SEEKING FACTS: WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN FACTS AND OPINIONS AND HOW CAN YOU TELL WHICH IS WHICH?

HOW IS YOUR PERCEPTION OF FACT AND OPINION AFFECTED BY THE BIASES OF THE PRESENTER OR THE AUDIENCE?

Summary: Discerning fact from opinion is a quest as old as human communication. It was never easy, but today’s students are bombarded with a constant stream of text, videos and multimedia presentations that blur or annihilate the line between fact and opinion.

In addition, while new sources of media provide many new options, Students will review news reports, editorials, videos and other media to understand how biases or sources, the audience and even themselves shape that information they are consuming.

ACTIVITIES

FACT OR OPINION

Facts are statements that can be proven or disproven objectively. Opinions are statements that cannot be proven objectively but represent someone’s feeling. Some statements are combinations of facts and opinions.

ANIMATED VIDEO: https://youtu.be/1Ngkj2Lx-Ks
ALTERNATE VIDEO: https://www.mometrix.com/academy/fact-or-opinion/
WORKSHEET: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1FymEbKSBfyusC6K-gNEZC-qdWPRpblQLhidWny-aE0U/edit?usp=sharing

HOW YOU KNOW WHAT YOU KNOW

One way to help discern facts from opinion is to look for the source of “facts.” In media, this is called attribution and it helps viewers and readers evaluate whether information should be trusted or not. Generally, information that is contentious or can damage someone’s reputation requires more attribution than routine information. A story about a student charged with a crime would need more attribution than a statement that school will be closed for a regular holiday.

Activity: Look at newspaper and websites. Find examples of attribution in stories. Why do you think some things are attributed and some aren’t? Does a lack of attribution increase or decrease the believability of a story?

ATTRIBUTION WEB PAGE: https://www.thoughtco.com/attribution-when-writing-news-stories-2074313
ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY (USE OF ANONYMOUS SOURCES)

RECOGNIZING BIAS

Although objectivity has been the dominant theme of American journalism for decades, some academics and practitioners argue that it is no longer an appropriate model. In any case, it is helpful to acknowledge that everyone has biases and it is good to know what biases may be present in a story or video.

WEBSITE: https://www.allsides.com/media-bias/how-to-spot-types-of-media-bias

FIND EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF BIAS IN NEWSPAPER ARTICLES OR ONLINE STORIES AND VIDEO

VIDEO: The role of opinions in social media: https://vimeo.com/180771524
HANDOUT ONLY: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1HrLsaO1oqUxfKzkVOsk4OggD4XEA-ZJ/view?usp=sharing
HANDOUT AND WORKSHEET: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GeGUHXXmA3T6tnPj8BMEJnPqgvsNbXm0P/view?usp=sharing
SMART MEDIA FULL LESSON PLAN: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GwqhP2Es-hI39EUhWW5nJ5i2Tj8z4si/view?usp=sharing
BIASED? SOMETIMES WE’RE TO BLAME.

Confirmation bias is so common that we often don’t even realize we’re using it. We gravitate toward information that confirms our existing beliefs.

**Confirmation bias videos:**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7zoWTb3KP-k
https://youtu.be/jOjiAiJCNlk

*Activity 1:* Find stories or videos that you agree with and other examples that you disagree with. Which are you most likely to believe?

*Activity 2:* Have you ever fallen victim to confirmation bias by believing something you agree with but it turned out to be false? Have students discuss times they’ve fallen prey to it. (Confirmation bias can be very difficult for some to even recognize, much less counteract. I have had students tell me that they have never, ever, succumbed to it. If you have some of your own examples, feel free to share them so students realize everyone is prone to confirmation bias.)

ECHO CHAMBERS

Although the internet is full of diverse viewpoints, our tendency toward confirmation bias means that we often actively seek out viewpoints that confirm our biases. In extreme form this results in a media diet that never tells us anything we don’t want to believe.

**Video:** https://youtu.be/Se20RoB331w

*Activity:* Every student has opinions, whether they’re about clothes, sports, music or cars. Use Google (or another search engine) to explore things they DON’T like or agree with. In class or small groups, have them discuss if they learned anything that made them question what they thought they knew.

AND SOMETIMES WE’RE NOT: CONFIRMING CONFIRMATION BIAS

Social media platform users often have little understanding of the algorithms that determine what they see on the platforms. For example, do they know that search engine results aren’t the same for everyone? Google tailors its searches based on your previous activities. That’s why, for example, your own searches may be different from day to day depending on your online activity. (This explains why sometimes you just cannot find a result that you discovered previously.)

