

Quality of Information: Point of View and Bias

Fast Facts

Curriculum Area: Social Studies
Grade Level: 6-8
Suggested Duration: Two to three 50-minute class periods

Stage 1 Desired Results

Established Goals

Social Studies

The history content standards for sixth through eighth grade are that each student will:
(f) understand that there are multiple perspectives and interpretations of historical events;
(g) analyze how people's perspectives shaped the historical narratives they created;
(h) identify limitations and biases in primary and secondary sources, specifically regarding misinformation and stereotypes.

English Language Arts

Key Ideas and Details

Determine a theme or central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details and provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions or judgments. (RL.6.2)

Craft and Structure

Explain how an author develops the point of view of the narrator or speaker in a text. (RL.6.6)

Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Analyze how a modern work of fiction draws on themes, patterns of events, or character types from myths, traditional stories, or religious works such as the Bible, including describing how the material is rendered new and include texts by and about American Indians. (RL.8.9)

Understandings

History is a story most often related through the subjective experience of the teller. With the inclusion of more and varied voices, histories are being rediscovered and revised. History told from American Indian perspectives frequently conflicts with the stories mainstream historians tell. (EU6)

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?
- What misconceptions and/or biases can you spot in this story? Are these negative or positive in nature? How do these misconceptions, biases, and 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 the term “author’s values” and explain where this is shown in the text.
- 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 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.
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.
3. Students self-regulate their own reading performance and know how/when to evaluate for quality of information and bias.
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.
5. Students demonstrate their understandings via oral and/or written assignments.

Stage 3 Learning Plan

Learning Activities

Lesson components: define vocabulary, teacher guided review of the book *Seaman's Journal*, students conduct their own book analysis and report their findings.

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

Historically, the portrayal of American Indians in curriculum has been presented from a non-Indian perspective, but progress has been made with the increasing number of books written by American Indian authors.

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 by carefully defining them and ensuring that students know the vocabulary and concepts. Students may be able to give examples of bias from their own experiences.

First, discuss the assignment and expectations, including the list of vocabulary. The following vocabulary list will be shared on the Smart Board or can be an assignment for the students to define on their own: accuracy in information, author's values, bias, embedded values, fiction, information quality, misconception, stereotype(s). After students define the words facilitate a class discussion to reinforce their understandings of the vocabulary words.

Following the review of the vocabulary words, the teacher and students discuss the big ideas and Essential Questions. These Essential Questions may have more than one answer, depending on viewpoints expressed.

Guided review of *Seaman's Journal*

Utilize the examples of bias included in this lesson plan. Teacher guides discussion and analytic activities, ensuring students as a group, and in discussion, identify (a) 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.

After the guided discussion, students offer their own opinions, based on their investigation of the author and story elements then they discuss their findings with other learners. The purpose is to learn more, and, where necessary, revise their efforts, based on their understandings.

Students evaluate their own findings; this will be done with the entire class. Each student should write an opinion reflection of what has been learned regarding 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).

Students who are not able to complete all features of the assignment should listen to the story, and could be paired with others, based on their different needs and abilities.

Now, introduce the selection and explain this will require 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.

Teacher will facilitate a class review of *Seaman's Journal*. Ideally, you would do a read aloud of this book before examining it for bias. Examples of bias within the text have been included in this lesson. These excerpts could be displayed for the whole class and/or you could provide print copies for students.

Have students answer the Essential Questions and ensure students discuss and then write their individual responses, using complete sentences. Time for reflection is essential.

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 a few of those highlighted as encountering Lewis and Clark along their journey. The map on the back cover has even fewer.
- 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.
- Front inside dust 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 of the dust cover 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,” “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”]. – Ask the students what this implies and 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 – It 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 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 such as The Devils Lake Sioux Tribe now call themselves Spirit Lake Dakota.
- Other examples of bias – makes assumption the Lakota only have bad manners. The 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; 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.” – This implies 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 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

Students will complete their own bias review activities in two to three class periods (about 50 minutes each). Extend the information they have learned to their personal reading (their library selections, for example).

Students will check out library books with American Indian themes and review for bias. *Indian In The Cupboard* by Lynn Reid Banks is full of biased language and might be another good book to use as an example with students. Please refer to the resource called *A Broken Flute: The Native Experience in Books for Children* for a critical review of *The Indian in the Cupboard*.

