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UNIT 2: WHO DO YOU TRUST?

Unit Overview

With more choices of information available than at any time in human history, students need to be able to tell the difference between high-quality information and junk.

In this unit, students explore what makes a media message credible, believable, and trustworthy. The activities examine a range of media types that have some elements of “truth”—from documentary films and Hollywood science fiction to news stories and Internet chat rooms.

These activities challenge students to evaluate information by decoding construction techniques and verifying sources of information. Students critically analyze Internet websites and create an evidence chart.

The activities in this unit provide students with an opportunity to explore some concepts in Character Education, including **fairness, trustworthiness, responsibility, self-direction, and perseverance.**

The “essential questions” of this unit are:

- **What criteria should people use in deciding which information is accurate, credible, and trustworthy?**
- **What makes moving images like film and television seem so realistic?**
- **What techniques do film producers, writers, and scientists use to increase people’s perception of realism and credibility?**



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UNIT 2: WHO DO YOU TRUST?

Explore strategies that can be used to judge the realism and evaluate the authenticity and authority of media messages found on TV, newspapers, the Internet, and in the library.

CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

2.1 Reality Check

A game to examine reality judgments made in evaluating different types of media messages.

2.2 Crossing the Line from Fact to Fiction

Read and analyze how a journalist lost her Pulitzer Prize because of faked information in her news story.

2.3 Chat Room Rumors and Media Hoaxes

Evaluate the believability of an article about disguised marketing techniques.

2.4 Credible or Incredible

Evaluate search engines and examine credibility of different websites in a web quest research scavenger hunt.

2.5 Skeptical about Sources

Evaluate the credibility of quotes and distinguish between neutral and biased language.

2.6 Hollywood's Time Travel Paradoxes

A creative writing activity.

PRODUCTION ACTIVITY

Create an Evidence Chart

Prepare an evidence chart showing ten pieces of information about the topic, organizing the information graphically to show differences between information sources that are more or less credible.

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UNIT 2: WHO DO YOU TRUST?

CONNECTIONS TO MARYLAND STATE CONTENT STANDARDS

The *Assignment: Media Literacy* curriculum has been designed to align with Maryland State Content Standards. Many of the activities and lessons are modeled upon the structure and format used in the MSPAP tests for language arts and social studies.

For each unit, the standards are listed for each subject area. The numbers at the end of each line refer to specific instructional goals identified in the Maryland Content Standards.

Use the chart below to identify the specific instructional objectives developed in each unit of the program.

HIGH SCHOOL LANGUAGE ARTS

1.12.1	Concepts of Print and Structural Features of Text (all)
1.12.5	Comprehension and Interpretation of Informational Text (all)
1.12.6	Evaluation of Informational Text (all)
2.12.1	Characteristics of Literary Genres (#1,3)
2.12.2	Comprehension, Interpretations, and Analysis of Text (all)
2.12.4	Evaluation of Literary Works
3.12.1	Organization and Focus (all)
3.12.2	Research (all)
3.12.3	Personal Narrative Writing (all)
3.12.5	Practical Writing (all)
3.12.6	Informational Writing (all)
3.12.7	Persuasive Writing (all)
5.12.1	Active Listening Strategies
6.12.1	Organization and Delivery Strategies (all)
6.12.3	Evaluation of Oral Presentations

HIGH SCHOOL SOCIAL STUDIES

1.12.1	Demonstrate understanding of the meaning, implication, and impact of historical events and hypothesize how events could have taken other directions.
1.12.3	Interpret past events and issues within the context in which an event unfolded rather than solely in terms of present-day norms and values.
1.12.5	Analyze the connections, causal and otherwise, between particular historical events and larger social, economic, and political trends and developments.
1.12.7	Analyze an author's implicit and explicit philosophical assumptions and beliefs about a subject.
1.12.8	Synthesize information from multiple sources and make distinctions between sound generalizations and misleading oversimplifications.
7.12.1	Evaluate the ways in which the public agenda is shaped and set, including the influence of political parties, interest groups, lobbyists, the media, and public opinion.
17.12.2	Analyze the origins, major developments, controversies, and consequences of the post-war African-American civil rights movement, including President Truman's decision to end segregation in the armed forces, the role and view of leading civil rights advocates, and key U.S. Supreme Court cases.

HIGH SCHOOL SCIENCE**Content Standards**

Goal 1	Skills and Processes: Expectation 1.1 Indicator 1.1.1 and 1.1.4; Expectation 1.4, Indicator 1.4.2, 1.4.3, and 1.4.9 Expectation 1.5, Indicator 1.5.1, 1.5.4 and 1.5.9; Expectation 1.7, Indicator 1.7.2 and 1.7.3.
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HIGH SCHOOL HEALTH

Outcome # 1	Students will demonstrate an understanding of health promotion and disease prevention concepts. (# 2.4, 2.3, 7.4)
Outcome # 3	Students will demonstrate the ability to identify and practice health-enhancing behaviors. (#3.4, 5.3, 3.5, 7.4)
Outcome # 4	Students will demonstrate the ability to use communication skills to enhance personal, family, and community health. (#1.5, 5.3, 3.5)



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.1 | REALITY CHECK!

