Narwhals Are Born Blind at Birth

We live in an age of (mis)information. To be quite frank, I don't know whether or not narwhals are born blind or not. In fact, I don't understand the physiology of most marine creatures let alone a narwhal. Though I do want you to do some self reflection. Do you see how quickly the title of the essay made you believe (even for a split second) that narwhals are genuinely born blind at birth? I apologize for the red herring but this leads me to the actual topic at hand: we need literacy more than ever.

It's a normal reaction to go "oh yeah, that must be true because narwhals hunt in the Arctic and the Arctic waters are dark." Of course, a quick internet search for the natal development of the Monodon monoceros would've quickly disproved my initial statement. But not everyone has the time to learn about narwhals so they rely on what they already know. Confirmation bias is an easy cop-out. I'll admit I'm still occasionally a sucker to believing "facts" from sources I know think know better than me. According to an article from the Harvard Department of Psychology, our brains will process anywhere from 45% up to a whopping 72% of information read online as true, even when it's clearly false. That's not a real study but my point still stands: you probably don't know as much information about psychology but you see "Harvard" and will probably not question it as much as you should've because it's ingrained into our minds to accept information from sources we trust and those statistics also seem enticing. Unfortunately, it's quite easy to make up information and pass it off fact which is why it's important to check the statement's validity instead of assuming it's automatically true.

As a child, I would always be convinced that when an adult said something, that was the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Bats are blind, bears hibernate, Pluto is a planet, and many more misconceptions. This appeal to authority was a major setback to accepting differentiating perspectives on topics I knew little about. My logic behind this was "if someone older than me is saying this statement is the truth, it should be true since I'm young and I don't know as much." As I've gotten older, I can whole-heartedly say many adults don't know what they're talking about and age isn't a definite indicator of knowledge. A middle schooler who spends adequate time learning about a subject shouldn't have their research disregarded by a 50 year old who hasn't put in the effort to learn about that same matter. Education isn't plateaued at a certain age. It is the responsibility of everyone to continue learning and question what they concurrently know in order to improve themselves.

In many intellectual debates, there will often be an unspoken rule for each claim made to provide sources in order to have said stance be taken seriously. In primary school we're taught to show our work when we're doing an assignment. You and I can look at a triangle and go "yup that's a triangle because it looks like one" since we're normal human beings who can see what's in front of them. In mathematical reasoning however, there is a burden of proof for the person solving the equation. They have to explain how exactly a triangle is a triangle using theorems and proofs. The burden of proof for math is relatively simple to find (not talking about theoretical mathematics of course) because these are answers that are already established and well-used; it is true because it works. With literacy, it's ever-evolving. There's no formula to search up how to interpret written text, visual perception, or spoken language. We make assumptions based on what we learn and it's necessary to challenge your past understanding with present-day

information. In 2010, Bruno Mars sang "I wanna be on the cover of Vogue Magazine, standing next to Oprah and the Queen," though I doubt he'd want to take a picture with the Queen in 2025 seeing as she's deceased. What was once true may not hold the same weight anymore.

The internet has had a substantial impact on our culture and society. It's easier to communicate with loved ones who are far away, shop online without having to go to a mall, and listen to your favorite songs without paying $17 for an album that solely has one good song. On the opposite end of the impact the internet has, it's also easier to manipulate people while posing as their loved ones, scam people looking to buy products online, and download viruses onto someone's phone because they couldn't tell the MP3 file they downloaded was malware. In a time where phones and computers rule the world, digital literacy is a must have. Back in 7th and 8th grade, I was on Instagram A LOT. I'd frequently get DMs from the people I followed, telling me to click on a link because someone posted a picture of me. The link would go to a page where you'd sign into your Instagram account and then your account would get hacked and the same message would get sent out to the people in your follower's list. I didn't fall for that but considering how many people did, I'd say there should be a course on internet safety before you can use it.

It's disheartening seeing people fall prey online because they don't understand that digital literacy is a skill they need to possess. I don't blame them though. AI has become so advanced that the details to spot usage have become niche and minute. Easy to spot Photoshop has ruined many people's lives. People will make agitational statements that are false yet parade it as if it were the truth. But I live by the philosophy that I am in control of what I take in and what I put out. Other people have the right to say their truths but it's ultimately up to me to verify mine.

I get how the information I'm providing is sort of unhinged absurdism in a Kierkegaardesque way but I hope at least one of your takeaways is to be doubtful. Skepticism is healthy. If something's too good to be true, it's more than likely not true. There will never be a point in your life where you should stop learning. It's okay to not spend your entire weekend learning about narwhals just because the author of this essay told you to fact check. It's okay to admit when you don't know what you're talking about yet want to learn more. Learning is a right and privilege. It is a right because it can't and should never be restrained; it is a privilege to be able to use the information you received in order to enlighten and guide others as others have done for you. Literacy, whether it is spoken, read, heard, or understood, is the foundation of every person's comprehension of the world. The question is: do *you* seek to develop your literacy?