

AXE 4

UNIT 12

SOMEBODY TOLD ME

How is the Internet fueling conspiracy theories?



YOUR PROJECT

- 1 Create a leaflet to help pupils to spot fake news and conspiracies in the media.
- OR
- 2 Participate in a radio show about conspiracy theories.

Au menu de cette unité :

DÉCOUVERTES CULTURELLES

- The "Panic Broadcast" (Orson Welles) et *The War of the Worlds* (H.G. Wells).
- La propagation de fausses informations dans les médias
- La lutte contre les *fake news*

- Les principales théories du complot aux États-Unis (*Area 51, the moon landing, The Philadelphia Experiment...*)
- *Fantasyland* (l'histoire des conspirations aux États-Unis)

OUTILS LINGUISTIQUES

- Le pluperfect
- L'expression de l'obligation
- L'expression de la probabilité

1 The News isn't Good

How does fake news start and spread?

1

The "Panic Broadcast"



- A. Listen to  MP3 n°66 . What type of document does it seem to be? Why?
- B. Listen again and find information about the two events. What is happening and where?
- C. Imagine how people in 1938 reacted when they heard this on the radio.
- D. Read the headlines to check your hypotheses.
- E. **Have your say.** What do you think about people's reactions? Do you think people would react this way today? Explain.

Help!

Words

- **turmoil** = panic
- **ominous** = scandalous
- **misleading** = deceitful: *trompeur*

- unreliable /ʌnri'lərəbl/ = that cannot be trusted
- be accused of + -ing
- exaggerate /ɪg'zædʒəreɪt/

Radio Listeners in Panic, Taking War Drama as Fact

Many Flee Homes to Escape 'Gas Raid From Mars'—Phone Calls Swamp Police at Broadcast of Wells Fantasy

RADIO PLAY TERRIFIES NATION

Mars Invasion Thought Real!

RADIO FAKE SCARES NATION

Cultural fact

Orson Welles (1915 - 1985) was an American actor, writer, director and producer. He recorded *The War of the Worlds*, a radio drama adapted from H.G. Wells's novel, in 1938.

Herbert George Wells (H.G. Wells) (1866-1946) was an English writer famous for his science-fiction novels. He wrote *The War of the Worlds* in 1898.

2

The "War of the Worlds" panic was fake news

- A. Read the text and find general information: type of document, source, author, topic.
- B. Focus on lines 1 to 8. Who exaggerated this story and why?

- C. Rephrase this sentence: "from these initial newspaper items on Oct. 31, 1938, the apocryphal apocalypse only grew in the retelling". (l. 9-10)
- D. What does the last paragraph show?

Orson Welles' infamous 1938 radio program did not touch off nationwide hysteria. [...]

How did the story of panicked listeners begin? Blame America's newspapers. Radio had siphoned off advertising revenue from print during the Depression, badly damaging the newspaper industry. So the papers seized the opportunity presented by Welles' program to discredit radio as a source of news. The newspaper industry sensationalized the panic to prove to advertisers, and regulators, that radio management was irresponsible and not to be trusted. [...]

From these initial newspaper items on Oct. 31, 1938, the apocryphal¹ apocalypse only grew in the retelling. A curious (but predictable) phenomenon occurred: as the show receded in time and became more infamous, more and more people claimed to have heard it.

As weeks, months, and years passed, the audience's size swelled to such an extent that you might actually believe most of America

was tuned to CBS that night. But that was hardly the case.

[...] The night the program aired, the C.E. Hooper ratings service telephoned 5,000 households for its national ratings survey. "To what program are you listening?" the service asked respondents. Only 2 percent answered a radio "play" or "the Orson Welles program," or something similar indicating CBS. None said a "news broadcast," according to a summary published in *Broadcasting*. In other words, 98 percent of those surveyed were listening to something else, or nothing at all, on Oct. 30, 1938. This minuscule rating is not surprising. Welles' program was scheduled against one of the most popular national programs at the time – ventriloquist Edgar Bergen's *Chase and Sanborn Hour*, a comedy-variety show.

¹ untrue, uncertain

Jefferson Pooley and Michael J. Socolow,
, 28 October 2013

2 Spotting Fake News

How can we prevent fake news from spreading?

VIDEO N°25

1 Fake news is everywhere 🎧

- A. How would you define "fake news"?
- B. Watch the video and find information about:
 - The fake news that can be found on the Internet;
 - The reasons why there is so much fake news;
 - The solutions imagined by companies and social media sites;
 - What people should do to spot fake news;
 - The news story at the end of the video.
- C. Get ready to report back to the class.



HELP!

