

# THE DOUBLE-EDGED SWORD

Using Propaganda Techniques to



# THE WHY

**Information Overload**

**Crowded Attention Economy**

**The library isn't silent.**

It is getting drowned out by entities with infinitely larger marketing budgets, algorithms optimized for engagement, and no ethical obligations.

And the people doing the fighting are already stretched impossibly thin just keeping the doors open.

**THE LIBRARY IS LOSING A MARKETING WAR IT NEVER AGREED TO  
FIGHT, WITH TOOLS IT WAS NEVER GIVEN.**

# THE GAP

What Libraries Have	What's Missing
Credible, trained professionals	Time to create public-facing content
Databases, research tools	Marketing infrastructure to promote them
Information literacy programs	Reach beyond people who already visit
Ethics embedded in practice	Ethics explicitly named and taught to the public
Logic embedded in reference work	Logic as a standalone, marketed skill set
ALA fighting institutionally	Local libraries translating that fight to their community

**The Core Marketing Problem:**

Librarians are doing the ethical and intellectual work but the **meta layer** — naming what they're doing, why it matters, and how it fights misinformation — is almost never communicated outward. The skills being taught in information literacy programs are exactly what people need to navigate AI-generated content, but they're marketed as library programs rather than **survival skills for the information age**.

# WHAT IF...

Library marketing started naming the cognitive skills explicitly

## Quick Example

Program: "Evaluating Online Sources Workshop"

🔍 Current marketing: Dry, institutional, low attendance

Reframed with Meta-Caption: "How to tell when AI is lying to you — and when a human used AI to lie for them"

🔍 [Why this works: It names the actual fear people have right now. It positions the librarian as the person who already knows the answer.]

Get a card - It's still free!  
Note the understated urgency and reminder of a forgotten benefit  
\*still\* implies scarcity of free things with digital platforms

The one place no one's trying to sell you something.  
Note the Irony/self-awareness — the ad admits it's an ad, which builds trust

Free.  
Quiet.  
Yours!

No algorithm decides what you read next.  
Note the Anti-marketing positioning — differentiates by contrasting with digital platforms

The internet wishes it was us.  
Note the Competitive framing and humor — makes the audience feel clever for choosing the library.

This entire ad used nostalgia, anti-consumerist sentiment, and FOMO-reversal to make you feel like the library is a rebellion. It worked, didn't it?  
Note that breaking the fourth wall — radical transparency paradoxically deepens engagement

# ETHICS & LOGIC GAP

Ethics and logic used to be embedded in classical education — rhetoric, philosophy, debate. They've been quietly removed or made optional, and nothing replaced them. Now AI has made this catastrophic because:

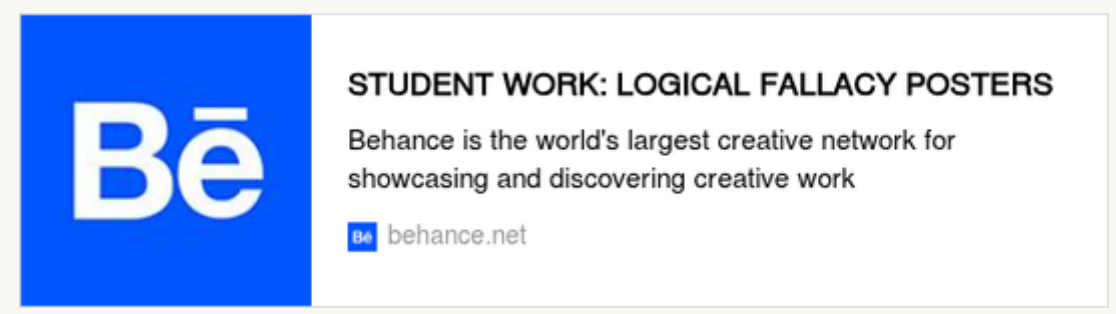


- Logic tells you whether an argument is structurally sound
- Ethics tells you whether the intent behind information is trustworthy
- Information literacy (the library's domain) tells you whether the source is credible

