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# Make Believe

## Encounters with Misinformation



Critical and Creative Thinking  
and Misinformation:  
An Education Resource

# Critical and Creative Thinking and Misinformation: An Education Resource

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## Make Believe: Encounters with Misinformation and the Critical and Creative Thinking Curriculum

Misinformation filters our view of the world. Whether it arises from simple mistakes, misinterpretations or deliberate deception, it can profoundly influence our thoughts, opinions and actions.

Despite having more access to information than ever before, we continue to be duped and seduced by mistruths. These falsehoods can completely deceive us or subtly draw us in — even when we know they are untrue — by echoing our beliefs, appealing to our emotions, using beauty to beguile us and making it easier to ignore uncomfortable truths.

The exhibition encourages us to look beyond contemporary forces like social media and AI and instead focus our attention inward: to reflect on the thinking processes and biases that have always played a part in perpetuating misinformation.

The centrality of metacognition and reasoning to the exhibition make it a useful prompt for addressing key aspects of the Levels 9-10 Critical and Creative thinking curriculum.

Specifically, the stories address: framing biases (VC2CC10M02); implicit thinking (VC2CC10Q02); unconscious biases (VC2CC10M02) and complex reasoning errors (VC2CC10R03).

Using visual thinking strategies to engage students with primary sources and contemporary artworks, the tour also encourages students to practice analysis and evaluation skills. This complements content descriptors that span the English, Humanities and Arts Curriculum. Case Study 3 (see below) also offers opportunities to address elements of the Health and Physical Education Curriculum.

## The in-exhibition experience

At the centre of this exhibition, a video explores the modern surge of false and misleading information. Library staff, academics, artists and subject specialists discuss the scale of the problem, questioning its causes, consequences and possible remedies.

There are eight screens and eight headsets available at any one time to view this video (the pre-visit activity includes a link to watch the video in class, before you arrive, so that no one misses out.)

Surrounding this space, four rooms present case studies that open up the topic of misinformation in unexpected ways. Victorian-based artists and academics have been invited to respond to items and local stories from the Library's collection. For more context about the case studies, you can visit the [exhibition microsite](#) to read about each section and watch video interviews with the featured artists and academics.

**CASE STUDY 1:** Advertising, Australia and distorting reality

**CASE STUDY 2:** Photography, archives and falling for fakes

**CASE STUDY 3:** Anatomy, biases and understanding the clitoris

**CASE STUDY 4:** Art, poetry and resisting censorship

Collectively these case studies ask: how do our own perspectives and experiences influence what we accept to be 'true'? At the same time, they model how curiosity and thoughtful research can help us question, navigate and engage with information more critically and confidently.

## The self-guiding tour

The self-guiding tour provides teachers with talking points and visual thinking activities for each of the case studies. These are designed to broadly address the aims of the Levels 9–10 Critical and Creative Thinking Curriculum. The tour invites students to critically examine the thinking processes that contribute to the spread of misinformation, while also modelling how to address this issue by highlighting how the artists and academics have used 'logical, flexible and adventurous thinking' to challenge misinformation.

Using visual thinking strategies, the tour also encourages students to practice analysing, evaluating and improving reasoning and thinking processes as they view and respond to the stories and objects on display.

For the best experience, we recommend dividing the classes into two groups, with each group being guided by a teacher.

Pre-visit activities to introduce students to the topic of misinformation, and post-visit activities to invite reflection, are also included in this kit.

Please note: Case Study 3 includes anatomical textbooks from the Library's collection that feature highly detailed illustrations of human dissections and sexual organs, including a printed engraving of a stillborn child.

The layout of the exhibition means this space is 'opt in.' Teacher notes are provided for this section of the exhibition, highlighting how unconscious biases can influence even seemingly objective genres like science, and the real-world impacts this can have.

It is at the teacher's discretion whether or not to include this stop on the tour.

# Pre-visit Activity: An Introduction to Misinformation

## Learning Intention

Students will be introduced to the concept and possible consequences of misinformation, in preparation for their visit to State Library Victoria's *Make Believe: Encounters with Misinformation* exhibition.