The algorithms are designed to show you more of what you like to see, whether they’re political threads or cat videos on Facebook or Instagram or dance videos on TikTok.

**Short videos:**

**Long video:**
This explains TikTok’s algorithm, and TikTok is a platform your students likely are using
https://youtu.be/nfczi2cl6Cs (The video, at 13 minutes, is long for sixth-graders, but it is an eye-opener for teachers.)
**VOCABULARY**

**Attribution:** Supplying the audience with the source of a statement, whether a fact of opinion. It may be a person, document, or website. Attribution provides the audience the ability to judge whether a statement is trustworthy.

**Bias:** Partiality, preference, or prejudice for/against a person, thing, or idea. Confirmation bias: The tendency for people to believe information that agrees with beliefs they already have and to reject information that conflicts with those beliefs.

**Echo Chamber:** The tendency for people to seek out information that agrees with their beliefs and ignore other information.

**Fact:** A statement that can be proved or disproved objectively.

**Filter Bubble:** A social media environment in which software algorithms reinforce the audience’s confirmation biases and reduces the likelihood of providing information contrary to their beliefs.

**Informed Opinion:** A statement that cannot be proved objectively but is supported by facts.

**Objective:** A report that is fair to every side of an issue, avoiding bias.

**Opinion:** A statement that cannot be proved objectively but represents someone’s feelings or beliefs.
RESOURCES

LESSON PLANS FOR MEDIA LITERACY

IDENTIFYING FAKE NEWS
https://www.weareteachers.com/recognize-bias/

CIRCULAR REPORTING AND SPREADING FALSE NEWS
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cSKGa_7XJkg

HOAXES OR REAL SITES?
http://www.thedogisland.com/index.html
https://zapatopi.net/treeoctopus/
http://www.dhmo.org/
https://www.tfes.org/
https://www.ourhollowearth.com/ourhollo/index.html

GOODWILL COMMUNITY FOUNDATION - DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY TUTORIALS
GCF has produced a large unit on media literacy, with multiple lessons and a YouTube playlist, available as teacher resources at the following link:

APPLIED EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS - TOP FIVE MEDIA LITERACY LESSON PLANS & RESOURCES
https://www.aeseducation.com/blog/top-5-media-literacy-lesson-plans-resources

MIDDLEWEB: ALL ABOUT THE MIDDLE GRADES -- TEACHING 7TH GRADERS SOCIAL MEDIA LITERACY
This is a blog post from a teacher and his insight and resources into teaching it to his class.
https://www.middleweb.com/43890/teaching-7th-graders-social-media-literacy/

PRODIGY EDUCATION - TEACHING MEDIA LITERACY: ITS IMPORTANCE AND 10 ENGAGING ACTIVITIES
[+ DOWNLOADABLE LIST]
This blog post offers 10 examples of activities to do regarding Media Literacy.

FACTITIOUS
This free quiz site has students determine if a news source is fake by reading the headline, story, and url. The current working version deals exclusively with the pandemic.
http://factitious-pandemic.augamestudio.com/#/

GET BAD NEWS
This free single-player game allows students to manufacture their own “fake news” to see how the process of manipulation works. Teacher resources, including a teacher guide and student worksheet, are available on the website at no cost.
https://www.getbadnews.com/#intro
7TH GRADE MEDIA LITERACY CASE STUDY
AUTHORS AND AUDIENCES: HOW A LOCAL CRIME STORY WAS TOLD WORLDWIDE

ESSENTIAL QUESTION:
When analyzing or creating media, why is it important to know the audience?

LESSON PLAN

The 2013 story of Australian exchange student Chris Lane, who was murdered by teenagers in Duncan, Oklahoma, quickly developed from a local crime story to international infamy. In this unit, students will examine how a story is told through the lenses of different regional, national and international sources. Students will determine authors’ perspectives according to geographical origin and explain how news presentations differentiate when appealing to different audiences.

