

CONSTRUCTING MEDIA BIAS

LESSON PLAN



LESSON PLAN: CONSTRUCTING MEDIA BIAS



Activity: Creating a Story

Goal: Groups of students will work together to create a news story using a series of possible options for each of the components of an article. The activity will demonstrate that different groups, using completely factual information, can generate different stories on the same subject through the choices they make about what to include and exclude from their constructed narrative. Groups will also be given different “priorities” for their narratives to inform their decision-making.

Procedures (15-20 minutes):

1. Place participants in five or six groups.
2. Display Attachment 1.
3. Tell each group that they will be acting as a team of journalists at a news organization. Their job will be to use the available information to fulfill each requirement of a news article. They will have to make critical decisions about what information to include and what information to exclude. They must also meet the demands of their editors and be able to explain how their finished article meets those demands.
4. Display Attachment 2 and explain that it is the template for their article.
5. Distribute Attachment 3 and explain that the text on this page is the only information they can use for each section of the template. They may include only one option from each category to complete their article.
6. Give each group a number (one through six). Explain that the number they are given matches the demand of their editor, as shown on Attachment 1. They must prioritize this editorial demand in the article they create and be able to justify how their article addresses that demand.
7. Pair groups by number: 1+2 / 3+4 / 5+6. Ask a member of each group to read their article aloud. Then, instruct groups to discuss the differences in their choices. How did the editor’s demands influence your decisions? How did those demands account for the different impressions left by the two stories?

ATTACHMENT 1

- You are a team of journalists at a news organization.
- You are tasked with writing an article for publication.
- You will draft the article by making judgments about what information to include and what information to leave out.
- You must fulfill every requirement of the article according to the template.
- Ink isn't cheap, so you have a word limit! You may not use more than one piece of information for each requirement.
- You also report to an editor. Your editor has a priority for your publication and you must be able to explain how your article address that priority:
 1. Pure information/neutrality
 2. Emphasize personality and sensation (exciting events, catchy statements, etc.)
 3. Portray officials from the Orange Party positively/Purple Party negatively
 4. Portray officials from the Purple Party positively/Orange Party negatively
 5. Promote a pro-nuclear power message
 6. Promote an anti-nuclear power message

TITLE

EXPOSITION

QUOTE 1

QUOTE 2

COMMENTARY

ATTACHMENT 3

Directions: Make a checkmark next to your group's choice for each category to form your story. Remember your editor's priority!

Title:

1. "City moves to approve construction of nuclear power plant"
2. "Duck and cover? City approves the nuclear option"
3. "City's nuclear power plant to bring 400 jobs"

Exposition:

1. Last night, the city council voted in a narrow 6-5 decision to approve the construction of a local nuclear power plant. City officials were met with protesters who fear the ecological and security dangers that the nuclear plant could represent. Many city officials had long pursued the contract's approval but others raised alarms over the idea of a facility that generates nuclear waste being so close to residents.
2. A measure for the construction of a nuclear power plant won a majority of votes in the city council last night. Although a small number of protesters stood outside city hall, representatives from the local construction workers and electricians unions cheered the measure as a job creator.
3. Last night, the city council voted along party lines in a 6-5 decision to approve the construction of a local nuclear power plant. Leading up to the vote, demonstrators both in favor and in opposition of the measure stood outside city hall. Protesters cited environmental and security concerns, while supporters cheered the potential for job creation.

Quote 1:

1. Mayor Smith joined his fellow Purple Party councilmembers in celebrating the measure's approval. "We are moving our city into an era of cleaner energy and economic growth with this vote," he said. "Technological improvements have made nuclear energy a safe and efficient energy option and the high-tech and industrial demands of the plants construction will represents hundreds of jobs for this community."
2. Councilwoman Mary Thomas (Purple), who led the charge for the measure's approval, called the vote "a step toward the future." "Environmental regulations led to the closure of the coal plant ten years ago, costing this community hundreds of jobs and millions of dollars in revenue," she said. "Nuclear power offers a safe, efficient, and clean alternative, that's a fact. If the facts aren't good enough for my Orange friends on the council, I don't know what would be."
3. Councilman Jeff Martin (Orange) addressed protesters gathered outside City Hall shortly after the vote. "It is a sad day for this city. Mayor Smith and the other Purples on the council have voted for corporate interests over the health and safety of this community," he said. "Chernobyl. Three Mile Island. Fukushima. This is not a collection of random accidents. This is a pattern. We may have lost this battle tonight, but we will continue to fight to keep this community clean, secure, and safe for our children's futures."

Quote 2:

1. Addressing criticism, Eric Michaels, a spokesperson for United Energy, the recipient of the contract, said, "I understand the objections but I feel they are overstated. I hear people talk about the tragedy at Fukushima and they're right to be concerned. But the technology has improved, the standards have been updated. Beyond that, look, this site is not on a fault line or in a tsunami zone. The danger just isn't there."
2. Joan Allen, chief regulator at the state Department of Energy, had been following the vote closely. "As someone who will actually be responsible for inspecting these facilities, I've had a vested interest in watching this debate," she said. "Speaking as someone who has worked in the energy industry for 20 years, I have to say there isn't really a perfect answer on this. Is there no danger whatsoever? Of course not. We're talking about the most powerful man-made force on this Earth. But on the other hand, we're talking about a technology which for over 60 years and across over 400 facilities has only had three known failures. That's a pretty good record."
3. Purple Councilman Tom Roberts dismissed the concerns raised by protesters as "nonsense." He addressed them directly after the vote, calling them "fanatics." "You all stand there and point fingers but regulations and environmentalists have cost this community dearly. It's time to move forward and stop all this hand-wringing." Roberts' statements were met with jeers and boos from the crowd. One protester even attempted to hurl a water balloon filled with green slime, which burst on the podium.

Commentary:

1. For detractors of the plant's construction, all hope may not be lost. The National Council for Environmental Protection (NCEP) intends to sue the city to halt construction of the plant and has already begun efforts to lobby Governor Yates to oppose the measure. The NCEP is banking on the Orange governor's track record as an advocate for clean energy to motivate him to intercede in the process. The city council and Mayor Smith also stand for reelection before groundbreaking on the plant is scheduled to take place. Orange groups aim to mobilize on this issue in an effort to flip control of the city council and cancel the contract for the plant.
2. The conclusion of this vote represents a turning point for the city. Since the measure was first proposed early last year, city government has been in gridlock as Orange officials have repeatedly used the measure as a means to stymie Purple legislative proposals. Many Purple officials are optimistic that with this issue resolved, they can finally begin to move forward on the other needs of the city.
3. Despite the victory of the measure in the city council, there is still a long way to go before the power plant begins operation. The city regulator's report on the project states that the next round of regulatory approval for the chosen site will take at least a year, as the ground is tested for moisture, hard elements, and soil density. Following final approval by state regulators, construction of the plant will take an estimated three years. Finally, the site must undergo a probationary period for security review by the Department of Homeland Security, adding even more time to the project's completion.