

## Determining Fact, Opinion, and Bias Foundation Lesson

### About this Lesson

When students are reading text for synthesis, for research, or to accumulate any kind of information, they should determine the validity of the source by looking at the author’s use of fact and opinion and by evaluating the presence of bias in the text. This lesson helps students determine bias by identifying fact and opinion in a text.

Passages for LTF® lessons are selected to challenge students, while lessons and activities make texts accessible. Guided practice with challenging texts allows students to gain the proficiency necessary to read independently at or above grade level.

This lesson is included in Module 15: Issues and Assertions.

### Objectives

Students will

- analyze excerpts from a text to identify facts and opinion.
- determine the level of bias in a text.

### Level

Grades Six through Ten

### Connection to Common Core Standards for English Language Arts

LTF Foundation Lessons are designed to be used across grade levels and therefore are aligned to the CCSS Anchor Standards. Teachers should consult their own grade-level-specific Standards. The activities in this lesson allow teachers to address the following Common Core Standards:

Explicitly addressed in this lesson

| Code | Standard  | Level of Thinking | Depth of Knowledge |
|------|---|-------------------|--------------------|
| R.1  | Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it. Cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text. | Understand        | III                |
| R.6  | Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.   | Analyze           | III                |
| R.8  | Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, including the validity of the reasoning as well as the relevance and sufficiency of the evidence.                                | Evaluate          | III                |
| L.5  | Demonstrate understanding of word relationships and nuances in word meanings.   | Understand        | II                 |

|     |   |            |    |
|-----|---|------------|----|
| L.6 | Acquire and use accurately a range of general academic and domain-specific words and phrases sufficient for reading, writing, speaking, and listening at the college and career readiness level; demonstrate independence in gathering vocabulary knowledge when considering a word or phrase important to comprehension or expression. | Understand | II |
|-----|---|------------|----|

Implicitly addressed in this lesson

| Code | Standard   | Level of Thinking | Depth of Knowledge |
|------|--|-------------------|--------------------|
| L.1  | Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.   | Understand        | I                  |
| SL.1 | Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. | Understand        | II                 |

### LTF Skill Focus

The foundation for LTF English lessons is the Skill Progression Chart that identifies key skills for each domain, beginning with grade 6 and adding more complex skills at each subsequent grade level while reinforcing skills introduced at previous grade levels. The Skill Focus for each individual lesson identifies the skills actually addressed in that lesson.

| Levels of Thinking   |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| Remember   | Understand  | Apply      Analyze      Evaluate      Create               |
| Close Reading<br><i>written, spoken, and visual texts</i>  | Grammar<br><i>purposeful use of language for effect</i> | Composition<br><i>written, spoken, and visual products</i> |
| <b>Reading Strategies</b><br>Determining Audience<br>Determining Author's Purpose<br>Determining Fact and Opinion<br>Generalization<br>Inference |   |  |

### Connections to AP\*

When writing the synthesis question on the AP Language and Composition Exam, students are expected to be able to evaluate the validity of the sources they choose to use in their essays. The ability to detect bias in an article will help them with this task.

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### Materials and Resources

- copies of Student Activity

**Assessments**

The following kinds of formative assessments are embedded in this lesson:

- guided questions

**Teaching Suggestions**

Work through the activity with students; then assign a nonfiction article for students to read. Then, using the procedures outlined in this lesson, students should be able to determine how the writer uses facts and opinions and whether bias is present in the article.

**Answers****Activity One****First paragraph**

Opinions included in the first paragraph:

- *Reading for pleasure is a waste of time.*
- *...don't get to live in the real world*
- *...don't learn anything that is useful*
- *...boring*

There are no facts used in the paragraph.

*The writer is highly biased—the whole paragraph is opinion with no factual support. The opinions seem to be based on experience.*

**Second paragraph**

Opinions included in the second paragraph:

*I think that school uniforms would put a restriction on our creativity.*

*If we all wear the same thing we don't get to really see what people are like on the inside.*

*Clothes don't distract us from learning the studies we need to, it simply lets us inspire our imaginations and lights up our worlds.*

Facts used in the paragraph:

*Clothes give us expression and the ability to use color and patterns.*

*The first impression we get of people is usually clothes, facial expression and language.*

*Usually girly girls wear pink and frilly things. Skaters wear baggy pants and Goths usually wear black.*

*This writer is less biased than the first, but much of the paragraph is based on strong opinions. Once again, the opinions seemed to be based on personal experience, with some thoughtful cause and effect logic included.*

**Paired paragraphs**

Opinions

*Eating tomatoes is one of the best things you can do; beautiful; not only thrill your taste buds and brighten your plate*

Facts:

