

predators being the “bald eagle and sasquatch” (Zapata, 2015, para.6). He turned to his partner and said, “Sasquatch aren’t real”. I was excited. I thought here we go; someone is going to figure it out. But, the word Sasquatch is linked to a site called ‘The Bureau of Sasquatch Affairs’ (zapatopi.net/bsa/octopus.html) and when he clicked on it and saw an official and scientific looking site about Sasquatch, he shook his head and said, “They must be real”. Just before the period ends ask them if they can figure out what these sites have in common. So far, no one has figured it out, including a student teacher who accompanied one of the classes. At the last second, let them know that all of the sites are a hoax, or fake, or full of misinformation. They are appalled!

Invite them all back for a follow up lesson. This second lesson gives them a chance to take another look at their bogus websites. First I send them off to look for obvious errors, e.g. spelling or grammatical mistakes. Always give them a chance to come back and share some of the things they find questionable. Next, we take a look at the purpose of the website: is it personal opinion, is it to inform, persuade, or sell you something? As soon as they see the PayPal or credit card symbols they should be suspicious. Then, just as we would question the authenticity of a book or article, we take a look at the author, the date, the references and so on. A quick look at our *Dihydrogen Monoxide* site reveals no author, date or references and a click on the DMHO homepage link (www.dhmo.org) leads us to merchandise for sale and an opportunity to donate money to this ‘cause’. And of course once you help them figure out that the site is talking about water, the content is completely ridiculous. Last, we discover what the URL can tell us. The easiest thing to teach them is to look at the domain. If the URL

ends in .gov it is a government site. If it ends in .edu it is an educational site, usually created by a university or college. If however it ends in .net or .org it is unrestricted and anyone or any group can be the ‘owner’. I also teach them to look for names. If a person’s name appears in the URL it is a personal site which might be useful for an author study, e.g. Gordon Korman (gordonkorman.com) or simply someone’s personal blog.

The final step of this lesson provides an opportunity to teach validity. Remind your students that they should always verify their information by finding it in more than one source. Send them back to search for the topic of their original website, e.g. *Jackalope*. As soon as they do this they often find words like hoax, fictitious, and joke. When searching for *The Burmese Mountain Dog* the search engine asks “Did you mean the Bernese Mountain Dog?” Encourage students to delve even further by looking for images of their topic. As soon as they do the images of the Bernese/Burmese Mountain dog should raise concerns as the images featured on *The Burmese Mountain Dog* site are of German Shepherds and obviously don’t match the images they find when they conduct this image search.

When faced with search results in the billions, evaluating websites is a skill we should be modeling as well as teaching our students. If you work with older students and feel this might be too simple, take a look at the CRAAP test (subjectguides.uwaterloo.ca/infosources). Many resources about this evaluation criteria are available on the Internet. This video provided by Seneca College provides a great overview youtu.be/35PBCC5TKxs. ■