LESSON RESOURCES

THE LAWTON CONSTITUTION:
“Duncan killers ‘wanted to see someone die’”
by Steve Metzer, Aug. 19, 2013
https://www.swoknews.com/duncan-killers-wanted-to-see-someone-die/article_1bdef0c5-2bc9-50b2-9333-0db2a329788f.html

“In wake of murder, security tight at Duncan schools”
by Steve Metzer, Aug. 22, 2013
https://www.swoknews.com/in-wake-of-murder-security-tight-at-duncan-schools/article_34440fc4-a3fa-5415-81a1-0a5c030e9bda.html

“Many miss school day in Duncan”
by Judi Boland, Aug. 23, 2013

“Hurting, Duncan draws together”
by Judi Boland, Aug. 24, 2013
https://www.swoknews.com/hurting-duncan-draws-together/article_5799d457-2e67-5d18-9e81-1e44417be121.html

“In wake of murder, Australian diplomat visits Duncan”
by Steve Metzer, Sept. 5, 2013

AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING CORPORATION:
“Australian Christopher Lane killed in drive-by shooting while jogging in Oklahoma”
(Australian AP), Aug. 19, 2013

“Mother of suspect in Christopher Lane killing in disbelief her son could be guilty of murder”
Aug. 20, 2013

“Memorial service held in Melbourne for slain baseballer Christopher Lane”
by Jeff Waters, Aug. 25, 2013
THE HERALD SUN:
“Australian’s US drive by death ‘senseless’”
by Peter Mitchell and Steve Lillebuen, Aug. 19, 2013

“Murdered Australian loved baseball; family”
by Steve Lillebuen, Aug. 19, 2013

“Lane murder shocks small Oklahoma town”
by Peter Mitchell, August 20, 2013

“US govt ‘deeply saddened’ by Lane murder”
by Peter Mitchell, August 21, 2013

“Superstar son Chris Lane remembered”
by Mike Hedge, August 28, 2013

PREPARE
These websites, resources, and activities can be used to help prepare the educator and students to introduce media literacy:

GOODWILL COMMUNITY FOUNDATION - DIGITAL MEDIA LITERACY TUTORIALS
Goodwill Community Foundation has produced a large unit on media literacy, with multiple lessons and a YouTube playlist, available as teacher resources at the following link:

FACTITIOUS
This free quiz site has students determine if a news source is fake by reading the headline, story, and url. Students can use this as a starting activity to identify sources -- a key part of understanding audiences. The current working version deals exclusively with the pandemic.
http://factitious-pandemic.augamestudio.com/##/

A. Have students pick one article from the above resources that was not covered in the introduction. Have the student identify key information using the questions below:
   1. What are your initial reactions to the story you just read?
   2. What specifically did the author intend to report about?
   3. Who or what did the author use as sources for the story?
   4. What quote(s) most supported the author’s intent?
   5. Why do you believe the author chose those quotes/sources for the story?

B. Organize students into small groups. Have students create two lists -- one labeled “Southwest Oklahoma” and another labeled “Melbourne” -- to present to their peers. Have students organize key facts across all articles and organize the key information into two groups, determining which information is best for that specific audience. If possible, have groups use separate articles so the class may contribute to the entire analysis.

C. Assign students with a partner to highlight/underline key facts from two US sources and two Australian sources. Encourage students to identify the sources of these key facts, such as local law enforcement, family, friends, government officials, etc. Have students determine what audiences each author is appealing to in their article. Have students organize what details are most important in each story, and how these details can be different when audiences change.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Article</th>
<th>Details showing Author's Point of View/Perspective</th>
<th>How does this article differ from the others?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>United States 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United States 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D. Have students research an international news topic of their choice and identify a U.S.-based news source and a foreign-based news source covering the chosen topic. Have students compare/contrast the coverage and identify key aspects of how each author appealed to their own audiences.

Students should determine important facts from articles, author purpose, points of view, and sources cited in their analysis.

DISCUSS

• What details were constant across all sources?
• What details were mentioned more in one region versus another?
• Who did the authors attempt to interview to cater to their own audiences?
• What do you believe is important for a writer when choosing who to interview/cite for information?
• What quotes do you believe are used to appeal to an audience’s emotion?
• Was there any information printed that you believed was unnecessary?
OKLAHOMA ACADEMIC STANDARDS:

7.3.R.1
Students will read works written on the same topic from a variety of historical, cultural, ethnic and global perspectives and compare the methods the authors use to achieve their purpose.

7.3.R.2
Students will evaluate how perspective affects a variety of literary and informational texts.

7.3.R.6
Students will identify literary elements and devices that impact a text’s theme and mood.

7.3.R.7
Students will analyze how information text structures support the author’s purpose: compare/contrast, cause/effect, problem/solution, description and sequential.

