

Am I Being Fair?

A video and graphic introduce four proven strategies students can use to counter their own bias when surfing online or conducting research; then students practice using these strategies when investigating a real-life issue.

GRADES: 7-12

DURATION: 30-60 minutes

MATERIALS

- Handouts: Pizza Prejudice (projected on screen or one per pair) and Am I Being Fair? worksheet (one per student or small group, included in this packet)
- Video: “Am I Being Fair?” (on lesson plan website)
- Tipsheet: Am I Being Fair? (included in this packet)
- Media Examples: Access to the [News or Noise? media map](https://newseumED.org/news-or-noise-map) [newseumED.org/news-or-noise-map] or printouts of Pokémon Go or National Walkout Day examples
- Internet: Access to conduct simple searches

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Ask students to brainstorm lists of things that they love and things that they hate. Then ask them to think about their reactions when they read/watch something about a topic or thing on either list. How do these strong feelings affect their reactions? Through the conversation, elicit the idea that we all have internal opinions (or biases) that shape how we react to the world around us.
2. Further illustrate the concept of individual biases using an approachable issue that still elicits passionate reactions: pizza. Ask students what is their favorite restaurant chain? What is their least favorite? Distribute or project the Pizza Prejudice handout. Tell students to imagine they're browsing online when they come across this article. How would they react? Why? (For example: Would they feel validated? Outraged? Not care? Would they dismiss the conclusion as stupid?)
3. Explain that to weigh whether these pizza experts' opinions should be taken seriously, we have to get past our own feelings about the topic to look at the content objectively. In other words, maybe it's right to dismiss their conclusion, but we can't know until we set aside our own biases. Watch the “Am I Being Fair?” video and go over the accompanying tipsheet graphic.
4. Revisit the pizza headline and work through the four strategies as they apply to this topic. For each strategy, brainstorm how it could apply. “Be yourself, but know yourself” examples: the type of pizza they grew up eating; whether dietary restrictions limit what types of pizza they can eat (or if they can eat it at all); whether they have fond/bad memories, etc. “Never rely on a single source” examples: Look for additional articles about this committee, its members and its process - what makes them “experts”; have other taste tests been done, etc. “Revisit and revise” examples: Has the student tried all of the chains, especially Uno's? Could trying a new place require them to rethink how they feel about their own personal pizza rankings? “Engage with Editors” examples: Where could students go to find a perspective to challenge their own? In this case, because the topic is something many people have experience and opinions about, they might start with talking to friends, but could also seek out food blogs, pizza fan sites, etc.
5. Now tell your students they'll apply these strategies to a real-life example. Pick one of the following topics/primary source collections from the News or Noise? map.
 - For younger students: Pokémon Go
 - For older students: National Walkout Day

Distribute the Am I Being Fair? worksheet that goes with your selected topic. (There are two versions in this packet.) Have students review the primary sources and complete the worksheet.

6. Give students a chance to share and discuss their answers. Then use the Discussion Questions below to continue the conversation.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which of these strategies do you think is the most/least effective at helping you counter your own biases? Explain.
- Why is it important to try to be objective when reading the news, especially when it comes to controversial topics?
- Does being fair about the news we consume mean we should try to ignore or suppress our emotions about the issues covered? Explain why or why not.
- In newsrooms, if someone has too strong a connection to a story, they are said to have a conflict of interest. A conflict of interest disqualifies them from covering the story. How close to a story is too close? When does prior knowledge or experience cross the line to become a conflict of interest?
- Are there any stories or issues to which you think you are too close to ever view them objectively? Explain.

EXTENSION ACTIVITY

Echo. Echo.

Watch the ["Ask an Expert: Echo Chambers" video](https://newseumed.org/tools/video-page/ask-an-expert:-echo-chambers) [newseumed.org/tools/video-page/ask-an-expert:-echo-chambers] featuring Rachel Davis Mersey, from the Medill School of Journalism at Northwestern University. Discuss the video and her tips for getting a fuller picture of a story. Do they seem easy or hard to do? Then, have students identify an issue or topic they care strongly about and their primary sources of information for it. Challenge them to diversify their sources using Mersey's guidelines. They should follow the news about their topic for one week. At the end of the week, reflect as a class on the experience, what they learned, and how they can help their peers escape their echo chambers.

