

A black and white photograph of a woman with long, dark hair, looking directly at the camera. Her face is partially obscured by horizontal digital glitch lines in various colors (red, blue, green, yellow, black). The word "DEEPFAKE" is overlaid in large, red, blocky letters across the middle of her face, also featuring glitch effects.

DEEPFAKE

by SARAH DARER LITTMAN

EDUCATOR GUIDE

WITH SUGGESTED ADAPTATIONS FOR
VIRTUAL AND DISTANCE LEARNING

ABOUT THE BOOK

Dara and Will are at the top of their class and the top of their game. As two of the most ambitious students at Greenpoint High School the competition seems fierce and real to everyone around them. But there's a thin line between love and hate.

When the whole school finds out through the school's infamous gossip column *Rumor Has It* that Will and Dara are dating, all students are abuzz — especially when a tape surfaces of Dara accusing Will of aying someone to take the SAT for him just to make the grade. Dara says it is not her in the video, but Will is being investigated anyway, and the whole school is intrigued and engrossed in Dara and Will's major crisis. Everyone wants to know who's telling the truth and no one knows who's behind the greatest leak in Greenpoint High history.

Right on time, Sarah Darer Littman's *Deepfake* explores what happens when the truth seems right beyond your fingertips and students' lives get disrupted by algorithms. Students will be able to explore and discuss how our world is shaped by the technology we create. Fostering conversations touching on topics from digital citizenship to competition in the school setting, *Deepfake* provides the perfect fodder for engaging and lively class discussion and student-generated projects. Told in three alternating voices, Littman's story allows for teachers to bring complex and delicate issues to the forefront in the classroom while also captivating the interests of the students.

Poignant, thought-provoking, and gripping, *Deepfake* examines how truth and lies clash in a world of ever-evolving technology and long-standing academic rivalries. It asks students to think and examine for themselves: What happens when we put our trust in what we see but forget that all we see may not be real?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR



SARAH DARER LITTMAN is the critically acclaimed author of *Deepfake*; *Backlash*; *Want to Go Private?*; *Anything But Okay*; *In Case You Missed It*; *Life, After*; and *Purge*. She is also an award-winning news columnist and teaches writing at Western Connecticut State University and with the Yale Writers' Workshop. Sarah lives in Connecticut with her family, in a house that never seems to have enough bookshelves. You can visit her online at sarahdarerlittman.com.

PRE-READING/JOURNAL ACTIVITIES

POSE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS TO YOUR STUDENTS

VOCABULARY

What does the term *deepfake* mean? Have students conduct research on the topic and journal about how the term *deepfake* has become a part of our current lexicon.

INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

- Have students journal using these questions as prompts: What do you look for in a friend or partner? How do you build trust in a personal relationship and what is needed in a relationship in order for you to trust? What do you need from a friend for a friendship to thrive?
- As your students read *Deepfake*, encourage them to use the Must-Haves and Deal-Breakers they journaled about as a lens for the romantic relationships and friendships in the book. Have them discuss or write a reflection of these relationships and how they compare and contrast with their own views.

REFLECTION

How important is achievement to you? What do you define as achievement and where did those ideals come from? Yourself? Your family? School? Society? Which outside influences affect how successful we feel? Have students journal about competition in school: Where does the pressure come from to be successful and how do you handle it?

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS FOR STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

1. What is the difference between healthy competition and toxic rivalry?
2. What is the responsibility of the media to tell the truth? What role does journalism and reporting play in the grand scheme of how we disseminate information?
3. Rumor Has It thrives on the fact that no one in the school knows who runs it. How effective is the “anonymous” trend? Do you think those who share information anonymously have a justified purpose in doing so or would you consider them cowards? Explain.
4. How do we know what is real and what is fake? With the creation of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and deepfake technology how do we establish new methods of knowing what is real? What are the safeguards and routines we can establish to protect ourselves from false information?
5. In the novel, the entire school is thrown into chaos in a nanosecond after the school’s gossip column leaks the news of a very incriminating video. In a world where every share could go viral and information moves so quickly, how does media and media bias play a role in how we think as a society? What role do we as individuals play?
6. How have the dynamics of relationships shifted based on our reliance on technology? What effect does technology have on interpersonal relationships?
7. How does friendship work? What are ways to build trust, support, and vulnerability into relationships when everyone can seem so “fake”?
8. Secrets fester and explode. What are ways in which secrets can taint the experiences we have in life, school and with others? Are secrets ever a good thing? Why or why not? How do secrets affect the relationships in *Deepfake*? How does the author use secrets to affect the plot?
9. Both Dara and Will feel the pressure to constantly succeed, which leads them to various pitfalls in the novel. How do we create spaces in which students feel free to achieve without pressure?
10. Are teens “addicted” to technology? Many say young people are losing their social skills because of technology. Do you believe that? In what ways is being connected “almost constantly” both positive and negative? How is sharing digitally different than sharing online and does that affect what and how you share? Is there anything about your technology habits you would like to change and if so, what would that be and why?

