

Conspiracy Theories People Actually Believed

A. WARM-UP QUESTIONS

1. What comes to mind when you hear the term 'conspiracy theory'?
2. Why do you think some people believe in conspiracy theories despite evidence to the contrary?
3. Can conspiracy theories ever have a positive effect on society?
4. Have you ever discovered that something you believed was false?
5. Do you think the internet has made conspiracy theories more widespread? Why or why not?

B. VOCABULARY PREVIEW

Match the words with their meanings. Check this again after seeing the words in context on page 2.

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| ___ 1. allegation | a) lacking proof or evidence |
| ___ 2. fabricate | b) seeming reasonable or probable |
| ___ 3. misinformation | c) false or misleading information spread regardless of intent |
| ___ 4. plausible | d) to invent or falsify information |
| ___ 5. hoax | e) an attempt to hide wrongdoing or mistakes |
| ___ 6. skepticism | f) an indirect or subtle suggestion, often negative |
| ___ 7. confirmation bias | g) seeking info that proves what you already believe. |
| ___ 8. cover-up | h) a trick or deception, often intended to mislead |
| ___ 9. far-fetched | i) unlikely and difficult to believe |
| ___ 10. innuendo | j) doubt about the truth of something |
| ___ 11. dissent | k) the expression of opinions that differ from those commonly held |
| ___ 12. unsubstantiated | l) an accusation without proof. |



CONSPIRACY THEORY

READING

1. Conspiracy theories have existed for centuries, often flourishing during times of uncertainty or social change. From secret societies allegedly controlling governments to elaborate plots about historical events, these narratives appeal to a deep human desire for clear, if not always accurate, explanations.
2. One of the most famous examples is the belief that the 1969 moon landing was staged. Proponents cite shadows, flag movement, and other supposed anomalies as 'evidence.' Despite overwhelming scientific proof, the theory persists, illustrating how distrust in authorities can outweigh factual information. Other examples range from the idea that vaccines contain tracking microchips to claims that entire climate science fields are fabricated for political purposes.
3. Psychologists suggest that conspiracy thinking offers a sense of control and community, especially to those who feel powerless or alienated. However, such beliefs can also erode trust, polarize societies, and even endanger public health. Understanding why people believe these theories—and addressing the underlying social and psychological needs—remains a complex but crucial challenge in an era saturated with information and misinformation.

COMPREHENSION

1. When do conspiracy theories tend to flourish?
2. What 'evidence' do moon landing deniers often cite?
3. Give two examples of conspiracy theories mentioned in the reading.
4. According to psychologists, why might people believe conspiracy theories?
5. What are some dangers of widespread belief in conspiracy theories?

VOCABULARY REVIEW

Complete the sentences.

1. The journalist faced a serious _____ that damaged his reputation.
2. It's illegal to _____ documents to mislead investigators.
3. Social media can spread _____ faster than ever before.
4. Her explanation seemed _____ at first but fell apart under questioning.
5. The viral story turned out to be an elaborate _____.
6. Scientific progress often depends on healthy _____.

7. His belief in the theory was reinforced by _____, ignoring opposing facts.
8. The whistleblower alleged a corporate _____.
9. The plot seemed too _____ to be taken seriously.
10. The film was filled with political _____ about corruption.

GRAMMAR REVIEW - MIXED CONDITIONALS

Complete the sentences with the correct form of the verbs in brackets.

1. If she _____ (not/spread) that rumor, people wouldn't think so badly of him now.
2. If they had questioned the source, they _____ (not/share) the false story.
3. You wouldn't be so skeptical if you _____ (not/be) deceived before.
4. If the government had acted sooner, the public _____ (trust) it more today.
5. I wouldn't believe the theory if I _____ (see) the evidence with my own eyes.
6. If he had studied the data, he _____ (realize) the claim was unfounded.
7. People would be less anxious if they _____ (understand) how the media works.
8. If the hoax had been exposed earlier, it _____ (not/cause) so much damage.
9. You wouldn't doubt the official report if you _____ (attend) the briefing.
10. If they had consulted experts, they _____ (avoid) these misconceptions.

DISCUSSION

1. What's the most surprising conspiracy theory you have heard of?
2. How can education help reduce belief in harmful conspiracy theories?
3. Is there a difference between skepticism and conspiracy thinking?
4. Should media platforms be responsible for removing conspiracy content?

CRITICAL THINKING

Choose a well-known conspiracy theory. Analyze its origins, why it appealed to people, the evidence for and against it, and its impact on society. Suggest strategies to counter its spread.