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MY WORLD LESSON #4

# What's the Angle?

## Overview

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Students learn that some news reports may have a point of view and recognize if it affects consumers' perceptions of events and people. After a role-playing activity that illustrates how perspective can shape a report, they explore common methods such as word choice and tone that affect audience's perceptions of people and events reported in the news. Students then attempt to identify point of view while watching the BBC *My World* video, "Different Perspectives," and then return to their notes to plot a graph reflecting where on a continuum of perspective that various news clips fall. Students will also try their hand at rewriting biased reporting to make it impartial. Understanding why journalism's standards of impartiality are important and recognizing when a report does not adhere to those standards will help students judge the accuracy of the news they see.

**Target audience:** English and Language Arts, Social Studies, Media Studies. Ages 11–14.

**Class time:** 45-60 minutes

**Student handouts:** Warm-Up Resource, "What's the Angle?" Informational article, "From Bias to Impartiality" Capture sheet, Check your media literacy assessment.

**Materials:** Computer or tablet with internet connection.

## Class structure and pacing

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1. 5 minutes Class warm-up activity
2. 15 minutes Informational article: "What's the Angle?" and discussion
3. 10 minutes *My World* video: "[Different Perspectives](#)"
4. 10 minutes Application activity "From Bias to Impartiality"

## Procedure

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1. Begin class with a role-playing activity involving weather reports with very different points of view. (See Student Handout: Warm-up Resource.) Follow the presentation by asking students what might have caused the reports to be so different despite containing the same factual predictions
2. Explain that by the end of this lesson, students will be able to:
  - **Understand how news consumers' understanding of people and events can be affected by reporting that is not impartial.**

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

**Understand** that news reports may contain a point of view or bias which affects consumers' perceptions of events and people.

**Analyze** techniques used in some media to promote a point of view.

**Detect** instances of biased reporting and draw conclusions about the motivations behind them.

**Explore** the standards of impartiality in journalism and why such standards are important.

### LESSON VOCABULARY

**biased** *adj.* expressing or containing bias—a favorable or unfavorable feeling or opinion about someone or something, similar to prejudice

**connotations** *n.* meanings that are associated with words or expressions in addition to their definitions

**cover story** *n.* a magazine article illustrated on the cover

**emphasis** *n.* stress or insistence that something is important

**impartial** *adj.* fair; neutral; treats all sides as equal

**medium** *n.* [*plural: media*] any one of the methods of communication, such as radio or newspapers

- **Identify common ways that a news report could fail to be impartial.**
- **Recognize instances of biased reporting and determine the idea or point of view behind such reports.**
- **Explain the importance of being impartial in news reports.**

3. Provide an overview of why and how bias may exist in news reports and media by having students read the informational article, "What's the Angle?" Options for instruction:

- **Direct students to read the article individually and then briefly discuss their reactions by posing questions about:**

- Students' awareness of their own biases
- Why impartiality in news reporting is important
- The challenges of reporting impartially
- Examples of the described signs of bias

- **Have the students read the article in small groups and discuss, within their groups, any questions or reactions they have.**

4. Present the *My World* video segment, "Different Perspectives," to explore the continuum of impartiality to bias on which news stories fall.

- **Before viewing the video, ask students to consider the impact of point of view on each news story clip they see and to score each one from 0, meaning "completely impartial," to 10 meaning "completely biased."**

- **Ask students to share their observations and why they scored the clip as they did. Average the scores for each clip to come up with the class result.**

5. Provide an opportunity for students to apply what they have learned about being impartial by revising the biased news reports on the handout, "From Bias to Impartiality." Make sure they understand that they are not limited to the one sentence when they change the biased news report into an impartial one.

6. Assess what students have learned and provide them a chance to express their views about the purpose and value of news media.

- **Direct students to complete the assessment handout.**
- **Allow students to consult their notes if needed for short answers.**

#### TIPS FROM

 Microsoft Education

**Create engaging learning experiences tied to this Lesson with the following free Microsoft Education tools:**

#### **Utilize Flipgrid with this Lesson**

For further discussion of focus questions, post the prompts and students can share their key learnings via [Flipgrid](#). Continue the conversation on Flipgrid!

