Researching Information: Is it true?

You might incorporate these activities in to other topics or do them separately in their own right.

The purpose of these activities is to:

1. To realise that not everything on the Internet is true.
2. To understand that anyone can create web pages that might look authentic / convincing.
3. To consider the motives behind the website: people might want to inform / sell / get support / persuade / trick etc.
4. To understand that sometimes people are genuinely mistaken but might pass on to others, inaccurate information, even though there is no evidence to support it.

Here are links to four fake info websites. They are returned at the top of the list in most search sites:

Site name & topic	URL	Suitable for
Tomato spider A red spider that lives among plants and dark corners in sheds.	http://webfronter.com/rbkc/tomatospider/	Y2-Y4
Tree Octopus A cephalopod that lives in the trees in the forests of N America.	http://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/	Y3-Y5
Dog Island An island refuge where over 2,500 dogs live happy & free.	http://www.thedogisland.com/	Y4-Y6
Petrol Direct A place where you can buy fuel cheaply.	http://www.petroldirect.com/	Y5-Y6

Activities:

1. Tell the children they are going to research a specific topic by doing an Internet search to find information.

2. Ask "How do we find information on the Internet?" to see what the children already know.

3. Show the children how to perform a search using a child friendly search site. (See list of sites at end)   If you log in to myUSO there are several appropriate sites in the "Safe Search" area

4. Help children choose appropriate key words to enter in the search panel. (Show older children how to search for a phrase by using speech marks: "Tomato Spider" or "Dog Island.") They will see the links to the websites listed above near the top of their search return, and can then visit the site to find out more.

5. Get them to write down a few key facts / notes, so that they can report back to the class all that they can. (You might provide questions to help structure precisely what they are looking for.)

6. Allow the children some time to investigate the website(s).

7. After some time share & discuss your research findings

8. Ask the children "Is everything we see on the web true?" Probe to find out why they think what they do.

9. Ask them whether they think there is such a thing as a Tomato Spider / Tree Octopus / Dog Island etc?

10. Once it has been established that the website has fake information, ask why this might have happened? What might be the reason for this? Why would people do this? What might this mean about other information on the Internet? How can we know what is true?

11. Explain about the references & links to other websites. Ask if there was there anything that *confirmed* or *supported* these claims? What might make the information MORE believable / genuine / authentic?

12. Explain that if information can be found on many other sites (on *different* web addresses), that it tends to suggest that the information has some substance, and that by reading about something in several different places you can often spot the inaccuracies.

13. Explain to children that sometimes we can even check if the site is fake. You can cross-check on a search engine (e.g. typing in to s search site "*is Dog Island real*" will give you the answer straightaway!) or (for older pupils) look to see which websites are linked to them. e.g. typing "*link:http://www.petroldirect.com/*" into Google will show that most of sites that link to the Petrol Direct site are directories of hoax websites!

14. Older children might also do some research using a wiki site.

15. Explain that a Wikipedia is an online encyclopedia in which anybody can contribute to the knowledge. All bits of information within the article must show its source with references (numerically listed at then end). The *advantage* of a wiki is that it pools the knowledge of the entire human race as people all over the world can contribute bits of information, or challenge the information that is there and change it. As time goes by an article settles down to a widely accepted version, and is locked with occasional additions made as more information becomes known. The *disadvantage* (especially with newer articles), is that sometimes the article might contain fake or inaccurate information that has no evidence. This is usually removed as time goes by and people question it. Wikis can be extremely useful but must not be relied on without checking elsewhere.

Some child orientated search sites
Wikis:

- Wikipedia for schools: http://schools-wikipedia.org/
- Simple Wikipedia: https://simple.wikipedia.org

General:

- Swiggle: http://www.swiggle.org.uk/
- Junior Safe Search: https://www.juniorsafesearch.com/
- Safe Search Kids: http://www.safesearchkids.com/
- PrimaryICT: http://www.primaryschoolict.com/