

# Lesson Plan: Conspiracy theories, Shakespeare and now

By Syd Golston. Adapted by **Paul Hricik**.

## Overview

Conspiracy theories are as old as history itself. There has always been a tendency among members of society to believe that secret powers cause their troubles, or can heal them. One of the oldest of these, anti-Semitism, pins the Jews as the scapegoats. In colonial times, some of the founding fathers, thought to be members of the “Illuminati,” feared a return to religious-based Old World divine right monarchy, and even suspected that George Washington had been assassinated and was being impersonated by someone else.

There is always a reason for the popularity of conspiracy theories. In this lesson, students will examine four examples of conspiracy theories and learn about the people and the times that brought them forth. Finally, students will be directed to fact checking sites that will help them to detect conspiracy theories.

## Subjects

U.S. History, World History, Language Arts

## Estimated time

Up to one hour of homework study, classroom discussion time as desired

## Grade level

9-12

## Objectives:

- Students will understand the role and spread of conspiracy theories in American public life through a comparison of four specific conspiracy theories.

**Warm-up Activity:** As a class, discuss the so-called “evidence” for Anti-stratfordianism.

1. Watch the Roland Emmerich video
2. Visit the Oxfordian society website
3. Read the article about Delia Bacon

Who proposed this theory? What is their proof? Why do you think these people believe in this theory?

## Main Activity:

This lesson can be used in either remote or traditional learning environments.

- If participants want to explore these conspiracies together as a class, jigsaw groups of four participants will work best for this lesson. Each participant reads one conspiracy theory case study and shares what she learned with the other members of the group. Whole class debriefing follows.
  - If participants read these case studies for homework, the following day the whole class will review the answers that the students have recorded.
1. Access the [Conspiracy Theory Handout](#). (*Note: You will need to make a copy of the Google doc to edit it or fill out the answers.*)
  2. Participants (alone or in groups) answer the questions that follow each case study.
  3. Each participant should read the conspiracy-theory fact check articles linked at the end of the handout. Answer the question below the links: Do you think fact-checking has the power to weaken conspiracy theories? Why or why not? Aside from fact-checking, what is a good way to combat conspiracy theories?
  4. Participants should gather as a class and discuss answers from the handout. Then address the following question:
    - Based on the historical examples, what do you think the lifespan of new or contemporary conspiracy theories like Q Anon will look like?

**Additional Resource:** If you would like to learn more about contemporary conspiracy theories and the power of fact-checking or debunking, you can [read this](#) PBS NewsHour article.

## National Standards:

### Common Core Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information. [/standard]

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole. [/standard]

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources

### College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards

D2.Civ.2.9-12; D2.Civ.8.9-12; D2.Civ.10.9-12; D2.Civ.12.9-12.; D2.Civ.14.9-12; D2.His.1.9-12; D2.His.2.9-12; D2.His.3.9-12; D2.His.4.9-12.; D2.His.5.9-12[

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