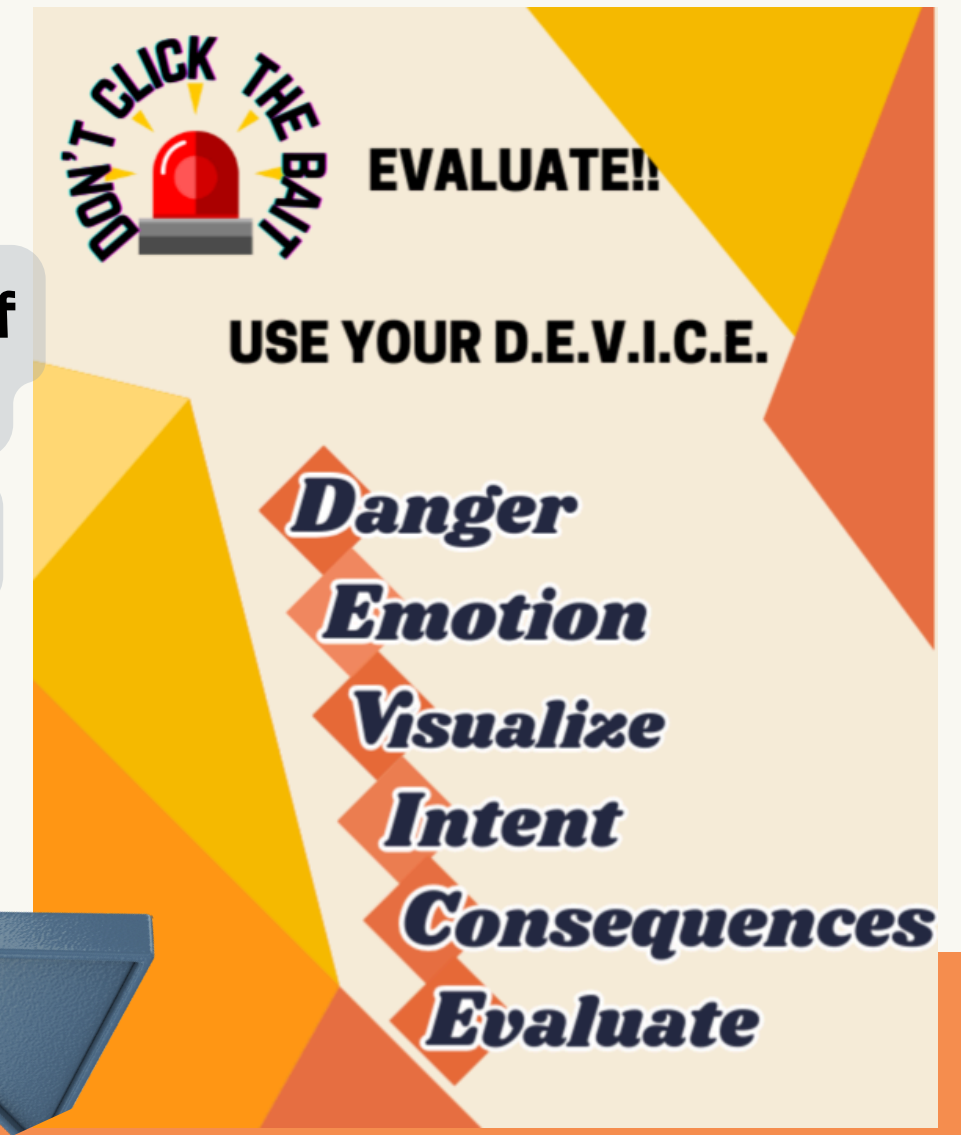
These three things together are essentially an immune system against misinformation — and the library is the only public institution positioned to teach all three for free, to everyone, without a political agenda.

# TACTICS & TRIGGERS

Meta-captioning is essentially a media literacy label that libraries put on their own programs and content, naming the cognitive skill being taught the same way a nutrition label names what's in your food. People don't know what information literacy does for them. Naming the mechanism makes it tangible.



