



STEMBoost Newsletter

Issue IV

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Science Olympiad Invitationals Begin!

Joseph Lee

The Science Olympiad Invitational season has begun, and the Kennedy Middle School teams have competed in the UT, BEARSO, and Boyceville invitationals thus far. Everybody who participated did a great job, and congratulations to everyone who won an award! We are proud to announce that the Kennedy Gold (Senior) Team won 1st place for Division B in all three invitationals they attended.

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Each year, STEMBoost officers and members help proctor events in invitationals. Likewise, this year, they have devoted their time and efforts into making sure that events run smoothly and are successful. Thank you to Amol Rama on Food Science, Andrew Zhou and Ashish Kashyap on Mission Possible, Daphne Guo on Meteorology, and Dylan Yang on Density Lab for your help at Cypress invitational. Thank you to Angela Zhang on Experimental Design and Dylan Yang on Digital Structure for your contributions at Boyceville invitational. Thank you to Iona Xia and Ishanvi Kommula on Write it CAD it for your assistance at Dodgen Invitational. Finally, thank you to Angela Zhang on Designer Genes and Joseph Lee on Anatomy and Physiology for your aid at November Scilympiad Practice.

This year, certain aspects of competitions have been changed due to COVID-19 restrictions. One notable change is that partners are no longer required to share an identical document for notes, called a “cheat sheet”. Another alteration is that recordings are submitted for device events. Some events are run differently. In the case of Write it Do it, the event has been changed to Write it CAD it in which students follow instructions to make something using CAD rather than physically assembling something.

Even amidst the difficult and unique situation we are currently in, we believe that Science Olympiad can still be a fun learning experience for everyone involved.

Fun Fact

How much does a cloud weigh?
(See answer in the back)

Editorial – The Hidden Danger of Fake News and Doxing

Ryan Li

The presence of fake news and disinformation within our increasingly digital world is growing larger. In its simplest, it is the spread of false information in an attempt to further one’s own goals, even when truth is still unclear. A common method of spreading fake news is through social media, in which anyone who has access to a digital device can view and post on. This can easily allow for potential misinformation which aligns with one’s beliefs to be taken as facts and be presented/shared in such a way for others to see (i.e. using the quote tweet function on Twitter). It is through this method that fake news can spread very easily online, leading to potentially disastrous consequences.

Fake news can have a great influence within developing countries. For example, in the 2018 Brazilian presidential election candidate Jair Bolsonaro had won the majority of the popular vote (55%), despite a recession and a scandal ruining the public view for much of the political elite within the country. A large reason behind Bolsonaro's victory was the presence of a disinformation campaign on the platform WhatsApp, an app which almost half of Brazilians use for news on politics. It was found that during the leadup to the election, 56% of the most-shared political images on the platform were misleading, particularly ones about opposition leaders. The fact that a large portion of the political images shared on WhatsApp were conveying false/misleading information about Bolsonaro's opponents not only shows that social media can be a powerful political campaigning tool, but also that it could be used as a means for someone to discount their own faults at the cost of casting others in a bad light.

Another case of social media being used to spread disinformation within developing countries is the Rohingya genocide in Myanmar. The government of Myanmar had been (and still is) actively inciting violence against the Rohingya ethnic group, spurred by the spreading anti-Rohingya rhetoric on Facebook. In fact, many of these posts have been shared by the government officials themselves. These posts are particularly impactful because Facebook is a primary news source for many people within Myanmar, and when coupled with people who possess a lot of power spreading disinformation against an ethnic group, the unfounded claim that the Rohingya deserve to be targeted and exiled becomes somewhat factual for those living within the country, further marginalizing the Rohingya. Thus, it is evident that social media can even be a deadly spreader of disinformation.

Even within developed countries the spread of disinformation can be an issue. In 2018, after a typhoon and earthquake had left thousands of Taiwanese citizens trapped in Kansai International Airport and Hokkaido, a lot of scathing criticism was delivered to the Taipei Economic and Cultural Representative Office located in Osaka regarding insufficient action on evacuations and accommodations for those stranded. Taiwanese influencer Slow Yang had also exacerbated these accusations, posting that the blame for the stranded citizens should lie solely on the office within Osaka, which was run by Su Chii-chenng. However, even though this wasn't the truth, a lot of criticism on social media was directed towards the head of the office, Su. This unfortunately led to Su committing suicide, even though the claims which had pressured him into doing so later turned out to be false, turning out to have been implanted by Chinese media.

Premature judgement of a situation based primarily on fake news can also lead to doxing, which is placing a person's private information for the public to see. Often this is done with the intention of wanting that person to be harmed, but with premature judgement the person who is being doxed may not be the actual person the doxer wanted to harm. This was the case of Sunil Tripathi, who had been mistakenly determined as the person behind the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing by social media doxers. Tripathi had already been missing before the bombing occurred, and his body was found within the Providence River a week after the bombing, apparently having committed suicide. It was also finally discovered that Tripathi was not the person who carried out the bombing. Tripathi's tragic death serves as a stark reminder of the dangers of not only misinformation but also doxing.

Through these cases events it is clear that misinformation via social media easily influences millions of people, and its consequences can have serious ramifications for those being targeted. Thus, it is crucial to remember to not jump to conclusions when posting on social media or while conversing with people face to face, and to always take posts on social media with a grain of salt. Also, being able to think critically for oneself by determining what is likely to be true and what is not can definitely help one make rational decisions on what to share, which may very well save the lives of others.

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million pounds
Answer: The average cumulus cloud can weigh up to a