



Dark Secrets: Conspiracy Theories

From the beginning of time, people have kept secrets. Sometimes, they may be small and insignificant, but occasionally, they are on a massive scale, involving thousands, if not millions of people. These are conspiracy theories.

Conspiracy theorists believe that the official version of events given to the public is often not the truth: they think that people in power are lying or covering up facts, in order to manipulate or control the population. Conspiracy theories range from being about relatively small occurrences, to large, world-changing events. Some people make a living out of investigating conspiracy theories, writing books and articles about their research into them.

The key element of a conspiracy theory is that it cannot be proved. Often, conspiracy theories are outlandish and sometimes even ridiculous. They lack concrete evidence and are often born out of rumour or speculation.

The Moon Landings

Perhaps the most famous conspiracy theory of all concerns the moon landings. In 1969, astronauts Buzz Aldrin and Neil Armstrong landed the spacecraft Apollo 11 on the moon. Footage and photos from their mission were broadcast around the world; it was the first time that man had walked on the moon.

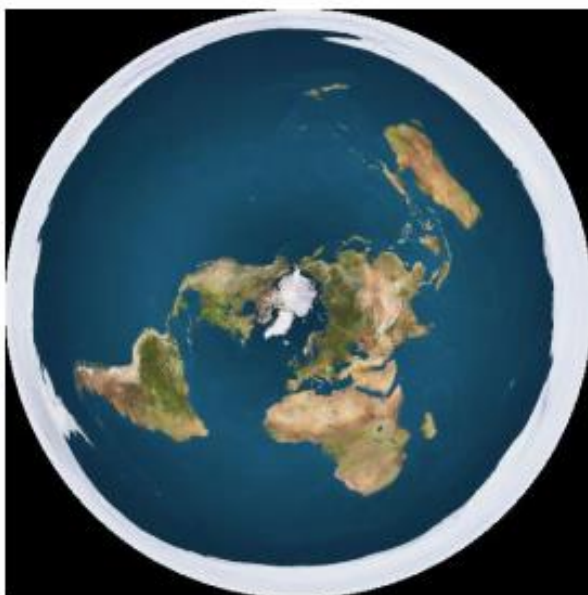
But conspiracy theorists maintain that the moon landings never actually happened. At the time, America was involved in the “space race”: an unofficial contest with the USSR (now Russia) to see who could put a man on the moon first. The theory goes that time was running out, and America realised they would never be able to achieve a moon landing, so instead they hired a studio in Hollywood and faked the whole thing. Theorists believe that the photographs from the mission give the game away – the shadows are wrong, the American flag is waving when there is no wind, and no stars can be seen in the sky. Of course, scientists have countered all these points, and no-one has so far been able to explain how the American government would have been able to keep such a massive conspiracy under wraps!



A photograph from the Apollo 11 moon landing.

The Flat Earth

Space seems to be a popular focus for conspiracy theorists. Another theory which is gaining considerable traction in the 21st century, is that the earth is not, in fact, round. A surprising number of people are starting to believe that the earth is a flat circle with the Arctic in the centre. Around the outside of the circle is a 150ft wall of ice, which stops people falling off into space. The basis for this theory seems to be that the earth looks flat – we can't generally see a curve when we look at horizon – and therefore it must be flat.



An image showing how flat earth conspiracy theorists view the world.

This theory sits hand-in-hand with the moon landings conspiracy, as theorists believe the photographs from the moon landing must be faked, as they show a spherical earth. Flat earthers believe that NASA is at the heart of this conspiracy, and is lying to people.

It's not entirely clear what theorists believe motivates this supposed conspiracy. General distrust of science is certainly a factor.

The Missing Popstars

The idea that a famous popstar is actually dead and has been replaced by a clone is a surprisingly tenacious one. Quite a few singers have fallen foul of this theory, including Avril Lavigne, a pop star who emerged on the music scene in 2002 with her album *Let It Go*. Featuring probably her most well-known single, "Complicated", *Let It Go* had a skater-grunge-pop vibe which made it an instant hit. However, there were rumours that Lavigne didn't cope well with her new-found fame. She was so overwhelmed by the publicity, the story goes, that her record company hired a lookalike, an actress called Melissa, to make appearances as the singer.

