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GOOD NEWS

WHY THE WORLD IS NOT AS BAD AS YOU THINK

wren & rook

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‘THE WORLD IS GETTING BETTER’

INTRODUCTION

‘ENDANGERED TIGERS MAKE AN AMAZING COMEBACK’

‘KIDS ARE CLEVERER THAN EVER’

This is the kind of news we want to see. The moments of humanity, kindness and goodness in the world. And there’s lots of it out there. But when you see the grown-ups watching the news or flicking through newspapers in the shops, you probably just see things that look bad. *Really* bad.

Imagine if you were an alien life-form that had just beamed on to this planet (one that can somehow read and understand a whole bunch of human languages). You walk around for a bit, look at the streets, the buildings, the people, and then you see a newspaper packed with terrible things – stories of crime and tragedy, stories about the planet being destroyed, stories about how everything is awful and it’s only getting worse and there’s nothing anyone can do to stop it. Would you want to stick around on this planet or would you beam straight back into space and get as far away as you possibly can?

I’m guessing you’d already be zooming off into space, because the news tells us we’re **DOOMED**.

BUT WAIT. THAT'S NOT THE WHOLE STORY. IT'S JUST PART OF IT.

In fact, can we hit pause for a moment on that word 'story'? It's important. That's what the news is. A story. When you think about stories in books and in films, what do you like to read and watch?

OPTION 1: The ones where *nothing* happens? Or stuff happens but it's really small, boring stuff and everything is basically very nice and then everyone goes to sleep? Or …

OPTION 2: The *exciting* stories and the *exciting* films? You know the ones. The books you can't put down, the films you have to finish because you just *have* to know what happens.

Most people would pick Option 2. We like a good story. This is the thing about the news. It tells a good story. A gripping story. Whether we like it or not, sensational, scary stuff makes people sit up and listen. It makes them want to hear or read more. It sticks in their mind. It makes them want to *tell* someone about it. It makes *that* person want to tell someone *else* about it. And before you know it, a piece of news has whizzed its way around the world faster than you can say 'Bob's your uncle'.

This is why we end up seeing lots of that scary stuff and why we don't see so much of the **GOOD** stuff. That's what this book is about. **GOOD NEWS.** Because it exists. *Lots* of it. It just doesn't get as much airtime because a lot of it is gradual improvements or small acts of kindness and people continuing to do good work, day in and day out – and, frankly, that just isn't as juicy as a hard-hitting headline about what a *disaster* everything is.

The last one doesn't sound like a big deal but it would be **HUGE** news. It would mean we used lots more renewable energy like wind and solar power and we *might* have hit the peak for emissions. Maybe they're going to fall after this.

Because we see so much more of the *bad* news, it's so easy to start thinking that things are much worse than they actually are. But we need to hear the *good* news so we can see how amazing our world truly is and the great part **YOU** have to play in keeping it that way.

WIRED TO WORRY

Now, you might be wondering why on earth we find bad news so interesting in the first place. The thing is, we're wired to worry …

This is something humans have been stuck with because, thousands of years ago, a bit of anxiety was just the ticket to stop us getting eaten. It was much better to see danger everywhere and jump at a shadow or the slightest noise and to keep *safe*, than to be overconfident and get gobbled up by a predator. But this means that now, negative stuff tends to affect us much more than positive stuff. It's where our attention goes and it's the thing that sticks in our heads.

And there's another problem: our brain likes to take **SHORTCUTS** to save time and energy. Another early human thing. One shortcut the brain takes is to rely on information that springs to mind quickly. Because bad news is everywhere, we can often immediately come up with vivid examples of terrible things. And because we remember these terrible things so easily, they feel way more common than they actually are. For example, the images of shark attacks from the news are so vivid that people often think deaths by shark attacks are quite common. They're not – they're extremely rare (about five a year). Many more people are killed globally by elephants and hippos (and, of course, the deadliest creature of all – the mosquito!).

Our brains are basically set up to seek out and hold on to all this bad news. And because we see so much of it and it's so easy to remember, we end up feeling even worse about everything. So if you feel like the world is bit of a scary and uncertain place right now, I hear you. Or maybe you think you *should* be feeling like that because the grown-ups around you seem to be worrying and stressed about lots of things. And you wonder if maybe you should be worrying too. It's hard, isn't it?