7.6.R.3
Students will determine the relevance, reliability, and validity of the information gathered.

7.7.R.1
Students will compare and contrast the effectiveness of techniques used in a variety of alphabetic, aural, visual, spatial and/or gestural content from various perspectives.

ISTE STANDARDS:

1 Empowered Learner
1a Students articulate and set personal learning goals, develop strategies leveraging technology to achieve them and reflect on the learning process itself to improve learning outcomes.

2. Digital Citizen
2b. Students engage in positive, safe, legal and ethical behavior when using technology, including social interactions online or when using networked devices.
2c. Students demonstrate an understanding of and respect for the rights and obligations of using and sharing intellectual property.

3. Knowledge Constructor
3a. Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.
3b. Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.
3c. Students curate information from digital resources using a variety of tools and methods to create collections of artifacts that demonstrate meaningful connections or conclusions.
3d. Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.

6. Creative Communicator
6d. Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for their intended audiences.
VOCABULARY

**Audience:** Anyone exposed to a media message, or anyone for whom a message is constructed.

**Bias:** Partiality, preference, or prejudice for/against a person, thing, or idea.

**Cite:** quote (a passage, book, or author) as evidence for or justification of an argument or statement, especially in a scholarly work.

**Claim:** A claim is a debatable argument that generally states a fact which is not just a personal opinion. It is specifically focused on an argument which defines your goal and the scope of the thesis. Its main purpose is to support and prove your main argument.

**Connotation:** Meaning added to a media message by the audience.

**Denotation:** The literal meaning of a media message (what is seen, heard, etc.).

**Digital citizenship:** The responsible use of technology by anyone who uses computers, the Internet, and digital devices to engage with society on any level.

**Ethos:** an argument that appeals to the audience by emphasizing the speaker’s credibility and authority.

**Evidence:** any sort of information that supports a certain assertion.

**Lens:** something that facilitates and influences perception, comprehension, or evaluation.

**Logos:** appeal to the audience’s logic and rationality.

**Mainstream media:** Media that disseminate messages to the general public via the largest distribution channels.

**Mass media:** Media that broadcast messages to large audiences (see also mainstream media).

**Media:** All channels of communication combined.

**Media literacy:** The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in a variety of forms.

**Objective Point of View:** A presented position that is fair to every side of an issue, avoiding bias.

**Pathos:** appeals to the emotions of the audience and elicits feelings.

**Point of View:** the way in which an author reveals a viewpoint or perspective through ideas, events, or narration.

**Propaganda:** Information intended to influence an audience to adopt a certain point of view.

**Text:** Any media production (a newspaper article, song, music video, podcast, etc.).
ESSENTIAL QUESTION
How does writing an argument free of bias support digital citizenship?

LESSON PLAN
Students will write an argumentative essay to support claims in an analysis of topics or texts, using logical reasoning and relevant evidence. Students will introduce precise, knowledgeable claims, establish the significance of the claims, and create an organized essay that logically sequences claims, counterclaims, reasons, and evidence and demonstrates an understanding of the topic or text.

MATERIALS
• Copies of newspaper opinion/editorials
• Computers
• Signal Words handout
• Arranging an Argument handout
• Argument Chart handout
• Argumentative Essay handout

ACTIVITIES
Have students work with a partner and underline the facts and highlight the opinions in the article, “It’s time to get back to work”. Remind them to pay attention to signal words to help identify facts and opinions.

Discuss the opinions, facts, and any bias that are found in the article.

Using the article, “It’s time to get back to work” complete the Argument Chart handout.

Analyzing Rhetorical Strategies
https://docs.google.com/file/d/1mygN_VYJ-XgZc35Hkw8Y1hOMQPFNxCUr/edit?usp=docslist_api&filetype=msword

Ethos Pathos Logos
https://docs.google.com/file/d/1OrhwSJuhwmd6ABzyH7KzF8aKGbyxPy3/edit?usp=docslist_api&filetype=msword

ESSAY
Do you agree with the author of the article, “It's time to get back to work”?  
https://www.swoknews.com/opinion/editorials/opinion-its-time-to-get-back-to-work/article_65ac27a2-3032-5db6-bff8-e1ed9b221c4c.html

Research sources that you will use to support your argument. Read and synthesize the information and then use the information to create a coherent, well-written essay which supports your claim on the topic. Be sure to have a clear thesis statement, contextual information to support your claim, a strong conclusion, and proofread for errors and awkward sentences.
OKLAHOMA ACADEMIC STANDARDS:
8.2.W.1 Students will apply components of a recursive writing process for multiple purposes to create a focused, organized, and coherent piece of writing.