Being Fair About Current Events

As a class, create a list of current controversial topics. (If you did this in the [Is It Fair? lesson plan](https://newseumED.org/tools/lesson-plan/is-it-fair?) [newseumED.org/tools/lesson-plan/is-it-fair?]) you may choose to revisit the same events or issues.) Individually, students should select a topic about which they will write a short (roughly one page) summary with the goal of being as fair as possible. They can also write a short reflection (roughly one page) describing how they used the four Am I Being Fair? strategies to help ensure their objectivity when writing their summary. Have students pair off and trade summaries. After reading each other's work, discuss whether their efforts to be objective were successful and share reflections on the process as a class.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Pizza Prejudice

Committee of Experts Selects Uno's Pizza as the World's Best

A group of 12 pizza experts gathered last week to settle a delicious debate once and for all: Which chain has the best pizza? The committee was made up of food scientists, chefs and restaurant reviewers with extensive pizza experience. They tasted a wide range of pies before coming to a decision.

The three dozen pizzas sampled over three days came from national and regional giants: Domino's, Pizza Hut, Papa John's, Little Caesars, Uno's, Hungry Howie's, Godfather's Pizza and California Pizza Kitchen.

After testing, the group reached a consensus with relatively little argument. The clear winner: Uno's, which claims it invented the deep-dish pizza. The judges noted Uno's high crust, fresh dough, homemade sauce and piles of cheese.

"It feels good to have this settled once and for all," said Susan Cassidy, a restaurant reviewer who participated in the tasting and debate.

Name: _____ Date: _____

Am I Being Fair? (Pokémon Go)

Pokémon Go: Harmless Fun or Dangerous Craze?

When the augmented reality game Pokémon Go became available to download on smartphones in the United States on July 6, 2016, it quickly became a popular pastime and the subject of national conversation. Millions of Americans were suddenly playing the game, which uses augmented reality technology to make cartoon creatures (Pokémon) appear in real-life locations on one's phone screen. The popularity of the app caused large crowds to gather in some parks and businesses in search of special game features, and some observers worried that players were causing chaos and not paying attention to their surroundings as they chased after virtual Pokémon.

Based on this short summary and anything you already knew about this topic, which position most closely describes how you feel about this topic? Circle one:

- A. The Pokémon Go craze was just a fun hobby for a lot of people, and it never posed any real threat to the public.
- B. The Pokémon Go craze got out of hand, and it could have put participants and bystanders in danger.

Use the strategies from the Am I Being Fair? tipsheet to check for and counter any bias you have about this topic.

1. Be yourself, but know yourself.
 - What experiences, connections or opinions do you already have about this topic or related topics — such as video games, use of technology, etc. — that might affect how you view it? List them below, along with how they could affect your views.
2. Never rely on a single source.
 - Find two photographs/articles/etc. from the Pokémon Go section of the News or Noise? map that present different perspectives on this topic.
 - Map source #1:
 - Perspective:
 - Map source #2:
 - Perspective:

3. Revisit and revise.

- Go online and find a more recent article about Pokémon Go.
 - Name of article:
 - Where did you find it?
 - Publication date:
- Does any of this information change how you feel about this topic? Explain why or why not.

4. Engage with “editors.”

- Go online and find a story, website, podcast, YouTube channel or other media example that provides a different perspective from your own on this topic. For example, if you think Pokémon Go was just a fun fad, find a source who thought it was dangerous, or vice versa.
 - Name of source:
 - What is it? (story, podcast, etc.):
 - Source perspective:
- Does this source make you rethink your ideas at all? Explain why or why not.

After going through these strategies, look back at the position you circled at the start of this exercise. Explain how your opinion about this topic has changed and how it has stayed the same (write three or four sentences).

Name: _____ Date: _____

Am I Being Fair? (National Walkout Day)

Student Walkouts: An Important Protest or an Inappropriate Disruption?

The National School Walkout was a nationwide protest against gun violence and for gun control laws. Students with a national youth activism group organized it for March 14, 2018, the one-month anniversary of a mass shooting at Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School that killed 17 students and teachers. Students across the country left class at 10 a.m. local time for 17 minutes. Each minute represented a person who had been fatally shot at Stoneman Douglas. Students honored the dead in various ways, such as displaying their photographs and reading their names. Reactions were mixed. Some people were critical of the goals and methods of the demonstrations; others applauded the students' activism and civic engagement.

Based on this short summary and anything you already knew about this topic, which position most closely describes how you feel about this topic? Circle one:

- A. The student walkouts were part of a serious movement to change gun laws and make schools safer.
- B. The student walkouts were well intentioned but pointless.
- C. The student walkouts were just an excuse for kids to skip class and disrupted the school environment.

Use the strategies from the Am I Being Fair? tipsheet to check for and counter any bias you have about this topic.

1. Be yourself, but know yourself.
 - What experiences, connections or opinions do you already have about this topic or related topics — such as connections to the protests, past interest in gun control or gun rights, etc. — that might affect how you view it? List them below, along with how they could affect your views.
2. Never rely on a single source.
 - Find two photographs/articles/etc. from the National Walkout Day section of the News or Noise? map that present different perspectives on this topic.
 - Map source #1:
 - Perspective:
 - Map source #2:
 - Perspective:

3. Revisit and revise.

- Go online and find a more recent article about National Walkout Day.
 - Name of article:
 - Where did you find it?
 - Publication date:
- Does any of this information change how you feel about this topic? Explain why or why not.

