HS: Analyzing Bias in a Racist Website

See the lesson: Constructing King
Watch a 6 min. demonstration video of this activity

Example CMD Activity Plan:

Teaching Context

- **Grade level:** HS  **Subject area:** Digital Literacy,  **Unit:** analyzing websites, Martin Luther King Jr.
- **What might come before or after this activity:** This will introduce our unit on website analysis.
- **Other relevant contextual information:** Students will be studying King and civil rights in some of their classes in preparation for school-wide presentations during the school’s MLK holiday celebration.

1) **Content Objectives:**
   - Students will apply prior knowledge on Martin Luther King Jr. and the civil rights movement.

   **Literacy/Critical Thinking Objectives:**
   - Students will analyze a web site for its purpose, target audience, messages, and the methods used to communicate those messages.
   - Students will reflect on the questions to ask when evaluating the credibility and bias in a website.

2) **Document(s) description and link:**
   - A 2017 screen grab from the homepage of the website www.marttinlutherking.org. This activity is taken from Lesson #3: Constructing King in Project Look Sharp’s kit: Media Construction of Martin Luther King Jr.

3) **Key Questions:**
   - Does this look like a credible website? Why?
   - Who is the target audience? What is your evidence??
   - Who might be behind this web site? What is its purpose?
   - What questions do you need to ask about websites as we navigate the Internet?

4) **Decoding Plan:**
   I will give little if any background information about this site - other than the URL: www.marttinlutherking.org, - before starting the decoding. I will start with the question: At first glance, does this site seem credible? Why? If necessary I will probe about the credibility of the ULR: Does the URL add credibility?

   I will quickly ask: Who is the target audience? and probe: What is your evidence? I expect students will recognize that the site is targeting young people but will be prepared to probe for that understanding: Who might be targeted by “pop quiz” and “rap lyrics.”

   A tricky part of decoding this site is the attack against King’s character: “I’m F- ing for God.” I could give a trigger warning at the beginning of the activity: Like many sites, this one will have some questionable content that might be disturbing and inaccurate. Or I might wait until we get into decoding the purpose and authorship before delivering the warning. Given my prior work with these students I am leaning towards the latter.

   Early in the decoding I will ask “What are the messages about King” with evidence probes. This is likely where students will identify the slur from Newsweek that will call for a response from me, e.g. Is this an accurate quote? How do we know? Why did they include this?

   At this point I will ask: Given what you have seen, who might be behind this web site? I will wait to probe for evidence once a student has suggested that it is a white supremacist or neo-Nazi site. If necessary I will probe for that understanding: “Jews and the Civil Rights Movement: Who Led the Civil Rights Movement” – What does that suggest about who is behind this site? I will then provide some background information, that Don Black, the leader of the white supremacist site “Stormfront,” purchased the URL www.marttinlutherking.org in 1994. I will ask: Why might Don Black have done that? I will ask: What is the purpose of this site? Probe to help students understand that this site is intended to discredit King and the civil rights movement in the eyes of young people (e.g. Say more about that. Explain how…

   I will end the activity by connecting to the bigger lessons here: Given that this was one of the most popular sites in a Google search for “Martin Luther King,” what do we need to do as we navigate the web? Probe for understanding of digital literacy, and the asking of key questions (Who produced this for what purpose? is it credible and accurate? What are the biases? etc.). See Key Questions to Ask When Analyzing Media Messages.