

Activity Suggestions: Grades 6-9

Is That a Fact?

Class time needed: 30 minutes

Materials

“Is That a Fact?” worksheets for each group of four to five students



Objectives

- Students will articulate the difference between fact and opinion.
- Students will identify ways to clarify or qualify statements of opinion.

Introduction

Understanding the difference between fact and opinion is critical to our ability to examine our reactions to events and people. Stereotypes and prejudices are often based on opinions that are perceived as facts. Skills practiced during this activity can be reinforced using content from textbooks, magazines, and newspapers, as well as from correspondence with your Peace Corps Volunteer if your class is participating in a World Wise Schools match program.

Procedure

1. Write three examples of facts on one side of the board and three examples of opinions on the other side of the board.

Examples of facts:

- George has blue eyes.
- This room has four windows.
- There are 50 states in the United States.

Examples of opinions:

- This room is too warm.
- Math class is boring.
- The best cars are made in the United States.

2. Ask students to identify the statements of fact and the statements of opinion. Label each group.
3. Have students work with partners to come up with definitions for the words “fact” and “opinion.” Choose a class definition, using a dictionary or a language arts textbook if necessary.
4. Divide the class into small groups of four to five students each. Provide each group with a copy of the worksheet “Is That A Fact?” Ask one student in each group to cut the sheet into strips as indicated. That student should “deal” the strips out to the group’s members until all of the strips have been distributed.
5. Have each small group divide its work space into three areas, one labeled “Facts,” another “Opinions,” and the third “Need More Information.” Have students work together to place the statements in the appropriate areas according to the definitions they agreed upon earlier.
6. As you monitor the group activity, ask representatives from each group to explain how the group is deciding to place the statements. Make sure their decisions followed the agreed upon definitions for fact and opinion.
7. Ask students to examine the statements in the “Need More Information” category. Have them work together to identify sources of information that would prove or disprove the statements.

Debriefing

When the small groups have completed their work, bring the whole class back together to discuss the process. Use the following questions to check student understanding of the difference between fact and opinion.

1. How can you tell whether something is a fact or an opinion?
2. What makes it difficult to decide if something is a fact or an opinion?
3. When you were working in small groups, did everyone agree on which statements were fact and which were opinion? Could any of the opinion statements be considered facts if we had more information or if the statement were more specific? (Example: When it comes to math scores, this is the best school in the whole town.)
4. If you're not sure whether something is a fact, what can you do?
5. Why is it important to know whether something is a fact or an opinion?



Extending the Ideas

- Have students rewrite the statements identified as opinions using qualifying phrases (e.g., I think, according to the book I read, etc.) or more specific language.
- Have students watch one or more of the World Wise Schools *Destination* video tapes. Ask students to listen for and record facts and opinions as they watch. Compare responses in small groups.
- Have your students read essays by Peace Corps Volunteers or other pieces of writing to find examples of facts and opinions. Check the World Wise Schools online resources for letters from Peace Corps Volunteers or use the excerpt, "Living in a Traditional African Way" from an interview with Volunteer Craig Benson. The entire interview can be found on the Peace Corps web site at <http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/dp/interview/wwsin2.html>.

Is That a Fact?



Girls are smarter than boys.

Americans love French fries.

Americans are friendly.

Men are usually taller than women.

The world is a better place now than it was 100 years ago.

There is more farm land in the United States than in any other country.

Today is a beautiful day.

Most people in Africa live in urban areas.

This is the best school in the whole town.

Women make better teachers than men.

Most people in Honduras are unhappy.

The U.S.A. is the richest country in the world.



Living in a Traditional African Way

The following reading is adapted from an interview conducted with Craig Benson during his Peace Corps service in Cameroon in Central Africa between 1990 and 1993.

The thing that's really important no matter where you go are the friends that you meet, the people that you love, and the people with whom you share life. I have some really great neighbors here. In particular, I have a family—five children, two parents—with whom I'm close. The wife is a leader of a farming group that I work with. She introduced me to her farming group, which has turned out to be one of the best. That family welcomed me in a very traditional African way.

