**What is the difference between a fact**

**and an opinion?**

**For a teacher as preliminary remarks:** The growing influence of mass media on the reality can be noticed not only in the area of acquiring knowledge and ideas but also in the aspect of creating values, norms, attitudes or views. The mass media are recognized as a determining factor when it comes to shaping one’s identity. Moreover, the mass media cover all possible topics.

For this reason, presenting the truth should be their main task. A true picture of reality enables people to make conscious, responsible decisions. The basis of this assumption is the fact that conscious decisions may only be made on the grounds of having correct information. Unfortunately, modern mass media are not free of manipulation. “Manipulated information is disseminated using different means: in politics, trade (advertising), fashion and even in education. However, the most effective means for manipulated information is the mass media.”

It is very common that different pieces of information mix with subjective opinions among the messages that reach the modern recipient. Presenting to young people what a model information message and an opinion looks like may help them to differentiate between these two types of message.

**A reliable media message that provides a fact** should not present just selected aspects of the issue but it should consist of all its elements.

Therefore, it must embrace elements, such as:

* What happened?
* When and where did it take place?
* Who participated in the event?
* It CAN (if necessary) take into account the context of events that will allow to understand their sense. Often without any additional information about cultural background, reasons, previous incidents etc.; being given only a piece of information, a recipient may misunderstand it.

Information often goes with a commentary on the motivations behind the activities and goals of people taking part in the events. In addition, we often put faith in public life commentators who are perceived as role models to us. Yet, we should bear in mind that they only present their own opinions concerning different facts.   
The teacher can draw students’ attention to the fact that these days information presented in the mass media, especially quasi-information on political issues, may deliberately deceive its recipients so as to shape opinions. Politics is a difficult and complicated field.

Journalistic genres include: the news, reports, timetables.

**The author of an opinion should** speak on his/her own behalf, highlighting the subjectivity of his point of view. He can do this by means of phrases such as “I think…”, “In my opinion….”, “It seems that…”, “I believe that…”, “To my mind…” etc. Using the conditional and expressions like “In all likelihood,…” or “Perhaps…” is a less direct language of expressing opinions.

Authors presenting their own views often use a more colloquial language, i.e. a language which is less official than the one used by the journalists trying to emphasise their own objectivity. This can be particularly noticed in columns. Their authors do not avoid humour which is unacceptable in news journalism.

A well-formed opinion should contain a convincing justification for a given issue that would demonstrate a thorough understanding of the discussed topic.

Apart from a column, the typical genres of presenting opinions (i.e. journalistic ones) include: a review, an essay and a commentary.

**Objectives of the lesson**

Students:

* know the difference between a fact and an opinion;
* can formulate a fact and an opinion on the basis of collected data;
* know in which situations a fact and an opinion is formulated.

**Course of the lesson**

1.

Using the examples from the **“INTRODUCTION”** file, explain what a fact as well as an opinion is, take advantage of the information above (“for a teacher”).

Place two sheets of paper on the board, one entitled “Opinion” and the other entitled “Fact”. Take the phrases out of **“Fact/Opinion”** file. Ask several people to come to the table. Ask them to choose a card, read it and then decide on which sheet of paper they want to attach it. Others can discuss and give advice. If the participants cannot make a decision, place the card in the middle, i.e. between two sheets of paper.

**\*DISCUSSION**

**\*”FACT/OPINION” FILE**

2.

Say that a fact should be objective and specific. Stick questions on a sheet of paper entitled ”Fact” which should be answered by means of reliable journalistic facts/information (**“Fact/Opinion”** file). Also, explain that an opinion is an expression of one’s view on a given subject. Note that sometimes phrases like “I think that…”, “In my opinion…” etc are employed – these phrases mean that the recipient immediately knows that the author is giving an opinion. It is also common that phrases such as “this is the best”, “this is the worst” are used. They are also opinions, yet, they are formulated as if they expressed objective truth. At this point you can point out that such statements are intentional and they often deliberately manipulate while **we act according to the Descartes’ words “Cogito ergo sum**”. We need to be aware of the purpose of the messages that surround us.

**\*Teacher’s mini-lecture**

**\*”FACT/OPINION” FILE**

3.

Divide the participants into groups of, for example, 3 people. Taking account of the sentences from the **”Circus” file**, ask them to formulate:   
a) a fact about the arrival of the circus used later in the „News” section;  
b) an opinion about this event used later in the “Students make comments” section on the school’s website.  
Ask the groups to place cards with the statements on the “Fact” or “Opinion” sheet of paper.  
Group representatives read the texts. Comment briefly on whether the texts meet the basic principles in their categories.

**\*GROUP WORK**

**\*”CIRCUS” FILE**

4.

The teacher reads the statements from the **“Fragments” file**, the participants match them to the “Fact” or “Opinion” category.

**\*DISCUSSION**

**\*”FRAGMENTS” FILE**

5.

Remind the participants of the first exercise. If there are some cards left in the middle of the board, ask them whether they can now match them to one of the sheets. Note that the recipient is not the only one who sometimes confuses a fact with an opinion. This also happens to journalists and publicists who write texts. This is often caused by the author’s strong involvement in the subject of the article. We should consciously use the messages that surround us.

\***Teacher’s mini-lecture – take advantage of “For a teacher” section**

6.

**The task: KAHOOT**

[**https://create.kahoot.it/share/informacja-i-opinia/663531ba-1d74-4a33-8442-ab49b43b1c17**](https://create.kahoot.it/share/informacja-i-opinia/663531ba-1d74-4a33-8442-ab49b43b1c17)

**\*\*\* Homework\*\*\***

The students are to bring any daily newspaper for the next class. You are to decide with them which sections should contain facts and opinions. You are to discuss why the boundaries between a fact and an opinion are often blurred.

**Evaluation**

Do the participants of the classes:

* understand the basic differences between an opinion and a fact?
* formulate both types of utterance?

Sources:

*MASS MEDIA WE WSPÓŁCZESNYM ŚWIECIE,* Redakcja naukowa Violetta Tanaś Wojciech Welskop, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Wyższej Szkoły Biznesu i Nauk o Zdrowiu Łódź, 2019

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