Now, I'm not saying everything's peachy. There's lots of bad stuff

happening and there is work to be done to make the world a better place.

Of course there is.

But some of that work *is* happening and there's actually *lots* of good news out there. You just have to find it.

PHEW!

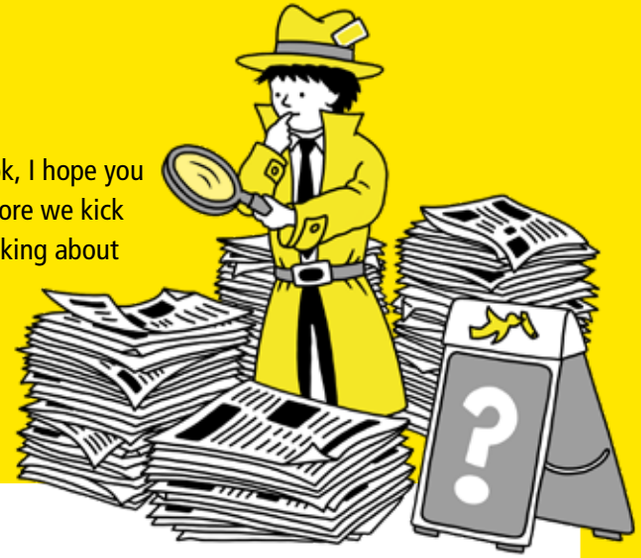
This book is going to put all that good news under the spotlight. Because we all need happy things to brighten up our day. We all need something to help sort out our worries (or at least take a *few* of them away). And we all need some hope. Hope is so important – if someone figured out how to bottle it up and sell it, they'd be a gazillionaire. We need it to be able to look forward to a positive and exciting future that we are *all* an important part of. I mean, that would be nice, right?

So, let's do this – let's talk about the GOOD STUFF. Let's talk about everything from good people in power and good businesses making a difference, to trees healing the planet, robots helping with healthcare, and amazing everyday people changing the world one step at a time. Let's big these things up so we can feel proud of the world we live in and excited about what might be around the corner if we pull together.

Because you know what?

I BELIEVE IN US

And, after reading this book, I hope you will too. Just one thing before we kick off: if we're going to be talking about the news – good or bad – there is a *very* important thing we need to talk about first and that's FAKE NEWS.



A YOUNG DETECTIVES SUPER-QUICK AND HIGHLY USEFUL GUIDE TO INVESTIGATING

FAKE NEWS

You may have heard of this thing called fake news. Well, it's something that is a big problem, but if you get your detective hat on, you can get to the bottom of it.

Here's your super-quick but highly useful guide to understanding what it is and how to bust it.

FAKE NEWS is news that isn't true. It's *false* or *misleading*.

There are two main types:

DISINFORMATION – stories that are deliberately made up to deceive others (to trick people into believing something), and …

MISINFORMATION – false stories that are shared without deliberately trying to trick people.

A story might start out as *disinformation* then become *misinformation* further down the line. For example, if you steal a cookie but tell everyone that someone else did it, that's *disinformation*. If someone hears that and, without knowing that it's a lie, starts telling everyone that that person stole the cookie, that's *misinformation*.

There are also genuine *mistakes*. Maybe the person writing the news hasn't checked all the facts. **UH-OH!** Maybe they were in a rush to get the story out (the news business is intense, after all). Usually, when the facts come to light, reporters who make mistakes will correct their articles with an update. It's very different to the deliberately false stuff! *That's* the stuff you gotta watch out for.

FAKE NEWS THAT ISN'T FAKE

Confusingly, sometimes some people call a story 'fake news' even when it's true. That might be because they don't *want* it to be true or because they don't want *you* to believe it's true! This makes it hard to know *what* to believe. But sometimes you can spot when this is happening because you'll hear the accusation that something's 'fake news' without any concrete evidence to back it up. Evidence, my friend, is key.

'I DIDN'T STEAL THE COOKIE! FAKE NEWS! DON'T LISTEN TO THEM. BECAUSE . UMM . IT'S FAKE NEWS!'