This activity is designed to provide an interactive game-like opportunity for students to explore the different kinds of television “reality” and to consider the complex ways in which television programs blend aspects of artifice and reality.

Getting Started

Consider using this activity as a pretend “game show.” Ask students to be the studio audience as well as potential contestants, as in *The Price is Right*. You may want to select one student to play the role of floor director and signal for audience applause.

There are four video clips:

- *ABC News* on car chases shown on local TV news in Los Angeles
- A scene from *Romeo and Juliet*
- A film trailer for *Anna and the King*
- An ad for ADT, a home security firm

Pass out copies of the activity sheet and explain to students that they will be seeing some short video clips and analyzing the realism and the lack of realism in each one.

Evaluating the Realism of Media Messages

Ask all students to write their responses to the statements: “This message seems realistic because . . .” and “This message seems unrealistic because . . .” Doing this as a writing activity helps responses to be more thoughtful and well developed.

UNREALISTIC ----- **REALISTIC**

Show the first video clip. Ask students to write their responses. Then select a contestant to play the game show. Invite the student to come to the front of the class and explain what is realistic and unrealistic about this message. You should draw a continuum on the blackboard and have the student write in where they would place the video clips on the line from “real” to “unreal.”

Class members can create their own horizontal lines on a paper at their desks and place the shows in the positions they think are best.

Continue playing the game show with the remaining three video segments. Encourage students to place the programs on the continuum and to comment on the choices and reasoning provided by other students. You may find these decisions generate some provocative and thoughtful debate about perceptions of realism. Conclude by emphasizing that judgments about “what’s realistic” are judgments—not facts.

The important point to emphasize is that people often make reality judgments unconsciously, but it’s important to reflect on the reasons why we evaluate messages as realistic.

Extension

To involve more students as contestants, you might extend the game by using a TV guide and giving students the names of different TV program titles (without showing video) and ask students where they would place shows like *Monday Night Football*, *ER*, or *Cops* on the continuum.

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.1

REALITY CHECK!

Instructions: For each video segment, complete the pair of sentences below.

Segment 1

This message seems realistic because _____

This message seems unrealistic because _____

Segment 2

This message seems realistic because _____

This message seems unrealistic because _____

Segment 3

This message seems realistic because _____

This message seems unrealistic because _____

Segment 4

This message seems realistic because _____

This message seems unrealistic because _____



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.2 | CROSSING THE LINE FROM FACT TO FICTION

This activity provides a critical reading on the history of one particular case of a journalist fabricating a news story, and provides a framework for understanding the importance of accuracy, fairness, and balance in journalism.

Getting Started

Students can be cynical and distrustful of the news media—so it’s important to introduce students to the very real values that drive journalists’ work in reporting news. Before exploring the story of Janet Cooke and the Pulitzer Prize, you might want to introduce the idea of the three core values of American journalism:

- Accuracy
- Fairness
- Balance

Accuracy is the goal of communicating information error-free. Journalists can be obsessive about spelling people’s names right, for example. It is also why journalists try to be skeptical about what people tell them and try to confirm what they learn by checking with other sources. Concern with accuracy is one of the central values of journalism.

Fairness is the goal of treating sources (the people who are interviewed) with respect. Journalists try to quote people’s words in the context in which they actually spoke, avoiding pulling out quotes to deliberately make a person seem stupid. They try to use neutral language to avoid presenting one point of view unfairly.

Balance is the goal of presenting information from a range of different perspectives and being even-handed in depicting various points of view. To accomplish this goal, journalists should use neutral language; also, they should attempt to get information from two or more sides of an issue.

Critical Reading

Pass out Activity Sheet 2.2 (A) and give students time to read silently. Or you may wish to have students read aloud, one paragraph at a time.

Pass out Activity Sheet 2.2 (B) and ask students to complete the questions. Depending on the available time, you may ask them to select three of the six questions to answer.

Or you may prefer to use these questions as large-group discussion or as a homework activity.

Questions and Answers

- 1. What was “excellent” in Cooke’s reporting of Jimmy’s drug experience?** The writing is very descriptive and visual, creating the impression that the reader was observing Jimmy’s experience.
- 2. Why was Cooke’s deception not discovered sooner?** Under the pressure of meeting deadlines and remaining competitive, some writers “cave-in” and cross the line from fact to fiction. Editors and copy editors are also under deadlines. They might not check everything—since they could only do their job with a certain amount of trust that their journalists are ethical in providing authentic sources for their stories.
- 3. Why would no reputable newspaper hire Cooke after she was fired from the *Post*?** The bad publicity surrounding the revocation of the Prize made newspapers afraid to hire her. Also, they might have been afraid she would create fake information again.
- 4. Did Cooke’s age and inexperience have anything to do with why she chose to fabricate her story in order to meet a deadline and the pressures put on her by a “no-nonsense” boss?** Answers will vary.
- 5. Was the *Washington Post* fair in firing Cooke?** Encourage students to explore the idea of accountability. Cooke’s publisher offered to resign in light of the scandal. The newspaper didn’t fire him, however. Why?

