

Beasts, Booze and Bells

News agencies aren't the only ones guilty of fake news. Some advertising companies like to go that extra mile to promote their product of choice. Take the special case of the Sibuxiang Beast, for example.

On September 19th, 1994, the television viewers in the quiet city of Taiyuan in northern China received a shocking message. Their TVs went blank for a moment, then a message scrolled across the screen warning that the Sibuxiang Beast was on the loose and rampaging towards them. It was only days away and heading for the city. What was the Sibuxiang Beast? A famed mythical creature with a deadly bite. Within days it could strike thousands of homes. Citizens were warned to lock their doors and bar their windows.

The poor citizens of Taiyuan! What could they do? Quite rightly, they panicked.

The only problem was that the TV warning wasn't a news broadcast. It was an advert! Advertising was relatively new to Chinese television and normally consisted of a simple image of a product and a voiceover describing its qualities. This advert was a stark departure from the norm. It ended with a message stating that it had been 'plotted by Jinzin Advertising', but not many people had paid attention to that part.

And Sibuxiang Beast? Well, that was a new brand of liquor, due to arrive in shops in the days following the broadcast of the advert. The Chinese authorities were less than pleased with this ingenious advertising campaign and fined the creator 5,000 yuan (about £450) for causing such a commotion. The advertiser thought this was fair dues, however. Sibuxiang became a household word overnight and sales quadrupled within three months of the advert airing.

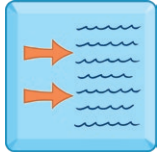
Another great advertising ploy? In April 1996 (April 1st to be exact), Taco Bell, the American fast food company, took out an ad in the New York Times stating that the company had purchased the historic artefact, the Liberty Bell, and would be renaming it the Taco Liberty Bell. Thousands protested at this apparent selling-off of one of America's historic monuments but, by noon, the entire thing was revealed to be a hoax. It garnered the attention of the nation though. For next two days, sales at Taco Bell shot up by a million dollars. That's one lucrative hoax!



Rapid Read Fake News: Advertising Fakery Questions



Analyse: How does the writer use rhetorical questions in the text?



Infer: Are these two advertising agencies likely to do the same thing again? Why or why not?



Personal Response: What do you think about the hoaxes mentioned here? Do you think the advertising companies went too far? Should companies be allowed to use a news-style format to advertise products?

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Analyse: How does the writer use rhetorical questions in the text?

Rhetorical questions are used in a variety of ways throughout the text. They highlight questions that the reader might indeed be asking themselves, such as 'What was the Sibuxiang beast?'. One is further used in the short third paragraph to highlight the predicament of the local people. It causes us to wonder if we would think any differently. Lastly, the rhetorical question is used as a link from one paragraph to the next at the start of paragraph 5 and acts as a type of subheading for the subject of the paragraph that follows.

Infer: Are these two advertising agencies likely to do the same thing again? Why or why not?

The inference from the increased sales figures is that these companies would most likely do this very thing again. It increased the sales of their products drastically and had little negative comeback. The fine from the government for the Sibuxiang Beast campaign was insignificant compared to the amount the company gained in sales.

Personal Response: What do you think about the hoaxes mentioned here? Do you think the advertising companies went too far? Should companies be allowed to use a news-style format to advertise products?

Personal responses. Students might consider how the blurring of lines between journalism and advertising might be dangerous and even illegal in some instances. Public panic and other serious incidents might occur following something relatively frivolous.

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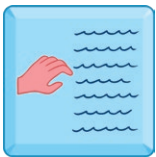


Deduce: Why did Taco Bell claim to have purchased the Liberty Bell?



Sequence: Can you put these events from the extract in order?

1. People panic.
2. The broadcast ends with the message that it has been 'plotted' by an advertising agency.
3. The TV broadcast states that the beast will arrive in Taiyuan soon.
4. The advertising company is fined 5000 yuan.



Retrieve: What was the planned new name for the Liberty Bell once Taco Bell owned it?

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Taco Bell uses a bell as its company logo. It chose to create an April Fool's joke for customers based on this fact. They were able to get people talking about their brand by creating this fun fake news story on April Fool's Day and this then generated sales. The Liberty Bell is known for being a symbol of American independence and so people would rightly be outraged by the supposed action of Taco Bell.

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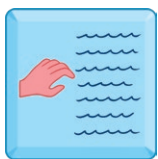


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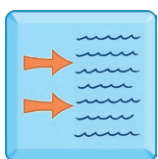
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Martians? Really?

Fake news has never been restricted to the paper press. Radio and television channels have been responsible for their share of hoaxes and sensationalised stories in the past, sometimes without real intent to fool anyone.

One of the most famous examples of a news-inspired 'hoax' took place on October 30th, 1938 at CBS Radio. The live broadcast of Ramon Raquello's orchestra playing at the Park Plaza in New York City was interrupted by a reporter from the Intercontinental Radio News. The reporter announced that astronomers had detected enormous blue sparks shooting up from the surface of Mars. The broadcast then returned to the originally scheduled programme.

More news flashes followed as events seemed to unfold in real time. A meteor seemed to be heading for earth. The meteor had landed. The meteor wasn't a meteor but a giant spaceship. A tentacled creature was emerging from the spaceship. The creature was armoured and had begun attacking areas of New Jersey! It was at this point that some listeners began to panic.

It has been estimated that six million people listened to the broadcast and over one million panicked when hearing the news of the alien invasion. Newspapers at the time reported mass stampedes, people fleeing their homes and even suicides. Modern research has found these reports to be false, however. The 'hoax' was never intended to deceive anyone; it was announced four times during the broadcast that the 'news report' was in fact a radio play, and most listeners recognised it as such. Some did believe it to be a real invasion, thinking it might be the Germans invading in disguise, but very few believed aliens had actually landed in New Jersey. The real hoax was the exaggerated newspaper reports that created the urban legend of panic and mayhem in the streets of New York City following the broadcast.

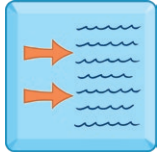
And what was the broadcast really about? In honour of Halloween, the broadcaster, actor and director Orson Welles had decided to do something a little different with his regular evening play in association with the Mercury Theatre. His prepared script, which presented a story of an alien invasion in the style of a news report, was based on the events of H.G. Wells' classic sci-fi novel **War of the Worlds**.



Rapid Read Fake News: Attack of the Martians Questions



Analyse: Look at the third paragraph. How has the writer used sentence structure here for effect?



Infer: What was the probable reason for people presuming the 'invasion' was actually a German one?



Personal Response: What do you think about this type of broadcast? Do you think the radio station went to adequate lengths to clarify that this was a play?

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The entire paragraph is made up of shorter sentences that reiterate the information from each radio news flash. The brevity of the sentences and the straightforward way in which the material is expressed is an attempt to relay the sense of the short, no-nonsense news report style of the original news flashes. This gives the reader the sense of the immediacy of the original broadcasts.

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The date given for the broadcasts is October 30th, 1938. This is only one year before the beginning of the Second World War. By 1938, the Nazi Party had been in power in Germany for several years and was already felt to be a major force on the world stage. The actions of Hitler and the Nazis were already scaring a large number of people and refugees were fleeing from Germany and other European countries to North America.

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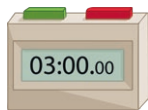
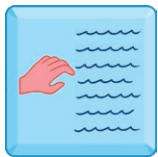


Deduce: Why might some people have felt that the Germans were behind the 'attack'? HINT: Look at the date the hoax occurred on.



Sequence: Can you put these events from the extract in order?

1. The people of New Jersey and New York City panic.
2. A meteor is seen travelling towards earth.
3. The alien creature supposedly leaves the spaceship and attacks the people.
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Retrieve: When did the events of the story happen?

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The whole broadcast was a radio play, simply done in a different style. Orson Welles had prepared the play based on War of the Worlds, the novel about a Martian invasion by H.G. Wells.

Deduce: Why might some people have felt that the Germans were behind the 'attack'? HINT: Look at the date the hoax occurred on.

The date of the broadcast was October 1938. At this time, the Nazi Party of Germany had already become a significant threat to the rest of the world. By autumn 1939, the Germans had invaded Poland and begun the chain of events that prompted the Second World War.

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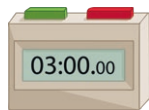
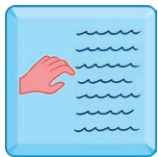


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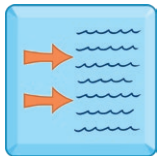
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Newspaper Monkey Business

We may think today that Donald Trump invented the concept, but 'fake news' has been around for a while. In the early 19th century, small regional papers called 'penny papers' promoted their product and expanded their sales with a host of hoax news articles. By the end of the century, these small papers had become much bigger concerns. While the owners of the papers no longer sanctioned outright lying, reporters were driven to create sensational pieces of entertainment, often at the cost of the truth. The Central Park Zoo Escape, reported on November 9, 1874, is one such event.

The front page of the **New York Herald** that day reported that various animals had escaped from their enclosures at the Central Park Zoo. A rhino had fallen into a sewer and a lion had been seen prowling through a church. The article stated that, while the police and National Guard were doing what they could, twenty-seven people had already died and numerous others had been injured. Readers panicked and armed men were seen in the streets, preparing to protect their loved ones and property by battling the wild beasts of the zoo. In their distress, they clearly hadn't read to the end of the article: the last line stated that 'the entire story given above is a pure fabrication'!

But why was it done? The article was the brainchild of a reporter named Joseph Clarke. Working alongside his editor, Thomas Connery, Clarke wanted to highlight the dangerous conditions at the zoo by showing the readership what could happen, not what actually had. They had no idea of the panic it would cause. The paper never apologised for the upset to New Yorkers. Instead, they ran a short statement requesting that safety conditions at the zoo be improved.

The lesson to learn? Always read right to the end!

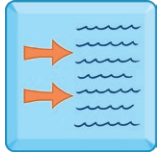
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Rapid Read Fake News: The Central Park Zoo Escape Questions



Analyse: How does the writer convey a feeling of light-heartedness in the article?



Infer: What was the public's probable reaction to the newspaper's refusal to apologise?



Personal Response: What do you think about the actions of the newspaper reporter? Was he justified in creating his original story to highlight zoo conditions?

Rapid Read Fake News:

The Central Park Zoo Escape Questions Answers

Analyse: How does the writer convey a feeling of light-heartedness in the article?

The writer initially writes about the 'cost of the truth', making it seem like quite a serious topic. However, the event described is clearly humorous. The image of a rhino falling into a sewer is particularly silly and the author has clearly chosen the funniest elements of the original story to describe. The image of armed men 'battling the wild beasts' to protect their property is equally comical. The author later uses the final words of the original article ('the entire story given above is a pure fabrication') to give the story a fun 'moral'. The writer suggests that we always need to read to the end and then adds a similar line to the end of the article: 'the entire story given above is not a pure fabrication'.

Infer: What was the public's probable reaction to the newspaper's refusal to apologise?

It can be inferred that the public would not be happy about the newspaper's unwillingness to apologise. There were scenes of actual panic amongst residents of New York City after the original article emerged. This seeming betrayal of the journalist's responsibility to portray the truth would have been difficult for people to forgive. There would also probably have been an element of anger from readers that they had been tricked. However, the truth was in the article, if only they'd read to the end.

Personal Response: What do you think about the actions of the newspaper reporter? Was he justified in creating his original story to highlight zoo conditions?

This is time for personal responses which will vary from student to student. Pupils might consider the ethics of journalism and whether a reporter has a duty to tell the truth at all times. They might also consider whether the production of a story like this at least goes some way to highlighting an issue that might otherwise receive little public reaction.

