

Quality of Information: Point of View and Bias

Fast Facts

Curriculum Area: Social Studies
Grade Level: Grade Five
Suggested Duration: Two 50-minute Class Periods

Stage 1 Desired Results

Established Goals

GLE 5.1.2 Students will assess the quality of information, especially the embedded values of the author, in a piece of historical fiction.

GLE 5.2.2 identify stereotypes of Indian people based on perceived group characteristics and know the misconceptions.

Library Media 1.B 8.4

RDG 5, B 8.3; GLE 5 Students will utilize a new critical reading skill to assess information quality. They will read to detect bias in historical fiction.

Understandings

- People view and report historical events differently (GLE 5.2)
- Sometimes an author may write from a point of view that shows a bias toward an individual or a group. The bias shown may be unintended, but its effects can be negative (GLE 5.2.2).
- Sometimes Indian people have been stereotyped or described in a negative way; such biased points of view give information and create misconceptions (GLE 5.2.2).
- Students can assess the quality of any piece of writing for bias and its effects. Good readers assess information quality every time they read (RDG 8 B 8.5)

Essential Questions

- What is meant by “quality of information”?
- What do you think is meant by “embedded values of the author”?
- What points of view are shown in this piece of literature? What is meant by “author’s point of view”?
- What is bias? What biases are shown here? What are stereotypes? Are there any in this selection? If so, what are they?
- What other points of view are left out? How can the reader tell what has been left out?



Quality of Information: Point of View and Bias – Grade Five

- What misconceptions and/or biases can you spot in this story? Are these negative or positive in nature? How do these misconceptions/biases/stereotypes limit understanding of Indian identity?
- On a scale of 1 to 10 (with 10 being the indicator for excellent information) how would you score the ‘quality of information’ in this story? Why?
- If quality of information is the most important element to be considered in this lesson, how could the author improve the story?

Students will be able to...

- define quality of information and give an example from the story.
- define what is meant by “author values” as these are shown in the story.
- research the author’s background to determine the person’s validity in writing about the particular topic. In this section, does the author appear to have appropriate information and background to write appropriately about the topic?
- define bias and show examples from the selection and/or give examples of stereotypes found in the selection.
- list other groups and individuals in the story who probably have other points of view, and explore these points of view.
- evaluate the quality of information given in this selection based on what they have learned about bias, point of view, stereotypes, and their effects.

Stage 2 Assessment Evidence

Performance Tasks

1. Students research an author’s background experiences to determine whether he/she is qualified writer on the particular topic or subject. They apply the steps of an inquiry process, especially as they locate and evaluate author information and gather and synthesize the information (GLE 5).
2. Students know the characteristics of quality of information and utilize these as they read a story. They detect bias and stereotypes in selections and articulate other possible points of view (GLE 7/8:2).
3. Students self-regulate their own reading performance and know how/when to evaluate for quality of information and bias (RDG 2, GLE 7/8: 4.5).
4. Students identify biases which contribute misinformation in the selection; they identify other possible points of view (for example, Indigenous perspectives) which were left out of the selection.

Stage 3 Learning Plan

Learning Activities

W= Students receive the assignment and expectations, including the list of vocabulary and concepts they are expected to know, the Essential Questions, Understandings, and the materials they need to complete their work.

H= Teacher and students discuss the big ideas and Essential Questions. These Essential Questions may have more than one answer, depending on viewpoints expressed.

E= Teacher guides discussion and analytic activities, ensuring that students as a group, and in discussion, (a) identify factual errors, (b) point of view given, (c) points of view left out. In a second discussion, review what students have learned, before having students (d) identify possible biases and stereotypes in the story; finally, students (e) critique author's background.

R= Students offer their own opinions, based on their investigation of the author and story elements; they discuss their findings with other learners; the purpose is to learn more, and where necessary, revise their efforts, based on their understandings.