It already sounds pretty outlandish, but things were about to become even more sinister... in 2011, rumours started circulating on the internet that Lavigne was no longer Lavigne at all. It was claimed that she had died in 2003, and been replaced full-time by Melissa. The reason for this elaborate switch? Some claimed Lavigne's record company killed her off, others said she had died in an accident.



Avril Lavigne - or is it Melissa?

As with all conspiracy theories, the evidence was shaky, at best. Fans compared images of Avril pre- and post-2003, claiming her jaw line is different, her eyes, her make-up – even her handwriting! The rumours became so persistent that in 2018 Lavigne responded to them, saying there was no truth at all behind them. But then, if she is really Melissa, fans argued, she would say that...

Guided Reading: Wednesday

1. Explain what these 3 words mean, in your own words:
 - Tenacious
 - Outlandish
 - Countered
2. Explain what these 3 phrases mean, in your own words:
 - Born out of
 - Hand-in-hand
 - Under wraps

Retrieval Questions:

1. What is a conspiracy theory?
2. What do conspiracy theorists believe was the motivation for faking the moon landing in 1969?
3. What do flat-earthers think the world looks like?
4. What supposed evidence supports the theory that the Earth is flat? (name 2)
5. What was Avril Lavigne's most popular song?
6. What is the reason conspiracy theorists believe that Avril Lavigne was replaced by someone else?
7. What evidence do conspiracy theorists cite to support the idea that Avril Lavigne was replaced by a look-a-like?
8. According to the introduction, how do conspiracy theories begin?
9. Why else do people believe the conspiracy theories about the moon landings and the Earth being flat?
10. List 2 pieces of evidence conspiracy theorists use to support the idea that the moon landings were faked.
11. Who do flat earthers think is behind the conspiracy that the earth is flat?

Answers

1. What is a conspiracy theory?

A theory that the 'official' version of events surrounding an event is not true, and that people in power are controlling or manipulating the truth

2. What do conspiracy theorists believe was the motivation for faking the moon landing in 1969?

They believe that America faked the footage in order to win the 'race' against Russia, upon realising that they wouldn't be able to land on the moon first.

3. What do flat-earthers think the world looks like?

A flat circle with the Arctic in the centre. Around the outside is a 150ft wall of ice, which stops people falling off into space.

4. What evidence do conspiracy theorists believe supports the theory that the Earth is flat? (name 2)

The moon landing photographs were faked and they show a spherical earth

The Earth looks flat – we can't see a curve when we look at the horizon

5. What was Avril Lavigne's most popular song?

Complicated

6. What is the reason conspiracy theorists believe that Avril Lavigne was replaced by someone else?

She couldn't cope with her new-found fame so hired someone else to make appearances as her

7. What evidence do conspiracy theorists cite to support the idea that Avril Lavigne was replaced by a look-a-like?

Photographs of the singer pre and post 2003, claiming her jawline is different, her eyes, her make-up and her handwriting.

8. According to the introduction, how do conspiracy theories begin?

From rumour and speculation

9. Why else do people believe the conspiracy theories about the moon landings and the Earth being flat?

Lack of belief in scientists

10. List 2 pieces of evidence conspiracy theorists use to support the idea that the moon landings were faked.

The shadows were wrong

The American flag is waving when there is no wind

No stars can be seen in the sky

11. Who do flat earthers think is behind the conspiracy that the earth is flat?

NASA

born out of Happening as a result	Tenacious Continuing with a firm opinion	fallen foul To get into trouble
gaining considerable traction Getting more popular/more people believing	Outlandish Sounding bizarre or unfamiliar	the evidence was shaky Not reliable
persistent Determined; not giving up easily	hand-in-hand Links together/closely related	Maintain Cause or enable to continue
Countered Respond to	under wraps Kept hidden/secret	Elaborate Involving many carefully arranged parts or details; complicated