The new National Geographic book *Breaking the News: What’s Real, What’s Not, and Why the Difference Matters* offers a highly engaging road map to media literacy for young people (ages 10 and up). Here, author Robin Terry Brown—who is also the editor of *NEA Today*—shares how *Breaking the News* can help young people navigate today’s confusing media environment.

**Tell us a little bit about *Breaking the News*.**

In the current media and political environment, the lines between truth and fiction are becoming increasingly blurred. *Breaking the News* provides a toolkit that readers can use to become critical thinkers about the media they consume. They’ll learn how to identify authoritative sources, how to recognize the telltale signs of misinformation, how to distinguish truth from propaganda, and how to become master fact-checkers.

What makes *Breaking the News* unique is that it combines this practical, how-to information with the bigger picture—how we got from there to here. The book takes a step back and teaches young people about the first amendment, propaganda, and what sets authentic journalism apart from everything else.

And since it’s a National Geographic book, of course it’s filled with great photographs and a colorful design to help keep kids engaged.

**Why do you think it’s so important for young people to be able to decipher fact versus fiction in the news?**

Young people are growing up in a world where news comes through social media feeds in addition to television or newspapers. Authentic news and false information exist side by side online and can look almost exactly the same. If we can teach young people how to think critically about the news now, we can set them on a path to become responsible, well-informed citizens.

**Was there a real news story or event that inspired you to write this book?**

There were so many, but two really stood out. In the infamous “Pizzagate” incident in late 2016, a conspiracy theory went viral, falsely accusing a Washington, D.C., pizzeria of harming children. As a result, an unstable man who believed the story walked in and fired an assault rifle into the restaurant. And then the ultimate wake-up call came during the 2016 elections, when Russians set up thousands of false social media accounts to try to influence voters. I wrote about both in the book as examples of why false information is so dangerous.

**As you began writing *Breaking the News*, what about this topic surprised you most?**

We know that people have a hard time discerning fact from fiction online, but seeing the actual numbers—for both young people and adults—was really eye-opening. One poll found that 44 percent of kids say they can’t tell fake stories from real ones. And an experiment conducted with adults found that they believed false “news” reports about 20 percent of the time.

**How can young people best utilize *Breaking the News*?**

The upcoming presidential election offers a great learning opportunity for readers to put the book’s guidance into practice. They can follow the election coverage online and learn how to distinguish between news, opinion, and propaganda. Young people can use the book’s “Truth Toolkit” to identify false information on social media. And they can use the fact-checking guide to see if the facts distributed by the presidential campaigns pass muster.

But the need for media literacy stretches far beyond the election, and my wish is that this book can play a part in helping young people become smart, savvy media consumers.

Robin Terry Brown earned a master’s degree from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. Prior to the National Education Association, she was a senior editor at National Geographic.