





# Birds Aren't Real


People & Society

## - Teacher's Insights -

### At a Glance

-  90 minutes
-  45-60 minutes (flipped classroom)
-  B2+, **C1**, C2
-  listening comprehension (video), speaking, vocabulary, and critical thinking

### Preparation

-  5-10 minutes
- Prepare the video link for the TED talk, and ensure you have an Internet connection to stream it.
- Print one worksheet for each student.
- Print the Teacher's Insights or keep them at hand as they contain the answers to the questions.

### Exercise Summary

**Kickoff:** speaking intro on conspiracy theories

**Vocabulary Focus:** choose correct definitions

**Video Comprehension:** watch the video and answer the comprehension questions

**Speaking:** discuss the video content and conspiracy theories in general

**Role Play:** create and present an imaginative conspiracy theory, acting out distinct roles

## Potential for use in a Flipped Classroom

① A flipped classroom is where you, as an ESL teacher, give your students materials to study at home first. This then allows class time to be used for interactive exercises, as well as answering any of the students' questions and doubts.

To use this worksheet in a flipped classroom format, ask students to do the **Vocabulary Focus** and **Video Comprehension** activities at home.

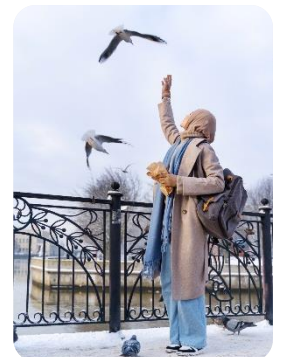
Start the class itself with the **Kickoff** activity, then review the answers to the **Vocabulary Focus** and **Video Comprehension** that the students have done at home. Then go on to the **Speaking** and **Role Play** activities.

**Kickoff:** **Ask and answer the questions as a group.**

① Get students talking about conspiracy theories in preparation for the video. Remember to be aware of cultural differences and ensure that the topic is suitable for all students. The objective is to understand various perspectives.

1. What is a conspiracy theory? Can you name one?
2. Why do you think some people believe in conspiracy theories?
3. Are there any famous conspiracy theories from your home country?
4. How can conspiracy theories impact society or individuals?

① You can remind students about the conspiracy theories involving microchips in vaccines, the idea that the world is flat, or that the moon landing was a hoax.



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**Vocabulary Focus:** Read the sentences and focus on the underlined word. Choose the correct definition from the box below.

① You can also do this activity interactively through this Wordwall link\*:  
<https://wordwall.net/resource/61114465/conspiracy-theory-vocabulary>

be patient	observation; watching	unquestioning followers	totally covers, soaks	mass political or social meetings
edges; not mainstream	made different; excluded	self-affirming information bubbles	grow rapidly and uncontrollably	give in; stop trying

- The gossip began to snowball online. = grow rapidly and uncontrollably
- The rain drenches protesters outside the secret meeting. = totally covers; soaks
- Conspiracy believers often hold rallies downtown. = mass political or social meetings
- He gets his news from the fringes of the web. = edges; not mainstream
- After threats, some activists chose to fold. = give in; stop trying
- Bear with me; this theory gets complex. = be patient
- He felt othered for his unpopular beliefs. = made different; excluded
- Government surveillance worries many privacy advocates. = observation; watching
- Some say the public are just blind sheep. = unquestioning followers
- Social media often becomes echo chambers of similar views.  
= self-affirming information bubbles

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**Video Comprehension:** Watch the video and answer the questions.

① If you have chosen the flipped classroom method, just check the answers together. If you are watching in class, consider pausing every couple of minutes to check understanding. You can also activate the subtitles or open the transcript if required (available through the link).

**[video link]**

- [00:13] According to the talk, how many birds were killed from 1969 to 2001?  
= 12 billion birds
- [00:57] What did the government replace the birds they killed with?  
= surveillance drone replicas (to spy on the American people)
- [01:24] Where does the speaker say that the birds recharge their batteries?  
= on power lines (up high)
- [02:41] What is the name of the movement that the speaker is part of?  
= Birds Aren't Real

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5. [04:32] How many people did the movement bring out to a rally in Washington Square?  
= 2,000 people
6. [05:19] How long did the speaker play this character for?  
= four years
7. [06:50] In what year did he decide to break character?  
= 2021
8. [07:12 - 07:58] Why was it easy for the speaker to play the role of a conspiracy theorist?  
= he grew up in a community with many conspiracy theorists so he could copy them
9. [08:44 - 09:13] How did the public react to the speaker's character?  
= they insulted him
10. [10:32 - 11:33] What reasons does the speaker give for people becoming conspiracy theorists?  
= when people are excluded and othered, they look for communities who support them and give them a sense of purpose; they join echo chambers

### Speaking:

### Discuss the questions in response to the video.

① You may have a whole-group discussion or split the class into smaller groups. This is the students' opportunity to react to the video. Ensure that they have understood the satire and the message behind this talk: that by excluding people, we do the opposite of helping them. There are no right or wrong answers here. Ensure all students respect each other's opinions and are given the opportunity to talk.

1. Do you think social media platforms play a role in the spread of conspiracy theories? How so?
2. How should schools or educational systems address the topic of conspiracy theories?
3. Can you think of a situation where a conspiracy theory turned out to be true?
4. What's the difference between healthy scepticism and believing in a conspiracy theory?

### Role Play:

### Create your own conspiracy theory!

① This is an opportunity to be creative and have fun in English. Consider using delayed feedback, so allow students to make mistakes, keep a mental note or write them down, and correct the mistakes as a group at the end of the session (without pointing out who made each mistake). Have fun!

In small groups, brainstorm and create your own imaginative conspiracy theory. Once you've come up with the theory, each member should have a distinct role:

1. Theorist: Presents the conspiracy theory to the class.
2. Sceptic: Questions and challenges its validity.
3. Witness: Shares a personal story (made up) that seemingly supports the theory.
4. Expert: Provides fake "scientific" or "historical" evidence to support the theory.

After preparation, each group will present their conspiracy theory to the class. They should try to present it in a convincing way. Once all the groups have presented their conspiracy theories, the class will vote on the most convincing, funny, and plausible conspiracy theories.

Remember, the goal is to be creative and to have fun!