8.2.W.2 Students will plan (e.g., outline) and pre-write a first draft as necessary.

8.2.W.3 Students will develop drafts by choosing an organizational structure (e.g., description, compare/contrast, sequential, problem/solution, cause/effect, etc.) and building on ideas in multi-paragraph essays.

8.2.W.4 Students will edit and revise multiple drafts for organization, transitions to improve coherence and meaning, sentence variety, and use of consistent point of view.

8.2.W.5 Students will use resources to find correct spellings of words (e.g., word wall, vocabulary notebook, print and electronic dictionaries, and spell-check).

8.3.W.3 Students will introduce a claim, recognize at least one claim from an opposing viewpoint, and organize reasons and evidence, using credible sources.

8.3.W.4 Students will show relationships among the claim, reasons, and evidence and include a conclusion that follows logically from the information presented.

ISTE
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1a Students articulate and set personal learning goals, develop strategies leveraging technology to achieve them and reflect on the learning process itself to improve learning outcomes.

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3b. Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.

3c. Students curate information from digital resources using a variety of tools and methods to create collections of artifacts that demonstrate meaningful connections or conclusions.

6. Creative Communicator

6d. Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for their intended audiences.
**VOCABULARY**

**Audience:** Anyone exposed to a media message, or anyone for whom a message is constructed.

**Bias:** Partiality, preference, or prejudice for/against a person, thing, or idea.

**Censorship:** Controlling or suppressing any part of a media message or text.

**Cite:** Quote (a passage, book, or author) as evidence for or justification of an argument or statement, especially in a scholarly work.

**Claim:** A claim is a debatable argument that generally states a fact which is not just a personal opinion. It is specifically focused on an argument which defines your goal and the scope of the thesis. Its main purpose is to support and prove your main argument.

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**Mainstream Media:** Media that disseminate messages to the general public via the largest distribution channels.

**Mass Media:** Media that broadcast messages to large audiences (see also mainstream media).

**Media:** All channels of communication combined.

**Media literacy:** The ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media in a variety of forms.

**Opposing Claim:** An argument that does not support your thesis statement. In fact, it directly contradicts.

**Pathos:** Appeals to the emotions of the audience and elicits feelings.

**Propaganda:** Information intended to influence an audience to adopt a certain point of view.

**Text:** Any media production (a newspaper article, song, music video, podcast, etc.).
VIDEO:
CONFIRMATION BIAS
This video discusses confirmation bias and why we have it.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=469ANHsysXc

WRITING ACTIVITIES
LITERACY IDEAS: HOW TO TEACH OPINION WRITING
https://www.literacyideas.com/how-to-teach-opinion-writing

EXAMPLE COUNTERCLAIM PARAGRAPH

PREWRITING WORKSHEETS

BRITANNICA PRO/CON
ProCon.org serves as a non-biased information source for users where you will find sourced pros and cons of debatable issues, as well as a host of reference information relevant to those issues.
https://socialnetworking.procon.org/

DISCUSSION STARTERS
Look at how different media cover the same story. Read or watch the same news story on sites that you know have ideological differences. Ask your students to compare and contrast the different ways the story is presented. Use the following site to compare and contrast the front pages of newspapers across the globe.

FRONT PAGES OF NEWSPAPERS
This site gives access to the front page of newspapers across the globe.
https://www.freedomforum.org/todaysfrontpages/#1

WRITING PROMPTS
• Should There Be More Educational Video Games in School?
• Does Technology in the Classroom Ever Get in the Way of Learning?
• How Would You Feel About a Computer Grading Your Essays?

HANDOUTS
Signal Words
https://docs.google.com/file/d/1PrnoyE51QX5Q096MM3GqNSEI3cruXnxk/edit?usp=docslist_api&filetype=msword

Arranging an Argument
https://docs.google.com/file/d/1ogkd1SyMdAlf5kNztWBoUckG4Cn8Boht/edit?usp=docslist_api&filetype=msword

Argument Chart
https://docs.google.com/file/d/16NX1U7ReU5zo2rWfPBO1SBfLBxm61y1/edit?usp=docslist_api&filetype=msword

Argumentative Essay
https://docs.google.com/file/d/12V862WGl0sNfJ80e7l-Gwha8Y30JRSH/edit?usp=docslist_api&filetype=msword

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