Words

- attempt = try
- dodgy /'dɒdʒɪ/ = weird = suspicious
- genuine /'dʒenjuɪn/ = real
- scam: arnaque, escroquerie

2 Mis- and Disinformation 💬

- A. Read the document. What is the difference between misinformation and disinformation?
- B. Should we avoid using the expression "fake news"?

C. Go Further. Try to give an example for as many types of mis-disinformation as you can.

D. Have your say. According to you, what is the most dangerous type of mis-/disinformation? Justify.

7 TYPES OF MIS- AND DISINFORMATION		
FABRICATED CONTENT News content is 100% false, designed to deceive and do harm.	MISLEADING CONTENT Misleading use of information to frame an issue or an individual.	FALSE CONTEXT When genuine content is shared with false contextual information.
SATIRE OR PARODY No intention to cause harm but has potential to fool.	IMPOSTER CONTENT When genuine sources are impersonated.	FALSE CONNECTION When headlines, visuals or captions do not support the content.
MANIPULATED CONTENT When genuine information is manipulated to deceive.		

Your TURN! 3 Help people spot fake news! 📝

Groupwork. Use what you have learnt to make a leaflet that gives a list of recommendations to help people to spot mis- and disinformation.

You should check if it is a reliable source...

4 Info Wars: Alex Jones

- A. Read the text to find general information: type of document, time, topic, place, people.
- B. Find information about: Alex Jones's activity; beliefs; influence; past and present communication tools.
- C. **Have your say.** Do you think such a website should be forbidden? Explain.

Since launching his broadcast career, [Alex Jones] has become a multiplatform prophet of paranoia who sees diabolical plots in every turn of the news cycle.

[...] Jones, who loves to draw analogies to sci-fi classics like *Dune* and *Star Wars*, sees the 21st century as a kind of fanboy-fantasy landscape populated by three groups: a rebel alliance of liberty-loving patriots (his fans); masses of consumerist sheep (those who ignore him); and a sadistic elite (global bankers and their agents), forever 10 tightening¹ the screws on the imperiled remnants² of human freedom.

[According to him] the New World Order³'s methods are many: manufactured economic crises, sophisticated surveillance tech and – above all – inside-job terror 15 attacks that fuel exploitable hysteria. The endgame, Jones believes, is a mass eugenics operation that will depopulate the planet by poisoning our food and water with fluoride, radioactive isotopes and various futuristic toxic



soups being engineered in New World Order laboratories.

20 [...] By disseminating such theories over the airwaves and online, where followers can get the word out faster than any film distributor, Jones can draw a million viewers within days [...]. "In the past, such theories were circulated in booklets, books, public speeches and sermons," says Chip 25 Berlet, who studies conspiracy culture [...]. "Jones reaches more people over the Internet than any conspiracy crank in U.S. history."

¹ resserrer • ² vestiges • ³ A conspiracy involving very rich and powerful people plotting mass population reduction and a one world government.

Alexander Zaitchik, ..., 17 March, 2011

YoUR TURN! 5 Fact checking: true or false?

- A. Look at the picture. Identify the type of document. What do you think it is about?
- B. Read the text on [Worksheet n°37](#).
- Check your hypotheses: were you right?
- C. Do you think it is a fake? Explain.
- D. Browse the Internet to check your answer.

WITNESS THE POWER OF THE ATOMIC BOMB

See Genuine Atoms Split to Smithereens

Take a tour to the outskirts of Las Vegas, Nevada to see American military science at its finest. Viewers shall be placed in an tower safe from burns way as American scientists produce an atomic explosion from a safe distance.

LOCATION: Nye County, 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas

Bus Schedule

Monday, Tuesday:	12:00pm
Wednesday, Thursday:	2:00pm
Friday, Saturday:	11:00pm
Sunday:	not available

American Conspiracy Theories

What makes America a “conspiracy nation”?

1

Believing in conspiracies

- A. Look at the document and find information about its nature, its source and its topic.
- B. Do you know any of these conspiracies? Which ones?
- C. Comment on the statistics. What do they show about the American population and conspiracy theories?