*red fruit; They help fight disease. Studies show that people who eat tomatoes, and lots of them, lower their risks of cancer because tomatoes contain lycopene, a powerful antioxidant.*

*The two paragraphs are exactly alike, containing both verifiable fact and personal opinion. The difference comes with the purpose of each writer. The first source, “Tomato Farmers of America,” is trying to persuade people to BUY a product, increasing profits. The second, the “doctor,” makes tomatoes seem attractive so his patients will be convinced to eat them—for their own sake, not for his. The doctor therefore has more ethos than the farmers and presents less bias.*

## Activity Two

**FACTS**—highlighted; **OPINIONS**—in the boxes

### Cell Phones Don’t Contribute to Learning

People are using cell phones everywhere, even in schools, leading some school systems to ban them during the academic day. “Cell phones don’t contribute to learning and are potentially a distraction,” says Thomas Sherman, Virginia Tech professor of education. “There are already enough distractions; there’s no need to add another.”

“Cell phones mediate or ‘stand between’ people,” he says. The words are sent but the non-verbal information is not. Some consider the voice tone, facial expression, and physical gestures as important to the meaning of a message as the words. When communication is frequently mediated, it is possible children will not learn these subtle aspects of communicating well. Today much communication is mediated with telephones, computer e-mail, and video. It is appropriate to limit this mediated communication with young children.

Modern cell phones are sophisticated devices that, like games, television sets, and computers, operate from screens. The idea of excessive “screen time” worries many educators. Children can spend two to four hours each day in front of screens. Much of this time has limited physical and mental activity. Often solitary entertainment screen time can occupy the majority of children’s out of school free time. Educators recommend that children engage in active play, read, play social board games, and fantasy play. “Screen time” should be limited.

Sherman listed a few other reasons for not having cell phones in school including that the ringing can be a distraction. Cell phones could contribute to social inequities creating a new level of “have/have-not” distinction. There may also be a “keep up with Jones” response as new and fancier phone technology comes along. Cell phones are small and getting smaller, thus, are easily lost and a potential target for theft.

“There are no good reasons for children to have cell phones,” he says. One of the reasons frequently given for youngsters to have cell phones is to allow them to be able to contact someone in an emergency. “But schools are safe places so emergencies don’t happen often,” Sherman says. “Schools are good about recognizing emergencies and making the appropriate contacts. Besides, it is not good to give children the impression schools are unsafe—exactly the opposite of the truth.

“There really are no clear learning related uses,” Sherman says, “and several disadvantages.”

It also is not accurate for families to think that the cell phone is making it easier for daily planning. Sherman suggested that waiting until the last minute to make plans—thus necessitating a call to the child—is a poor model for children. It is a better model for children to be learning to plan and study with a longer perspective. Parents should keep children informed and within a well planned context.

“Young students don’t need this electronic tether to home and parents. They should learn to make decisions and experience the consequences. If children can’t make, on their own, the decisions needed at school, they may never learn to be independent thinkers. We just don’t need to be so ‘connected,’” Sherman says.

3. *Tone: The prevailing tone of the opinions is negative, suggested by words such as “don’t contribute,” “distraction,” “may inhibit,” “stand between,” “will not learn,” “limited,” “inequities,” “no good reasons,” “may never learn.”*
4. *Author: The author is a researcher at Virginia Tech and interviewed a professor at Virginia Tech.*
5. *Bias: The professor’s experience with cell phones in the classroom may have been negative.*
6. *The writer is intentionally biased because there is only one side presented—only one professor was interviewed.*
7. *The article clearly gives one perspective, but the bias is too strong to be taken at face value without seeking out another opinion.*

### Reading and the Cell Phone: An Up and Coming Romance

Terence W. Cavanaugh

*In this article, Dr. Cavanaugh stretches our notions of literacy by providing examples of how technology, in this case cell phones, can be used for reading and writing.*

Cell phones and schools are not usually associated together, at least not in a good way. But this form of technology is one that has been undergoing great leaps and improvements, and perhaps one day soon teachers will be reprimanding students for forgetting to bring their cell phones to class, or teachers will be listening to excuses from the student who didn’t complete his reading homework because the phone battery was recharging.

Today cell phones seem to be everywhere and in nearly every hand. And before anyone dismisses the idea of using cell phones for reading, consider how readily available these tools are. The digital natives of today, also known as a member of the Millennial Generation, seem to have been born with a cell phone, to the extent that in 2003, over 43% of school aged children owned at least one wireless device (Patrick 2004). Breaking down that statistic you will find that in 2003, 70% of middle and high school students and 61% of upper elementary students had cell phones (Branigan 2004), and the numbers have only been growing since then.

