is often trying to stop you from thinking carefully.

Part 3: Field Work - Analyzing the Evidence (20 minutes)

Goal: To practice applying the C.A.S.E. method with guided examples.

1. Open the "Top Secret: Case Files" folder. Inside, have 3 printed or bookmarked examples of media. Analyze each one together using the C.A.S.E. method.
2. **Case File #1 (Factual):** A news article for kids about a recent scientific discovery from a reputable source like NASA's Climate Kids or National Geographic Kids.
*(Discuss: Who is the **Creator**? NASA. What is their **Aim**? To inform. What **Support** do they have? Photos, data, expert quotes. Does it use strong **Emotion**? No, it's mostly factual.)*
3. **Case File #2 (Biased/Opinion):** A movie review or an ad for a new toy.
*(Discuss: Who is the **Creator**? A reviewer or a company. What is their **Aim**? To persuade you to see the movie or buy the toy. What **Support** do they use? Opinions like "it's the best ever!" How does it appeal to **Emotion**? It tries to make you excited.)*
4. **Case File #3 (Misinformation):** A classic, kid-safe "fake news" example, like an article about "spaghetti growing on trees" (from a famous BBC hoax) or a photoshopped picture of a cat with wings.
*(Discuss: Look at the **Creator**—is it a real news site? Does it have any real **Support**? How does your **Emotion** tell you something might be off? It feels too silly to be true!)*

Part 4: Undercover Assignment - Create Your Own News! (20 minutes)

Goal: To demonstrate understanding through a creative, hands-on application.

1. **The Mission:** "Truth Sleuth, your final mission is to go undercover. You need to create three short news reports about the same simple event. This will show you how easily a story can change." The event can be simple and silly, like "The Cat Spilled a Glass of Water."
2. **Report 1: Just the Facts.** Write one or two sentences stating exactly what happened. (e.g., "At 2 PM, the family cat, Whiskers, knocked over a glass of water on the kitchen table.")
3. **Report 2: The Gossip Column.** Write it with bias and opinion. Use emotional words. (e.g., "In a

shocking crime, the villainous cat Whiskers maliciously attacked an innocent glass of water, causing a devastating flood across the table. Is any glass safe?")

4. **Report 3: The Fake News Story.** Make up something completely false and sensational. (e.g., "Scientists today confirmed that a local cat, Whiskers, has developed telekinetic powers, using his mind to throw a glass of water across the room in a fit of rage.")

4. Assessment & Closure

Case Debrief (10 minutes)

Goal: To reflect on the activity and solidify the lesson's main points.

1. Have the student present their three reports. For each one, ask: "How did you make this one sound factual? How did you make this one sound like gossip? What makes this last one obvious fake news?"
2. **Connect back to the real world:** "See how easy it was to change the story? Now imagine someone does that with a real news story about people. This is how big misunderstandings and arguments start online. It's just like school gossip, but it can spread to millions of people in an instant and cause real harm."
3. **Final Thought:** "Being a Truth Sleuth means you have a superpower. You can spot the truth, stop the spread of harmful 'gossip,' and help make the internet a smarter, kinder place. Case closed!"

5. Differentiation and Inclusivity

- **For Extra Support:** Provide fill-in-the-blank templates for the three news reports to help structure the student's writing. Use very clear, black-and-white examples in the "Field Work" section.
- **For an Advanced Challenge:** Introduce the concept of satire (like The Onion) and discuss why it's different from intentionally malicious fake news. Have the student find their own examples of the three types of media to analyze.
- **Inclusivity:** The core analogy (school gossip) is broadly relatable. The examples used can be tailored to the student's interests (e.g., if they love video games, use examples from the gaming world).

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