This graphic is a classic example of "Warning Design," utilizing specific cognitive triggers to bypass a user's impulse to click and engage the analytical brain instead. By breaking down the D.E.V.I.C.E. acronym, we can see how the design forces a psychological "stop-and-think" moment.



# MORE TACTICS & TRIGGERS

## Classic Techniques Reimagined

A closer look into three core "shortcuts" and how they translate into a library context:

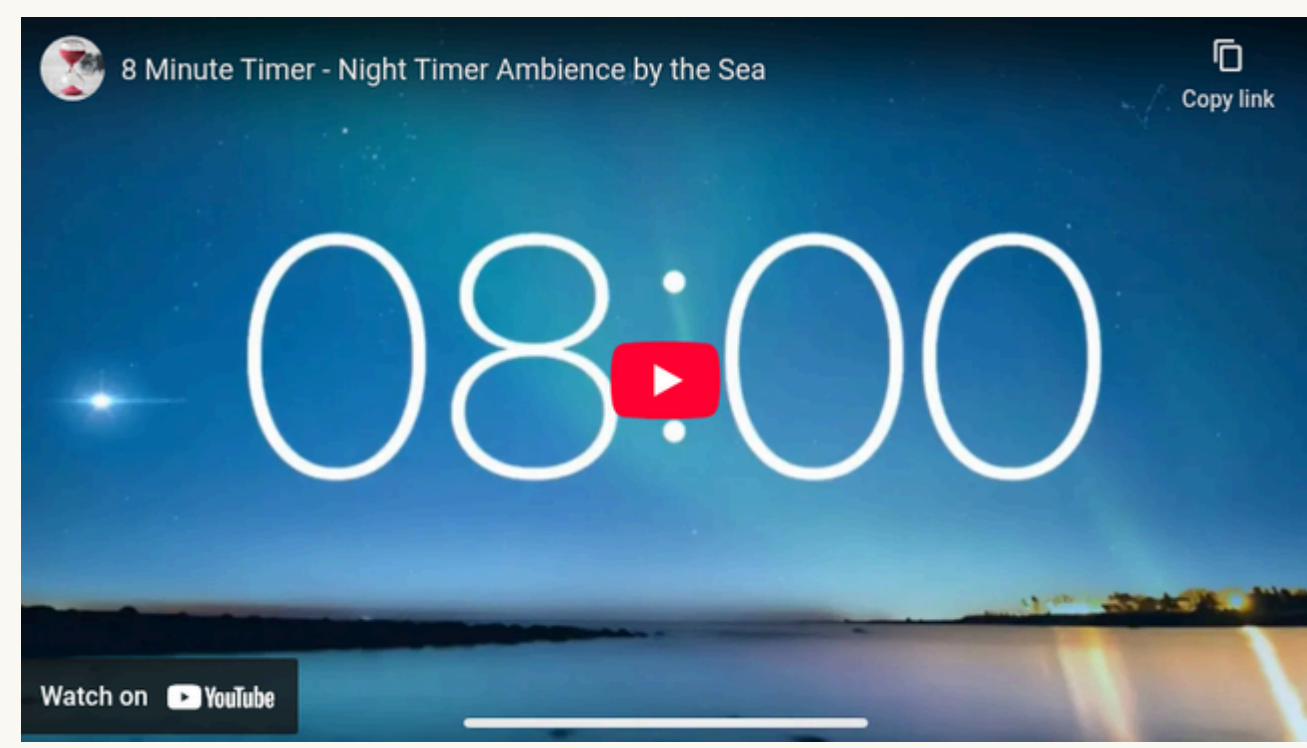
- **The Bandwagon Effect:** Moving from "We have books" to "Join the 5,000 neighbors already using our digital collections."
- **Testimonials & Plain Folks:** Leveraging peer stories instead of institutional "voice" to build trust.
- **Emotional Appeals (Pathos):** Using the "Fear of Missing Out" (FOMO) or the "Warm Glow" of community belonging to drive clicks.