When I first came to the house they brought me food for three months. I didn't cook. They brought me two meals a day. I got to try out all the different kinds of African foods. They would always invite me out for any occasion, invite me to come to the church, invite me to the farm, invite me to this baptism, invite me to go to this "cry-die," which is what they say for a funeral, or to this "born-house," which is a birth celebration when a woman has a baby.

They showed me the village and have watched out for me since I've been here. It's those kind of people that really, no matter how much the chips go down, make an experience like this worthwhile.

Let me tell you about one friend I have. He's a young man here in the village who hadn't been in school for some time. When I came, I asked for someone to help me around the house—not really so much for cleaning, but to show me where to get water and how to do things in the village. That young man, Dan, has become a good friend. We have a poultry project going on.

You couldn't buy eggs anywhere in Ande, so Dan and I put our heads together and said, "Well, we both like to eat eggs, so let's get some day-old chicks." And, sure enough,

now we have poultry and they're grown. They're giving us eggs. So I've just put Dan in complete control of that. I've taught him the ropes about what diseases poultry can get, what kind of feed to give them, how to get a lot of eggs, what kind of green feed, bone meal, sand, and ants they need. We're feeding them well and it's a nice demonstration. People come to see it and ask why our fowls are so big and theirs are so small. They ask why ours are alive and theirs are dead (because they've died in the dry season).

We're getting some revenue from it, which Dan is controlling. He collects eggs. My deal with him is, "You just give me the eggs I need to eat, and the rest is yours." He manages it—saves the money from it to buy more feed and then whatever is left over he uses. He's actually put himself back in school. He's been able to sponsor himself through school by taking care of some chickens.

Let me say one more thing about Dan. He's teaching me how to play football, which is very important! I'm a terrible soccer player—football is what they say for soccer. And it's the only game in town—it doesn't matter if I know how to play basketball, baseball, volleyball, and all the rest—you can't play them here. Football is it. So I said, "Dan, I'll help you with the fowls. I'll help you with anything, but you've got to teach me how to play football." So I'm getting better. It's been a year, but I'm only up to the level of high school-age players. I play with little kids, and that's about as good as I am. I'm not as good as people my same age, but I'm on my way!



How Accurate Is It? ²⁶

Class time needed: 40 minutes

Materials

- “How Accurate Is It” worksheets for every two students
- Pencils and paper

Objective

- Students will learn to identify and modify generalizations.

Introduction

This activity introduces students to the difficult concept of generalization so that they will challenge generalizations made about people, insist on knowing the evidence that supports these, and be willing to modify their own generalizations when confronted by evidence showing them to be false. It is important for students to understand that almost all generalizations, particularly those about people, need to be qualified. The activity also asks students to practice using qualifying language.

Procedure

1. Explain the meaning of “general” and “specific” using objects in the room or pictures to illustrate your point (e.g., “This horse is black” versus “All horses are black”).
2. Write the following statement on the board: “Snakes are harmful.” Ask students to write whether they agree or disagree with the statement at the top of a sheet of paper. Then read each of the following questions aloud. Have students write “yes” or “no” in response to each question.
 - Are all snakes harmful?
 - Are most snakes harmful?
 - Are many snakes harmful?
 - Are some snakes harmful?
 - Are a few snakes harmful?
 - Do you know about all snakes?
 - Is the statement “Snakes are harmful” true?
3. As a class, explore the following questions.
 - How many students agreed with the statement on the board? How many students answered no to the seventh question? What made you change your mind?
 - What words can you add to the statement “Snakes are harmful” to make it more accurate (e.g., some snakes, many snakes, a few snakes in Asia)?
 - What can you add to the statement to show that you don’t have a lot of factual information about snakes (e.g., as far as I know, I’m not sure, in my experience)?
4. Have students work in small groups to evaluate the accuracy of the generalizations listed on the “How Accurate Is It?” worksheet. Encourage them to discuss their reasoning and come to consensus on each statement. Then have students work in pairs to rewrite each statement using the qualifying phrases discussed above so that it is as accurate as possible.
5. As a class, discuss the conclusions of each group, paying close attention to how the statements were qualified.

Debriefing

Use the following questions to guide a brainstorming session to help students recognize generalizations and begin using qualifying language.