- 6. How did Cooke’s false story harm—if at all—her newspaper? Her readers? Herself?** Answers will vary, but you might want to point out how readers depend on a newspaper to tell them what actually happened in the world—if a newspaper can’t deliver accurate and trustworthy information, then readers may not be willing to pay for the product.

Extensions

Research more recent examples of journalists who have faked news or crossed the line from fact to fiction. Examples include: a Boston columnist who faked information in his columns, and a reporter who wrote about her bout with cancer when she did not have cancer. Use the magazine *Columbia Journalism Review* to get more information about these and other stories.

CROSSING THE LINE FROM FACT TO FICTION

By Catherine Gourley
Excerpted from *Media Wizards*

He was eight years old and except for the needle marks on his thin brown arm, he looked like most boys. He played baseball. He wore designer sneakers. His name was Jimmy and, according to a feature news story that appeared in the Sunday, September 28, 1980, edition of the *Washington Post*, he was a heroin addict. Janet Cooke, the author of the piece, suggested to the reader that she had been present and actually witnessed Jimmy's mother's boyfriend inserting a heroin-filled needle into Jimmy's arm. Cooke wrote:

[He] grabs Jimmy's left arm just above the elbow, his massive hand tightly encircling the child's small limb. The needle slides into the boy's soft skin like a straw pushed into the center of a freshly baked cake. Liquid ebbs out of the syringe, replaced by bright red blood. The blood is then re-injected into the child.

Janet Cooke's words wowed her editors who nominated the story for a Pulitzer Prize. Equally wowed, the judging committee selected Cooke's story to receive journalism's highest award for 1981.

In the days following the announcement that Janet Cooke had won a Pulitzer Prize, the managing editors of the *Washington Post* discovered in alarm that Jimmy did not live in southeast Washington, DC. He resided solely in Janet Cooke's imagination. In a tearful 2:00 A.M. confrontation with her bosses at the *Post*, Cooke admitted, "There is no Jimmy." She had made up the story.

By 7:00 A.M., Cooke's resignation was official and the *Post* notified the Pulitzer Prize committee that they were returning the prize. Cooke slipped quietly away into anonymity. The story of her deception had made headlines of its own. No respectable newspaper would hire her.

Janet Cooke was a young reporter, just twenty-six years old and on the job at the *Post* less than one year when she won and lost her Pulitzer Prize for a non-fiction story that was really fiction. Surely there were and still are children like Jimmy, addicted to heroin. Sadly, just as Cooke's story suggested, many become addicted through abusive adults. Jimmy could have been a composite character, that is, a made-up child based on the real experiences of other children. But Cooke never identified Jimmy as a composite. She could have searched longer, harder for a real Jimmy, but she didn't.

"What I did was wrong," Cooke admitted in an interview fifteen years later to a former friend and fellow *Post* writer, Mike Sager. At the time, she was working part-time in a department store. "I regret that I did it. . . . I'm ashamed that I did it." The question remains, then, why did she do it? Why would any reporter fabricate sources and so cross the line from fact to fiction? The answer may have something to do with a warning given to Cooke by her *Post* editor, a no-nonsense newspaper woman. According to Mike Sager, the editor "doled out praise as often as she did harsh criticism."

Over lunch one day, she told Cooke: "You need to remember two things. First, no matter how good your last story was, people around here want to know, 'What are you going to do for me today?' Second, no matter how good a writer you think you are, you're nothing without me. I've made you what you are, honey pie. I can unmake you just as fast."

In the newsroom, competition is stiff. If you slip up, you're out. Under tremendous pressure by her editor to come up with a dynamite story within a given deadline, Cooke did the next best thing she could: She invented "Jimmy's World."

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.2 (B)

**CROSSING THE LINE FROM
FACT TO FICTION**

Questions:

1. The Pulitzer Prize is awarded for excellence in journalism. Based on the single paragraph excerpt from Janet Cooke's story presented in this article, what might the judges have found "excellent" in her reporting of Jimmy's drug experience?
2. This article suggests that had Cooke not won a Pulitzer Prize for her story, her editors would not have discovered her deception. Copy editors and managing editors do indeed read stories prior to publication. So why was Cooke's deception not discovered sooner?
3. Why would no reputable newspaper hire Cooke after she was fired from the *Post*?
4. In your opinion, did Cooke's age and inexperience have anything to do with why she chose to fake her story in order to meet a deadline and the pressures put on her by a "no-nonsense" boss?
5. In your opinion, was the *Washington Post* fair in firing Cooke? Why or why not?
6. How did Cooke's false story harm—if at all—her newspaper? Her readers? Herself?



