

Lesson Title: Decoding Media Bias

Subjects

U.S. History, U.S. Government, Civics

Suggested Time

One to two 50-minute class periods

Grade Level

7-12

Essential Question

In what ways can the news media show bias?

Objective

To examine where people in the U.S. get their news, how news selection amplifies one's political views, and how media organizations decide to cover stories.

Overview

Students will view the *We The Voters* film “MediaOcracy,” and then examine current news stories and how they're covered by the three main cable news outlets. They will conclude by examining news stories for bias/point of view.

Materials

- *We The Voters* film, “MediaOcracy”
- Copies of Student Handout #1: Media Website Examination
 - CNN: <http://www.cnn.com>
 - Fox News: <http://www.foxnews.com>
 - MSNBC: <http://www.msnbc.com>

Procedure

Warm Up: Ask students: Where do you go to read the news? [If students state social media, where specifically? Whom do they follow? If students state TV, which programs?] Why do you go there? What other options do you have?

Film Viewing: Have students view the *We The Voters* film “MediaOcracy.” Discuss how their responses during the warm-up discussion may have aligned with the idea of “incestuous amplification” (selecting news sources to reinforce our own views) as defined in the film.

Media Website Examination: Have students complete Handout #1: Media Website Examination. Students will go to three cable news outlets and examine the top three home page and politics page news stories, including original and

aggregated pieces, focusing on headlines. Next, students will choose a topic addressed on all three networks and read a story from each network to examine for point of view. Have students look for a top-of-the-page topic that addresses politics or public policy. Discuss students' findings when finished. What facts were included in all three stories? Was there one news source that contained facts the other two did not? Why might that be? What did you notice about the language/word choice? Was there leading or subjective language to favor one point of view over another?

Extension Activities

1. News organizations have great power—deciding which topics are important enough to cover and where to position those topics within their newspaper, TV program, or website. People can also exercise power through the news stories they choose to engage with. Have students go to [Newsmap](http://newsmap.jp) <<http://newsmap.jp>> and examine the trending news stories. The larger the news story box, the more people are reading about the story. You can also choose specific topics by selecting the topic check boxes on the bottom. Discuss what this says about the informed status of the electorate.
2. Another option is to have students go to [All Sides](http://allsides.com) <<http://allsides.com>> to introduce them to news topics written in three distinct viewpoints: left, center, right. Discuss this as a tool to recognize bias. The site also serves as a resource that people can go to read something that may challenge their assumptions, and with which they may disagree, as suggested in the *We The Voters* film “MediaOcracy.”

Standards

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, connecting insights gained from specific details to an understanding of the text as a whole.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.3

Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.6

Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.7-12.8

Evaluate an author's premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.

Standards from Social Studies for the Next Generation: the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework

D2Civ.2.9-12 Analyze the role of citizens in the U.S. political system.

D2Civ.5.9-12 Evaluate citizens' and institutions' effectiveness in addressing social and political problems at the local, state, tribal, national, and/or international level.

D2Civ.9.9-12 Use appropriate deliberative processes in multiple settings.

D2Civ.14.9-12 Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.

National Standards for Civics and Government (Center for Civic Education)

Standard 11: Understands the role of diversity in American life and the importance of shared values, political beliefs, and civic beliefs in an increasingly diverse American society

Standard 19: Understands what is meant by “the public agenda,” how it is set, and how it is influenced by public opinion and the media.

Standard 20: Understands the role of political parties, campaigns, elections, and associations and groups in American politics.