Suggest these topics for book reviews: Columbus, Thanksgiving, and Lewis and Clark.

Encourage students to review children’s books with older publication dates.

- Have students review and present their findings as oral and/or written presentations to the class.

- Have students utilize the Resource Evaluation Checklist for Educators in their review of books.
- 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.
- Make sure you have alerted the librarian or your library service so books can be reserved for student check out.

Assessment

- ✓ Participation in class discussion regarding the bias contained within Seaman's Journal.
- ✓ Individual/small group presentations/discussions.
- ✓ Summary 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.

Vocabulary/Concepts

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

Resources

Seaman's Journal: On the Trail with Lewis & Clark by Patricia Reeder Eubank (2010)

A Broken Flute: The Native Experience in Books for Children by Doris Seale and Beverly Slapin (2005). This book was sent by the Office of Public Instruction to all public school libraries. It is an excellent resource to use for examining bias. This book deals with the issue of cultural accuracy in books for children and evaluates hundreds of books for children and teenagers published from the early 1900s-2004.

[American Indians in Children's Literature](#)

[Essential Understandings Regarding Montana Indians](#)

[Essential Understandings Key Concepts](#)

[Evaluating American Indian Materials and Resources for the Classroom](#)

RESOURCE EVALUATION CHECKLIST FOR EDUCATORS

Title of Resource: _____
Type of Resource: _____ Fiction: ____ Non-Fiction: ____
Publisher or Web site: _____ Publication Date: _____
Creator (author, illustrator, director): _____

General Questions

1. Which tribe or tribes are identified in this resource?
2. If the creator of this resource is not a tribal member, were tribal members, cultural committees, or knowledgeable experts consulted about the American Indian content in this resource?
3. Has this resource been reviewed by a tribal cultural committee, tribal historian, or other well qualified reviewer?
4. Is there anything about this resource that leads you to question the validity, accuracy, or authenticity of the information it presents about American Indians?

What to watch out for: Does the resource...

- ___ mix and match cultural attributes or characteristics from different tribes?
- ___ feature generic "Indians" or a vague "Native American" identity?
- ___ imply all indigenous peoples from North America have the same language, culture, history, spiritual traditions, or way of life?
- ___ promote stereotypes or caricatures of American Indian people, tribes, or cultures?
- ___ imply American Indian people or cultures are inferior or bad?
- ___ use biased language to create prejudiced impressions of indigenous people or cultures?
- ___ perpetuate blatant inaccuracies about American Indian people, histories, or cultures?
- ___ omit, avoid, or minimize indigenous histories, people, or experiences?
- ___ imply that all American Indians and/or indigenous cultures are identical or extinct?
- ___ present only a non-Indian point-of-view of history or events?
- ___ mention only American Indians who were useful to Europeans or Euro-Americans?
- ___ avoid controversial or complex issues or gloss over harm inflicted by the policies, non-Indian citizens, military, or government of the United States?
- ___ deny or seek to undermine tribal sovereignty, cultural self-worth, or linguistic value?
- ___ contain any material that would shame or embarrass an American Indian student?
- ___ contain any material that would cause any student to think American Indians or indigenous cultures are inferior, bad, or unimportant?

What to include: Does the resource...

- correctly locate and identify tribes?
- acknowledge the cultural, physical, and linguistic diversity between tribes?
- present information about American Indians respectfully and accurately?
- acknowledge tribal sovereignty and promote a better understanding of the unique relationship between tribes and the federal government?
- recognize and honor the intrinsic value of indigenous cultures as well as the importance of continued cultural and linguistic survival?
- acknowledge indigenous contributions to American society, history, politics, and culture?
- include American Indian perspectives and experiences in a respectful manner?
- address controversial or complex subjects by giving equal voice to all sides, including American Indian people?
- depict the cultural, religious, political, and economic diversity among present-day American Indians?
- recognize and honor contemporary and/or historical American Indians who are heroes or heroines within their own tribes?
- portray American Indian people as intelligent, capable, trustworthy, and caring human beings?
- nurture cultural and personal pride in American Indian students?
- provide positive American Indian role models for all students?
- encourage all students to respect American Indian people, histories, and cultures?
- inspire all students to learn more about American people, histories, and cultures?