CLASS ACTIVITIES

DISRUPTING DEMOCRACY?

When writing about the inspiration behind her writing in *DeepFake*, Sarah Darer Littman asks the question: *How could deepfakes be used to disrupt our lives and our democratic process?* Students can conduct research to determine the effect of AI technology on populations that have been discriminated against in the past and the present. Their research could include things such as: racial and gender bias and other forms of discrimination and stereotypes. AI has been discussed increasingly over the past few years in all types of arenas from the *New York Times* to *Adam Ruins Everything*. Why is AI considered one of the growing fields in technology and our next frontier at this moment? What are the advantages for AI technology in terms of positive uses for humanity? What problems arise when AI is created without considering the effects on populations already affected by systemic racism and lack of opportunity? And who is doing the creating? Is that important? Students can produce informative videos in which they discuss the pros and cons of AI. As a challenge task, they can hold a mock Senate vote after their research that either makes laws that promote or abolish AI technology for the future. Or have students do a film review in which they identify pros and cons of AI in popular films we see today.

SHARK TANK

This novel is driven by the chaos that can ensue when technology is misused, but what happens when we create technology that actually improves the world? Since the digital world is the next frontier, pitch a business that will be necessary for a world where we only depend on algorithms. Research an industry or market, and create a viable business plan for a proposed company that would include AI technology and be essential in the future. What can you use AI for that people will REALLY need? For a challenge task, students can also add their pitch of an AI form of technology that would be beneficial in schools. Students can present and have a *Shark Tank*-like finale.

DIGITAL CITIZENS

Have students create a brief handbook for digital citizenship and for determining accurate and genuine information online. Students can create a concise instructional manual that guides students through new digital rules to help them navigate the evolving world wide web. Have students consider what guidelines or restrictions need to be put in place to avoid situations like Dara and Will's in the novel. What guidelines should you adhere to if you are going to be successful online? This handbook could include instructional videos and guidelines for important skills, identifying markers of accurate versus inaccurate digital info, creative scenarios to encourage critical thinking and problem solving when online, new guidelines and rules for human interaction, etc.

MEDIA WALL

At Greenpoint High school, keeping up appearances is key. Teens in the novel and the real world find themselves trying to “fit in” with what the media thinks they should be. Have your class keep track of and create collages from media all around them that surrounds particular themes. Students could do a Media Wall around a variety of topics: from the appearance and perceptions of different groups in digital media to the frequency of data collection they notice in their own lives. Create small group collectives for each topic and have students create a tracker. Monitor for a week and come together to discuss, analyze, and present their data.

DISTANCE LEARNING ADAPTATIONS

CLASS DISCUSSIONS

Establish norms for class discussion through video chat by starting with the Deal-Breakers and Must-Haves journal prompt. You can give students agency and voice by assigning student leaders who monitor and guide the discussion with roles like timekeeper, recorder, and responder in the chat room. Students can use these roles to hold themselves accountable through student-led guiding questions and collecting the answers of their peers on digital documents.

DIFFERENTIATED WORK

Give students a menu of options when completing class projects/activities. For example, for the activity *Disrupting Democracy?*, have students' final product be a choice of informative video, elaborate slideshow or even enlightening podcast. Then collect all assignments and display through shared digital folders where students can view and practice constructive criticism with their peers. Or, in the Media Wall project, students can collect digital images in Google folders and share with classmates or post to a digital classroom for discussion. Students can also have the option of turning in videos that display the prevailing media messages or create interactive slideshows; either way the importance is they get to choose!

RESOURCES

Adam Ruins Tech

<https://www.trutv.com/shows/adam-ruins-everything/articles/adam-ruins-tech>

“Deepfakes, Technology, and the Truth” by Sarah Darer Littman

<https://nerdybookclub.wordpress.com/2020/06/18/deepfakes-technology-and-truth-by-sarah-darer-littman/>

“Deepfakes Are Going To Wreak Havoc On Society. We Are Not Prepared.” by Rob Toews

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/robtoews/2020/05/25/deepfakes-are-going-to-wreak-havoc-on-society-we-are-not-prepared/#d4e8af974940>

“The Machines Are Learning, and So Are the Students” by Craig S. Smith

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/12/18/education/artificial-intelligence-tutors-teachers.html>

“Top 22 Best Artificial Intelligence And Robotics Movies Of All Time”

<https://www.newworldai.com/top-22-best-artificial-intelligence-and-robotics-movies-of-all-time/>

“When Bias Is Coded Into Our Technology” by Jennifer 8. Lee

<https://www.npr.org/sections/codeswitch/2020/02/08/770174171/when-bias-is-coded-into-our-technology>

This teaching guide was written by Room 228 Educational Consulting, with public school teacher Morgan Cuffie as lead teacher.

We at Room 228 are true believers in young people becoming critical thinkers, viewers, listeners, and readers.

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