1. Have you ever heard anyone use a generalization to describe you or another person? How does it feel when someone does that?
2. What happened when we used a generalization to describe snakes? Was the statement accurate? What happened when we used qualifiers to describe snakes? When you filled out the worksheet, which statements were more difficult to evaluate—the statements about things, or the statements about people?
3. What are some ways we could complete the following sentences?
We should try not to use generalizations because _____.
It is important to use qualified statements because _____.
4. What can you do if you hear someone using generalizations to describe a person or a group of people? (Help students articulate some nonconfrontational ways to respond to generalized descriptions.)

Extending the Ideas

- Watch one or more World Wise Schools *Destination* video tapes. Ask students to listen for and record the qualified statements made in the tape. (Example: Most people in Honduras live in the mountains.)
- Ask students to collect examples of generalizations from advertising. Discuss why advertisers use generalizations and have students revise generalized statements to make them more accurate.
- Use returned Peace Corps Volunteer Julie Kaminsky's description of education in Gaoual, Guinea, in West Africa to help students recognize generalizations and qualified statements. Have them work in pairs to read the article and identify the statements that indicate that Julie Kaminsky was trying not to generalize. Then have them locate any generalizations. (For a complete list of "Volunteer Views," visit World Wise Schools on the Peace Corps web site at <<http://www.peacecorps.gov/www/dp/www1.html>>.)



How Accurate Is It?

Directions: Read each statement carefully. Then ask yourself the following questions.

- Are all (or almost all) baseballs (or elephants, etc.) white (strong, etc.)?
- Are most baseballs (or elephants, etc.) white (strong, etc.)?
- Are some. . .?
- Are a few. . .?
- Do you know about. . .?

Put a check in the box that shows how accurate each statement is.

Statement	How Accurate It Is					
	all or almost all	most	many	some	few	don't know
1. Baseballs are white.						
2. Elephants are strong.						
3. Fish have gills.						
4. Spiders are poisonous.						
5. Candy is bad for your teeth.						
6. Babies cry.						
7. Politicians are dishonest.						
8. Teachers are smarter than children.						
9. Americans are rich.						
10. Poor people are lazy.						



School in Guinea, West Africa

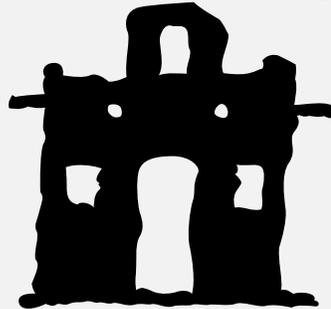
I served in Guinea in West Africa. My town, Gaoual, was predominantly Moslem, and most children attended several years of Koranic school before they started regular classes in elementary school. While children could begin school as young as six years old, most started when they were eight or nine years old. Official statistics are difficult to obtain, but I was told that around 50 percent of all children attend elementary school (grades one to six).

In sixth grade, students take a national exam to get into middle school, and about half will continue. After that, each year school children must take exams to go on to the next grade level. Many don't pass on the first try and most will repeat a grade at least once or twice somewhere along the way. At the end of tenth grade, students take an exam to attend either high school or technical school (to become a carpenter, nurse, plumber, etc.). Only about 10 percent of all children actually attend through high school. My eleventh grade class had about 40 students; the twelfth grade class had 17; the "terminal" (final year of high school) had only four students.

By the time students complete "terminal" they are usually 20 to 24 years old. Generally, children come to school Monday through Saturday. Middle school and high school students attend three classes daily, each two hours long: in the morning from 8 to 10 and 10:15 to 12:15 p.m., and in the afternoon from 12:15 to 2:15. Some subjects take only one hour, so the second half of the two-hour block the students have free time.

Students attend classes October through May, with national and local exams held in June. July, August, and September are summer vacation (the rainy season). During the month of Ramadan (a Moslem religious month when all adults fast during daylight hours) older students and teachers fast but continue to come to class. All state holidays are days off and there are one-week vacations twice a year: December 25 to January 1 and April 4 to 11, standard throughout the country.

Julie Kaminsky served as a Peace Corps Volunteer in Gaoual, a town in the north-west corner of Guinea, from 1993 to 1994.



Good News/Bad News/Who Cares?

