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WAKE ME UP BEFORE YOU GO-GO: USING UNLIKELY EXAMPLES TO ENGAGE STUDENTS IN INFORMATION LITERACY

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INTRODUCTION

While librarians everywhere believe that information literacy is important, often we struggle to make it interesting to students. Whether it's online or face-to-face, a one-shot instruction session or full semester course, we work to capture students' attention and engage them in thinking about information literacy. As librarians, we know that the basic tenets of information literacy are broadly applicable to many situations outside the library and academic research. Yet all too often, it seems that students are uninterested in learning anything besides the minimum they must know in order to complete a particular assignment. Then, because the content of library instruction has seemingly little or no relevance to this goal, and is often delivered in the most efficient and dry manner possible, students quickly become bored and inattentive. Worse, they fail to recognize that these skills are pertinent to all their information seeking habits. By incorporating examples from the news, popular culture, and social networking sites like Reddit and Twitter, I have created more engaging classes that push students to think critically about their information sources and recognize the need for information literacy outside of the classroom.

BACKGROUND

In 2007, I graduated from library school and was immediately hired at the University of West Georgia. There, I regularly teach a for-credit course called LIBR 1101, Academic Research and the Library, as well as a variety of one-shots each semester. These two instruction scenarios share a number of similarities. Both usually meet for 50 minutes at a time. Both feature from one to three student learning outcomes a session, generally based on applying some facet of the ACRL's *Information Literacy Competency Standards for Higher Education* (2000). Most significantly, both scenarios gave me the same challenge: no one had ever taught me how

to teach. I initially based my teaching style around what I had experienced in college: a largely lecture and demonstration-based pedagogy. As might be predicted, students were bored, apathetic, and unengaged. When I tried to talk about higher level information literacy concepts, students tuned out because they couldn't see the relevance of the concepts to the immediate assignment or their outside lives.

So I began including examples from outside the library in my instruction. When students said they got their research from Google, I told them stories of pranksters manipulating the results to make jokes or racist sites come up first. Eventually, I realized that I didn't need to just tell them about these cases; I could show them how Google can be usurped. Soon, I kept an eye out for any media story, popular entertainment, or internet fad that I could relate to an information literacy standard. As I grew more confident as a teacher, and learned more about pedagogy and constructivist methods, I discovered that many of these same examples could serve as the basis for active learning exercises and student-focused learning.

Regardless of whether students were appalled, angered, confused, or entertained by these real-world examples, they were, at the very least, interested. After basing a brief lecture, demonstration, or active learning exercise around the example, I could segue into the features, capabilities, and/or limitations of the library resources I was brought in to cover, and the students would remain alert and participative. They understood why any extra steps such as logging into our online resources or picking the right database were necessary and why the instructor and I were asking them to accomplish a better level of research and discovery.

SAMPLE LESSON PLANS

Below, I have listed several lesson plans built around unconventional examples from the media, news, and internet. For each example, I have identified which ACRL information literacy standards they address, a sample lesson plan of active learning or student-centered exercises librarians may use in their instruction, and a series of critical questions one can ask about the resources. A full list of citations for all the media used can be found at the end of this article. Other unlikely examples can be found at http://tiny.cc/loexmedia.

It is important to note that I found none of these examples by expressly looking for something relevant. Instead, as I followed my normal news, social networking, and entertainment channels, I kept an eye out for stories that struck a chord with me as a librarian. Not every story or meme or trend will result in a lesson plan. Some may require a bit of unconventional thinking or imperfect metaphors to work. As you look, remember to concentrate on your audience. What will be relevant and interesting to them? What will challenge their assumptions? Timeliness is a very important factor here. What can seem monumentally important to students one semester may be forgotten by the next. So pay attention to what is currently trending in the media and on sites like Facebook and Twitter, and always continue looking for new examples. Some of the examples below are a little old, but they are based around still relevant cultural icons.

Beyonce: Information Literacy Standard 5.1 and 5.3 (ethical use of information)

Sample Lesson Plan: Watch the first minute of the "Single Ladies" music video by Beyonce (2009). Ask students to comment on the video and the creators. Follow this by watching the first minute of the "Mexican Breakfast" video choreographed by Bob Fosse (2011). What did they notice? Watch Beyonce's 'acknowledgement' of her inspiration and discuss whether this is plagiarism (2008). Now watch the "Beyonce vs Keersmaeker" video comparing choreography and other influences in the "Countdown" music video [from 1:30 to the end] (2011). Give students a copy of *GQ*'s interview with the director of the "Countdown" video [or have them find it themselves] (2011). How does the director address the similarities? What was the director's intention in using the choreography, costumes, shot set-ups, etc.? Why did she not cite where she got the original work from? How does she describe Keersmaeker's reaction? Have the students double-check the article by finding Keermaeker's reaction on Google (2011). Was the director's description accurate? Why or why not?