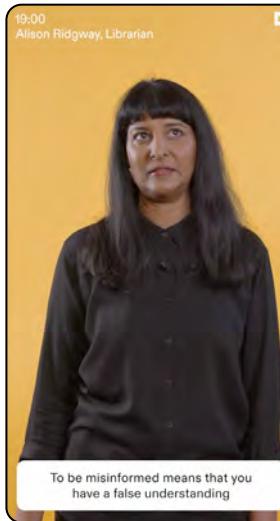
## Success Criteria

- Students will understand the concept of misinformation
- Students will be able to describe why it is an important issue
- Students will compare and contrast the current 'crisis in information' to other moments in time.

## Tuning In

### WATCH

This video features librarians from State Library Victoria, alongside academics and artists featured in the *Make Believe* exhibition and introduces the topic of misinformation and the artworks on display.



## Activities

### 1. DISCUSS

Make links to students' existing knowledge and experiences:

**Can you think of any cases of misinformation you've read or heard about?**

*Prompts/examples: online news, political misinformation, celebrity gossip*

**Have you ever been duped by misinformation?**

**What is the difference between misinformation and disinformation?**

*Misinformation: wrong or misleading information.*

*Disinformation: deliberately false information, intended to mislead*

## 2. THINK

Jigsaw activity: Form small groups and ask each group to create a list of all the possible consequences of misinformation, under one of the following headings:

**SOCIAL** – issues relating to things like family, community, identity and culture.

**POLITICAL** – issues relating to governments and legal systems.

**ECONOMIC** – issues relating to all things related to money and finance.

**ENVIRONMENTAL** – issues relating to our planet.

Some of the issues may be connected, or lead to other issues – ask students to document this also. Ask groups to share their answers and create a master list of everyone's collective ideas. You could use a fishbone diagram to compile this information.

Give students two minutes thinking time and then ask them to write down what they consider to be the most scary or serious consequences of misinformation. Ask a student to collect the slips of paper and tally a vote. Discuss the outcome.

### 3. REFLECT

Here now, then there thinking routine /  
Think Pair Share

As the librarians in the video indicated, misinformation has always existed. Is it worse today? The World Health Organisation declared in 2020 that we are living in an unprecedented “infodemic” due to the vast amount of misinformation being circulated. However, Nina, one of the librarians in the video you just watched, compared today’s situation to life in a 16th-century German town and suggested otherwise.

In pairs, ask students to create a list of positive and negative factors relating to misinformation for both periods in time. After 5 minutes, collate a class list on the board.

#### Exit pass

What time period would you prefer to live in?  
What makes you say that?

What are the most important things to consider on this list? What makes you say that?

	German Village, 1600	Melbourne, 2026
Positives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• No deep fakes, trick photography, filters or Photoshop to create fake images or evidence.</li><li>• No modern technology, such as social media or the internet to share misinformation online.</li><li>• Misinformation would have spread less rapidly because of these factors.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Access to libraries, schools and the internet allows us to explore different perspectives and information from various sources, enabling us to fact-check.</li><li>• Education is for everyone – all students in Victoria are learning critical thinking skills that can help them to evaluate misinformation.</li><li>• We have legal systems to deal with misinformation cases.</li></ul>
Negatives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lack of access to information – the availability of books, schooling and education were limited to the wealthy. This would have made fact-checking very hard.</li><li>• Limited exposure to different people, cultures and experiences restricted access to new or diverse ideas and viewpoints.</li><li>• Low literacy/education rates made it harder for people to engage with issues critically.</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Social media and the internet allow anyone to create and distribute misinformation.</li><li>• Misinformation can be spread rapidly, increasing its scale and impact.</li><li>• Algorithms reduce exposure to new information or perspectives that differ from our own.</li><li>• Online information and social media platforms are owned and controlled by a small cohort of billionaires.</li></ul>

For teacher reference



# **Misinformation and Critical and Creative Thinking Self-guiding Tour**

## **Before arriving**

- We ask that schools planning to visit the Library/exhibition to complete the self-guiding contact us in advance. You can do this by filling out a form [here](#).
- Complete the pre-visit activities provided above or watch the introductory video [here](#).
- For the self-guiding tour of *Make Believe*, we suggest that single classes are split into two groups, each accompanied by a teacher.
- More information about school visits can be found [here](#), including details on how to get to State Library Victoria.
- Want to do a paid curator tour? Visit our [website](#) to book. If your school has a low ICSEA rating you may be eligible for free transport.
- For any further enquiries, contact the schools team at [education@slv.vic.gov.au](mailto:education@slv.vic.gov.au)

## **On the day**

When you arrive, kindly check in with our friendly Visitor Services staff at the Swanston Street Welcome Zone.

