



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 9 to 12
About the Author:	Adapted from <i>News is Not Just Black and White</i> , a workbook created by the Canadian newspaper Association (CAN)

Fact Versus Opinion

Overview

This is the fourth of five lessons designed to teach students to think critically about the way aboriginal peoples and visible minorities are portrayed in the press.

"Fact Versus Opinion" begins with students discussing the difference between fact and opinion. Students then apply what they have learned to an opinion piece selected by the teacher, and then an opinion piece that they have selected.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- recognize bias and value judgements in written work
- distinguish between fact and opinion
- understand the reasons why bias might occur in news reports
- understand the underpinnings of fact and of opinion

Preparation and Materials

- Select and photocopy a column, editorial, letter to the editor or opinion piece that deals with a diversity-related issue (i.e., immigration, recognizing religious holidays, funding for cultural festivals, multicultural funding).
- Make enough copies for the entire class.

If students don't have copies from previous lessons, photocopy the handouts:

- The Editorial Page (educational handout)
- Letter to the Editor (educational handout)

Note: As an optional warm-up activity to this lesson, have students complete the worksheet: *Wolves: Fact or Opinion?* and then compare their answers to the *Wolves: Fact or Opinion? Answer Sheet*.



Procedures

Introduction:

In order to break down stereotypes, people have to know the difference between what is true about an ethnocultural minority group and what is someone's opinion. Newspapers tend to contain both fact and opinion, often with little distinction between the two. Although the writer's opinion should never appear in a news story, it is allowed in other parts of the newspaper – in the editorial pages, columns, or letters to the editor. After working to distinguish between fact and opinion, students should be better equipped to reject stereotypes and educate themselves about the realities surrounding ethnocultural minority groups.

- Discuss the difference between fact and opinion, referring back to earlier handouts, The Editorial Page and Letter to the Editor.

Activity

- Distribute copies of the chosen "Opinion Piece"
- Ask students to try to separate the facts from the opinions:
 - What are the facts?
 - What are the opinions?
 - How can you tell them apart?
- Assign notetakers to write down all the facts on one side of the board, and all the opinions on the other.
- Work with the class to determine which facts are accurate, and based on a provable fact, and which are false, and based on an "opinion."

Assignment:

- Have students select a column, letter, or editorial of their own.
- For homework, students will deconstruct the opinion piece they have chosen based on the criteria above.

Evaluation

- Student analysis of an opinion piece.



The Editorial Page

The editorial page is one place in the newspaper where opinion is not only permissible, but encouraged. The editorial page is dominated by comment and analysis rather than objective reporting of factual information. It is here that the opinions of the newspapers editorial board are put forth in editorials and that readers can put forth their opinions in letters to the editor.

Opinions of newspaper staff members and outside correspondents appear in bylined columns, usually located on the facing page, called the "Op-Ed" page. The Op-Ed page also contains analysis and background pieces. At some newspapers the editorial and Op-Ed page may be combined.

A typical editorial page consists of the following items:

Editorials: although written by individuals, unsigned editorials reflect the corporate opinion of the newspaper's editorial board. The viewpoint expressed is usually the result of consensus among the editorial board members.

- Letters to the editor
- Editorial cartoon
- Columns
- Bylined pieces by newspaper staff.

Some newspapers divide this material between an editorial page and the Op-Ed page.

Purposes of the Editorial Page

The editorial page provides a forum for the opinions of readers and editorial staff in order to:

- provoke thought and discussion
- influence the actions of public officials
- campaign for reform and specific proposals
- provide background and analyze events
- serve as a community voice

Letters to the Editor

The letters section is the readers' forum. It gives readers space to react to domestic and foreign news, criticize or praise editorials and columns, question the judgment of editors, and offer personal comments on the human condition.

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NEWS:



**NOT JUST
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Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor:

I'm glad the editorial page of your newspaper gives people a chance to express their opinions, because today I have an opinion I want to share. It's about young people.

The ones I see don't appear to be contributing to our city or our Canadian culture. I'm getting tired of seeing them hanging around malls, smoking and getting in people's way. If they don't have money to shop, what are they doing there? On occasion, I've also seen store security leading them away for shoplifting. The ones who don't get caught only cause prices to rise for honest people like me. I have also heard about purse snatching and pick-pocketing by these young people occurring in the malls.

I don't want to pay health and education tax for their benefit. Why should I pay for their education? They could get a job and pay their own way, or get their relatives to help out.

I'm sick and tired of reckless skateboarders and roller bladers speeding irresponsibly on our sidewalks and roadways, causing accidents and injuring pedestrians. We have no interest in this, so why should we allow it here at all?

The young people I see hanging around the malls and arcades are not contributing to our society, unless you call the money they spend on junk food, trendy clothes and things to play with a contribution. In all likelihood, they aren't even spending their own money.

My final comment has to do with the future. If these people are just going to grow up and take our jobs why should we support them now? I say we do something, before the problem gets worse and keep things the way they are for adults.

Yours truly,
Sick and Tired

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NEWS:



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Wolves: Fact or Opinion?

Identify which of the following statements are facts, and which are opinions. How can you find out this information?

Statement	Fact or Opinion?	Why?
Wolves are sly, cunning and mean.		
Wolves live in packs or families.		
Some North American native people think that the wolf is brave, loyal and		
Wolves are carnivores.		
A wolf will only eat meat from a freshly killed animal.		
Wolves have supernatural powers.		
Wolves are very clever.		
Wolves are always hungry.		
Wolves will accept humans into their pack.		
Some Inuit people use wolves as work animals.		
Wolves can dig with their paws.		
Wolves will gang up on a member of their own pack.		
Wolves have a nine-week gestation period.		



Wolves: Fact or Opinion? Answer Sheet

This page clarifies which of the following statistics are facts, and which are only opinions.

Statement	Fact or Opinion?	Why?
Wolves are sly, cunning and mean.	Opinion	This statement makes a generalization about all wolves. It can be proven that most wolves do not exhibit these traits.
Wolves live in packs or families.	Fact	Animal-behaviour experts have observed that this is true.
Some North American native people think that the wolf is brave, loyal and intelligent.	Fact	Ethnologists know that in the traditional mythology and spiritual beliefs of First Nation Peoples, the wolf is portrayed as having these traits.
Wolves are carnivores.	Fact	The fact that wolves eat meat has been well documented.
A wolf will only eat meat from a freshly killed animal.	Opinion	This statement has been proven to be incorrect: ranchers often insert poison into carcasses and leave them for wolves.
Wolves have supernatural powers.	Opinion	This statement has been proven to be incorrect: ranchers often insert poison into carcasses and leave them for wolves.
Wolves are very clever.	Opinion	As a breed, the intelligence of wolves is well documented. However, some wolves may not be as clever as others.
Wolves are always hungry.	Opinion	Scientists have observed that wolves have to work very hard for their meals. On average, only one in ten chases is successful. However, this doesn't mean that wolves are always hungry.
Wolves will accept humans into their pack.	Opinion	Although there are many legends about humans joining wolf packs, this has never been proven. Therefore, this statement is an opinion.
Some Inuit people use wolves as work animals.	Fact	Anthropologists have observed that some Inuit people use wolves as work animals.
Wolves can dig with their paws.	Fact	Scientists and hunters have observed wolves digging out their dens.
Wolves will gang up on a member of their own pack.	Opinion	Some wolves have been observed ganging up on another member of the pack," or "Wolves will sometimes gang up on a member" would be more accurate ways of describing this observation.
Wolves have a nine-week gestation period.	Fact	The gestation period of wolves is a scientifically proven fact.

