A recent Stanford University study of more than 7,000 middle school students has documented that most students have trouble telling fact from fiction, whether they are reading online or not. To media literacy teachers, this is no surprise: students are not taught the foundational skills of media literacy from an early age, even though in this world of online instant access to all media, these skills are essential. (For the details of the study: https://sheg.stanford.edu/upload/V3LessonPlans/Executive%20Summary%2011.21.16.pdf)

Help your students learn the difference between fact and opinion, and inference and evidence.

AHA!: Everyone has an opinion and sometimes it’s presented as fact!

Grade Level: 5-7

Key Question #2: What creative techniques are used to attract my attention?

Core Concept #2: Media are constructed using a creative language with its own rules.

Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are created for profit and/or power.
Materials: Fact vs. Opinion worksheet available to print here, or make your own. Be sure to cover the answers at the bottom of the worksheet. Process skills associated with Close Analysis of media texts provides another avenue for teaching this topic. Find out more in Literacy for the 21st Century (http://www.medialit.org/literacy-21st-century).

Activity: Use an on-line news source or even an Instagram photo with a caption to show students how news is captured and circulated every day. Then give them the Fact-Opinion Worksheet to fill out individually. Work with the students to see how they responded and to help them understand what constitutes fact vs. opinion and evidence vs. inference.

Here are some helpful definitions:

Fact: something known with certainty that can be objectively verified. A journalist covering a news story is sent out to gather facts – who, what, where, when. (The question of why? Is often based on opinion). Facts are descriptive in nature and can be supported by evidence.

Opinion: a belief or conclusion not necessarily substantiated by positive knowledge or proof. This is where the person relaying the story guesses, speculates, or fabricates the details about what happened by interjecting his or her own interpretations or judgments.

Evidence: tends to prove or disprove something; ground for belief; proof.

Assumption: the belief that something is true and taken for granted without proof.
Inference: arriving at a conclusion based on assumption.

Denotation: a direct, specific meaning.

Connotation: a meaning suggested by a word or an expression in addition to its exact meaning.

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of the Center for Media Literacy’s MediaLit Kit™ and Questions/TIPS (Q/TIPS)™ framework. Used with permission, ©2002-2016, Center for Media Literacy, http://www.medialit.com