#### **Facilitate collaborative learning**

Post warm up questions from the lesson into Teams and copy the guided practice into OneNote where students can collaborate, and seamlessly upload articles and videos to evaluate different types of news. Free education collaboration tools are at your fingertips with [Office 365](#).

## Extend and connect

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### ELEMENTARY/PRIMARY

*(ages 6–11)*

Explain that there are different ways to communicate the same facts. Read both weather reports from this lesson's "Warm-up Resource" to introduce the idea that a reporter's personal attitude about something can affect the reactions of those who read or hear a news report. Define biased and ask a volunteer to give biased descriptions of a type of pet, a popular movie or TV show, or a public figure. Ask the class why it is important for news stories to be impartial—the opposite of biased.

### HIGH SCHOOL/SECONDARY

*(ages 14–19)*

Examine the reasons that a news or media outlet—a particular newspaper, magazine, broadcast news, or radio show—might have to promote one view of an event or person over another. Ask students to consider financial reasons, including how that outlet makes money. Direct students to use the internet to research how several major media outlets are funded. Point out that impartial news organizations often acknowledge if they are affiliated with a company when reporting on it, in an effort to be transparent.

### EDUCATION STANDARDS

#### Media Literacy

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

ISTE 3d Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.

ISTE 6c Students communicate complex ideas clearly and effectively by creating or using a variety of digital objects such as visualizations, models or simulations.

#### CCSS English and Language Arts

##### Reading Information

RI.7.9 Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts.

RI.8.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

RI.8.9 Analyze a case in which two or more texts provide conflicting information on the same topic and identify where the texts disagree on matters of fact or interpretation.

#### CCSS Social Studies

RH.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

RH.6-8.8 Distinguish among fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment in a text.

RH.9-10.6 Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

## Directions

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Ask volunteers to present the following example weather reports or to make up their own. Even something with verifiable data, such as temperature and humidity, can be presented as clearly positive or negative depending on bias. Ask students to think of other situations where the same information could have drastically different interpretations.

*Positively Biased Weather Report:*

Reporter:

Well, folks, looks like we have another beautiful day for going to the pool or beach. With a predicted high of 95 degrees Fahrenheit, 35 Celsius, and not a cloud in sight, the water should feel perfect. Take advantage of this clear weather because, unfortunately, rain will arrive in a few days.

*Negatively Biased Weather Report:*

Reporter:

Well, folks, we've got another scorcher on our hands. With a predicted high of 95 degrees Fahrenheit, 35 Celsius, and not a cloud in sight, it could be dangerous to be outdoors. Be careful and stay inside as much as possible. Luckily, rain will bring cooler temperatures in a few days.

## What's the Angle?

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Every story and article is presented from a certain perspective, even if that perspective is just that all sides should be fairly presented.

Journalists strive to be **impartial** observers who relay an unbiased view to the audience or reader. Journalists realize that the perspective, or angle, used to relate a story or article affects what it communicates. If a writer's attitude towards a topic is favorable, that topic will be presented as good; if the attitude is unfavorable, the topic will be presented as bad. When news is presented in a way that reflects a certain attitude, the news is said to be **biased**.

**Why Does Bias Exist in the News?** Isn't the news supposed to be informative? Isn't informative writing different from persuasive writing? Yes and yes. However, news reports, whether they are written or broadcast, are rarely purely informative. That's because they originate with people.

Everyone has ideas about the world that affect how people, events, and other ideas are viewed. Most journalists attempt to present the news as impartially as they can, but consumers of the news must be aware that bias can creep into it. Sometimes, a biased news story is an accidental result of a journalist's personal views, and other times it is more deliberate.

Bias in the news has always existed. Whether it is accidental or deliberate, whether it reflects a journalist's attitudes or those of whoever owns the news outlet in which it appears, a biased report prevents news consumers from getting the whole story. Without the whole story, he or she cannot have accurate knowledge of what is happening in the world.

**How Do We Spot Bias?** It is impossible to deal with bias unless it is perceived. News consumers must be able to recognize bias when and where it exists and consider its effect on their reactions. Only then can they have a realistic idea of what is happening in the world.

The most common signs for detecting bias are:

**Language use:** A writer's word choices affect the impression a news story makes. Although politician and statesman are synonyms, they have very different **connotations**, as do *concise* and *curt*, *unaware* and *ignorant*. Impartial news stories use more neutral words.