## Tour overview

The tour begins on the Library forecourt with an introduction to the history of the Library and an acknowledgement of country, then moves into the Gallery space. Teacher notes for Case Study 1 and Case Study 2 are designed to help scaffold students' engagement with the objects and themes. Case Study 3 and 4 offer opportunities for more independent learning.

Visual Thinking Routines used in this tour are all based on Harvard's Project Zero toolbox, adapted to help meet the [Victorian Critical and Creative Thinking Curriculum](#).

### Introduction to the Exhibition: Swanston Street Entry foyer

Today, we will be visiting the *Make Believe: Encounters with Misinformation* exhibition.

What are some words we could use to describe the amount of misinformation in circulation online?

The pervasiveness of misinformation in our lives can make us want to throw our hands up in the air and give up. AI generated images, deliberately misleading disinformation, dodgy websites and online scams can make us feel like we are powerless in the face of things.

Today, we are going to use critical and creative thinking to explore how we can individually address this imbalance by examining the role we each play in perpetuating misinformation. That's right, the role **YOU** play!

## How to use this guide

1. Teacher script in black
2. **Discussion questions and actions for students**
3. **Teacher prompts — helpful for when discussion falls flat!**

→ *Directional information to help you find your way*

You may or may not realise that a lot of misinformation is spread because of our own psychology. We often unconsciously absorb information that already fits into our world view (this is called implicit thinking) and uncritically accept misinformation that confirms what we already believe or want to believe is true, without even realising we are doing it!

Being self-aware about these thinking processes is the first step to challenging misinformation – and something we are going to practice today.

Now, we are going to step inside the gallery and look at some examples of historical misinformation, and the ways Victorians have used research and creativity to redress these mistruths.

→ *Enter the gallery through the double glass doors and turn into the first room on your left.*

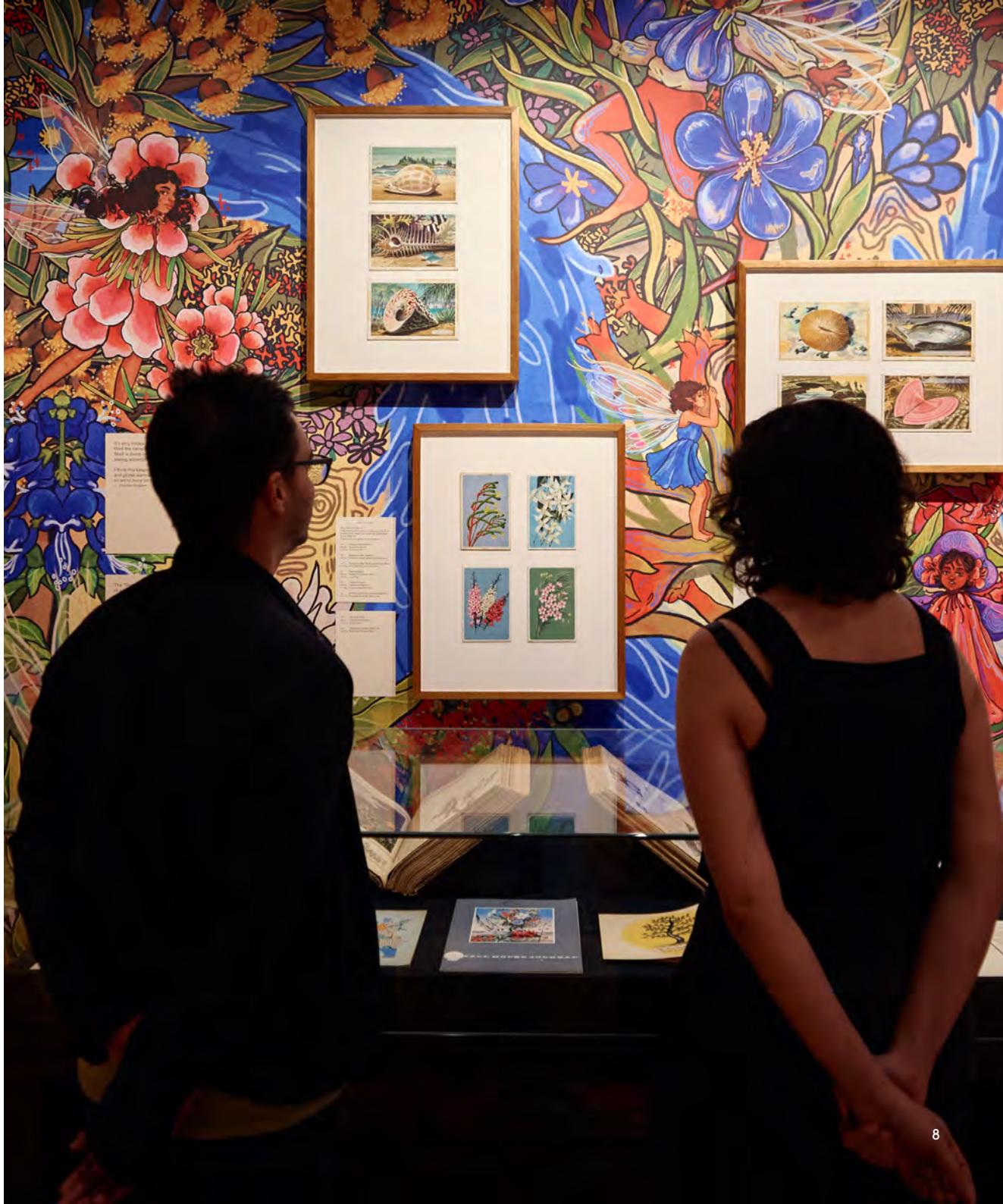
# Case Study 1: Advertising, Australia and distorting reality

