

# Citizenship case study and lesson plan

## Citizenship

**In citizenship, students are constantly engaged with a variety of sources and are encouraged to question them critically in terms of validity and reliability based on a background of sound subject knowledge. This knowledge is essential so they can see for themselves where information is being misrepresented or simplified and where interpretations are being used which may distort the readers' perceptions.**

### Critical literacy link to Key Stage 3 programme of study

- Pupils should be equipped with the skills to think critically and debate political questions
- Pupils should use and apply their knowledge and understanding whilst developing skills to research and interrogate evidence

### Case study – Year 8 citizenship project at The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre, Kent

**As part of their citizenship lessons, students investigated a series of local protests against immigration. The outcome of the project was for students to produce a documentary film about the situation and so a large part of the lessons included interviewing a range of participants and residents who were affected, and examining media and social media coverage.**

Whilst students were learning about the right to protest, counter-protest and the role of the police, it was also important to consider how such events are perceived by different stakeholders, how they are reported and disseminated, and how this influences what we come to know and think about events. This project formed part of the school's response to anti-extremism policy, and was developed in the Building Resilience project with the Association for Citizenship Teaching.

Initially students engaged with a range of articles and social media platforms but struggled to question them critically, therefore a series of activities was devised to demonstrate how media bias and misinformation can occur.

**Differentiating facts from opinions:** A simple questionnaire at the start of a lesson assessed students' knowledge of these terms and allowed any misunderstandings to be clarified. Students were then presented with negative headlines about young people and asked for their reactions. This generated outrage about how unfair the journalists were being and how inaccurate the reports were. An article was then given to the students about the youth

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of the UK. They looked for the facts and the opinions and then gave their reactions to the article. They were able to differentiate between opinions and facts and to give supported views on why they felt the writer was only giving one side of the story. Students then went on to extrapolate how readers who never had contact with young people may be influenced by these articles, especially if they read multiple similar stories over time.

**Hoax stories:** We then looked at a less subtle but more manipulative example of a hoax story. Students were fascinated by a blog by Amina, called *Gay Girl in Damascus*, and there were audible gasps when the blog was exposed as a hoax and students were shown that major news outlets including the Guardian, Telegraph and BBC had also been duped into believing the story.

**Inaccuracies in 'factual' reporting:** To return the focus to immigration, a range of headlines were shown on the topic accompanied by graphics which 'mythbusted' them. Students were then able to make links between the task on young people and the headlines on immigration.

“The students valued the opportunities to engage with specific examples of distortion and lies in mainstream media cover and social media. This helps students encounter the bigger picture, outside of regular mainstream media so students can see that the media can be distorted by omission.” (Zoe Bowden, teacher)



During these activities students checked their own and their peers' views about immigration and one boy who had started to critically analyse some of his own negative perceptions announced to the class he was glad he was part of the lesson as nobody else ever discusses these things. It was clear that his understanding and thought processes had changed greatly throughout the lesson. During an evaluation of the lessons one student stated:

“It's strange to think that the way the media represents people completely changes the opinion of a person (...) after they've read

something about the person (...) it completely changes the way they see people.”

As the final activity the class produced a checklist to assess the reliability of sources then compared with a checklist produced by the teacher.

Contributed by Zoe Bowden, Teacher at The Towers School and Sixth Form Centre.

## Citizenship example lesson plan

### Year 8 (Key Stage 3)

#### **Building Resilience Project: Dover, what is all the fuss about?**

**Learning objective: To understand how media can influence the views our views and evaluate how reliable the media can be.**

#### **Context of lesson:**

This lesson is one of a sequence in which students were investigating protests in a local town based on immigration. There had been violent clashes between fascist groups and anti-fascist groups over a number of weekends. Press coverage had been both local and national including policing of the demonstrations by the Metropolitan mounted division. The outcome for students at the end of the unit was to make a documentary regarding the protesters with a local film crew recoding their views and the views of those involved. The lesson which follows is the second in a series and follows an introduction to documentaries and the media coverage of the protests so far.

Depending on length of lessons in schools and the discussions the sources stimulate it is possible to split the lesson into two parts, covering the Myth Busting section as a separate lesson.