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.3 | **CHAT ROOM RUMORS AND MEDIA HOAXES**

Students research the use of people delivering positive messages about products using “word-of-mouth marketing” on the Internet. They explore how “media hoaxes” can trick journalists into reporting a news story that never happened.

Background

This is an ideal opportunity to explore Character Education concepts, including **fairness, honesty, and responsibility.**

Getting Started

Begin with a discussion of Internet chat rooms—what they are, who visits them, and why. Ask students to explain why someone, writing about a movie or a music CD, might disguise their identity in a chat room.

Pass out Activity Sheet 2.3 (A) and ask students to read the article. After reading, invite students to vote on whether they think the “chat room rumors” is a true story or not. Discuss the clues in the article that make it seem authentic or phony.

Pass out Activity Sheet 2.3 (B) and ask students to read about media hoaxes. Ask students to share any experiences they have had in being exposed to messages that later turned out to be rumors or hoaxes.

Discuss the ethical implications of rumors and hoaxes. Is it fair to pay people to pretend they are fictional characters who send chat room messages to suggest they like a certain product? If this company recruited and paid real fans to promote products or musicians via Internet word-of-mouth marketing, would it be unethical? Why or why not?

Researching Rumors and Hoaxes

Invite students to select one of the stories presented on Activity Sheet 2.3 (B). You might want to award a small prize to the students to find the best evidence on whether the statements are true or false. Encourage students to share their findings with the class.

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.3 (A)

**CHAT ROOM RUMORS AND
MEDIA HOAXES**

An article that appeared in the November 11, 1999, issue of *Creativity*, a magazine for marketers, stated the following:

At L.A.-based Word of Net, 40-year-old Mary Gallien spends the day undercover in Internet chatrooms, newsgroups and bulletin boards, spreading buzz about her clients' products. One day Gallien is a 21-year-old male college grad chatting up Careerpath.com, a job-hunting service. The next, she's a 50-year-old female movie buff reviewing the new Gramercy film *Being John Malkovich*. Sometimes Gallien assumes two or three personalities at once, posting messages as one and responding as another. She often makes purposeful grammatical errors or misspellings to make her posts look genuine.

Questions:

1. For whom does Gallien work?
2. What is the purpose of Gallien's work?
3. How—and why—does Gallien fake her true identity?

The article states that the biggest surprise movie hit of 1999, *The Blair Witch Project*, was promoted in just this manner. According to the article, marketers "dressed as e-wolves in sheep's clothing" infiltrated teen chat rooms to spread the buzz about *Blair*.

Do you believe this story?

Or, is it a media hoax, that is, a false story that sounds both incredible and credible at the same time?

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.3 (B)

CHAT ROOM RUMORS AND MEDIA HOAXES

"The media can never deny coverage to a good spectacle. No matter how ridiculous, absurd, insane or illogical something is, if it achieves a certain identity as a spectacle, the media has to deal with it. They have no choice. They're hamstrung by their own needs, to the extent that they're like a puppet in the face of such events."

Mark Pauline

By Catherine Gourley
Excerpted from *Media Wizards*

Media hoaxes are like echoes; they keep repeating. The person relaying the story swears it is true, having heard it from a "friend of a friend" who read it on the Internet or heard it on the radio. The story is passed on, either through word of mouth or through the media. Hundreds of hoaxes are zipping along the information superhighway, in particular. Each reported story that later proves to be false, however, damages the media's credibility for reporting information accurately. Two recent examples include:

- a 1990s NBC Nightly News brief reported that some brands of kitty litter are radioactive. Not true. The story was a misread quote from another source about a single cat in Berkeley, California, that had somehow swallowed a dose of Iodine 131, a radioactive substance.

- a Valdez, Alaska, newspaper reported that a bald eagle had swooped down into a gas station and "snatched" a "Chihuahua-like dog." The woman-owner was distraught; her husband cheered. Not true. The story had appeared many times elsewhere with different breeds of dogs.

Instructions: Select one of the statements below and use the Internet to discover whether the statement is true or false. Be prepared to share your results with the class.

1. Edgar Allan Poe faked news stories when he worked as a reporter for the *New York Sun*.
2. A new company has developed a new sport—indoor ice fishing.
3. Communities are organizing to reduce street crime by providing guns to homeless people to protect themselves.
4. The Marlboro Man died of lung cancer.
5. An amazing bio-technology experiment is now underway—the first male pregnancy.
6. You can tell when some important military action is going to take place by counting the number of orders for pizza delivered to the Pentagon.
7. *The Blair Witch Project* was marketed in chat rooms by people paid by the film company to promote the film.



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.4 | CREDIBLE OR INCREDIBLE?