E= Students evaluate their own findings, based on what the class as a whole has determined. Each should write or tell his/her opinion in a reflection of what has been learned about determining the quality of information in a story. (If written, this can be in a journal or notes—but it should be retained by the student as a part of work efforts on this assignment).

T= Students who are not able to complete all features of the assignment (they may have an IEP, for example) should listen to the story, and could be paired with others, based on their different needs and abilities. The IEP guides selection of the student's assignment.

O= Students will complete the activities in two class periods (about 50 minutes each); this should keep student engagement and learning high. Discussion (Essential Questions, initially, and ensuing discussion may take one other class period). Extend the information they have learned to their personal reading (their library selections, for example).

MONTANA CONNECTION: Seaman's Journal takes the reader through Montana, using tribes and locations, which make this a good book to use.

This lesson builds on lessons which begin in grade one, when students learn how to identify fact and fiction. In grade two, students continue to learn to identify fact, fiction, and start to learn about accuracy as related to stories. In grade three, students begin evaluating the quality of information (e. g., accuracy, relevance, fact, or fiction) in group discussions and individually. In grade four students continue to evaluate information quality, and learn that people view and report historical events differently. In grades five and six students continue to hone their skills regarding quality of information. By grades seven and eight students are ready to extend their understanding about the quality of

Quality of Information: Point of View and Bias – Grade Five

information and its intended and unintended effects when misconceptions, false information, bias, stereotypes, and the like are perpetuated.

The portrayal of American Indians in curriculum to this point has been presented from a particular perspective, but not usually the perspectives of American Indians.

Personal identity and tribal identity suffer when stereotypes, biases, and distorted points of view are present, even when these are unintended.

Teachers should utilize the background knowledge of students to identify what they already know about quality of information, stereotypes, and bias.

Utilize the definitions included with this lesson, carefully defining these and ensuring that students know the vocabulary and concepts. Students may be able to give examples of bias from their own experiences.

Introduce the selection, and explain this is a selection which requires their critical reading skills. This selection is being utilized because it presents an opportunity to learn how to assess quality of information—a valuable, critical reading skill.

This could take a few class periods. Ideally, the grade five teacher should plan to utilize the 90 minutes of reading, and also the social studies time for the day; time to think and respond maximizes the impact of this lesson.

Ensure that students discuss and then write their individual responses, using complete sentences. Time for reflection is essential.

Talk about other books in the library that can be used to hone these skills. Make sure you have alerted the librarian or your library service so books can be reserved for student check out.

Essential Understanding 6:

(OPI / Indian Scholars Collaboration)

Much of our history has been told from one perspective. Only until very recently have American Indians begun to write about and retell history from an Indigenous perspective.

Books such as *Lies My Teacher Told Me* by Loewen expose the underlying bias that exists within much of our history curriculum by leaving certain voices out of the stories. In examining current curriculum content, it is important to keep the following in mind:

Children’s history books use terms such as “westward expansion” and “Manifest Destiny” to describe what would be more accurately called ethnic genocide. These Books alternately portray Indians as “noble savages,” “faithful Indian guides,” or “sneaky savages” who lead “ambushes” and “massacres” while in contrast, cavalrymen fight “brave battles.” These books

Quality of Information: Point of View and Bias – Grade Five

propagandize the “glory and honor” of taking land and oppressing native people for European purposes that are portrayed as holy and valid [Loewen 1996].

Specific Examples of Bias in Seaman’s Journal (note the book does not contain page numbers and references to bias are made according to the dates and locations mentioned):

