



THE

# GREAT DEBATES™

POWERED BY THE MUSEUM OF BROADCAST COMMUNICATIONS

**CURRICULUM & TOOLS**

**9<sup>TH</sup>-12<sup>TH</sup> GRADE**



**- OBJECTIVITY VS. NEUTRALITY -  
PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION MEDIA COVERAGE**



## PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS AND THE NEUTRALITY OF MEDIA

This high-school lesson plan has been developed to help students improve media literacy by looking at different aspects of how presidential candidates have been covered over time, improving their ability to analyze media messaging and learn how to separate fact from fiction. In this lesson plan, students will learn the difference between “objective” reporting and “neutral” reporting.

- Objective reporters cover candidates without any demonstrated political bias, but they can and do challenge the accuracy of candidates’ statements.
- Neutral reporters also are not political biased, but don’t fact-check or challenge candidates’ statements.

For the assessments, students will review coverage of previous elections to see if and how media coverage has changed over time, and whether it reflects a change in the nature of reporting from objective to neutral to biased reporting. Students will also determine if and when neutral or biased reporting can lead to the spread of false information.

For the assessments, students can use either a current campaign or an historical one. They will be able to review the coverage through the online materials available at the The Great Debate pages from the Museum of Broadcast Communications website. The weekly newsletter, which we plan to make available to teachers who enroll in curriculum support with the museum, will also give teachers and students more tools to evaluate current events in political campaigns.

Students have the option to present their findings in writing, oral reports, or multimedia presentations, depending on interest and access to digital equipment and projections.

# SUMMARY

Students will review coverage of three previous elections to see if and how media coverage has changed over time, and whether it reflects a change in objective and neutral reporting and what bias or misinformation is being presented when reporting isn't objective.

# MATERIALS NEEDED

## Teacher

- Computer
- Projector
- Access To website

## Student

- Pens/pencils
- Worksheets
- Access To website, student computers or iPads
- Neutrality and Objectivity handouts

# STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.6

Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.9-10.9

Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7

Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.9

Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.SL.2

Integrate and evaluate information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively and orally.

# LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Students learn about and develop skills to discern if media coverage is “objective” or “neutral” reporting and what bias is present in media coverage. This is part of the skill of media literacy and helps them become more informed participants in election coverage.
- Students will be able to contrast a neutral news report from an objective one.
- Students will be able to identify features of a news report that indicates bias in media.
- Students will be able to correctly define objectivity and neutrality given the opportunity to think about it.
- Students will be able to analyze various forms of news coverage, given the definitions of neutral and objective, and draw their own conclusions on the nature of the coverage.

Teacher	Student	Minutes
<p><b>Day 1:</b> Teacher provides outline of the project and sets up the framework of what it means for news media to be objective, neutral or biased. Ask students what they think objective reporting means, take several answers. Write your class's definition on the board.</p>	<p>Students listening, offering input.</p>	<p>5 Minutes</p>
<p>Next, ask the students what they think neutral reporting means. Write your class's answers on the board.</p>	<p>Students offering input.</p>	<p>3 Minutes</p>

Teacher	Student	Minutes
<p>Share the worksheet titled “Media Bias, Objectivity, and Neutrality.” Then play clips of CNN, MSNBC, and Fox News coverage of the Trump vs. Clinton debate.</p>	<p>Students listening.</p>	<p>10 Minutes</p>
<p>Have students fill out the top section of their worksheets, then have them share <b>with a partner</b> their conclusions about the debates based solely on the news coverage.</p>	<p>Students fill out worksheet. Then students complete the Think Pair Share.</p>	<p>5 Minutes</p>
<p>Play footage from the first presidential debate, then have students fill out the second section of the worksheet and complete the Think Pair Share.</p>	<p>Students fill out worksheet. Then students share conclusions with their neighbor.</p>	<p>15 Minutes</p>
<p>Bring the class together for a quick discussion on whether students think the news clips they watched before watching the debate presented the same story. Was there a slant to stories? If so, which side was favored?</p>	<p>Students sharing ideas.</p>	<p>15 Minutes</p>
<p>Presents the summary of the definitions of “objective” and “neutral” to the class. Pass out the handout on “Neutral vs. Objective.”</p>	<p>Students listening, and reviewing handouts.</p>	<p>10 Minutes</p>

