



# Information Literacy

by JENNIFER LaGARDE & DARREN HUDGINS

*As a species, we are facing a series of unprecedented crises: a global pandemic, climate change, poverty, and an ongoing struggle for racial justice (to name just a few). All of these monumental challenges have one thing in common: they are all fueled, and worsened, by mis-, dis-, and mal- information. The need for comprehensive, innovative approaches to Information Literacy has never been more urgent.*



## LITERACY CHAMPIONS: JENNIFER LaGARDE AND DARREN HUDGINS

**Jennifer LaGarde** has spent her entire adult life working in public education. She has served as a classroom teacher, a teacher-librarian, a digital teaching and learning specialist, a district level support staff member, and a statewide leader as a consultant for both the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction and the Friday Institute for Instructional Innovation. A passionate advocate for readers and

libraries, Jennifer currently teaches courses focused on emerging literacies and young adult literature at Rutgers University. *Library Journal*, The American Association of School Librarians, *The New York Times*, and The Carnegie Corporation have all recognized Jennifer's work. When she's not busy working, Jennifer spends time reading, hiking, chasing her two dogs, and drinking too much coffee with her husband, David, in Olympia, Washington. Follow Jennifer's adventures at [librarygirl.net](http://librarygirl.net).

**Darren Hudgins** is a passionate advocate for creating learning experiences that drive educators of all kinds and their students to think, do, and thrive. He believes in this mission so much that he conceptualized and currently directs Think | Do | Thrive, LLC. Here he uses his more than 20 years in education, edtech, and coaching to inspire critical thinking, champion active learning, and create opportunities for educational communities to improve. As he says, "Let's untangle this world together." Follow Darren at [thinkdothrive.org](http://thinkdothrive.org).



## One to Know: mis-, dis- and mal- information are human problems.

Traditional instructional strategies for helping learners determine what can (and can't) be trusted online are insufficient in today's complex information landscape. In part, this is because they:

- fail to address the overlap between Information Literacy and Social-Emotional Learning
- lack bridges between the strategies for locating credibility markers on a laptop or desktop computer and the devices kids (and adults!) use most to access information
- require learners to seek a static, "right answer" to a binary like: "Is this real or is this fake?"  
Imply that the answer to that question can be found by solely examining the content itself.

It's tempting to blame technology for the Information Literacy mess we currently find ourselves in, but mis-, dis- and mal- information are *human* problems. Behind every username, blue checkmark, avatar, algorithm, and bot is a human being whose motivations are often much easier to untangle than the technology used to achieve their goals. Technology changes, but human behavior is remarkably predictable... which we find empowering. If Information Literacy is a human created problem, that means humans are capable of creating the solution.

## What to Do: Help learners think deeply about how information makes them feel.

Learners of all ages are exposed to media. Picture books, memes, podcasts, commercials, apps, videos and the evening news are all examples of media that today's learners engage with regularly, even those learners who are not yet reading. The places where Information Literacy and Social-Emotional Learning overlap offer powerful opportunities to help kids practice the skill of thinking about how information/media makes them feel.

Whether you are reading a picture book to a group of 1st graders gathered on the carpet around your chair, or having 8th graders explore a set of memes related to a science concept, or asking your 11th grade students to analyze videos on YouTube or Tiktok for evidence of persuasive language, rather than asking your learners to describe what they see or notice in the content, challenge them to think about these questions instead?

### For younger learners:

- How does this information make me feel?
- What do these feelings make me want to do?

### As kids get older:

- What specific words or elements of this triggered this emotion?
- Can I spot other attempts to trigger an emotion that didn't work on me, but might trigger strong emotions in others?

### As kids get (even) older:

- Who benefits if I feel this way?
- What actions are they hoping I will take?

### All learners:

- Sometimes emotions need calming. What are some strategies that work to help me navigate and calm strong emotions?

## More to Know and Do: Book Studies

For Information Literacy efforts to be successful and sustainable, teachers, support staff, and admin must work together to create a culture that works to embed these skills across content areas. One way to support this learning among adults is through staff book clubs and self-directed professional development. Here are some tips for making these successful:

- **Choice:** Adult readers are just as motivated by choice as their students. Give your staff some voice/choice in selecting the book for their Information Literacy book club.
- **Access:** Making sure all participants have access to the format that is best for them (physical copy, audiobook, ebook, etc) is the first step to ensuring they will engage with the book. But also make sure that there are plenty of extra copies on display in the library, staff room, and other places where teachers hang out. These books will not only serve as a resource in a pinch, but they will also act as reminders that this is work your staff is committed to doing together.
- **Time:** To whatever extent possible, carve out time for participants to read. Canceling a meeting, covering bus duty for a friend, or taking something else (even if it's something tiny!) off their plate, not only makes room for reading, it also builds goodwill.
- **Share:** Build as many opportunities for shared reading experiences as possible. From shelfies (selfies with books!) to read alouds during a faculty meeting, to #booksnaps in the school newsletter, never miss an opportunity to create a community experience out of your book club.
- **BIG Picture Deliverables:** As a staff, imagine the best possible outcomes that could result from your learning and then create deliverables that will help you reach those goals. Be sure to create opportunities to check-in, monitor progress.

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