4. Engage with “editors.”

- Go online and find a website, podcast, YouTube channel or other media example that provides a different perspective from your own on this topic. For example, if you think the protests were admirable and important, find a perspective that believes they were not a good way to express these views, or vice versa.
 - Name of source:
 - What is it? (story, podcast, etc.):
 - Source perspective:
- Does this source make you rethink your ideas at all? Explain why or why not.

After going through these strategies, look back at the position you circled at the start of this exercise. Explain how your opinion about this topic has changed and how it has stayed the same (write three or four sentences).

WORKSHEET EXAMPLE

Am I Being Fair? (Pokémon Go)

Pokémon Go: Harmless Fun or Dangerous Craze?

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Based on this short summary and anything you already knew about this topic, which position most closely describes how you feel about this topic? Circle one:

- C. The Pokémon Go craze was just a fun hobby for a lot of people, and it never posed any real threat to the public.
- D. The Pokémon Go craze got out of hand, and it could have put participants and bystanders in danger.

Use the strategies from the “Am I Being Fair?” tipsheet to check for and counter any bias you have about this topic.

5. Be yourself, but know yourself.
 - What experiences, connections or opinions do you already have about this topic or related topics — such as video games, use of technology, etc. — that might affect how you view it? List them below, along with how they could affect your views.

I play a lot of video games and I think they are a good way to pass the time and maybe even make you smarter and more coordinated.

I didn't play this particular game, but a lot of my good friends did.

6. Never rely on a single source.
 - Find two photographs/articles/etc. from the Pokémon Go section of the “News or Noise?” map that present different perspectives on this topic.
 - Map source #1: *Story Touts Health Benefits of Pokémon Go*
 - Perspective: *This is a good game because it gets people to go outside.*
 - Map source #2: *Article Warns of Dangers of Pokémon Go*
 - Perspective: *People aren't aware enough of some of the risks of playing this game, most of which have to do with being distracted.*

7. Revisit and revise.

- Go online and find a more recent article about Pokémon Go (or something related, like the most recent gaming craze).
 - Name of article: *Examining Motivations to Play Pokémon Go and Their Influence on Perceived Outcomes and Physical Activity*
 - Where did you find it?: *The National Center for Biotechnology Information website*
 - Publication date: *October 24, 2017*
- Does any of this information change how you feel about this topic? Explain why or why not.

This article reinforces my feelings. Scientists studying this game found it had mostly positive impacts in people's lives, in particular when it comes to increased physical activity.

8. Engage with "editors."

- Go online and find a story, website, podcast, YouTube channel or other media example that provides a different perspective from your own on this topic. For example, if you think Pokémon Go was just a fun fad, find a source who thought it was dangerous, or vice versa.
 - Name of source: *Pokemon Go dangerous? Every crime, accident, death linked to game so far*
 - What is it? *An article from Syracuse.com*
 - Source perspective: *Somewhat critical, pointing out that Pokémon Go has been connected to a number of bad things happening*
- Does this source make you rethink your ideas at all? Explain why or why not.

Yes, a little bit. I didn't realize just how many crimes and accidents had taken place while playing this game. In a lot of cases, the people involved were just being pretty stupid. But maybe some changes to the game would help make it less likely that people could get hurt.

After going through these strategies, look back at the position you circled at the start of this exercise. Explain how your opinion about this topic has changed and how it has stayed the same (3-4 sentences):

I still think that overall, Pokémon Go was just a fun craze, and I actually want to try it out myself. But I also now understand why some people thought it could be dangerous, particularly when there were large crowds involved or when important parts of the game were taking place in dangerous locations. I don't think it should have been banned or anything like that, but I do think everyone should be more aware of the possible risks of playing this game irresponsibly.

Am I Being Fair?

How to Balance Your Brain

Getting good information requires not only evaluating your sources, but also evaluating your own process and preconceptions. Use these four road-tested strategies from journalism to counter your own biases.



Be yourself, but know yourself.

Recognize your identity, experiences and emotions. Think about how they affect your views and responses — both for better and for worse.

Never rely on a single source.

Seek out a variety of information to make sure that facts hold up and to gain more than one perspective on the issue.



Revisit and revise.

Assume that new facts will emerge and circumstances will change.

Be prepared to adjust your own views and responses accordingly.



Engage with “editors.”

Find people, publications, podcasts, and such that introduce new ideas, challenge your views and force you to sharpen your arguments.



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Find a video tour of this tipsheet at newsseumed.org/fact-finder