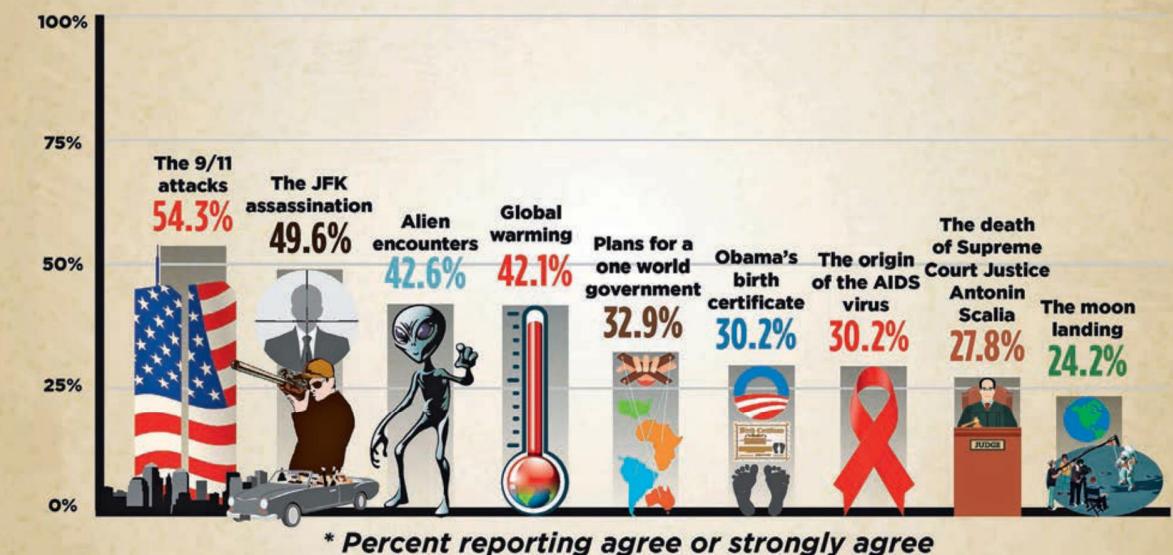
HELP!

Words

- conceal /kən'si:l/ = hide
- half the population / more than one quarter of the population / thirty percent
- fool (v) = deceive = trick
- frame (v) = incriminate

Belief in Conspiracies

The government is concealing what they know about...



The Chapman University Survey of American Fears 2016



CHAPMAN UNIVERSITY
ORANGE, CALIFORNIA

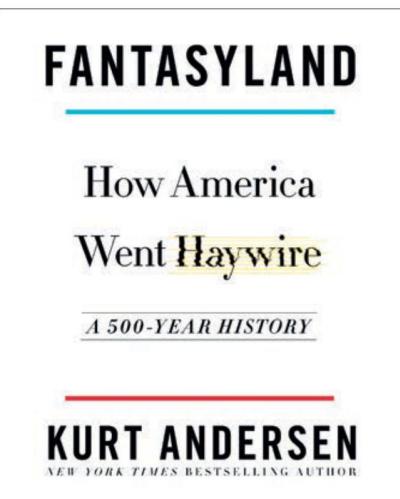
YOUR TURN!

Present one conspiracy theory

Choose one of these conspiracy theories and find information about it. Get ready to report back to the class.
Use **Worksheet n°38** for help.

3 Fantasyland

Read the back cover of *Fantasyland*: explain in your own words what the book is about and what you have understood.



FANTASYLAND

How America
Went Haywire

A 500-YEAR HISTORY

KURT ANDERSEN
NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

In this sweeping¹, eloquent history of America, Kurt Andersen shows that what's happening in our country today – this post-factual, "fake news" moment we're all living through – is not something new, but rather the ultimate expression of our national character. America was founded by wishful dreamers, magical thinkers, and true believers, by hucksters² and their suckers³. Fantasy⁴ is deeply embedded⁵ in our DNA.

Over the course of five centuries – from the Salem witch trials to Scientology to the Satanic Panic of the 1980s, from P. T. Barnum to Hollywood and the anything-goes, wild-and-crazy sixties, from conspiracy theories to our fetish for guns and ¹⁰ obsession with extraterrestrials – our love of the fantastic has made America exceptional in a way that we've never fully acknowledged⁶. From the start, our ultra-individualism was attached to epic dreams and epic fantasies – every citizen was free to believe absolutely anything, or to pretend to be absolutely anybody.

1 de grande envergure • 2 colporteur • 3 gullible, naive person •
4 myth, folklore, imaginative desire • 5 ancré • 6 admitted



5 Why do people believe in conspiracy theories?



4 We, the paranoid

Watch the video and find information about:

- The origins of conspiracy theories and their role in politics.
- Jesse Walker's interest in conspiracy theories.
- Categories of conspiracy theories.
- Conspiracies and art (literature and movies).

HELP!

Words

- hoax /həʊks/ = joke
- grifter = swindler: escroc
- strand = element

A. Watch the first part of the video. Find information about:

- The statistics and results from the university poll;
- The 3 psychological factors described.

B. Watch the second part. Find information about:

- The 3 psychological factors described;
- The advice given.

C. Sum up the video in your own words. Explain why it is important to learn how to check information before spreading the word.