## Thinking routine: Values, Identities, Actions

In 1954 Shell Petroleum opened Victoria's first oil refinery in Geelong. Soon after, they launched an advertising campaign called 'Discover Australia with Shell,' encouraging families to learn more about the natural wonders of Australia by going on road trips. In this room, you can see artefacts from this campaign and illustrations on the walls, which are a contemporary creative response to this collection by First Nations artist Charlotte Allingham, who also goes by the name of CoffinBirth.

## Activities

1. EXPLORE; you have 5 minutes to read the labels and explore the space.
2. LOOK CLOSELY at the **Shell Petrol archive** and stand in front of an item you like – it could be a painting on the wall, an object in a case or the framed map.





## VALUES

### What values does this work invite us to think about?

(Values can relate to all kinds of things that people care about, for example, people can have family values and political values, or value things like respect, compassion and care.)

*Prompt: Respect for the environment, empathy for animals, admiration of plants, the value of spending time in nature, the value of spending time with family, travel, healthy eating, learning about the natural world.*

## IDENTITIES

### Look closely at the Shell artwork. What are these items speaking about?

And who is it trying to speak to?

*Prompt: The beauty of nature, holidays, collectables, children, parents, families, road trips.*

### Do you fit in this story?

Who is left out?

*Prompt: Consider the landscape in the Shell images – was the land empty?*

## ACTIONS

### What actions might the Shell artworks encourage?

(Actions can be something concrete, like doing something, or just mental actions, like learning.)

*Prompt: Spending time outdoors, collecting the cards, cooking healthy food, reading stories, roadtrips, learning more about the natural world.*

→ Move to the back corner of the space, where Helmut Newton's black-and-white photographs of the Shell refinery in Geelong are displayed.



3. LOOK closely at these photographs and the wallpaper behind them. Charlotte's artwork and Helmut's images on the wall present very different framings of Shell's relationship to the environment.

Consider the words you used to describe the Shell artworks. Does petrol represent or link to these values and identities?

What makes you say that?

Advertising, like Shell's, relies on the audience's susceptibility to framing biases. In advertising, art and information is presented in very specific ways, deliberately designed to emphasise positive aspects of the product and influence how we evaluate it.

In the 'Discover Australia with Shell' campaign, the soft pastel colours, along with images of delicate shells and flowers, paint a scene far removed from the reality of dredging the ocean and mining the land for oil, or the pollution and impact on the land from building roads and car travel.

Instead, we are shown a very pretty picture. Even though we know it is the advertiser's intention to sell us a product, we can often be very susceptible to or distracted by these misrepresentations, if we fail to use our critical thinking skills.

As artist Charlotte Allingham's quote on the wall points out, it's often easier and more convenient for us not to confront

uncomfortable truths – in this case, the environmental cost of petrol, something many of us rely on daily to make our lives more convenient. **In this way, we are all complicit.**

Can anyone think of an example of advertising today that uses similar strategies?