Other uses: How did students find the articles about the similarities? What keywords did they use and why? Can they find other examples where Beyonce (or other music artists) plagiarized? How does this change their viewpoint of the performer? If someone saw one of these videos and wanted to hire the choreographer, who would they be likely to contact? Have the students write a reflective blog post or two

minute paper talking about why it is important to cite sources. Use the above questions as the basis for a lively demonstration or group discussion. Depending on your time limits, you can use any subset of these sources to great effect.

Harlem Shake: Information Literacy Standard 1.2 (types and formats of information, primary/secondary sources)

Sample Lesson Plan: Watch your favorite version of the Harlem Shake video, or have your students identify their favorite version. Ask students if they've seen it before and if they know where it came from. Then watch one to two minutes of the original Harlem Shake music video (2013). What did they notice about the differences between the original dance and the trending copies? Now watch the video of reactions from Harlem residents (2013). What was their reaction? Why did they feel that way? Finally, view the *Know-Your-Meme* page on the Harlem Shake (2013). How do they cover this phenomenon? All three sources are on the same topic, but how does their information differ? Use these examples to demonstrate primary, secondary, and tertiary sources.

Other Uses: This is an excellent way to connect students to the differences in primary, secondary, and tertiary sources. It's a fun and immediately relevant way to connect these abstract concepts to something that students will be very comfortable talking about and analyzing. However, with all internet fads, timeliness is key. I used the Harlem Shake in spring 2013 when it was trending on YouTube and Facebook. In prior semesters, I used examples like "Call Me Maybe" and the "Sad Keanu" meme. Luckily the news media love to fill their broadcasts with human interest stories about these trends and the site *Know-Your-Meme* has articles about most internet fads, so it is easy to update this lesson utilizing other trends. Use this to have students realize the characteristics of different types of information sources, then apply it to more scholarly sources they may not be familiar with, like speeches, articles, and books.

Cable News: Information Literacy Standard 3.2 and 3.4 (evaluation, bias, accuracy)

Sample Lesson Plan: Split the class into two groups. Give one group copies of the Fox News article on the debt ceiling discussion from 2011. Give the other group copies of the Huffington Post article on the same event (2011). Ask them to prepare a short skit acting out the event. Alternatively, ask them to describe the event and state who was wrong. What are the differences in coverage and why? Can they find a less biased source? Can they identify their own bias in interpreting this situation?

Other Uses: The above example uses two descriptions of the dramatic breakdown in debt ceiling talks between Republican leader Eric Cantor and Democratic president Barack Obama on July 13, 2011. The media immediately seized upon the drama and published some very different accounts of the same event. Without diving deep into

political or philosophical discussions, such examples are great at demonstrating bias, rhetoric, and the importance of double checking sources. Again, while this is a somewhat older example, debt ceiling talks continue to be an issue in the news, as does an increasingly divisive political arena. Any time there is a political scandal, you (or your students) can find a liberal and conservative viewpoint on the event. Ask your students to watch MSNBC and FOX News cover the same event and compare the commentary. Inside of class, have them find an event covered by the sites Huffington Post, Mother Jones, Drudge Report, and/or Free Republic and see if they can identify any issues with the sources. If you are short on time, find examples yourself and use them in a jigsaw exercise. For instance, divide the class into groups of 3-5 students. Give each student in a group a different article on the same event. Students then read and report on their article to the group, contrasting language, audience, bias, etc. Most internet articles are only two to four pages long and easily read within a class period.

COPYRIGHT ISSUES

In pulling examples from the news, media, and internet, you will be using other's work for your instruction and copyright must be addressed. Under fair use, many educational activities are allowed, particularly in face-to-face instruction. Know your rights, but in order to protect yourself and your institution, make sure you follow any local fair use guidelines. Whenever possible, avoid copying and distributing material. If you would like your class to read an internet article or view a video, just provide the link. Don't duplicate it or embed it on your web space. Give the content creator the page hits and ad views that make their sites profitable. If content is behind a paywall, use that as an opportunity to show your students how to use the library's journal locator or the benefits of library databases.

Finally if you find a particular copyrighted example you would like to use in perpetuity, ask the publisher for permission. Make sure you clarify what specifically you would like to copy, how many copies you would like to make and how you will distribute them, how you will use the copies in your classroom, and who will have access to the copies. In many cases, content creators may be willing to give you a permanent license to copy and distribute the material in your classes. This can be useful for making print copies of articles for classes that don't have computer or internet capabilities.

CONCLUSION

Librarians love to advocate for the importance of information literacy both in and out of the classroom. By incorporating examples from popular culture, trusted networks, and the places where students actually go for information, we can demonstrate the relevance and significance of our teachings in students' lives. Students become more engaged when they are surprised, intrigued, and challenged by authentic and uncanny examples.

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MEDIA EXAMPLES (IN ORDER OF USE, LINKS CAN BE FOUND AT TINY.CC/LOEXMEDIA)

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