This research activity helps students learn the basic characteristics of search engines and evaluate a number of different Internet websites using specific criteria to establish credibility, authority, and authenticity.

Background

When using the Internet for research, students too often select the first site that appears on the screen. In addition, they may not examine the quality or the credibility of the information they find. This activity attempts to show students the important differences in the kind of information revealed using different search engines as well as the important criteria to use in evaluating a website.

The activity has two parts, found on 2.4 (A) and 2.4 (B). The first part asks students to select three different websites on a single topic. The second part asks students to review these websites using a list of questions that focus on each website's authorship, content, and structure.

This is an ideal activity for collaborative learning. Encourage students to work in pairs or a small team for this project. This assignment prepares students for completing the Production Activity in this unit.

Getting Started

Introduce the activity by telling students that the most important skill in an information age is the ability to manage information—to acquire information, evaluate it, and use it to solve problems.

But what's the difference between high-quality information and junk? And how can you tell the difference when the subject matter is unfamiliar to you?

Using the Video to Introduce the Topics

There are three topics that will guide the exploration of learning to evaluate information. Use the video to introduce these topics:

- Time travel
- Martin Luther King assassination
- Near-death experiences

Break students into three groups and ask each team to focus on one of the three segments. After viewing each segment, ask students to identify facts, information, and production elements that made them believable and unbelievable.

Have students create a list of what seemed “believable” and “unbelievable” on the blackboard or chart paper. Ask students to share their evaluation with the class in a brief presentation. Point out to students that we make complex judgments about what’s believable using our prior knowledge and life experiences.

Gathering Evidence using Search Engines

Create pairs or small teams of students and ask them to select one of the three topics. Have students use three different search engines to collect the top five sites on this topic. You might ask them to try different combinations of keywords and notice the differences in search results.

After teams have used three search engines to collect their data, invite them to examine the similarities and differences between and among the sites that were selected by the different search engines.

You might want students to prepare a brief oral presentation listing the similarities and differences they found between and among the different search engines.

Demonstrating Analysis of a Website

Pass out copies of Activity Sheet 2.4 (B) to student teams. Each member of the team will need one activity sheet. You might want to model the analysis needed to complete this worksheet by printing out the first page of any website or displaying it on an overhead projector. By working through the questions one at a time, you can share the reasoning processes involved in analyzing a website. Modeling this activity for students demonstrates how much active thinking goes into the process of critically evaluating a website.

For example, you might discuss with students the specific components of the website that you use to evaluate the purpose of the site. If there are a lot of fancy graphics and animations, this might suggest the purpose is to entertain. If there is an offer to buy a product, this might suggest the purpose of the website is to persuade.

After you have modeled completing this activity sheet with a single website, ask students: Which one or two questions on the worksheet are most important to you in evaluating the credibility of a website? Why? Student answers will vary. You can encourage students to provide reasoning for their responses.

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.4 (A)

CREDIBLE OR INCREDIBLE?

***Instructions:** Search one of the topics listed below on three different search engines: Yahoo!, Lycos, and a third search engine of your choice. Write the names of the top five sites for each search engine on the list below.*

Question: How do the top five sites differ from search engine to search engine?

Research Topics: *Time Travel* *MLK Assassination* *Near-Death Experiences*

TOP FIVE SITES ON YAHOO!

TOP FIVE SITES ON LYCOS

TOP FIVE SITES ON SEARCH ENGINE OF YOUR CHOICE

Name _____ Class _____ Date _____

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.4 (B)

CREDIBLE OR INCREDIBLE?

Instructions: Select a website from the previous list and use the chart below to evaluate the site's credibility.

Name of site: _____

URL: _____

Credibility Criteria

Authorship

- Does the site identify the individual or institution who authors the site? yes no
- Is a contact person identified with an E-mail address? yes no
- Does the site have a commercial sponsor or co-sponsor? yes no

Content

- What is the purpose of this site? to inform to entertain to persuade
 (check all that apply) to teach to make money to express

- Is the information current? yes no
- Is the information provided supported by details, examples, or statistics? yes no
- Are the sources of information identified? yes no
- Does the site provide resource links to enhance content? yes no
- Are the links current and reliable, taking you to the existing and relevant sites? yes no
- Is the language unbiased rather than emotional? yes no

Format and Structure

- Are the spelling and grammar flawless? yes no
- Do the graphics enhance the information instead of simply decorating the website? yes no
- Is the site easily readable and navigable? yes no
- Does the site provide for interactivity and/or dialogue exchange? yes no



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.5 | SKEPTICAL ABOUT SOURCES

Students evaluate fact and opinion and identify “hot” and “cool” language that identifies point of view. Students read passages about the Martin Luther King assassination and explore how language use affects our judgments about the credibility of a media message.

