Lesson 9: Analysing bias in the news

Learning objective
- To analyse biased language in news reporting

Learning outcomes
- Explain what bias means
- Identify examples of biased language in a news report
- Evaluate how a writer uses language to influence their reader

Curriculum links
- Reading comprehension: analysis of language and its impact on the reader
- PSHE education: exploring and critiquing how the media present information
- Statutory Relationships Education: critically consider online sources of information

Journalist Training School context
Journalists should only use factual and concise language in news reporting. They should not use words which convey their own opinion or influence their reader to feel a certain way. Use of ‘influencing’ language is another way in which news reports can be biased.

Core knowledge/skills
- Some news reports might be slanted to make one side of the story seem more important. This is known as ‘bias’.
- A news report might be biased because a) it does not include different viewpoints, meaning it is unbalanced, or b) because of the ‘influencing’ language the writer uses, such as negative adjectives to describe someone in the story. Refer to the ‘Is it biased?’ section of the News navigator.
- Bias can happen because people in power (eg the news company owners) want to influence their audience’s opinions. In the UK, there are newspapers which support specific political views or parties, which might affect how that paper writes about a specific politician.
- Always look for bias in the news, so that you can work out whether a news report is trying to influence you. Once you’ve done that, you have the power to decide whether you agree with this message or not.
- Reading, watching and listening to lots of different news reports from different sources, even those you disagree with, can help you to understand the full story.

This lesson focuses on the NewsWise values: truthful and balanced.
Starter/baseline assessment

1. **Whose side are they on?** Pupils read the football match report and decide who wrote it, focusing on whether it is biased towards one team or the other. Highlight the key words which indicate that the writer favours one team over another. *How can you tell who wrote the report? Whose side are they on? What does the writer want you to feel or think? How do you know? How else might this story have been told?*

2. Use this example to introduce the idea of bias. *Can you think of a time when you might have been biased?*

Learning activity

1. Pupils read *Report 1* and answer the following questions: *who do you want to defend in the news story/whose side do you agree with? Who do you want to criticise in the story/whose side do you disagree with? Why do you feel this way? How do you think the writer has influenced you?*

2. Pupils create ‘word banks’, listing the words or phrases used in the report to describe both the girl and the council. This will highlight the use of positive or negative language to influence the reader.

3. Pupils read the *BBC report* as an example of more neutral reporting on the story. *How do the reports differ? Which one is the fairer report? Why?*

**Challenge:** pupils complete the *Controlling the news* activity to consider why news might be biased. For each scenario, pupils consider: *who has power in the story? Which parts of the story might the person with power want to share? Which parts might they want to control by not sharing? Why?*

Plenary

1. Return to the football report from the starter and consider how else the story might have been told. Can pupils re-write the report, or a chosen section or sentence, to reflect a different perspective?

2. Consider why it is important to look for bias in the news. Highlight that reading multiple different news reports, even those you disagree with, can help you to understand the full story. Remind pupils that, as journalists, they must ensure that their own news reports are not biased; they need to report their stories in a fair and balanced way, even if they have a strong opinion about it themselves.

**Questions for assessment**

*What does bias mean? Why might a news report be biased? What could the consequences be of biased reporting? What can we look out for to tell if a report is biased?*

**Online resources checklist**

- News navigator
- Whose side are they on?
- Report 1
- BBC report
- Controlling the news