FAKE NEWS IS NOTHING NEW

This stuff has been around for a long, long time. In ancient times, kings, warriors and soldiers often tricked the enemy into thinking they had huge armies and lots of scary weapons so they wouldn't attack their kingdom. They also used it to turn people against the enemy and mislead them into believing '*their* side' was the best and doing the right thing. In Ancient Rome, after the death of Julius Caesar, his adopted son Octavian spread fake news to try and ruin the reputation of Caesar's general, Mark Antony. He even had anti-Antony slogans written on coins! You'll see fake news pop up during wartime, too. It's a sneaky tool for politicians trying to get people on side. When it's used like this, we call it *propaganda*.

THIS STUFF MOVES *FAST*

The big problem with fake news now is how fast it can travel. A long

time ago, before the internet, TV, radio and printers, it could take ages for people to find things out. To make the news travel faster, you needed a town crier (a person with a very loud voice!), a carrier pigeon or a messenger on horseback. Then, in the 1440s, a version of the printing press was invented – a machine that made it possible to mass-make books, leaflets, newspapers and posters. (Before this, things were mostly written up by hand, one by one! Achy hands all round and, as you can imagine, it took forever). The printing press meant the news could go much further, much faster. But *now*, with the internet, all it takes is the click of a button!

CLICK! SEND SHARE LIKE! GUESS WHAT!!!

You probably know people who use social media so you know just how fast a video or a photograph can **WHOOSH** around the world, how quickly it can go viral. The same thing can happen with a news story. But WHY would a news story get shared like that? Lots of reasons. Maybe it's interesting or about someone interesting (like a celebrity). Maybe it makes us laugh. Maybe it's surprising or even shocking. Maybe it's a properly juicy bit of gossip. Who can resist sharing that? The thing about fake news is that it tends to tick at least one of those boxes. So it's almost *guaranteed* a trip around the world.

MAYA tells **CARLOS** – **CARLOS** shares with all his friends including **AKIKO** – **AKIKO** shares with all *her* friends including **NOAH** etc

CLICKBAIT

Clickbait is a headline or piece of text online that is so exciting or interesting or outrageous that it practically *screams*

CLICK ME, READ ME, TELL EVERYONE ABOUT ME!

So much so that people sometimes react to these articles and even share them *before* they've actually read them! News companies love this. With online articles, their job

FRUIT IS ACTUALLY BAD FOR YOU.

it's ***NOT****, it's not! Don't worry, detectives. That's only if you eat WAYYY too much of it*

THE SHOCKING TRUTH ABOUT YOUR FAVOURITE MOVIE STARS ... [Dun dun DUNNN…]

is to make you click. Why? Because they get money from advertisers who pay to have their products advertised next to the news article. Juicy online stories with clickbaity headlines and captions make money by getting lots of clicks and shares.

IS THERE AN ECHO IN HERE?!

ECHO IN HERE.

ECHO IN HERE.

There's another ingredient to whack in the mix that helps stories spread even faster and that's ***CONFIRMATION BIAS.*** Sounds very technical, but all it means is that we tend to look for stuff we already agree with and ignore the stuff we disagree with. So if an article pops up that someone agrees with, they're more likely to share it and talk about it. (There are people out there who believe that humans never landed on the moon – that it was all a big scam (sorry, Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin!). If they see an article that backs that up, you BET they're gonna share it. Maybe even before they *read* it!)

Now, because our friends often *tend* to think a bit (or a lot) like us, we end up seeing more and more of the same stuff. It's an:

ECHO CHAMBER. . . ECHO CHAMBER. . .

The danger is that you can end up in a bubble where you keep hearing and seeing the same messages about the world. You might feel protected in your bubble, but it's actually really important to hear other people's views. To challenge what you think and believe. To learn new things.

EVEN if it's a piece of news that fits in with what you believe. **EVEN** if it's shared by the cleverest and most honest person you know.

Who knows – it might have been shared in a rush. After all, one BIG challenge we all face today is this …

INFORMATION OVERLOAD!!!!!!

There is a lot of information out there and it is being chucked at us with incredible speed. Add in fake news and we've got a serious problem. The news is supposed to be helpful but when there's so much of it and when some of it is fake, it can get confusing, upsetting and stressful. And with so many people believing and sharing things that just aren't true, it can even be *dangerous.*

We need to be able to filter things and sort fact from fiction. It's hard but it IS possible.