Background

Understanding the difference between a fact and an opinion is a critical reading skill. Review the concepts of fact and opinion to make sure students understand the distinction:

- A **fact** is something that can be measured or proven.
- An **opinion** is a belief or statement that may not be able to be measured or proven but represents the point of view of the communicator.

This activity has two parts. The first part on Activity Sheet 2.5 (A) asks students to identify fact and opinion based on a short reading passage. Activity 2.5 (B) asks students to identify neutral and biased language by circling words that communicate an intense point of view.

Getting Started: Identifying Fact and Opinion

Pass out Activity Sheet 2.5 (A) and read the instructions aloud. This activity is ideal for individual student seatwork. As students complete the activities, draw their attention to the source cited, that is, the person who made the statement, which is identified in parentheses following each statement.

After students have completed the activity sheet, review the answers together.

Questions and Answers:

Fact vs. Opinion

1. F
2. F (Note that while Pepper is making a claim in this statement, the statement itself about the book's content is factual.)
3. 0
4. F (Again, although Dexter's quote is his opinion, the statement itself about what happened is factual.)
5. 0

Getting Started: Neutral vs. Biased Language

Pass out Activity Sheet 2.5 (B) and read the instructions aloud. You might introduce the idea of "hot" language, which is vivid, emotional, and highly connotative. By contrast, "cool" language is qualified and neutral.

One fun way to use this activity is to read aloud these passages, asking students to circle the words that are "hot" and underline the words that are "cool." Review the answers with students.

Questions and Answers

1. **Biased.** The author uses "hot" phrases including: "snakebit boob," "any idiot can pull a trigger," "running hither and yon."
2. **Biased.** The author uses vivid description, i.e., "pale prison blues hanging off his gaunt frame," "eerie portrait." The author explains the "three most important words" as a strategy to recreate the scene and create sympathy for Ray.
3. **Neutral.** "Cool" phrases include: "seeking a trial," "believed caused by hepatitis," and "apparently."

Extension

Ask students to find additional "hot" language in the local newspaper. Which types of articles contain the most examples of "hot" language?

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.5 (A)

SKEPTICAL ABOUT SOURCES

Analyze everything that you see and be pretty skeptical. —Peter Jennings, ABC News

By Catherine Gourley
Excerpted from *Media Wizards*

On April 4, 1968, an assassin shot and killed Reverend Martin Luther King in Memphis, Tennessee.

Eleven months later, on March 13, 1969, three days after pleading guilty to the murder, James Earl Ray wrote to Judge Preston Battle, claiming he had been “crowbarred” by police into admitting responsibility for the assassination. In fact, Ray never had a public trial. His confession

resulted in a 99-year prison sentence as opposed to the death penalty.

For thirty years, Ray stuck to his new story—that he was innocent. Did the U.S. government, specifically either the CIA or the FBI, conspire to assassinate King and make Ray the scapegoat? An investigation by the House Select Committee on Assassinations concluded that a conspiracy among St. Louis businessmen did indeed exist, but that Ray acted alone. In recent years, the King family has questioned whether Ray was, in fact, guilty.

Instructions: Each quote below comes from a news article or transcript discussing the assassination of Martin Luther King. Label F for statement of fact, O for statement of opinion on the lines next to each statement.

_____ 1. Dexter King was a child of seven when a sniper gunned his father down on the balcony of the Motel Lorraine in Memphis. (Charles Overbeck, *Matrix* Editor, 1997)

_____ 2. In the book *Orders to Kill*, William F. Pepper, Ray’s last lawyer, claimed a Green Beret sniper team was in place in Memphis at the time of the assassination. (C. D. Stelzer, *Riverfront Times*, 4-29-98)

_____ 3. In a bizarre episode last week, a nattily dressed Dexter King marched into the Nashville prison where James Earl Ray is serving a life sentence, shook the hand of his father’s assassin and told him, “I believe you and my family believes you.” (Andrew Ross, Mg. Ed., *Salon* online magazine, 1999)

_____ 4. With the death of James Earl Ray last week, mainstream news organizations have intimated that the convicted assassin of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. somehow took all knowledge of the crime with him to the grave; that nothing further can be learned. (C. D. Stelzer, *Riverfront Times*, 4-29-98)

_____ 5. MARTIN LUTHER KING’S SON SAYS: JAMES EARL RAY DIDN’T KILL MLK!
(Lisa Pease, *Probe*, May–June 1997)

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.5 (B)**SKEPTICAL ABOUT SOURCES****Identifying Neutral vs. Biased Language**

Instructions: Which of the passages below are written in neutral language, presenting primarily factual information, and which are written in “hot” language? In the biased passages, circle specific “hot” words or phrases that increase the emotional impact of the language. In the neutral passages, underline specific “cool” words or phrases that seem neutral and unbiased.