**Prompt: Four Wheel Drive advertising – cars crashing through nature!**

**Extension question:** what other 'misinformation' does Charlotte's artwork address?

**Prompt: Terra Nullius, and the removal of Aboriginal people from their lands.**

→ Move to next room, Case Study 2

## Case Study 2: Photography, archives and falling for fakes

### Thinking routine: Beauty and Truth

This room features the work of artist Scotty So, and historical items from the State Library Victoria's collection. But which is which? Can you tell?

### Activity

1. EXPLORE the room for a few minutes, and without reading the labels, try and decide which items are historical artefacts from the Library's collection, and which are Scotty So's fakes.
2. PICK a photograph or item in the room that you consider beautiful and take to be a genuine artefact.

What criteria did you use to decide this was genuine?

*Prompt: Display techniques, historical details, gut feeling...*





Artist Scotty So playfully explores our natural inclination to conflate beauty with truth.

**How might beauty reveal truth?**

*Prompt: Beauty can get our attention, ask us to look closer, engage us. If something is very beautiful, it may also be unrealistic and this can lead us to uncover the truth about it.*

**How might beauty conceal truth?**

*Prompt: We might be seduced by the image and less critical of it if we find it attractive.*

**Read the label and check to see if you are right about the authenticity of your chosen item.**

When we have a positive, instinctive reaction to something, it can influence the judgements we make about it. In psychology, this is known as the 'halo effect', and it is a cognitive bias. If we perceive something to be attractive our brains make assumptions about this person or object, usually based on our own values and beliefs, rather than fact.

**Think about photographs we encounter online – if someone is beautiful, what kind of assumptions do we make about their life and personality?**

**Have you ever believed someone or something was superior because it was beautiful?**

Artists, advertisers and designers have long relied upon this bias to sell us their works, products and services. It is also used to spread misinformation: when something is beautiful, we are instinctively more likely to accept it as true or associate it with positive things. In this way, we can be unconsciously seduced by misinformation.

Scotty So's trick photographs rely on these biases – they are often so beautiful we want to believe they are real. Academics, journalists and many others have been duped; his fakes have snuck into documentaries, Wikipedia pages, academic articles and his prints are even being re-sold on eBay as vintage photographs! Watch the video on the old iMac to see the extent of his trickery.

→ *Move to the wall with the photographs of the Chinese magicians.*



3. LOOK closely at these images. Some of the photographs are of Scotty So, dressed up, but others are 'real' images from the Library's magic and conjuring collection. However, many of the 'Chinese magicians' shown here were actually European people, dressed up, pretending to be Chinese in order to appear more 'mystical' and benefit their careers.

If you were a researcher here at the Library and you came across these images, would you have been able to tell? What makes you say that?

When you see an object in the official context of the State Library, are you more likely to uncritically accept it as a genuine historical artefact? What makes you say that?

*Prompt: Because of the formal context it is presented in. The environment lends the object authenticity - the framing, the glass display cabinets, the archive and the association with the Library all lend the items legitimacy and influences the way our brain reads the information. The halo effect in a different format.*

What are the possible consequences?

*Prompt: Misunderstandings and misrepresentations of history and culture.*

Think about the photographs on your phone. In 50 years, if your future grandchild would like to see what you looked like as a 16 year-old, do you think these images will provide an accurate historical record? What makes you say that?

*Prompts: Selective framing (what parts of our life do we photograph and what parts do we leave out?), filters, photoshopping, the halo effect.*

In the future, how will historians interpret our past, when we currently live in a world full of fakes?

→ Move to next room, Case Study 3 or Case Study 4. Please read the notes below before entering Case Study 3.

# Case study 3: Anatomy, biases and understanding the clitoris

Please note: Case Study 3 includes anatomical textbooks from the Library's collection that feature highly detailed illustrations of human dissections and sexual organs, including a printed engraving of a stillborn child.

The layout of the exhibition means this space is 'opt in.' Teacher notes are provided for this section of the exhibition, but it is at the teacher's discretion whether to include this stop on the tour.

You might like to brief the students before they enter this space and let them know it contains anatomical drawings of female genitals.

'I deal with misinformation all the time. There's not one person who enters our therapy practice who understands their own genital anatomy or the anatomy of others.'

'One of the consequences of this misinformation is that people don't understand their own bodies, and they don't understand how pleasure is embodied in their bodies.'

'As an occupational therapist, I was really motivated to find some tools of the trade, which didn't exist, to help redress this. Previous models focused on reproductive anatomy – the uterus and the vagina – but didn't actually show where the clitoris sat; it was just not included at all.'