Teacher	Student	Minutes
<p>Once again, show press clips from CNN, MSNBC and Fox News to the class. Instruct them to use their handouts on neutrality and objectivity to complete the third section of the worksheet and complete the Think Pair Share.</p>	<p>Students listening, watching, completing worksheets and completing the Think Pair Share.</p>	<p>15 Minutes</p>
<p>Give out assignment worksheet. Have students pick a current campaign and three broadcast news sources. Explain to students how to use The Great Debates website for historical evaluation and how to use media for current coverage.</p>	<p>Students listening. Take note of the homework assignment.</p>	<p>5 Minutes</p>
<p><b>Homework:</b> Students work alone or in teams to review news coverage of election content, from different sources and answer the worksheet questions.</p>	<p>Students complete the homework overnight.</p>	
<p><b>Day 2:</b> Discuss findings as a class and ask students to explain where they found bias or neutral coverage that left untrue statements unchallenged. Final part of the discussion is about whether students think the news media have an obligation to correct misstatements. Is the same true on social media? Use example in resources: Twitter adding fact checking to presidential tweets.</p>	<p>Students discuss.</p>	<p>45 Minutes</p>

# ASSESSMENTS

<b>Optional reflection paper and taking it to the next level.</b>	Students will write a 2-3 page paper following the classroom discussion on their belief about the role of news media in presenting objectively on candidate's statements. Students can also use the Ad Fontes Media Bias Chart. The nonpartisan, nonprofit that analyzes news outlets and bias. (The name is Latin for "to the source," which is the organization's mission — it looks to the media's sources to analyze bias.) Did the class discussion of bias match the chart's characterization?
<b>Worksheet</b>	The students will choose their own campaign on which to review news coverage. Students will fill out the homework worksheet (attached) and the teacher will grade it based on understanding of neutrality and objectivity.

# ADAPTATIONS OR ACCOMMODATIONS NEEDED

<b>Learners</b>	<b>Adaptations/Accommodations</b>
Highly Proficient	<p>Students will be able to identify examples of left-leaning and right-leaning coverage and examples of misstatements that go unchallenged. They will also have identified objective coverage and be able to indicate how they know the coverage was more accurate.</p> <p>Highly proficient students will have the opportunity to complete the extra credit to display higher level thinking.</p>
ELL	<p>Students will be able to identify examples of neutral coverage and examples of misstatements that go unchallenged and how they know those statements were untrue.</p> <p>Students have the option of working in partners for help.</p>
Struggling Learners	<p>Students will be able to identify how media coverage seems slanted to one viewpoint or another and may be able to identify where the statements were untrue that candidates made.</p> <p>Students have the option of working in partners for help.</p>

# RESOURCES

## MSNBC, CNN and FOX clips

Please use The [GreatDebates.org](https://www.greatdebates.org) as a reference for coverage clips and the full debate.

**Twitter adds fact checking to Presidential tweets** — story outlines Twitter’s first move to fact-check President Trump’s tweets. But the fact-checking is not quite accurate either.

**News Literacy** — TEDTalk on what it means to be news literate.

### Additional websites:

**Ad Fontes Media** — nonprofit and nonpolitical site which rates media bias.

**AllSides** While not a fact-checking site, AllSides curates stories from right-, center- and left-leaning media so that readers can easily compare how bias influences reporting on each topic.

**Fact Check** This nonpartisan, nonprofit project of the Annenberg Public Policy Center of the University of Pennsylvania monitors the factual accuracy of what is said by U.S. political players, including politicians, TV ads, debates, interviews and news releases.

### Examples of right and left leaning fact checking for students to compare:

**Media Matters** A nonprofit and self-described liberal-leaning research center monitors and corrects **what it says** is conservative misinformation in the media.

**NewsBusters** A project of the conservative Media Research Center with a right-leaning slant, NewsBusters is focused on “documenting, exposing and neutralizing liberal media bias.”

### **Classroom game**

**Factitious.** A game from American University, evaluating news credibility.

### **Deep Dive — ebook**

**Web Literacy for Student Fact Checkers** by Mike Caulfield outlines his “Four Moves” to check accuracy of stories as part of the Washington State University & Digital Polarization Initiative of the American Democracy Project.

# THE GREAT DEBATES NEUTRALITY VS. OBJECTIVITY HOMEWORK

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class Period: \_\_\_\_\_

## MEDIA NEUTRALITY AND OBJECTIVITY

ALLOW TIME IN BETWEEN THESE 3 SECTIONS TO ABSORB AND THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU'VE WATCHED BEFORE ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS.

