

## Lesson Title: Great Debates

### Handout #6: A Note on Fact Checking

The internet era has given voters a tool they never had before: instant online resources to determine the accuracy of what candidates claim during debates or speeches. Here are three websites to consult. Generally it takes them only a few hours to post their research.

#### Fact Check

[www.factcheck.org](http://www.factcheck.org)

Fact Check is a non-profit organization, sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania's Annenberg School of Public Policy. Fact Check evaluated Hillary Clinton's acceptance speech at the Democratic convention and found this error: **"Clinton said, "90%" of income gains have gone to the top 1 percent."** But that is an outdated figure. It's now 52%.

#### PolitiFact

[www.politifact.com](http://www.politifact.com)

PolitiFact is a project of the St. Petersburg Times. It's famous for its "Truth-O-Meter," whose lowest category is called "Liar Liar Pants on Fire." For example, PolitiFact checked Donald Trump's claim that **"The Obama administration was actively supporting Al Qaeda in Iraq, the terrorist group that became the Islamic State."** In fact, the US has always opposed ISIS and its predecessors. Donald Trump's statement garnered the "Liar Liar Pants on Fire" designation.

#### Fact Checker

[www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker](http://www.washingtonpost.com/news/fact-checker)

Fact Checker is a project of the *Washington Post* newspaper. When asked at a July 27<sup>th</sup> news conference about his ties to Russia, which might have been seen as links to the Russian hacking of Democratic Party e-mails, Trump said: **"I have nothing to do with Russia. I have nothing to do with Russia – for anything."** Fact Checker found that Alan Garten, general council for the Trump Organization, had said in June, "I know we have looked at deals in Russia. And in many of the former Russian republics."

#### Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think such websites have come into existence in recent years?
2. Do you think candidates intend to skew the facts during debates?
3. Why do you think they would do this, even though it is relatively easy for the news media and public to fact check what candidates say?
4. Do you think it matters to voters if candidates get their facts wrong during a presidential debate? Explain.

Now, examine the Associated Press's (AP) fact checks on Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump's acceptance speech at the Republican National Convention in Cleveland, Ohio, on July 21, 2016.

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/ap-fact-check-donald-trumps-rnc-speech/>

Next, examine the Associated Press's (AP) fact checks on Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton's speech at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia, Pa., on July 26, 2016.

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/ap-fact-check-hillary-clintons-dnc-acceptance-speech/>

**Discussion Questions:**

1. Were you surprised at which remarks the AP reported were not accurate or truthful?
2. Which remarks did Trump and Clinton receive criticism for, in which you think there was a blatant error of the facts?
3. Were there any fact checks that you think might not affect the candidate very significantly?
4. Are you more apt to dismiss or forgive an error in facts if you support the candidate who made it?
5. Some of the fact checks the AP described might fall into a grey area—that is, it may not be possible to say if the candidate was 100 percent wrong in his/her facts. Why do you think that's the case?
6. Do you think it is necessary for another news outlet to fact check the AP's stories?