### LESSON VOCABULARY

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**impartial** *adj.* fair; neutral; treats all sides as equal

**medium** *n.* [plural: *media*] any one of the methods of communication, such as radio or newspapers

**Emphasis:** Both the perception of how important a story is and what kind of impact it has are affected by the use of **emphasis**. A magazine's **cover story**, an article on a newspaper's front page, or a news segment early in a broadcast are perceived as more important than stories located elsewhere. In addition, the examples or details used to describe a person or event may stress either mainly pleasant or mainly unpleasant aspects.

**Omission:** If a news story leaves out important facts, there may be a reason other than space or time. Facts may be omitted that support a view of a person or event different from the view the included facts support.

**Photograph choice:** How individuals and events are visually portrayed can easily suggest things about them that may or may not be accurate. It is rare for only one photograph or film clip to be available. Again, choices are made about what to present.

**Limited sources:** When any news **medium** relies on one source or group of sources to the exclusion of others, it is unlikely that its stories are duly impartial. "Official" sources or spokespeople, whether they are tied to the government, a corporation, law enforcement, or any other established group, usually reflect the views of the group to which they are tied.

## From Bias to Impartiality

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**Directions:** The two reports below contain examples of language use, emphasis, and omission that result in biased coverage of a news event. Look for the bias in each report and then rewrite the coverage as impartially as possible.

Report A: Harlan Smith, who has long been at the helm of National Bank and Trust, was today badgered repeatedly by Senator Ruth Thomas, widely believed to have her eye on occupying the Oval Office, whose intrusive questions about private, internal bank matters were often greeted by shocked silence.

Report B: Harlan Smith, who oversees all operations at National Bank and Trust, which is suspected by federal law enforcement of having defrauded its customers by misrepresenting its interests, was today either unwilling or unable to answer many probing questions from Senator Ruth Thomas about secretive bank activities currently under investigation.

Impartial Coverage:

## From Bias to Impartiality - Answer Key

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Impartial Coverage:

**Model Answer:**

***Harlan Smith, CEO of National Bank and Trust, which is under investigation for possible misrepresentation of its interests, was questioned today by Senator Ruth Thomas. Senator Thomas asked a number of questions, not all of which were answered, about bank activities that had not previously been made public.***

1. A biased news report always fails to provide its audience with
  - a. accurate facts
  - b. an impartial view
  - c. in-depth coverage
  - d. believable information
  
2. What is a reason that due impartiality is not always achieved in news reporting?
  - a. Impartiality is not a goal of most journalists.
  - b. The length of news reports prevents telling both sides of a story.
  - c. It is difficult to differentiate between bias and impartiality in a news report.
  - d. A journalist may not always be aware of the effect of their point of view.

3. Identify three common signs used to detect bias in a news story.

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4. For each headline, identify what the story is likely to be about and the idea or view suggested by the headline.

Headline	Likely topic	Implied idea or view
High Court fails to protect artists' rights	_____	_____
	_____	_____
Unruly mob disrupts Senator's effort to talk to eager crowd	_____	_____
	_____	_____

5. **REFLECT** Think about the effects of biased reporting on someone's ability to understand accurately know what is happening in the world. Then write a paragraph about what you can do to counteract the impact of biased reporting.

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***Possible answers: language use, emphasis, omission, photograph choice, limited sources***

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Headline	Likely topic	Implied idea or view
High Court fails to protect artists' rights	<b><i>Model answers</i></b> <b><i>Topic: Something about rights</i></b>	<b><i>Implied: Court decision will hurt artists</i></b>
Unruly mob disrupts Senator's effort to talk to eager crowd	<b><i>Model answers</i></b> <b><i>Topic: A politician's speech</i></b>	<b><i>Implied: A small group of hooligans interfered with a larger group's right to hear a speech.</i></b>

5. **REFLECT** Think about the effects of biased reporting on someone's ability to understand accurately know what is happening in the world. Then write a paragraph about what you can do to counteract the impact of biased reporting.

***Model answer: I can be on the look-out for indications of bias in news stories I read or hear, determine what I am intended to infer from that story, and check other news outlets for indications that such an inference is or is not reasonable. I can be careful to get my news from a variety of outlets and try to take an impartial look at opposing views. Most importantly, I can give more weight to news that meets standards for impartiality and seek out more of such news outlets.***