1. From everything I've read about Ray over the past three decades, he was the kind of snakebit boob who would rob a convenience store and drop his driver's license as he fled. Yet we are supposed to believe that he not only killed King—and indeed, any idiot can pull a trigger—but that he also created the diversionary tactics that had Memphis police running hither and yon in the crucial moments immediately after the 1968 assassination and managed to get all the way to Canada and then London before being apprehended. (Barry Saunders, Staff Writer, *The News and Observer*, Raleigh, NC, 1999)

2. Here was James Earl Ray, his pale prison blues hanging off his gaunt frame, trembling slightly in the Nashville prison hospital conference room, standing on the precipice of death after three months of near-fatal liver failures. . . . Across from Ray sat Dexter Scott King, an eerie portrait of

his father, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. He listened intently to Ray's denials of involvement in his father's assassination and then said the three most important words Ray will ever hear: “I believe you.” (Charles Overbeck, *Matrix* Editor, 1997)

3. James Earl Ray, the petty criminal who confessed to assassinating King but then recanted and spent decades seeking a trial, died today. He was 70. King's widow, Coretta Scott King, said today that Ray's death is tragic because the truth of her husband's assassination will never be known. Ray was serving a 99-year prison sentence for the April 4, 1968, killing in Memphis. He had been in poor health, suffering most notably from cirrhosis of the liver believed caused by hepatitis, which he apparently contracted during a blood transfusion after being stabbed by black inmates in 1981. (ABCNEWS.com, 4-23-99)



TEACHER NOTES

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.6 | HOLLYWOOD'S TIME TRAVEL PARADOXES: CREATIVE WRITING ACTIVITY

Students create an imaginary short story (500 words in length) that makes use of one of two different theories of time travel.

Background

Creative writing activities encourage students to blend fact with fantasy, which is a part of all storytelling. Science fiction often contains substantial amounts of real scientific fact—students will enjoy the chance to develop their own science fiction stories.

Getting Started

Pass out copies of Activity Sheet 2.6 (A) and encourage students to read. Students need not have seen the movies referenced in the reading section of this activity. However, you might begin by asking who has seen *Terminator 2* and *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*. What did they like or dislike about these films? How realistic or unrealistic were they?

Ask students to supply the titles of other movies or television shows that explore the theme of time travel. They will be able to list a number of different programs.

Ask students if time travel is, in fact, possible or just the science fiction imaginings of Hollywood writers.

Writing Process

Pass out copies of Activity Sheet 2.6 (B) and review the assignment, which provides a process for developing a short story using one of the two theories of time travel.

Encourage students to stick to the suggested word count limit of 500 words. Discuss: How does the length limit affect the sequence of actions in the story? How does the length limit affect the way the writer describes the characters and the action?

Challenge

Research and read the first time travel stories ever written. Here are the answers to the challenge assignment:

- In 1896, H. G. Wells wrote *The Time Machine*, a novel that described, for the first time, an imaginary device that would go into the future or past just as an automobile can move.
- In 1899, Mark Twain wrote *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, a novel where an American of the 19th century moved thirteen centuries into the past and found himself with the Knights of the Round Table.

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.6 (A)**HOLLYWOOD'S TIME TRAVEL PARADOXES:
A CREATIVE WRITING ACTIVITY**

In *Terminator 2*, humans on Earth in the 21st century are at war with Skynet, an evil computer that rules the world with its computerized machines. The leader of the rebel force is John Connor. Skynet sends a computerized assassin back in time to when John is a rebellious teenager. The plan is simple: By eliminating Connor as a child, Skynet will ensure its tyranny in the future. That's the science fiction. What's the science fact?

One theory of time travel proposes that the past is fixed, unchangeable. Even if a person—or a super-intelligent, form-changing computer—travels back in time with the intentions of altering the future, nature's laws of physics will somehow prevent that from ever happening. In *Terminator 2*, the theory holds. Actor Arnold Schwarzenegger is Hollywood's version of nature. As the Terminator, he saves Connor's life over and over again until at last the assassin-computer melts in a vat of bubbling goo.

In *Star Trek IV: The Voyage Home*, Earth is a planet where whales are extinct. Captain Kirk and Spock time travel back to the 20th century, beam up two whales, and transport them to the future. That's the science fiction. What's the science fact?

A second theory of time travel proposes that the past is not fixed and is changeable. In physics, however, every action triggers a reaction. In attempting to alter the past, the individual creates a new reality. The original universe still exists but now a second, parallel universe develops alongside it. It is to this parallel universe that the time traveler returns. According to this theory, even if Kirk and Spock wanted to return to an Earth without whales—which still exists—they could not.

Challenge

What were the first time-travel stories ever written? Research and read about the first stories written by British and American authors.

UNIT 2 | ACTIVITY 2.6 (B)

**HOLLYWOOD’S TIME TRAVEL PARADOXES:
A CREATIVE WRITING ACTIVITY**

***Instructions:** Use your understanding of the two theories of time travel to create a short-short story of no more than 500 words. In this story, you—as the time traveler—return to a year when and a place where your parents were teenagers. This, too, has been the subject of Hollywood movies, including *Back to the Future*. What do you see? More importantly, why have you traveled back in time and what will you do there that will or will not alter time?*

Step One: Create the science fiction using the “Power of Three” story formula.