TIME TO TURN ON YOUR FAKE NEWS RADAR, DETECTIVES

First of all, STOP. Think. Question *everything.* Not because it's a big bad world and you can't trust anyone. But because you're a detective, and every fine detective knows it's a good habit to *sense-check* the information you take in. Wondering how to do that? Ask these questions and you'll be sniffing out fake news in no time:

- **HANG ON. WHO WROTE THIS, ANYWAY?** Check the SOURCE. That's where the story comes from. Where did you find it? On the radio? A newspaper? Is this journalism or is it an advert?

What does this person or organisation believe? What are their values? On websites, look up the 'About Us' section. It might tell you why their stories try to push you in a certain direction.

- **WHO PUBLISHED THE STORY?** Can you trust them? There will (hopefully!) be some well-known news companies or official organisations in your country that are considered trustworthy. There are also some specifically designed for young readers. On the flip side, there will be some that are known for … err … *STRETCHING* the truth. Maybe this is something you can chat to a grown-up about. Someone like a parent, a teacher or a librarian – librarians know lots about finding the best sources of information.

GOOD DETECTIVES ARE NEVER TOO SHY TO HIT UP THE EXPERTS.

- **HOW DOES IT MAKE YOU FEEL?** What do you think the person writing it wants you to feel or believe? Fake news stories are often the kind that get people REALLY worked up. If a story looks like it's trying to do that, whip out your magnifying glass and give it an extra good look.
- **DID YOU CHECK THE DATE?** *Always* check the date. Old stories are sometimes recycled and they can be really misleading.
- **DID THEY BRING IN THE TOP DOGS? THE EXPERTS?** Does the story quote official sources of info like government sources, the World Health Organisation or the United Nations? Fake news usually won't. It's usually more opinion-flavoured than fact-flavoured.

- **CAN YOU FACTCHECK IT?** Can you find the same story on a really reputable website? (On three websites to be sure.) You can use humans to factcheck too if you happen to know someone who knows a great deal about a subject.

- **HEY, HAS SOMEONE BEEN MESSING ABOUT WITH THOSE PHOTOS?** You might be able to spot a fake photo, but not always. Technology is so advanced now that it's possible to create fake photos or videos of people that look very real. But you can often spot something that isn't quite right. It's magnifying-glass-o'clock again!

- **IS THERE SOMETHING FISHY ABOUT THIS WEBSITE?** Check for an official website address (URL) like .gov and .ac or something normal like .com (but remember, anyone can buy a .com). And look out for mistakes in spelling and grammar – journalists on reputable news sites will *quadruple*-check this sort of thing. Capital letters, bold or underlined text and exclamation marks can be a giveaway too because REPUTABLE NEWS SOURCES DON'T USE CAPITAL LETTERS, **BOLD TEXT**, <u>UNDERLINING</u>, AND EXCLAMATION MARKS TO MAKE A POINT!!!!!!!!!!!!!!!

- **IS THIS SOME KIND OF A JOKE?** No, really. There is a chance the story is *supposed* to be poking fun at things (like an article from The Onion or The Daily Mash or a magazine like *Private Eye*). The whole aim is to be funny or make a statement – *not* to mislead people. This is *satire* or *parody* and it's very different to fake news.

But sometimes this can even go wrong. That's what happened with The Great Moon Hoax. In 1835, the *New York Sun* printed a bunch of articles about life on the moon (with pictures and everything!). It had things like mini-zebras, unicorns and people with bat-wings. This was intended to be a satire, but the general public actually believed it! This made-up story was hugely popular and was reprinted around the world.

- **FINALLY, WHAT DOES YOUR GUT SAY?** Does the headline and story sound and feel believable? If it's really shocking or outrageous, it might not be true.

That last one's important. You've got your gut. If a story stinks … it's *probably* fake. At the very least, it's a call to **STOP** and **THINK** and look up multiple alternative trustworthy sources.

GOT ALL THAT?

I know it might feel like a lot to think about, but you don't have to do it all by yourself. When you see a piece of news that raises your eyebrows, it's always worth having a chat with friends, family or teachers. Detectives don't work alone, you know. Putting your heads together