

UNIT

2

Facts or Opinions

Theoretical and Rationale Foundations of the Strategy

The Writing and Communication Centre (2019) remarks on the importance of judging the facts and opinions presented in a text in order to evaluate whether they are objective or subjective. Furthermore, Kadir et al. (2014) mention that “we [teachers] do not want them [EFL learners] to be submissive readers all the time” (p. 210). Consequently, the authors point out the need to implement explicit instruction to develop critical reading skills and educate readers to critically judge information, avoiding taking anything for granted. Their call is for professors to encourage readers who identify and agree or disagree with the arguments presented in the text, considering that lots of the content can represent speculative or unfounded opinions that lack factual data. As stated by Rashtchi & Aghajanzadeh (2008) “[EFL] readers need not accept the words on the page as given” (p. 120) In order to do so, it is necessary to analyze and evaluate the texts to distinguish between facts and opinions.

Identifying facts and opinions is seen as a strategy to foster critical reading for authors such as Axelrod and Cooper (2002, as cited in Nasrollahi et al., 2014), Raashtchi & Aghajanzadeh (2008), Fitzell (2011), and Anuar & Sidhu (2017), among others. The scholars argue that the ability to distinguish between facts and opinions aids readers in progressing from simply remembering data to developing higher-order cognitive processes such as evaluation, as outlined in Bloom’s Taxonomy. In this sense, distinguishing fact from opinions not only enhances comprehension of the author’s intentions but also enables readers to articulate their own viewpoints and engage with the text from a more critical, analytical, and reflective perspective.

Cottrell (2005) defines facts as “items of information that can be checked and proved,” whereas opinions are described as “a belief that is believed to be true, but which is not based on proof or substantial evidence. An opinion may be a personal point of view” (p. 141). Franco (2016) expands upon the concept by arguing that facts present objective information that can be verified as accurate or inaccurate based on actual evidence. Opinions, conversely, are inherently subjective as they vary from one person to another and lack reliability. Likewise, the author calls for students to carry out rigorous processes of critical evaluation of the information presented in texts, as opinions can be presented as facts or may include speculative elements without offering verifiable support for the claims.

When designing Unit Two, we considered the criteria to differentiate facts from opinions provided by the Public Schools of Robenson County (n.d.). They have created a lesson plan for distinguishing facts from opinions, where it is argued that words like “believe, feel, possibly, probably, should/ should not, think, best (good)/ worst (bad), always/ never, least/most, all, suggest” (p.2) are hints to determine the text contains opinions. On the other hand, the document indicates that elements such as “names, statistics, places, dates, and times” (p. 3) serve as indicators for identifying factual information.

This unit aims to foster students’ ability to critically engage in the evaluation of non-fiction texts by distinguishing between facts and opinions, identifying false or misleading information, and reflecting on the authors’ positions. Students are also encouraged to formulate their own viewpoints based on their analysis. Implementing this strategy throughout the unit is essential, since it promotes a critical stance toward textual content. Rather than accepting information as absolute truth, students develop techniques to analyze, evaluate, and interpret the authors’ arguments, which subsequently allows them to suggest reasoned agreements or disagreement.

Unit Two: Facts or Opinions

Lesson 1: Distinguishing Facts and Opinions

Explain and Demonstrate Stages

Material: Video about facts and opinions; worksheet #5

Time: 55 minutes

Suggested Procedure



Step 1- Explain the differences between facts and opinions. You can use the video titled *Distinguishing between Fact and Opinion* by Franco (2016) where several strategies for identifying facts and opinions are discussed. Pause the video and provide explanations and/or additional examples when necessary.

Step 2- Write a list of statements (Facts and Opinions) about a topic your students are familiar with. Subsequently, apply the think aloud strategy to exemplify the process for deciding whether the statements are facts or opinions and what clues can help to distinguish one from the other.

Step 3- Distribute worksheet #5 to each of your students individually. Ask them to analyze each statement to determine if they are facts or opinions, providing justification for their conclusions.

If considered appropriate, model the process by judging the first statement collectively as a class, encouraging discussion to explore the reasons for categorizing it as a fact or opinion. Once students have finished the activity, instruct them to compare and discuss their responses with a partner. Be prepared to give feedback and address questions.

Step 4- (optional) Have your students reflect and share their insights on the importance of distinguishing facts and opinions when reading.

