



 Prestwick House

Free Lesson Plan

UNDERSTANDING LANGUAGE:

Slant, Spin, and Bias in the News

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1,6,7,8 | TEKS 110.31.(b).12(C)

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Objectives:

By the end of this lesson, your students will be able to:

- Define and identify bias in nonfiction sources.
- Analyze a work to uncover hidden or deliberate bias.
- Read nonfiction sources critically and compare biases.
- Compare two sources to see how they portray the same issue from different perspectives.

Time:

45 Minutes or 1 Class Period

Materials:

- Handout: Bias in the News Worksheet
- Computer or device with Internet access
- Computer projector capable of sharing your screen with the class

Procedure:

1- Introduce your class to the concepts of slant, spin, and bias.

While nonfiction articles, like the news or reporting about history, are often presented as “true,” they actually almost always contain a mixture of facts and opinion-based analysis to tell the story, and they present that story from a particular viewpoint.

Almost every piece of nonfiction is written with a goal in mind. That goal might be to inform the reader or to convince the reader of a specific point, but oftentimes the goal is to influence the reader’s opinion, either through outright editorializing or by writing the piece with a slant, spin, or bias.

Slant is the writer’s personal point of view coloring the passage. This can come from, as an example, an author who has strong gun control views writing about a murder. Another example might be a reporter who believes in free trade writing about a trade deal. This can, at its simplest, be an innocent assumption of values, or it can also be a more complicated direct attempt to manipulate emotions.

Spin is the deliberate presentation of negative items in a positive light, either by lessening their impact, by comparing them with other items, by twisting the interpretation of the subject of the story, by emphasizing specific statistical evidence and de-emphasizing others, etc.

While slant and spin can be used innocently and accept the fact that there could be other opinions, Bias refuses to acknowledge other viewpoints as having validity. It includes treating opinions as outright facts and argues that the thesis of the piece is the only valid thesis, and anyone who disagrees is wrong.





2- Pull up a variety of news sources on the same topic and discuss the biases of the authors or new sources.

Select a current event to look at, and bring up two different articles from different media sources to review.

Because this lesson is being released during the election cycle, a good example might be from the current election. Be careful when selecting a topic that you don't pick something that's too controversial for your community.

For this example, I've selected two news articles with a different take on the Trans Pacific Partnership Deal that is part of the current news. Please feel free to use articles that are more current.

- Wall Street Journal - Obama Makes a Long-Shot Bid for TPP Trade Deal
<http://www.wsj.com/articles/obama-makes-a-long-shot-bid-for-tpp-trade-deal-1478014457>
- Global Research - Video: The Building Storm Against The Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) Trade Agreement
<http://www.globalresearch.ca/video-the-building-storm-against-the-trans-pacific-partnership-tpp-trade-agreement/5552468>

Read the two articles aloud to your class and discuss what the different viewpoints on the articles are. When you discuss these articles, you may find it helpful to ask the following questions:

1. What are the differences between the viewpoints in these two articles?
2. What examples of slant, spin, or bias can you find in these articles?
3. Is one of these articles fairer than the other one? Does that "fairness" match your own preconceived notions?
4. What are the different goals of and audiences for these articles?

3- Ask your students to research two other topics in the news and complete the handout, Bias in the News.

Using search engines and popular news sites, ask your students to research an issue looking for two very different news sources to analyze. Your student can use sites like Google News to find articles on a topic or look through newspaper or magazine websites.

4- Discuss your student's news sources

Ask for volunteers to discuss the different views on the topics on display. Many students probably selected similar topics, so ask your class if anyone else has a different article on the same topic, other than the ones that have been brought up. Then, see how its position differs from the ones already discussed. Ask your students to judge whether the news sources they're reading are fair or biased.

5- Wrap Up

After reviewing all of these different approaches, you can see that almost every piece of writing has some sort of angle. When you read a news article, it's important not to simply and unquestioningly trust it, but to critically analyze why it was written and who it was written for. It's valuable to explore multiple news sources to find the most trustworthy sources.

If time allows, share the following article, which lists the most and least trustworthy sites, as reported by Business Insider. Discuss which sources your students have read and whether they think they are trustworthy.

<http://www.businessinsider.com/here-are-the-most-and-least-trusted-news-outlets-in-america-2014-10>

Ask your students where they get their news? Do they trust those sources? Why?

Bias in the News



Topic #1: _____

Title	
Viewpoint	
Alternate Article Title	
Alternate Article's Viewpoint	
Which view is better supported and why?	
Write one sentence from each article that describes the same fact, but demonstrates the different viewpoints between the two articles.	



Topic #2: _____

Title	
Viewpoint	
Alternate Article Title	
Alternate Article's Viewpoint	
Which view is better supported and why?	
Write one sentence from each article that describes the same fact, but demonstrates the different viewpoints between the two articles.	



Homework:

Ask your students to look at one of the following news sources and see if there's a bias to the types of articles that they're publishing. Have students write a paragraph describing the audience that the news source targets and the bias that the news source exhibits.

Mother Jones	Fox News
The New York Times	The Washington Post
The Drudge Report	The Guardian
Huffington Post	NPR

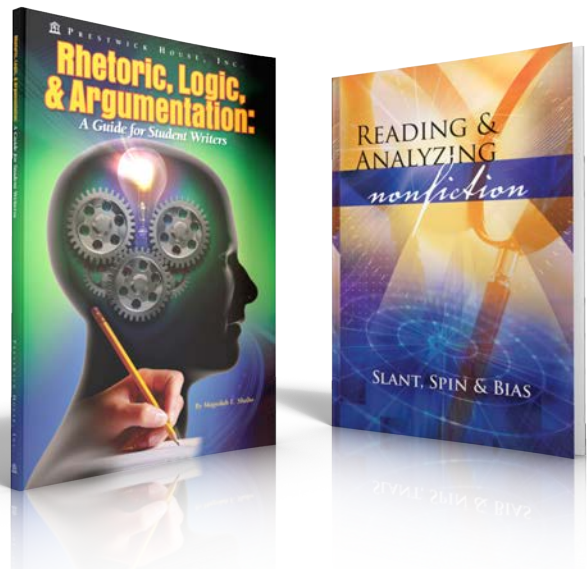
Standards

Common Core state Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.1	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.7
CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6	CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.8

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Sources:

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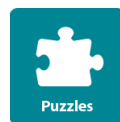
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