### Section 1

WATCH THE NEWS COVERAGE YOU'VE SELECTED ON YOUR CHOSEN CANDIDATE. THEN ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.

1. How would you evaluate your candidate's performance based on the news coverage?
2. Record any examples of bias in the news coverage below.
3. Was the news coverage neutral? Was it objective?
4. Briefly explain your answer to number 3.

## Section 2

**NEXT, WATCH COVERAGE OF YOUR CANDIDATE IN A DEBATE.  
THEN ANSWER THE QUESTION.**

1. Was the news coverage you watched on your candidate fair? Explain your answer.

## Section 3

**NOW, REWATCH NEWS COVERAGE OF YOUR CANDIDATE.  
THEN ANSWER THE QUESTIONS.**

1. Give one example of objective news coverage you observed. (Did the newscasters present the facts correctly, using non biased terms?)
  
2. Give one example of neutral news coverage you observed. (Did the newscasters leave untruths without questioning?)
  
3. Give one example of biased news coverage you observed. (Did the newscasters try to convince the viewers of one viewpoint?)

### **OPTIONAL ASSIGNMENT FOR EXTRA CREDIT.**

Write a 2-3 page paper describing what you believe the role of news media should be in covering candidates' debate performances. Should they remain objective? Should neutrality be the goal? Explain your answer.

# THE GREAT DEBATES NEUTRALITY VS. OBJECTIVITY HANDOUT

## DEFINITIONS

### **Neutral:**

adjective

1. Not aligned with or supporting any side or position in a controversy: The arbitrator was absolutely neutral.
2. Of or belonging to a neutral state or party: neutral territory.
3. Of no particular kind, characteristics, etc.; indefinite: a neutral personality that made no impression whatsoever.

### **Objective:**

adjective

1. Not influenced by personal feelings, interpretations, or prejudice; based on facts; unbiased: An objective opinion.

Source: dictionary.com

# THE GREAT DEBATES NEUTRALITY VS. OBJECTIVITY WORKSHEET

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class Period: \_\_\_\_\_

## MEDIA BIAS, OBJECTIVITY AND NEUTRALITY

**FIRST WATCH THE FOOTAGE OF CNN, MSNBC AND FOX NEWS' REPORTS ON THE PRESIDENTIAL DEBATE.**

**1. Who do you think won the debate based on Fox News's reporting?  
Why do you think this?**

**2. Who do you think won the debate based on CNN's reporting?  
Why do you think this?**

**3. Who do you think won the debate based on MSNBC's reporting?  
Why do you think this?**

### **Think Pair Share:**

**Talk to your partner about your preliminary conclusions about the debates.**

# THE GREAT DEBATES NEUTRALITY VS. OBJECTIVITY WORKSHEET — PAGE 2

**NOW, WATCH THE ACTUAL DEBATE FOOTAGE**

- 4. Based on the debate itself, who do you think won?  
Explain why you think this.**

**Think Pair Share:**

**Talk to your partner about your thoughts on the debate.**

**PAUSE TO WATCH THE NEWS COVERAGE AGAIN**

- 5. Based on the Fox News report, did the newscasters remain objective?  
Why or why not?**

- 6. Did the Fox News newscasters remain neutral?  
Why or why not?**

# THE GREAT DEBATES NEUTRALITY VS. OBJECTIVITY WORKSHEET — PAGE 3

7. Based on the CNN news report, did the newscasters remain objective?  
Why or why not?

8. Did the CNN newscasters remain neutral?  
Why or why not?

9. Based on the MSNBC news report, did the newscasters remain objective?  
Why or why not?

10. Did the MSNBC newscasters remain neutral?  
Why or why not?

# THE GREAT DEBATES NEUTRALITY VS. OBJECTIVITY WORKSHEET — PAGE 4

11. Did Fox News, MSNBC or CNN show bias toward or against one candidate or the other? Use the table below to complete your answers.

Media Coverage	Candidate 1: Donald Trump	Candidate 2: Hillary Clinton
cnn	Record biased statements for or against here:	Record biased statements for or against here:
Fox News	Record biased statements for or against here:	Record biased statements for or against here:
msnbc	Record biased statements for or against here:	Record biased statements for or against here: