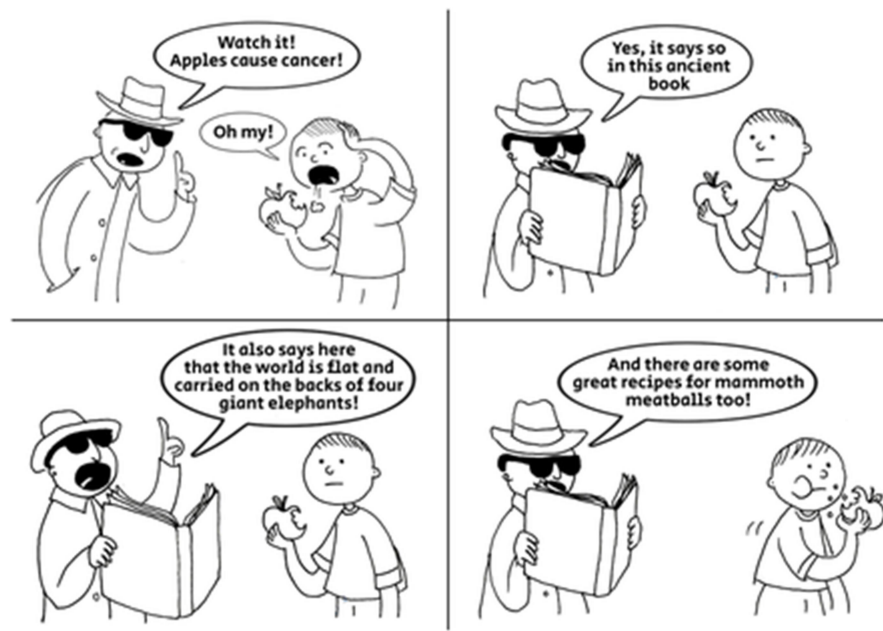


ASSIGNMENT 2: Using OPVL to Test the Reliability of Internet Sources

Both historians and students must continually measure the reliability of the sources of information they use. This is because not all sources are created equal. Arguably a source's reliability is one of the most difficult things to measure accurately. There are several reasons why this is so difficult:

1. Literally anybody with a computer can post to the Internet. By comparison books take more time, expertise and money to produce (making them generally more reliable). With that said, not all books are necessarily trustworthy (but let's leave that for another discussion).

2. Students make considerable use of the Internet for research. There's so much information available they are almost drowning in the sheer amount of information. It is unwise to just assume what you've read is true without first testing it somehow.



3. People typically look for and find websites confirming what they already *believe* to be true. For example, if you believe the Earth is flat, aliens created the pyramids in Egypt or mermaids are real, etc. you will find websites that so-called "proves" it. The Internet has become something of an "echo chamber" where people just look for proof in support of their beliefs while blocking out information that disproves or challenges their beliefs.
4. Lastly, and related to the previous problem, people generally lack the expertise or knowledge to discern what is and what is not trustworthy. Many websites present quality information; however, some are deliberately created for the purposes of disinformation and propaganda. You cannot believe everything you read.

Scholars developed the OPVL method to help take some of the guess work out of measuring a source's reliability. The following is a basic introduction of the four components of the OPVL method (including guidance questions students might find helpful).

Origin: this refers to the setting, time, and personality (or culture) that created a source. Some potential questions a student could ask exploring a source's origin are:

- When was the document created?
- Who created it?
- Where did it first appear?
- Are there any special cultural considerations to take into account when reading this document?
- Is it a primary or secondary source?
- What was the historical context in which it was created?

Purpose: this focuses on the intention or purpose behind the creation of the source in the first place.

- Why did the author or culture create the document?
- Who is the source's intended audience?
- Is the document intended specifically for fellow scholars or for regular people?

Values & Limitations: although these two attributes are treated separately they cover essentially the same ground: values relate to the beliefs of the source's creator while limitations refer to any potential problems affecting a document.

- What information was available to the author that might not be available elsewhere?
- What important information was *not* available to the author? For example, consider when the document was created and if any subsequent scholarship has revealed something new about an event or personality.
- Did the author get their information from a reliable source?
- Does the author have reasons to emphasize certain facts over others? Would the author present the story differently to a different audience?
- What specific information did the author leave out?