- Open the book and have students look at the map. (sometimes bias can be more about what is not included or represented) American Indian nations are invisible – except for those highlighted as encountering Lewis and Clark along their journey.
- Ask students what they know about the Louisiana Purchase. Why might some American Indians view this as the largest real estate swindle in world history? Did the American Indian nations included within the Louisiana Purchase benefit or receive money from sale of their land? Point out this land was sold under the assumption that European nations had the right to claim land that was already occupied regardless of what the Native inhabitants thought or said.
- Inside cover third paragraph states: “Seaman tells of his love for Sacajawea, the Shoshone woman whose husband was interpreter and guide, and her baby whom Clark nicknamed ‘Pomp.’” Ask students if they notice anything about this statement. In reality, Sacajawea was also utilized as an interpreter and guide but this statement fails to mention that fact.
- The last paragraph contains a sentence referring to the plants they “discovered” – mention that most of these plants were already well known by many of the Indian peoples Lewis and Clark encountered. They were only unknown to this particular group of travelers.
- Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, August 1803 – “Corps of Discovery” again bring up issue of discovery for whom.
- Camp Along The Missouri River, May 22, 1804 – Kickapoos are mentioned. Ask students how many tribal nations encountered Lewis and Clark on their journey. Over 50 tribes were encountered – in the United States we have over 500 different tribal nations.
- Missouri River, North of Platte River, August 1804 – ask students about the following sentence: “Lewis spoke of peace and explained that the French and Spanish had sold the land to a ‘new Great Father,’ the president of the United States” (as if there was an “old Great Father”). – What does this imply? Ask students if they think the two tribes mentioned got to have any say in whether or not they wanted their lands sold. – Also note the graphic at the bottom of the page – labeled as Indian beadwork – would have been better if the author specifically mentioned which tribe this beadwork came from instead of using the generic term Indian.
- Big Sioux River, August 25, 1804 – Once again the author should have been tribal specific instead of saying “We heard an Indian legend...” which tribe?
- Off Teton River, September 1804 – Point out to students that the word Sioux is actually not what the Teton Lakota historically referred to themselves. Sioux is actually a derogatory term used by the Ojibway (historical enemies of the Lakota) to refer to the Lakota – It means treacherous enemy or snake like. French fur trappers initially interacting with the Lakota picked up this term from the Ojibway and that is how that name came into use. Note: many tribal nations are reclaiming their own names; i.e., The Devils Lake Sioux Tribe now call themselves Spirit Lake Dakota.

Quality of Information: Point of View and Bias – Grade Five

- Other examples of bias – makes assumption that the Lakota only have bad manners. Last sentence is problematic. “The Sioux eat dogs!” There was and still is (conducted by only a few people in very spiritual ceremonies) the eating of dog. The book could mention that some cultures view the eating of cow as disgusting; i.e., Hindu’s view the cow as a sacred animal and would not think of eating beef.
- Village Of The Arikaras, October 9, 1804 – Use of the term “servant” instead of the more accurate “slave” in reference to York. York was promised his freedom after the journey but never got it.
- Fort Mandan, December 25, 1804 – “Even the Mandans danced.” Somehow assumes the Mandans did not usually dance. Singing and dancing (for fun and for ceremony) was a big part of Mandan life.
- Bitterroot Mountains, October 9, 1805 – There is no tribe called the Flatheads. There is the Flathead Reservation with Salish, Kootenai, and Pend d’Oreille Tribes. Also note the graphic with the label “Flathead.”

Note: It is important to point out the issue that the bias contained within this story is unintended. The author was just writing from a particular point of view (in this case, attempting to write a cute story from the perspective of the dog).

Guided practice:

- Have students review and present their findings: Oral and/or written presentations to the class.
- Students could make use of scanners or digital cameras and PowerPoint (or similar program) to make their presentations. Bias text could be digitized for easier presentation format. Images also could be imported into Word documents.

Assessment

Facilitate a class discussion around the bias contained within Seaman’s Journal.

Have individual/small group presentations/discussions.

Students could check out library books with American Indian themes and review for bias – i.e., *Indian In The Cupboard* by Lynn Reid Banks is full of biased language.

Summary paper of books/materials reviewed and results.

Have students rewrite biased statements.

Assessment is an ongoing process, students will be aware of language bias in curriculum and should be able to point out future instances in other curricular areas.

Quality of Information: Point of View and Bias – Grade Five

Vocabulary/Concepts

accuracy in information, author's values, bias, embedded values, fiction, information quality, misconception, stereotype(s)