Class time needed: Approximately 40 minutes

Materials

- One “Good News/Bad News/Who Cares?” activity sheet for each student
- Pencils and paper
- Almanacs and other reference materials

Objective

- Students will recognize that there are many ways of interpreting a single piece of information.

Introduction

To develop global perspectives, students need to form the habit of reflecting on the sources of their own opinions and reactions. This activity asks students to respond to a series of facts, analyze their reactions, and compare their responses. Students will also practice viewing factual information from multiple perspectives and work to develop awareness of the hidden biases in “factual” statements.

Procedure

1. Distribute copies of the “Good News/Bad News/Who Cares?” activity sheet to students. Explain that the statements are based on accurate research and can be believed to be true.
2. Instruct students to read each statement in the “Fact” column, then quickly note their response to each statement in one of the response columns. Is the statement good news, bad news, or just an uninteresting fact (Who Cares?)? For those statements interpreted as good news or bad news, students should jot a few words in the “Why?” column to explain their feelings.
3. Once students have completed their charts, tally their responses to each statement. Are a variety of opinions represented? Or did students have similar responses to the same facts? What factors might account for this? Ask individual students to share the thinking behind their opinions. Discuss why some statements did not elicit strong opinions (e.g., some statements may not contain enough information to warrant an opinion, others may simply not provoke the interest of individual students).
4. Divide the class into small groups of two to three students. Ask students to review their individual charts. Each student will choose one statement about which he or she felt strongly and discuss the reasons for that opinion with other group members. Then the group should brainstorm a short list of people who may have reasons for forming the opposite opinion. For example, students are likely to feel strongly that a \$2.61 hourly wage for Mexican workers is bad news because that amount is very low compared to what most U.S. workers earn. However, the information could be good news for a U.S. manufacturer who is looking for a less expensive way to make products. Check in with the small groups frequently as they work; students may need help to place isolated facts into a more complete picture.



Debriefing

1. Ask a student spokesperson from each group to give some examples of the perspectives they considered and to summarize any difficulty the group had in imagining different points of view.
2. Ask students to discuss how they felt when their opinions were challenged by other students. Did any students change their opinions during the activity?
3. Revisit statement #7. Ask students if their reactions to this statement would change if it were phrased in a different, but equally true, way? For example, the statement would be equally true as “Almost 80 percent of the cars purchased in this country are made in the United States.” Point out that even “facts” can be stated in ways that emphasize a particular perspective.
4. Help students identify ways statements of fact can be checked for accuracy and bias. For example, the fact should be supported by multiple sources. We can develop the habit of looking “behind the curtain.” In other words, who is issuing the statement? Does that person or organization have a biased perspective?

Extending the Ideas

- Ask students to gather a list of facts from almanacs or other brief information sources about a Peace Corps host country and indicate whether those facts represent good news or bad news. This is a good opportunity to instruct students about the uses and limitations of various sources of information. For example, in most almanacs, infant mortality rates for a given country are reported for one year only. What at first glance appears to be a dire fact may actually be good news when statistics are compared over time.
- If the class is participating in the World Wise Schools match program, students can locate facts about their Peace Corps Volunteer’s host country and ask the Volunteer to respond in good news/bad news fashion.

Good News/Bad News/Who Cares

Fact	Good News	Bad News	Who Cares?	Why?
1. Americans spend more than \$20 million a day on snacks.*				
2. In 1993, Middle Eastern nations produced 18,446 barrels of crude oil a day. Those countries used 3,489 barrels a day.				
3. Chinese is the native language of more than one billion people. English is the native language of 300-450 million people.				
4. Each person in the United States eats more than four pounds of cucumbers a year.*				
5. The number of Internet users reached 25 million in 1995.				
6. The average hourly wage for workers in Mexico was \$2.61 in 1994.				
7. In 1993, 15.6 percent of the automobiles sold in the United States were made in Japan.				
8. The New York Yankees won the World Series in 1996.				
9. About six billion people inhabit the Earth. By 2050 the world population will increase to about 10 billion.				
10. School attendance is not required in Guatemala.				

*Source: The Great Food Almanac: A Feast of Fact From A-Z by Irena Chalmers (San Francisco: Collins, 1994). Other information is from The Universal Almanac 1996, John W. Wright, editor (Kansas City: Andrews and McMeel, 1995).

