

Deepfakes and synthetic media

40 minutes

Following My Interests Online

Outcome 3.9

Outcome 3.10

WHAT THIS LESSON DOES

Practise identifying synthetic media and deepfakes by examining remaining visual and audio tells. Judge examples as real, likely synthetic or cannot tell, then explore how this affects news reporting, evidence and personal trust in media.

CURRICULUM OUTCOMES

Outcome	What the specification asks for
3.9	identify examples of where image, audio and video manipulation has been used in digital media content
3.10	discuss how image, audio and video manipulation can impact on the audience or user

WHAT STUDENTS SHOULD BE ABLE TO DO

- Recognise AI-generated and deepfake media and discuss its impact on audience and trust (LOs 3.9, 3.10)
- Use remaining tells to commit to real / likely synthetic / cannot tell
- Discuss what it means for news, evidence and trust when any image, voice or video could be fabricated

BEFORE THE BELL

- Class Play needs a device each and students signed in. Start it from the step on the board; the join code appears on screen for them to type in.
- No printing is required. The two discussion situations, Evidence and Trust, are written out in full on the student step for "Your turn: news, evidence and trust", so you only need the step on the board. The optional News situation is in your notes for that step if time allows.
- Teacher device and board; interactive activity ready in explore mode
- A device each, students signed in; the board shows the join code

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HOW THE LESSON RUNS

4 min	introduction	Start
5 min	content	Examine and discuss
4 min	activity	Hands-on: deepfake detection challenge
13 min	activity	Class poll: real, synthetic, or cannot tell?
8 min	activity	Your turn: news, evidence and trust
3 min	content	Make sense
2 min	content	Reflect
1 min	summary	What you covered

ANSWERS AND LOOK-FORS

- Item 1, Likely synthetic Several classic deepfake-style signs stack together: lip-sync drift, a short visual glitch on jewellery, overly clean audio, and zero official source. Likely synthetic is the defensible call. Even one strong sign plus no verifiable publisher is enough reason not to share.
- Item 2, Real Messy, ordinary capture signs and independent people confirming they were there support a real recording. Perfect polish would have been more suspicious than this. Real does not mean every claim in the chat caption is true; it means the footage itself looks captured from the world.
- Item 3 (if time), Likely synthetic Repeated pebble patterns and broken background text are common machine-image signs, and there is no named creator. Likely synthetic fits. A clean landscape can still be real, but these specific artefacts plus no provenance push the call.
- Item 4, Cannot tell Audio alone is often not enough. A good voice clone can sound right, and a real recording can also sound right. With no matching video, no original post, and a high-stakes claim, the skilled call is cannot tell until you verify with Sam or another solid source. Refusing to decide from thin evidence is the point of this item.
- Item 5, Real Everyday phone flaws and an unplanned interruption are hard to fake convincingly at this level, and the people shown are interacting with the post as themselves. This is ordinary real footage, not synthetic media. Compression alone is not a deepfake sign.

TEACHING MOVES

- Keep Examine short: the two definitions, the three verdicts, and the point that clean quality is not proof. Put the three starter prompts on the board as the challenge opens, so they arrive as tools the class is about to use.
- Run the detection challenge teacher-led, with pairs whispering before the show of hands; if devices are available, pairs may tap a verdict before the class reveal.
- Pacing: give Items 1 and 2 no more than two minutes each, about five minutes to Item 4 and about three to Item 5. If only three items fit, run 1, 4 and 5, keeping the cannot-tell audio in every version because it teaches the hardest judgement.
- Circulate during pair work and push for specific observations rather than "it felt fake".
- Model the habit yourself: pause on emotional media, then say which check you would run next.
- Use open prompts so that caution is balanced against the costs of distrusting everything.

WHAT TO WATCH FOR

- Students treat 'cannot tell' as failure: reinforce it as the skilled response when the evidence is genuinely weak.
- Subtle signs are overlooked in high-quality examples: spend the time on the hardest items in the challenge.
- The discussion slides into blanket distrust: guide it towards practical habits such as checking the source.

DIFFERENTIATION

- Support: leave the three starter prompts visible on the board for the whole challenge, and read them again before the harder items.
- Extension: invite students to suggest one additional check they would run, and run Item 3 if the four core items finish early.
- Support: pair students thoughtfully for the discussion so that both voices in a pair get heard.