

Bias in reporting

When fact and opinion mix together

Whose side are they on?

Bad luck for hardworking Southampton as they lose to Manchester City

Southampton Football Club put up a brave fight against Manchester City last night. Although Manchester won, Southampton should be very proud of the way they played.

Manchester City only had two shots on target because Southampton defended so well. Even though Southampton played amazingly, they suffered the same bad luck they have had all season.

Southampton fans should be very proud of their team.



Students 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?*

You may want to print this slide so students can highlight key words indicating who the writer favours.

Photo: Emilio Garcia via Unsplash

What is bias?



News reports might show only one side of the story = bias

News reports might try to make you believe or do something = bias

What does the writer want you to think?

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Report 1



Shocked teenager fined for feeding a pigeon

A teenager from Wales has been fined £100 for feeding a McDonald's chip to a pigeon.

Lauren-Paige Smith kindly offered one of her chips to a hungry bird. She was quickly given a harsh fine for littering even though no food was left on the ground. The rude council worker ignored her point of view.

Lauren said: "I can't believe I'm being treated so unfairly for doing a simple act of kindness!"

Print report 1. Students find and highlight the words or phrases that describe the teenager and words or phrases that describe the council worker. *What does the writer want you to think?* Draw students' attention to the positive and negative words trying to persuade you to agree with the teenager.

Note: this is a version of a real news story that has been adapted for this activity to model bias.

Photo: Brett Jordan via Unsplash

Photo: Sneha Cecil via Unsplash

What does the writer want you to think?

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Report 2



Pigeon feeder taken to court

Lauren-Paige Smith said she was only “feeding the birds” when she got a fine from a council worker for littering. Miss Smith said: “The person who gave me the fine did not give me any warning or tell me to pick anything up.”

The local council stated: “If you are caught throwing food you will be given a fine for littering. We have had problems with angry birds attacking people out shopping nearby. We want to make the city centre a clean and nice place for people to visit.”

The judge will be speaking to council workers and other witnesses before continuing the case.

Students to now read report 2 – an example of more neutral reporting. *How are the reports different? Which one is fairer? Why?*

Photo: Brett Jordan via Unsplash

Photo: Sneha Cecil via Unsplash

Can you make this report unbiased?

Pathetic school bag ban!

A local high school has banned large backpacks due to risk of injury for younger students.

Many students are angry and disappointed about this unexpected and ridiculous school rule. One student, Jacob Ford, said many students will have to waste lots of money buying a smaller bag for school to follow the new rule.

Hannah Catterall, another student at the school, argues that older students struggling to carry all their books and belongings without the right size bag is just as dangerous. An online petition with 453 signatures has been handed to the school, signed by parents and students alike.

Read report 3 about the school that banned large backpacks. *What does the writer want you to think?* Students highlight the words that show you what the writer wants you to think.

Can students rewrite this story on the report template so it isn't biased and shows different viewpoints? *What words do they need to change? What might be the other viewpoints?* (Eg the school or headteacher who wants to keep all students safe.)

Note: this is a version of a real news story that has been adapted for this activity to model bias.

Learning check

1. “The unnecessary new bike lane will cause endless problems for drivers, and is only the result of cyclists moaning to the local council.”

What words in this paragraph show bias?

2. What kind of problems could bias in news cause?



What have you learnt?



- *What is bias in news reporting?*
- *Why might a news report be biased?*
- *What can we look out for to tell if a report is biased?*
- *What might happen if people only read biased news reports?*

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