> **Most kids believe that if it's on the Internet, it must be true.**

November adds, "but we need to expend ten times more effort teaching them how to interpret what they've found."

The purpose of even the most noble-sounding Web site can be quite the opposite of what it seems. You'd think a site with the URL www.martinlutherking.org would contain a tribute to the fallen civil rights leader, for example, but it's actually dedicated to attacking King's ideas and history. To an adult, that's quickly obvious. To a ninth grader, not so clear.

Tech experts recommend that educators continually drill their students on the difference between objectivity and advocacy and teach them to be skeptics when it comes to online information. The tree-octopus story, for instance, once fooled an entire high school science class, which dutifully created reports based on a teacher's assignment to check out the site. Talk about being up a tree.

Steps for Skeptics

When you go online, be a skeptic. Think critically about the purpose and perspective of a given Web site. Don't accept information online as the truth.

Teach your students to decode the Internet. The real revolution is in information and communication, not technology. Don't tell your students to simply "go on the Internet." They can be manipulated by people who know how the Internet works. Give them specific reliable sites to check out.

Many people, especially kids, will believe someone who sounds authoritative, so check out the site's author. Be especially wary of a site whose URL contains the word *user*. It's a personal page.

Find out who owns the site. One easy way is to check out www.easywhois.com. That will give you a quick idea of who is creating the ideas you're reading.

Check out who is linking to the site. Go to Alta Vista and type in "Link: (insert URL)." A site that at first blush appears to be an appreciation of the civil rights movement, for instance, might be a white-supremacist creation linked to by hundreds of hate mongers.

Switch to Ask.com and Answers.com, says November, which are much better than Google for schoolwork. —*James Daly*

Online, on Alert

Heard about the pine-tree-loving Pacific Northwest tree octopus? Or the great California Velcro shortage of 1993? They must be true—Web sites confirm both.

Welcome to the pseudoscience (OK, outright lies) of the online world. Trouble is, most kids believe that if it's on the Internet, it must be true. That could mean big trouble for students who haven't honed their critical-thinking skills.

"Kids use the Internet without being taught to be skeptical of what they see online, and that's dangerous," says Alan November, a former high school science teacher who heads the November Learning education consultancy, in Marblehead, Massachusetts.

"We spend a lot of time teaching kids to find things on the Net,"