Let's walk through what this looks like in the wild.

# DECONSTRUCTION PRACTICE

USE THE DECONSTRUCTION LAB HANDOUT  
YOU HAVE 8 MINUTES.



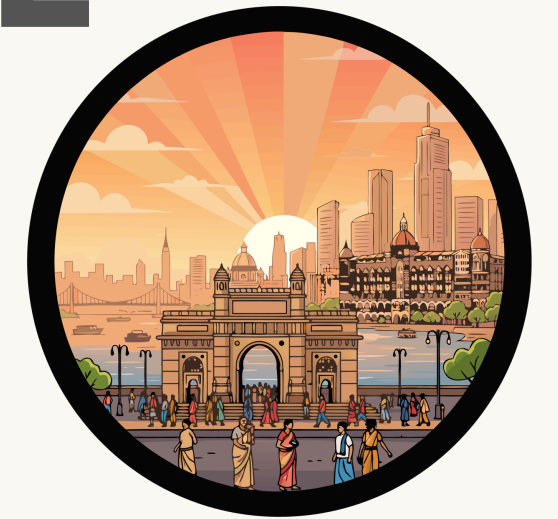
This graphic is a classic example of "Warning Design," utilizing specific cognitive triggers to bypass a user's impulse to click and engage the analytical brain instead. By breaking down the D.E.V.I.C.E. acronym, we can see how the design forces a psychological "stop-and-think" moment.



# DECONSTRUCTION PRACTICE

## The Pitch:

**Step Into the Library: The Heart of Democracy, The Beacon of Freedom, and the Gateway to Your Infinite Future!!**



## The Tactic:

**Glittering Generality - using virtue words that sound amazing but provide no specific information.**

## The Trigger:



**It triggers an immediate positive emotional response (patriotism, hope) that makes the audience less likely to ask questions.**

## The Literacy Lesson:

**Ask for the *definition*. How exactly does this specific program facilitate freedom? If you remove the buzzwords, what remains?**

# DECONSTRUCTION PRACTICE

## **The Pitch:**

**In an age of AI misinformation, you can either learn to use our verified databases or stay trapped in a bubble of fake news. The choice is yours.**

## **The Tactic:**

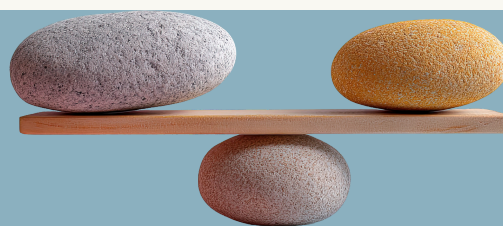
**False Dilemma (Either/Or Fallacy): Presenting two extremes as the only options.**

## **The Trigger:**

**Fear and a sense of “us vs them.” It forces a quick decision by making the alternative seem catastrophic.**

## **The Literacy Lesson:**

**Look for other ways. Can someone be information literate without using the library’s specific database? (YES) Point out that reality is a spectrum, not a binary!**



# DECONSTRUCTION PRACTICE

## The Pitch:

**I'm not a tech genius; I'm just a busy mom. If I can learn to 3D print a science project at the library, anyone can!**

## The Tactic:

**Plain Folks Appeal - establishing the speaker as "one of us" rather than an elite expert.**

## The Trigger:

**Trust through relatability. We are more likely to believe someone who shares our perceived social status.**

## The Literacy Lesson:

**Check for manufactured relatability. Is this a genuine testimonial, or is a brand/institution wearing a "costume" of normalcy to lower your defenses?**



# DECONSTRUCTION PRACTICE

## The Pitch:

**Ranked #1 for Community Impact!! The Gold Standard for Public Service!!**

## The Tactic:

**Appeal to Authority**

## Critical Questioning:

**Who gave the rank? What were the criteria for “The Gold Standard”? Is the authority actually relevant to the service provided?**



# DECONSTRUCTION DEBRIEF

Before transitioning to next activities, any questions?

