



Hey.  
I'm not a lumberjack,  
or a fur trader...  
and I don't live in an igloo  
or eat blubber, or own a dogsled...  
and I don't know Jimmy, Sally or Suzy from Canada,  
although I'm certain they're really, really nice.....



Although the "Rant," as we Canadians have come to know it, is merely an advertising concoction, it does reflect some of the stereotypes that we think others have of us. The rest of the "rant" is dedicated to correcting some of these stereotypes, something that anyone who has travelled outside our country has either done or longed to do. The question is, why do others see us this way in the first place? The answer is media bias. If the perception of Canadians that we all live in igloos and drive dogsleds is a stereotype, then it follows that what we see of other countries in the media doesn't reflect the daily lives and rich diversity of those places. This lesson is all about the way media can influence our perspective of the world and world issues.

1. Identify countries in the world that are affluent and locate them on the overhead map. With a different coloured marker, locate those countries which you think are developing countries. In what ways are developing countries different from Canada?
2. Take the "True or False?" quiz. Why are some of your perceptions incorrect?
3. Brainstorm and list some of the current problems facing Canada (or your local area). Discuss how you might feel if the only information that others knew about Canada was the negative or unpleasant aspects about the issues. What else would you want others to know about Canada?
4. What terms are associated with developed and developing or third world countries?
  - Where do these ideas come from?
  - What is missing from their perceptions?
  - How might the perceptions differ if the class was made up of more/fewer students who have lived in a developing country?
  - How do they think people from developing countries would feel about others' perceptions of their region?
  - Is the most common impressions of developing countries an exception or the norm?
  - What roles to family, personality, experience, beliefs and the media play in how we see the world?
  - What other "filters" or "lenses" affect how we see the world?

5. Read the article on media and political bias. Choose an article about a developing/third world country and analyse it for bias using the following criteria:
  - What is the main message of the article (or cartoon)?
  - What is the purpose of the information given? (e.g. to inform, influence, persuade, entertain)
  - What data does the author use to support the main message? (e.g., facts, statistics, opinions)
  - Who is the author or creator? (in the case of a web site, navigate to the home page for more information about the source of the article)
  - What bias can you identify? (Look for any main points of view or facts that may be missing, persuasive words or irrelevant facts.)
  - What is your own bias?
  - How does this sample of media make you feel?
  - What can you conclude about the main message? (Do you have enough information yet to make a conclusion?)

Developed v. Developing Countries:

## Media and Perception: True or False?

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Indicate whether each of the following statements is true or false by writing a “T” or an “F” to the left of the statement. Then, write in the correct answer and its explanation in the space below each statement as it is being taken up in class.

\_\_\_ 1. The leading cause of child death in developing countries is famine.

\_\_\_ 2. Canada provides about 10 cents per tax dollar as foreign aid.

\_\_\_ 3. 2% of the world's children are starving (visibly malnourished).

\_\_\_ 4. 90% of the world's children go to primary school.

\_\_\_ 5. Half of the budget of a developing country comes from overseas aid.

\_\_\_ 6. Children are malnourished because they don't get enough food to eat.

\_\_\_ 7. The rate of population growth in the developing world is decreasing.

\_\_\_ 8. There is enough money and resources in the world to meet everyone's basic needs.



There is no such thing as an objective point of view. No matter how much we may try to ignore it, human communication always takes place in a context, through a medium, and among individuals and groups who are situated historically, politically, economically, and socially. This state of affairs is neither bad nor good. It simply is. Bias is a small word that identifies the collective influences of the entire context of a message.

Politicians are certainly biased and overtly so. They belong to parties and espouse policies and ideologies. And while they may think their individual ideologies are simply common sense, they understand that they speak from political positions.

Journalists, too, speak from political positions but usually not overtly so. The journalistic ethics of objectivity and fairness are strong influences on the profession. But journalistic objectivity is not the pristine objectivity of philosophy. Instead, a journalist attempts to be objective by two methods: 1) fairness to those concerned with the news and 2) a professional process of information gathering that seeks fairness, completeness, and accuracy. As we all know, the ethical heights journalists set for themselves are not always reached. But, all in all, like politics, it is an honorable profession practiced, for the most part, by people trying to do the right thing.

The press is often thought of as a unified voice with a distinct bias (right or left depending on the critic). This simplistic thinking fits the needs of ideological struggle, but is hardly useful in coming to a better understanding of what is happening in the world. I believe journalism is an under-theorized practice. In other words, journalists often do what they do without reflecting upon the meaning of the premises and assumptions that support their practice. I say this as a former journalist. I think we may begin to reflect upon journalistic practice by noticing that the press applies a narrative structure to ambiguous events in order to create a coherent and causal sense of events.

For citizens and information consumers (which are one in the same today), it is important to develop the skill of detecting bias. Remember: Bias does not suggest that a message is false or unfair.

## **Critical Questions for Detecting Bias**

1. What is the author's / speaker's socio-political position? With what social, political, or professional groups is the speaker identified?
2. Does the speaker have anything to gain personally from delivering the message?
3. Who is paying for the message? Where does the message appear? What is the bias of the medium? Who stands to gain?
4. What sources does the speaker use, and how credible are they? Does the speaker cite statistics? If so, how were the data gathered, who gathered the data, and are the data being presented fully?
5. How does the speaker present arguments? Is the message one-sided, or does it include alternative points of view? Does the speaker fairly present alternative arguments? Does the speaker ignore obviously conflicting arguments?
6. If the message includes alternative points of view, how are those views characterized? Does the speaker use positive words and images to describe his/her point of view and negative words and images to describe other points of view? Does the speaker ascribe positive motivations to his/her point of view and negative motivations to alternative points of view?