

Factual Descriptions: Opinions vs. Informed Opinions And Their Role in Journalism

Subjects

Journalism, Language Arts, Social Studies

Estimated Time

30-minute Writers' Workshop period for 6 weeks

Grade Level

Middle School

Materials

Worksheets [2.3 A](#), [B](#), [C](#), [D](#), [E](#) & [F](#)

Overview

Students learn why many people like opinions more than facts and reflect on the negative and positive consequences of this tendency. Then they practice three strategies for determining the difference between the opinions and facts to discover the power of critical thinking.

Warm Up Activity

Fact vs. Opinion vs. Informed Opinion

Ask: What's the difference between "fact" and "opinion"? Then pass out Worksheet 2.3 A to students. Together read through the definitions and then as a class create the best definitions and give a few examples for each one.

Pass out Worksheet 2.3 B and let students work first on their own to complete their paper and then in pairs check their answers with each other and explain to each other why they think their answer is correct.

Main Activity

The Role of Informed Opinion in Journalism

Ask: When and where do we see opinion pieces in the news? How do we know it is an opinion piece?

Go to the [BBC One Minute News](#) and select one short news story to play for the students. Then play three minutes of the PBS NewsHour analysis piece with Mark Shields and Ramesh Ponnuru included in online materials or see it [here](#).

Ask students which was the opinion piece and how do they know?

Pass out Worksheet 2.3 C and read through the definition at the top with them and then have them fill in the blanks. Have students share their answers with the class and write good answers on the board.

Ask: What is a blog? Do they have any favorites that they follow? Why do they like to follow blogs?

As a class create a working definition of a “blog” and write it on the board. Then have student read the second part of Worksheet 2.3 C and ask- building upon the definition they just came up with- what would a news blog look like?

Write adjectives and nouns on the board that students imagine would describe a news blog.

Then pull up the [PBS NewsHour Rundown blog](#) for the class on the board and see if their pre-conceptions about a news blog were right or wrong.

There are also news blogs that can be written by one person – here is an example of student who blogs for the Huffington Post. Hand out “Worksheet 2.3 D News Blogger: Noah Fitzgerald” for students and have them read through his [short biography](#) and [blog](#).

Have students work in small groups to complete Worksheet C.

Have a short discussion about the different forms of news they have just learned about.

- What formats did they like or not like?
- What are some benefits of having a news blog like the Run Down vs. a regular news article?

Explore and Analyze the News: Nifty Articles and Bodacious Blogs

Explain to students that they have an important task ahead of them- they must find the best news articles, opinion pieces and news blogs and evaluate them. Some places to check out are (ex: The Washington Post, The New York Times, The Richmond Times Dispatch, Huffington Post, BBC News, Slate, Al Jazeera, etc.)

Here is a list of topics that might interest them or even better- come up with a class list of interesting topics Possible Topics:

- Cuts to your school system’s budget for the current (or next) academic year.
- Rising costs of college tuition in your state.
- Recent decisions about players on one of your region’s sports teams.
- The economy
- A current political debate

Pass out copies of Worksheet D and E to students, read through it with them and then give them their tasks:

Find one example of a news article and one example of an opinion article on the same issue.

Examine popular online news blogs (ex: Fox News Blog, The Huffington Post, The Daily Nightly, etc.) or another online opinion resource. Select one opinion piece from one of these sources, and then conduct online research to locate another news article in another news source about that particular topic. Print all articles so that you can read and mark them as you work in pairs on Worksheets D and E.

Discuss Study Findings

Encourage students to discuss their findings of how fact coverage in news articles differs from the presentation of an informed opinion, and how presentation of a point of view in a news blog differs from a straight news article. Where do they see emotion shining through? What kind of language or vocabulary differences do they see? How much coverage of sides is there in each type? List students' observations on the board.

You can review some of the ways to distinguish fact from opinion in written, video, or interactive sources:

News items that present the facts will carefully avoid appealing to emotion. Opinion pieces are trying to appeal to the emotion of the reader or viewer. Opinion pieces will try to evoke some kind of reaction (agreement, disagreement, move to action, etc.).

An opinion piece often uses language that is much more demonstrative, flamboyant, and sometimes inflammatory; that is how it often hooks the emotion of the reader. News items that cover only the facts do not use this kind of language.

Opinion pieces will often present only one side of an issue, with a small acknowledgement somewhere in the piece of the presence of another side of the issue. A news item that covers the facts will strive to present all of the facts as they are known.

Closing Activity

As a class have students share a summary of their news piece or news blog and why it is the best piece of journalism in UNDER 1 MINUTE in their pairs. Then have the class nominate and vote for the best piece of journalism. The winner gets a small reward (candy, leave class a minute early, bonus point on the next test, etc.) and have the rest of the class volunteer answers as to why they think the winner's piece was so good.

Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 11–12 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.11-12.1 Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.

ISTE: Media Concepts, 3.0 Students will be able to interpret and evaluate various media presentations within their context.