**NEXT STEP: REFLECT ON *ACTUAL* MATERIAL**



**Let's do a Scavenger Hunt!!**

# REFLECT ON *YOUR* SCRIPT

Let's rethink our marketing: we're moving from just selling to using our materials as a live, hands-on lesson in information literacy.



The Red-Urgency Tactic A bright red alarm visual is a great opportunity!!

Add a small pull-out box or caption right next to it

Literacy Lesson: That red color? It's a psychological nudge meant to bypass your "stop-and-think" brain. Stay aware, stay in control.

# THE SCAVENGER HUNT

## PART ONE



Identifying existing tactics in your own library's digital footprint.

Audience	The Task	The Critical Question
Elementary (K-5)	Finding "Shiny Words" Glittering Generality Fallacy	"Does this picture want me to feel excited or left out?"
Middle (6-8)	The "Peer Pressure" Audit Bandwagon Fallacy	"Are they using this student because they like it, or to look cool?"
High School (9-12)	Either/Or Trap False Dilemma Fallacy	"Come to the library or be bored."
Staff/Faculty	Professional Alignment. Appeal to Authority Fallacy	"Ranked #1 for Community Impact: The Gold Standard of Public Service"

Transparent or Sneaky? — be honest.

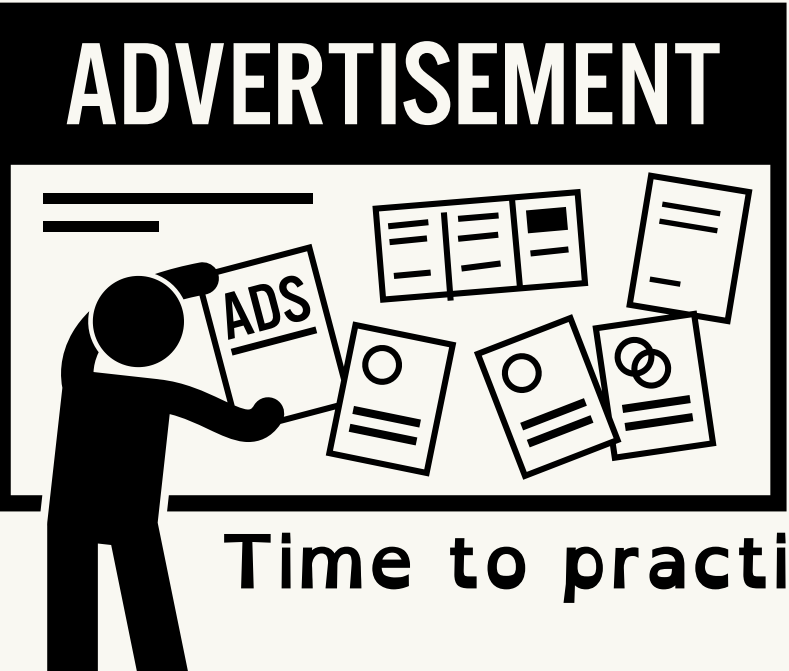
# THE SCAVENGER HUNT

Check In - From Auditor to Creator



Did you find a sneaky tactic?      Excellent!!

Now own it - Ethically



Choose one to fix

Time to practice making new, ethical marketing *and* embed a literacy lesson!

# THE FLIP CHALLENGE



**GOAL:**

CHOOSE ONE "SNEAKY" POST FOUND AND REWRITE THE CAPTION OR DESIGN TO MAKE IT A LITERACY LESSON.

Previous Example

<b>Original Pitch</b>	Attend the Evaluating Online Sources Workshop
<b>Identify Trigger</b>	BORING - I had this in 6th grade!
<b>Draft a How This Works</b>	Reframe: "How to tell when AI is lying to you — and when a human used AI to lie for them"
<b>Explain Design Choice</b>	Why this works: It names the actual fear people have right now. It positions the librarian as the person who already knows the answer.