– Anita Brown-Major

'Lack of information is also misinformation.'  
– Anita Brown-Major

'We believe we must challenge the way the medical community has approached female patients and how to treat them, including the right to decide what's best for us.'

'We have acknowledge that centre our sex and gender experiences to those of our bodies. This is a reminder that we are women on our own terms, respect that, and we're not afraid of how it looks. Decisions about our sex – it's up to us, that's the theme here.'

Photo credit: Science Museum





## Thinking routine: Here now, then there

This room is about medical misinformation.

Can medical or scientific information be 'wrong'? What makes you say that?

We often assume medical information is impartial and unbiased, but this room explores how misinformation can occur even in scientific contexts.

Specifically, this room explores misinformation about the anatomy of the clitoris and the labia, and how this has had significant impacts on the health and well-being of women, for generations. Anatomy is the study of the bodily structure of things — usually based on dissections.

### Activities

1. WATCH the video from start to finish.
2. EXPLORE the room and READ the quotes on the wall.

What surprised you?

What do you think is the biggest contributor to misinformation about women's bodies?  
What makes you say that?

### 3. DISCUSS

Gender bias refers to an unfair difference in the way men and women are treated. In the case of anatomy, throughout history, the male body has been used as the standard of what's considered 'normal'. Medical textbooks and anatomical studies often only show a male body. However, as Professor Helen O'Connell's research shows, in some parts, women's bodies function very differently to men's, making this a false analogy.

A false analogy is a comparison drawn between two things that are superficially similar but have significant, relevant differences.

Why were women's bodies not accurately mapped in the past? Imagine you are travelling back in time – what values, judgments and attitudes could have existed that may have contributed to this historical misinformation?

*Prompts: Women were considered inferior, dissecting female bodies may have been considered taboo, the health and wellbeing of women was considered less, careers in science were not available to women: anatomists and doctors were men.*

4. FIND a book in this room that shows gender bias.

Can you explain how?

5. DISCUSS

Are things different now?

What attitudes may have changed?

What has stayed the same?

*Prompts: Improvements in technology, advances in women's rights/equality movement, more research, more women working in the sciences.*

We may think the world is more progressive or advanced now, but results from a 2017 review of Australian medical textbooks, which analysed over 6,000 images, indicated that images of anatomy in textbooks remains predominantly male. This provides medical students with inadequate information about 50% of the population.

What are the possible consequences of this misinformation?

*Prompts: Doctors incorrectly educated, doctors don't have enough information to make correct diagnoses, surgeons are performing surgeries on women with inadequate diagrams, women don't have access to information about their own bodies, diseases affecting women are understudied...*

Could things be different in the future?

→ Move into the central space, near the entry to Case Study 4. You might like to address students here, due to the soundscape in the room.



# Case study 4: Art, poetry and resisting censorship

## Thinking routine: Unveiling stories

1. In this room, Australia-Iranian artist Sofi Basseghi has created a new video artwork that responds to beautiful, illustrated manuscripts and poetry books from the Library's collection.

Here, instead of me telling you about the misinformation story, I'm going to ask you guys to find out and *tell me*.

First, find a partner to work with. I am going to give each pair a different question to answer:

What was truths were hidden?

Why are the books on display important?

What would you say the message of the artwork is?

How does this room link to the theme of misinformation?

How does the artist suggest we can tackle misinformation?

How does censorship contribute to misinformation?

You will have 5 minutes to read the labels and artist quotes and view the artwork on display. Then, you will need to report back your findings to the group.

2. What other histories can you think of that have been left out of history books?

What questions do you have for the artist?

What did the video make you think about?





## Post Visit

How can individuals challenge misinformation in 2025?

Which story did you find the most compelling? What make you say that?

How might you use art to express your views on a topic?

## Other resources

### Exhibition microsite

Watch interviews with artists, academics and librarians talking about aspects of misinformation. Learn more about the key themes of the exhibition and meet the contributors.

### Research Guide

Equip your students with resources to combat online misinformation with this comprehensive Research Guide, created by State Library Victoria librarians. The guide offers tips and tools for evaluating information and finding credible sources and includes links to reliable fact-checking resources and useful books and articles available through the Library's catalogue and collection, as well as up-to-date information on government policies and organisations addressing the issue. You can also delve deeper into the case studies presented in this exhibition.



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