- Does the author concede¹ a certain point that is inconvenient to him/her to admit to?
- How might the historical context in which the document was created influence the author?
- How might the document's original historical context affect our own understanding of the document's reliability?
- Could the document's author have made use of better, more reliable sources?
- To what extent is this resource reliable or relevant to incorporate into an essay or oral presentation?

Procedure

1). Read and evaluate the reliability of the source below called *A Look at the Dark Ages: When Things were Really Medieval* (drawn from the website found at <http://medieval.stormthecastle.com/essays/a-look-at-the-dark-ages-when-things-were-really-medieval.htm>).

2). Create a *Google Doc*. Entitle it Assignment 2. Write **one total response paragraph** where you discuss the source's origin, purpose, value and limitations. The guidance questions above will prove helpful in developing your answers. Your paragraph must be a minimum of 150 words in length. Ensure the ideas in your paragraph transition and segue smoothly from one to the next. Do not just dump the answers from your OPVL guidance questions one after the other. If you do this, your paragraph will sound like gibberish. Share the file with your teacher (rdelainey@lcbi.sk.ca) giving them full editing privileges.

A Look at the Dark Ages: When Things Were Really Medieval

The Dark Ages were a period of great upheaval, constant war, horrendous plague, and stagnant cultural growth. But through these difficult centuries new ideas and a new culture was born. And in today's world we still feel the effects of these changes that were brought about during these Dark Ages.

The Dark Ages is a period generally accepted as having begun in the year 410 with the fall of Rome and ending in 1095 CE with the launch of the First Crusade. The fall of Rome sets a good understanding for what the Dark Ages were all about because for centuries the Roman Empire was a unified force that brought stabilization to most of Europe. It had a vibrant trade and commerce industry supporting a reasonably secure lifestyle for millions of people. When Rome fell, this network of trade and commerce collapses and the European World was set into chaos. It took seven hundred

¹ The word *concede* literally means to "admit that something is true or valid after first denying or resisting it."

years of wars, plague, and poverty before the continent came out of it and was moved into the Renaissance.

Medieval Warlords and the Struggle to be Emperor

Before it fell, Rome had been the center of the European world for seven hundred years. The emperor ruled over everything and when this all fell the concept of one man ruling the world still remained. It was this aspiration to rule over everything that perpetuated the darkness of the times. Lords from all over Europe were engaged with each other in battles for land and power. This battling lasted literally centuries and it meant a constant drain of resources and a standstill in cultural growth.

Outside Forces Make It Worse

This constant struggling for power within the continent of Europe made it very easy for outside forces to penetrate into the continent and further wreak destruction and drain wealth and resources. From the north Vikings constantly invaded and plundered and from the south Moorish invaders brought war and the word of their prophet. The whole continent was under the constant pressure of three points of attack –from within and from both the north and south.

The Plague Negates All Progress

Throughout the first century of the Dark Ages Europe made slow but tangible progress and Emperor Justinian was on the verge of reuniting the continent when the bubonic plague hit and killed tens of millions of people. This destroyed all hope of reunification and kept the continent in chaos for several more centuries.

The Force that Brought Us Out of the Darkness

Christianity was an ideal that rose to power during the dark ages and many warlords of the time embraced it. This had a unifying force on the entire European continent and even though there were many kingdoms they all swore allegiance under the pope. This brought an end to the internal fighting that had been going on for centuries and this unification was solidified with the launching of the Crusades beginning in 1095. This gave all the various warlords and kings a common religious goal and a foe they could join together and focus on.

The Crusades, while being for the most part a failure in that they held very little of the land they attempted to conquer, were a significant factor in the rebirth of Europe in that Europe was reunited under a common religion and returning crusaders brought back with them to Europe a wealth of new information in architecture, medicine, philosophy, mathematics and many other areas. This infusion of ideas, paired with the end of constant war within Europe set the stage for the Renaissance.

The Dark Ages were an extraordinarily difficult period in the story of humanity. It is estimated that 100 million people died at the hands of war, poverty, and plague. But during this time new ideas and ideals were born and much of the groundwork was laid for the world we know today.