#### **Activity one: Getting you thinking**

Students complete a short questionnaire identifying facts from opinions and answers are shared and discussed. During feedback ensure all students are confident with a working definition of a fact (which can be proven and checked by anyone) and an opinion which is the view of somebody and can change depending on who you are and the circumstances you are in.

#### **Activity two: Images of people in the press**

Show students a range of headlines or frontline images that represent young people in a less than positive way. If you feel another topic for your school context would be more suitable than young people you could use a different topic.

Students should as a class discuss these images. Questions to stimulate discussion could include:

- What are these headlines trying to say?

- How do they make you feel?
- Do you agree with anything in these images?
- Do you disagree with anything in these images?
- Can you give me evidence to show these headlines are right/wrong?
- How would people who read these headlines feel?
- How would people who had never met or mixed with young people feel after reading these headlines?
- What effects could it have on their reactions towards young people?
- What kind of impact would it have if headlines like this came out week after week?

### **Activity three: Identifying fact and opinion in a news article**

Provide students in pairs a news article on the topic. In this case it was by Joanna Lumley in the Telegraph however you may have local resources or other articles you prefer to use. Try to make sure the article will provoke reaction from the class.

Ask students to highlight in two colours the facts and opinions in the article. Carry out a feedback session to ensure students are using the terms fact and opinion correctly.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/picturegalleries/celebritynews/8352571/Joanna-Lumley-were-raising-lazy-children-with-no-morals.html>

Alternative article for those who would need more obvious links:

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2024486/UK-RIOTS-2011-British-youths-unpleasant-violent-world.html>

### **Suggested discussion prompts:**

- What are students' reactions?
- Is there evidence that Lumley's views are correct?
- Do they feel they are being described in accurately in the article?
- Could the article be damaging to young people?

### **Activity four: Identifying who and what influences us**

Students create a spider diagram of the people or things that influence them.

Ask students to write the people/organisations they have identified in order of trust starting with the one they trust most then in descending order.

Discuss as a class the choices students have made and ask them to explain them. Why do they believe they can trust this person/organisation. Could there be a reason this person may give opinions rather than facts? Is there a way they could check?

### **Activity five: Amina Gay Girl in Damascus**

Depending on the knowledge your class have on the situation in Syria and how the rebellion started you may need to provide them with some context.

Then introduce them to extracts of an online blog from Amina who was seen as a leading light in the rebellion. Ensure that students are aware that by writing about being homosexual Amina was being brave and putting herself in a dangerous situation.

Examples of the blog can be taken from here:

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/jun/13/gay-girl-damascus-blog>

Discussion can be held around the blog's contents for example:

- What kind of things does Amina want?
- Does she seem different to any other young person?
- What would motivate her to write this blog?
- Once students are engaged with Amina as an individual, show the blog extract which reports Amina is missing.
- Question students who may have taken her and why etc.
- What action could authorities take?

Go on to show the film and report which exposes the entire blog as a fake:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cofa4eEGC3w>

Explain to students that not only were they fooled but large news outlets too had fallen for the story for example:

- <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-13744980>
- <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/syria/8572884/A-Gay-Girl-in-Damascus-how-the-hoax-unfolded.html>
- <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/06/gay-girl-damascus-syria-blog>

Ask students why the story seemed so believable?

Looking back are there any clues that Amina was not real? (Later pupils realised nobody had ever met with or spoken to Amina except via the blog).

Encourage students to suggest how they could test their sources to ensure that they are reliable and not fake.

In pairs students are to devise five tests for investigating sources of information.

The class share and justify the choices they have made. Encourage other students to evaluate the others suggestions. Would there be an issue with that? Is it always possible to do that? Etc.

Compare the ideas students have written with those written by the teacher.

### **Activity six: Myth busting**

Now students have built up a range of skills on topics which were easy to engage with, they will apply these to the focus of their immigration enquiry.

Show students three or four headlines related to immigration; a quick search produces many. Ask students to decide if these are fact or opinion. Ensure they can justify their views. Are they able to use any of the checklist they have just produced to see if the headlines are correct?

Using a range of headlines discuss them in detail and ask students how they would use their new critical skills to assess these news stories. Once they have suggested methods, provide the information next to the headline which disproves it.

### **Activity seven: Tying it together**

Students complete Ten Top Tips for people their age regarding what to believe in the news and how to check the facts.