Create the story’s premise, using Hollywood’s character-plot formula called “the Power of Three.” At its simplest, it goes like this: Boy meets girl; boy loses girl; boy gets girl again. Or, as in *Terminator 2*, Skynet sends evil computer to kill Connor; Connor, the adult, sends his own terminator back in time to kill the evil computer; the Terminator wins and Connor survives. What’s your “Power of Three” formula? Keep in mind that one of the characters must be the time traveler and one of the other characters will be a parent. Who is the third character and how does this third character complicate the time travel mission?

Step Two: Select a time travel theory.

Begin with a conflict. Send your character back in time for a reason. Describe what he or she experiences. Then, depending on which time travel theory you select—either nature will thwart all efforts to alter the past or nature will create a parallel universe—describe what happens next.

Step Three: End by revealing the consequences.

End by returning to the present and revealing how—and if—the time travel experience altered events.



TEACHER NOTES



UNIT 2

CREATE AN EVIDENCE CHART

Create an evidence chart that displays ten different sources of information about your research topic. Provide short descriptions of the information and the sources and organize these on a continuum showing your judgments of the credibility and believability of each of the ten sources.

This activity invites students to conduct research on a topic and evaluate the quality of the evidence they find. This activity is ideal for working with a partner or as a member of a small group.

Activity 2.4 is especially useful in preparing students to complete this assignment.

Invite students to find “wacky” or “questionable” sources as well as “credible” and “believable” sources to include on this chart. Part of the challenge of this activity is to include a wide range of different types of sources.

Review the Checklist

Pass out the Production Activity worksheet and review the steps in the process needed to complete the activity. Encourage students to check off the steps by using the circles in the left margin. Establish a realistic deadline and monitor students’ work during the process.

Evaluation

Use the evaluation rubric provided to give students feedback about their writing. You might also want students to evaluate each other’s work using this evaluation sheet.

Publishing Student Work on www.AssignmentMediaLit.com

See the Resources section on page 183 to learn how you or your students can send completed evidence charts to be published on the *Assignment: Media Literacy* website.

ASSIGNMENT



UNIT 2

CREATE AN EVIDENCE CHART

- (**ASSIGNMENT:** Create an evidence chart that displays ten different sources of information about your research topic. Provide short descriptions of the information and the sources and organize these on a continuum showing your judgments of the credibility and believability of each of the ten sources.

CHECKLIST TO COMPLETE THIS ACTIVITY:

Select your research project.

- Time travel
- Martin Luther King assassination
- Near-death experience
- Other—your choice

Gather at least ten different sources of information.

- Make sure you have information from a range of different types of books, magazine articles, newspaper articles, videotapes, and Internet websites.
- Strive to select sources that contain both facts and opinions about the topic.
- Select information sources that are more and less credible.
- Gather information from both current and older sources.
- Write the complete citation for each source on 3 x 5 index cards.

Review materials and select key paragraphs and phrases for each source.

- Use the criteria shown on Activity Sheet 2.4 (B) to assess the credibility of these sources.
- Identify paragraphs or other information that provides important facts and opinions about your topic.
- Write or type each key quote or paragraph on 3 x 5 index cards.

Prepare an evidence chart on poster paper or as a web page.

- Arrange the index cards along a continuum from “highly believable” to “not at all believable.”
- Discuss your judgments with others.
- Send your completed project to the www.AssignmentMediaLit.com website to publish it.

EVALUATION



UNIT 2

CREATE AN EVIDENCE CHART

Student Name: _____

Ten different sources of information have been selected about the topic.

4	The sources demonstrate these characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- they include different types of genres and media forms,- they contain facts and opinions,- they come from current and older sources. The complete citation for each source has been written correctly on index cards.
3	The sources demonstrate these characteristics: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- they include different types of genres and media forms,- they contain facts and opinions,- they come from current and older sources. Citations are incomplete or not written in correct format.
2	Sources are not diverse enough or do not explore the topic appropriately.
1	No evidence that sources were selected with strategic purpose.

Paragraphs display key ideas from the source materials.

4	Paragraphs demonstrate that the student has a strong understanding of main ideas and important facts and opinions on the research topic.
3	Paragraphs demonstrate that the student has an adequate understanding of main ideas and important facts and opinions on the research topic.
2	Paragraphs have not been selected carefully and do not demonstrate the student's understanding of important facts and opinions on the topic.
1	Paragraphs are missing or poorly selected.

Evidence chart is attractive and well organized.

4	The cards are placed in a way that shows the continuum of believability and the display is attractive and well organized.
2	The evidence chart is difficult to understand, incomplete, or sloppy.

Comments:

Grade:

