Lesson 7

Identifying the difference between fact and opinion

Learning objective

- To distinguish between fact and opinion

Learning outcomes

- Explain the difference between news reports and opinion pieces
- Use language clues to analyse whether a statement is fact or opinion (also including speculation and rumour)
- Summarise a news story using the key facts

Curriculum links

- Reading comprehension: distinguishing between fact and opinion; summarising key information; analysis of language
- PSHE - Living in the wider world: exploring and critiquing how the media present information
- Statutory relationships education: critically consider online sources of information

Journalist Training School context

Journalists must not include their own opinions in a news report. They can include the opinions of those involved in the story, but must not report them as fact. Therefore, journalists must be able to tell the difference between fact and opinion, as well as speculation and rumour.

Core knowledge/skills

- Journalists can include other people’s opinions in news reports through reported or direct speech, but they must not include their own opinions.
- Opinion pieces, where journalists are allowed to share their own opinions about stories, are different to news reports and will be clearly marked as opinion.
- When a breaking news story first happens, it can be difficult to know which information online is trustworthy because not many facts are known. Despite this, people make guesses, share their opinions or even make up information. You may see:
  - Fact: something that is true and can be supported by evidence
  - Opinion: a person’s thoughts or feelings
  - Speculation: a guess or inference about what has happened
  - Rumour: a story that has not been proven, often parts of the story that people hear about from others, without any actual evidence

- See Language Clues to model how language analysis can help to identify the difference between fact, opinion, speculation and rumour.

This lesson focuses on the NewsWise value: truthful.
Theme 2: Navigating the news

Starter/baseline assessment

1. **News report or opinion?** Pupils read an extract from a news report and an extract from an opinion piece, identifying which is which. How did you know? Were there any words or phrases that helped you? **Challenge:** can you find an example of an opinion in the news report paragraph? What is different about this compared to the opinion piece?

2. Discuss the difference between the news report and the opinion piece. Watch [Gary Younge's explainer video](#) to explore why news publications also publish opinion pieces. Opinion pieces differ to news reports, which must be truthful and only include other people's opinions. Having your own opinions about news is important, but the main thing to remember is that when writing a news report, you don’t report your opinions as facts.

Learning activity

Before beginning the following activities, you may like to use [Spot the truth](#) to model the activity.

1. Pupils read different tweets about a breaking news story: a gorilla escape at London Zoo (see [Rumour has it...](#)). Pupils analyse each statement using the **Language clues** to identify whether it is fact or opinion. **Challenge:** introduce speculation and rumour. As well as sorting statements into fact and opinion, pupils also identify the statements which are actually speculation or rumour.

2. In role as reporters, pupils write a news headline and summary (using the 5 Ws), stating the facts of what actually happened at London Zoo. This could be a drama activity, with pupils performing news bulletins in role as TV or radio reporters.

Plenary

1. Refer back to the news story from the starter. Pupils write either a fact or opinion statement about it. **Challenge:** write a speculation or rumour statement.

2. In pairs, pupils swap statements and decide what type of statement their partner has written, highlighting the language clues. Ask some pupils to share their fact, opinion, speculation or rumour statements with the class. **How can you tell the difference?** What type of language clues can we look out for? Why is it important to be able to tell the difference between fact and opinion when online? **What would happen if a journalist reported a speculation or rumour as fact?**

Questions for assessment

What is fact/opinion/speculation/rumour? Why is it important to know the difference between fact and opinion? How can we check whether something is factual? How can we tell the difference between fact and [_______]? What is the difference between a news report and an opinion piece?

Online resources checklist

- Language clues
- News report or opinion?
- Gary Younge's explainer video
- Spot the truth
- Rumour has it

Extension opportunities

Pupils write their own opinion pieces in response to a news story.