For the development of this first lesson, we considered and adapted some of the ideas, suggestions and worksheets available literacy ideas (<https://literacyideas.com>) and education.com (<https://www.education.com/>). The purpose of this worksheet is to help your students better comprehend and distinguish what facts and opinions

are. It is an ideal source for developing the explanation and demonstration stages of the framework proposed along this book.

In Worksheet #5, you can find a series of statements taken from the New York Times newspaper article about the Broadway musical “Hamilton” that have been included to ask your students to attentively analyze them and choose if they are facts or opinions and argument their conclusions. While some of the statements may seem simple, they require an elaborate reflective and analytical approach that can help the teacher assess the students’ understanding of the topic and strategy.

Worksheet #5: Hamilton Facts and Opinions (Photocopiable)

Name: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Read and re-read the following extracts taken from the article: *Hamilton and History: Are they in Sync?* from the New York Times newspaper and choose if they are facts or opinions; then, explain how you know they are a fact or an opinion. This worksheet was adapted from Text-based Fact or Opinion worksheet (www.education.com, 2019)

Fragments from the text	Fact or Opinion?		How do you know?
Lin-Manuel Miranda, who created the hit Broadway musical <i>Hamilton</i> , has received many important awards, including the 2015 George Washington Book Prize. (Schuessler, 2016)	Fact	Opinion	
It's a fantastic theatrical production, but I'm worried that people might mistake it for actual history. (Schuessler, 2016)	Fact	Opinion	
Eliza, Hamilton's widow, sings in the show's final song that if he had lived longer, he could have done much more to oppose slavery. (Schuessler, 2016)	Fact	Opinion	
Eric Foner thought the show should have shown a more balanced view by mentioning that Hamilton was elitist and cared more about property rights than fighting slavery. (Schuessler, 2016)	Fact	Opinion	

Unit Two: Facts or Opinions

Lesson 2: What is my Opinion?

Guide Stage

Material: Worksheet #6 (For designing it, we considered some ideas proposed by Public Schools of Robenson County, 2025).

Time: 45 minutes approximately

Suggested Procedure

Step 1- Hand out worksheet # 6 to each student in your class.

Step 2- Tell your students to read the document of facts and opinions about J.K Rowling twice.

Step 3- Have your students write their opinions on the statements written in worksheet #6. Encourage them to thoughtfully analyze the information and state their opinions based on their own feelings and insights. Monitor the task and support its development by raising problematizing questions.

Step 4 – Ask your students to reflect on what their perceptions and explore what these reveal about their personal positioning and ideologies. Throughout this step, it is relevant to explain learners that all authors consciously or unconsciously represent their opinions in their texts, the reason why these ideas influence our conclusions as readers.

Constructing informed opinions requires writers to formulate more than a personal judgment. It involves engaging with the text, exploring the emotions and thoughts it evokes and considering the prior knowledge about the topic. Worksheet #6 encourages this level of involvement by asking students to share their thoughts on what they have read. In doing so, the task strengthens a distinction between fact and opinion. This task corresponds to the “guide” stage in McLaughlin and Allen’s (2009) instructional model, when activities require consistent guidance and feedback from teachers.



Worksheet #6: J.K. Rowling Facts and Opinions (Photocopiable)

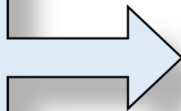
Name: _____ Date: _____

Directions: Read the following facts and opinions about J.K. Rowling. Write your own opinions about those statements. Use your thoughts, feelings and previous knowledge.

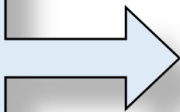
FACTS

MY OPINIONS

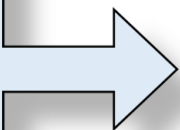
The book “Harry Potter and the Philosopher Stone” was published in 1998. Its movie was released in 2001. (Cable News Network, 2024)



Just in the USA, Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows sold more than 8 million copies in less than 25 hours. (Cable News Network, 2024)



In 2009, J.K. Rowling was accused of plagiarizing the book “The adventures of Willy the Wizard” Written by Adrian Jacobs in 1987. She was found innocent in 2011. (Cable News Network, 2024)



Unit Two: Facts or Opinions

Lesson 3: Fact or Opinion?