Newspaper Monkey Business

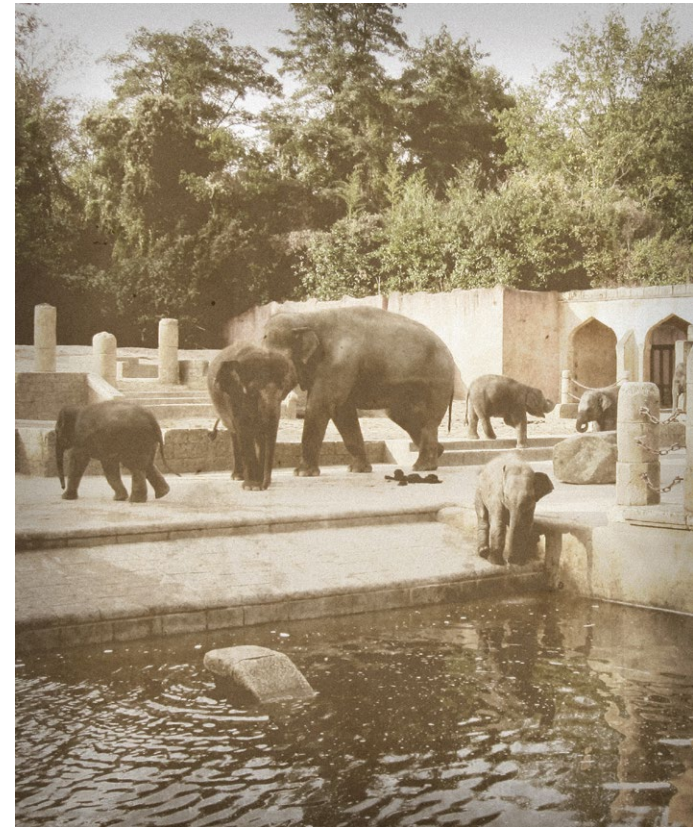
We may think today that Donald Trump invented the concept, but 'fake news' has been around for a while. In the early 19th century, small regional papers called 'penny papers' promoted their product and expanded their sales with a host of hoax news articles. By the end of the century, these small papers had become much bigger concerns. While the owners of the papers no longer sanctioned outright lying, reporters were driven to create sensational pieces of entertainment, often at the cost of the truth. The Central Park Zoo Escape, reported on November 9, 1874, is one such event.

The front page of the **New York Herald** that day reported that various animals had escaped from their enclosures at the Central Park Zoo. A rhino had fallen into a sewer and a lion had been seen prowling through a church. The article stated that, while the police and National Guard were doing what they could, twenty-seven people had already died and numerous others had been injured. Readers panicked and armed men were seen in the streets, preparing to protect their loved ones and property by battling the wild beasts of the zoo. In their distress, they clearly hadn't read to the end of the article: the last line stated that 'the entire story given above is a pure fabrication'!

But why was it done? The article was the brainchild of a reporter named Joseph Clarke. Working alongside his editor, Thomas Connery, Clarke wanted to highlight the dangerous conditions at the zoo by showing the readership what could happen, not what actually had. They had no idea of the panic it would cause. The paper never apologised for the upset to New Yorkers. Instead, they ran a short statement requesting that safety conditions at the zoo be improved.

The lesson to learn? Always read right to the end!

The entire story given above is not a pure fabrication!



Rapid Read Fake News: The Central Park Zoo Escape Questions



Understand: What is the article about?

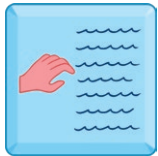


Deduce: Where is this fake news story set?



Sequence: Can you put these events from the extract in order?

1. The paper doesn't apologise for the fake story.
2. The **New York Herald** runs a news story about zoo animals escaping.
3. People around New York panic.



Retrieve: Can you find the date on which the news article was printed?

Rapid Read Fake News: The Central Park Zoo Escape Questions Answers

Understand: What is the article about?

The article is about fake news stories in newspapers, focusing on the Central Park Zoo Escape in particular.

Deduce: Where is this fake news story set?