First let’s think about the phone. Today’s cell phones have a number of interesting functions and abilities beyond just voice communication. One factor of the constant technology growth is that today’s better cell phones actually have the computing power of a mid 1990s personal computer (Prensky 2004). Now, a number of cell phones also have the ability to use removable memory cards, which can be used in the phone and in a computer. Almost all cell phones now can send and receive text messages, do note-taking (as voice or text), have calendars, and the ability to

play games – which actually means that they can run additional software programs. Some phones have abilities which are becoming more common, such as being able to browse the Internet or play MP3s.

What does this have to do with reading? Well for one thing, students are already reading their phones: texting or messaging has become a common tool for students. What I’m suggesting is that teachers start thinking about using the communication tools that students already have, are using, and are quite comfortable with. Let’s start having our students use their cell phone also as a reading tool – Books on Phone. One of the early cell phone books to receive a lot of attention was written by an author in Japan named Yoshi, who self-published a book titled *Deep Love* as a serialized book that was distributed as downloadable text files to be read on cell phones (Steuer 2004). Within three years of its release the cell phone book’s download site had accumulated over 20 million hits, being very popular with female teen readers.

Already there are a wide variety of book types available for cell phones, including non-fiction, poetry, graphic novels, short stories, and whole novels. For the cell phone, these electronic books break down into three basic formats: audiobook, web book, and Java book.

In some ways the modern cell phone is like the VCR of yesteryear—remember the flashing clock that perhaps you or your parents couldn’t get to stop. Enter the digital native: children took to VCRs and cable television programming and used them with what seemed like instinct. Today cell phones occupy a similar niche in the technology environment, so if you really want to know what your cell phone can do, sit with a teenager and get him or her to take you through step by step some of the options and abilities of your phone.

3. *Tone: The tone of the few opinions is neutral. There is little or no connotative diction used.*
4. *Author: The author of the article is a professor at the University of North Florida.*
5. *The author may or may not be writing from experience. It is obvious from the references that he has researched the subject.*
6. *There is very little bias present; the article is predominantly factual.*
7. *The writer can be trusted—he seems to have no “agenda” other than to make a suggestion for teachers to try something new.*

## Determining Fact, Opinion, and Bias Foundation Lesson

Read the definitions below:

**Fact:** a piece of information presented as having an objective reality; knowledge or information based on real occurrences

**Opinion:** a view, judgment, or appraisal formed in the mind about a particular matter; a belief or judgment that rests on grounds insufficient to produce complete certainty

**Bias:** an inclination of temperament or outlook, *especially* a personal and sometimes unreasoned judgment

Ways that bias may be created:

- the writer has incomplete information
- the writer is deliberately trying to persuade the audience
- the writer's experience is influencing the writer's attitude

### Determining fact, opinion, and bias in a nonfiction article

1. Underline the facts in the article. Can they be validated?
2. Circle the opinions.
3. Looking at the opinions, what is the prevailing tone? Is it positive or negative?
4. What do you know about the writer of the article?
5. How might experiences or objectives "color" this writer's opinions?
6. Do you think the writer intentionally uses bias to persuade, or it is unintentional?
7. How biased is the article? Can the writer be trusted, or is the bias too strong for a clear understanding of the topic?

### Activity One

Read the following paragraphs, and then try to determine whether there is bias, using the information, questions, and suggestions from above. If so, what might be creating the bias?

Reading for pleasure is a waste of time. People who spend hour upon hour reading don't get to live in the real world. They don't really learn anything that is useful about how to deal with everyday people and problems. Plus, teachers always make us read things that are boring.



Parents always talk about how if schools had uniforms, everything would be so much easier. You wouldn't get caught up on looks and would learn the skills you need. I disagree with this, I think that school uniforms would put a restriction on our creativity. We dress the way we do for a certain reason. Clothes give us expression and the ability to use color and patterns. The first impression we get of people is usually clothes, facial expression and language. If we all wear the same thing we don't get to really see what people are like on the inside. Usually girly girls wear pink and frilly things. Skaters wear baggy pants and Goths usually wear black. Clothes don't distract us from learning the studies we need to, it simply lets us inspire our imaginations and lights up our worlds.—*Anonymous writer on TeenInk.com*

Read the next two examples. Is there bias in both? Is it perceived in the same way? Why or why not?

Eating tomatoes is one of the best things you can do. These beautiful, red fruit not only thrill your taste buds and brighten your plate, they help fight disease. Studies show that people who eat tomatoes, and lots of them, lower their risks of cancer because tomatoes contain lycopene, a powerful antioxidant.—*Tomato Farmers of America*

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## **Activity Two**

Read the articles “Cell Phones Don't Contribute to Learning” and “Reading and the Cell Phone: An Up and Coming Romance.”

Complete the bias activity for those two pieces and then answer the following question.

Which article is more **reliable**?