**YOUR GOAL IS A PITCH THAT STANDS ALONE AS A CLASSROOM EXAMPLE OF MEDIA LITERACY.**

# THE FLIP CHALLENGE

THE ETHICS CHECK-IN YOUR SAFETY NET

**Does it pass the Sunlight Test?**

**If you explained the psychological tactic to a patron, would they feel enlightened or tricked?**

**If they'd feel tricked, it's coercion; if they feel enlightened, it's education.  
That's your line in the sand. Do Not Cross!!**

**For a deeper evaluation, we'll apply the D.E.V.I.C.E. Framework on the next slide.**

Reframed with Meta-Caption: "How to tell when AI is lying to you — and when a human used AI to lie for them"

🔍 [Why this works: It names the actual fear people have right now. It positions the librarian as the person who already knows the answer.]

# THE DECODER

## THE D.E.V.I.C.E. FRAMEWORK

A tool for patrons — and librarians — to slow down the gut reaction and engage the analytical brain. The full framework is in your handout. This is what can be applied at any stage of an information encounter.

It works in both directions: use it to evaluate content you encounter, and to audit content you create.

Take a couple of minutes to reflect on your Flipped Challenge. Does it pass the Sunlight Test?

How does it hold up against the D.E.V.I.C.E Framework?



# TALKING TO PARENTS

## THE "SUS" CHECK



Tell them: 'We want to give your kids a D.E.V.I.C.E. to navigate the digital world'.

Explain it as a 'Sus' Check.

It's a parent-friendly way to talk about Danger and Critical Reading in a non-political, relatable, and teaches students to trust their gut.

Remind parents that this isn't about being 'anti-advertising'; it's about being 'pro-questioning'.

We are teaching children to see the 'costume' a brand is wearing."



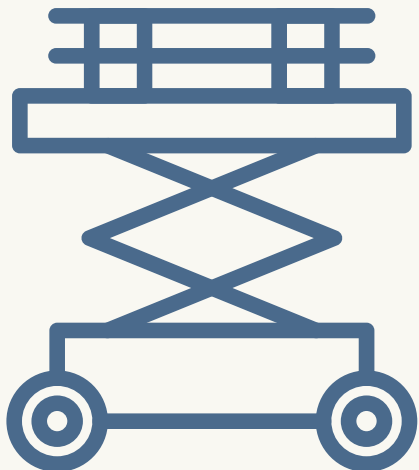
# SCAFFOLDING FOR TEACHERS

## GRADE-LEVEL LESSONS

SLibrary Scaffolding - This is how we avoid a 'one-size-fits-all' lesson.

**Elementary:** Lead with Feeling Detectives. It's about emotions — does this picture make you feel excited or left out? This maps directly onto SEL goals teachers are already working toward.

**Middle & High School:** Start with the Peer Pressure Audit. Teens are hyper-aware of being played — use that. Show them how the library uses Plain Folks appeals to look approachable, then let them deconstruct us. There are enough logical fallacies to keep lessons fresh all year.



The goal is to shift the library's identity from a place that has information to a Deconstruction Lab where students learn to outsmart the algorithms.

# TO SUMMARIZE

YOUR DOCTOR TEACHES YOU TO RECOGNIZE SYMPTOMS — AND CHARGES SO MUCH THAT BEING MIDDLE CLASS BARELY COVERS IT.

YOUR LIBRARIAN TEACHES YOU TO FIND CREDIBLE INFORMATION, RECOGNIZE LIES, AND THINK CRITICALLY. PAID FOR BY PUBLIC TAX DOLLARS. FREE FOR EVERYONE.



ONE OF THEM GETS INSTANT RESPECT, A PLATFORM, AND STREAMING DEAL.

THE OTHER IS BEING DEFUNDED AND SHUT DOWN.



# DEBRIEF - QUESTIONS

THE LIBRARY MUST STOP BEING INVISIBLE IN  
A FIGHT IT WAS LITERALLY BUILT TO WIN

QUESTIONS?