The story is set in Central Park in New York City.

Sequence: Can you put these events from the extract in order?

1. **The New York Herald runs a news story about zoo animals escaping.**
2. **People around New York panic.**
3. **The paper doesn't apologise for the fake story.**

Retrieve: Can you find the date on which the news article was printed?

The article was printed on November 9th, 1874.

Newspaper Monkey Business

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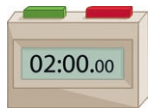
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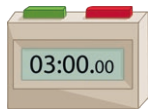
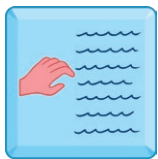


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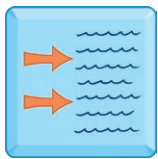
1. The paper doesn't apologise for the fake story.
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Retrieve: Can you find the date on which the news article was printed?



Analyse: How does the writer convey a feeling of light-heartedness in the article?



Infer: What was the public's probable reaction to the newspaper's refusal to apologise?



Personal Response: What do you think about the actions of the newspaper reporter? Was he justified in creating his original story to highlight zoo conditions?

Rapid Read Fake News:

The Central Park Zoo Escape Questions Answers

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3. The paper doesn't apologise for the fake story.

Retrieve: Can you find the date on which the news article was printed?

The article was printed on November 9th, 1874.

Analyse: How does the writer convey a feeling of light-heartedness in the article?

The writer initially writes about the 'cost of the truth', making it seem like quite a serious topic. However, the event described is clearly humorous. The image of a rhino falling into a sewer is particularly silly and the author has clearly chosen the funniest elements of the original story to describe. The image of armed men 'battling the wild beasts' to protect their property is equally comical. The author later uses the final words of the original article ('the entire story given above is a pure fabrication') to give the story a fun 'moral'. The writer suggests that we always need to read to the end and then adds a similar line to the end of the article: 'the entire story given above is not a pure fabrication'.

Infer: What was the public's probable reaction to the newspaper's refusal to apologise?

It can be inferred that the public would not be happy about the newspaper's unwillingness to apologise. There were scenes of actual panic amongst residents of New York City after the original article emerged. This seeming betrayal of the journalist's responsibility to portray the truth would have been difficult for people to forgive. There would also probably have been an element of anger from readers that they had been tricked. However, the truth was in the article, if only they'd read to the end.

Personal Response: What do you think about the actions of the newspaper reporter? Was he justified in creating his original story to highlight zoo conditions?

This is time for personal responses which will vary from student to student. Pupils might consider the ethics of journalism and whether a reporter has a duty to tell the truth at all times. They might also consider whether the production of a story like this at least goes some way to highlighting an issue that might otherwise receive little public reaction.






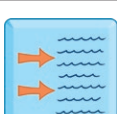
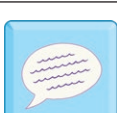
Rapid Read Notes for Guidance

The Rapid Read Cards can be used in a number of ways to develop students' reading skills. Each Rapid Read session can range from five minutes to nearly half an hour, depending on the approach used. As such, they make an excellent starter or intervention activity.

It's advisable to hand out the Text Cards to students first, without the questions. This allows them to focus on reading and understanding. Students should be given two minutes to read the text in full. Dictionaries could be provided with the text if dictionary work is a desired reading focus.

Once the two minutes are up, the Question Cards can be handed out. These are available in higher or lower ability formats, or an editable format with the full range of questions. Each question focuses on a different reading skill and has a suggested time-frame clearly marked so students can pace themselves appropriately. The total time needed to complete all questions is 25 minutes, but the approach can be differentiated to suit individual students' needs.

The question types are as follows:

	Understand basic understanding of the text.
	Deduce making simple deductions about what is happening.
	Sequence putting events from the extract in order.
	Retrieve finding a short word or phrase within the text and copying it accurately.
	Analyse looking at language, form or structure, and their effects.
	Infer thinking about the implications made within the piece.
	Personal Response giving an informed personal response on a particular aspect of the text.