Practice Stage

Material: Worksheet #7

Time: 60 minutes

Suggested procedure



Step 1- Introduce the activity by referring to Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl as two famous children’s literature authors. Delve into their backgrounds from a positive or negative perspective for students to raise biased opinions.

Step 2- Divide the class into two groups. Distribute Worksheet #7 – section titled *Student A* to one group and Worksheet #7 – section named *Student B* to the other. Instruct students to attentively review the factual statements about each author. Following the perspective assigned, students must propose a series of biased opinions. This activity has been proposed to foster critical awareness of how bias can shape the interpretation and presentation of factual content.

Step 3- Tell your students that writers normally include, consciously or unconsciously, their opinions in their texts. Have your students write a paragraph about the author, integrating information from both sides (facts and opinions). Encourage your students to write a first draft, carefully stating opinions so they look unbiased.

Step 4- Once your students finish, ask them to fold the worksheets so that the only section visible is the paragraph. Thereafter, require students in group A to look for a partner to work with in group B. They join to exchange paragraphs; hence, student A will receive student B’s worksheet and vice versa.

Step 5- Tell your students to review the texts written by their partners and circle the statements they consider to be factual and those that look like opinions.

Step 6 – (optional) Ask students to work with their peers to compare and discuss their responses. Promote a reflective discussion on how an author’s opinions can cause a text to be biased and emphasize the critical reader’s role in identifying and evaluating such bias.

Step 7 – Once your students have additional information about who Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl are, assign half of the group to read “The Lorax” book written by Dr. Seuss. Meanwhile, the other half of the class reads “Matilda” by Roald Dahl; have them watch the movies as well!

Step 8 – Organize students into small groups to dialogue about the diverse perspectives presented in the book regarding current national or international issues, such as politics, environmental challenges, education, or technological advancements. After discussing collectively and reaching a consensus on their perspective about the topic, each group should complete Worksheet #8, distinguishing factual information from opinions.

Worksheet #7 has as its main purpose raising students’ awareness of how readers can be easily influenced by the author(s) of a text when there is a critical evaluation of what is objective and what is subjective in a non-fiction reading is not carried out. Furthermore, it encourages students to evaluate the text to distinguish facts and opinions and not to believe everything stated in a text. Finally, it is paramount to explain that the content was selected to connect national or international realities about social issues with the main message of a children’s book. In this way, learners engage in critical dialogue, serving also to acknowledge that children’s literature can go further entertainment. Worksheet #8 can be used with the proposed books in the suggested procedure or with any other book you consider useful.

Worksheet #8: The Facts and Opinions Honeycomb (Photocopiable)

Name: _____ Date: _____

The worksheet features a yellow honeycomb background with six white hexagonal cells arranged in a 2x3 grid. Each cell contains five horizontal lines for writing. A callout box on the right side of the top row contains the text: "You can practice your summarizing strategies here as well". A callout box on the right side of the bottom row contains the text: "Your opinions as well as the author's intended opinion". A callout box on the left side of the middle row contains the text: "Facts" with a red arrow pointing to the leftmost cell of that row. Red curved arrows are drawn between the cells, starting from the top-right cell, moving left to the top-middle cell, then down to the middle-middle cell, then left to the middle-left cell, then down to the bottom-left cell, then right to the bottom-middle cell, and finally up to the bottom-right cell.

Unit Assessment

Assessment for this unit is applied through self-assessment. Have students analyze their own process and use a checklist to portray their strengths and weaknesses for distinguishing facts from opinions.

Reflection

Your students will have the opportunity to write their reflections in their journals. They will assess contents, benefits and difficulties in their learning processes, while distinguishing facts from opinions.



Facts and Opinions Self-assessment Checklist (Photocopiable)

Name: _____ Date: _____

After finishing the proposed activities for fostering critical reading skills (distinguishing facts from opinions), I can:

- Easily distinguish facts from opinions.
- Distinguish when a text is being biased by the author(s).
- State my own opinion of a topic based on real facts.

Further actions I can take include:

- ✓ _____
 - ✓ _____
-

Facts and Opinions Self-assessment Checklist (Photocopiable)

Name: _____ Date: _____

After finishing the proposed activities for fostering critical reading skills (distinguishing facts from opinions), I can:

- Easily distinguish facts from opinions.
- Distinguish when a text is being biased by the author(s).
- State my own opinion of a topic based on real facts.

Further actions I can take include:

- ✓ _____
- ✓ _____

