

3. Understanding media bias

Video summary

A short classroom film for secondary schools introducing the concept of media bias and how it can shape the way news stories are presented. In the film, presenter and documentary filmmaker James Blake demonstrates how the same event can be presented in different ways, showing examples of bias by omission (where important details are deliberately left out of a news story) and confirmation bias (where an isolated incident is used as a proof for a previously held belief). Students are encouraged to try this for themselves, writing two distinct stories for the same everyday event.

Before watching

Establish a safe learning environment. Remind students that being misled online is common, and the goal is to learn strategies, not judge others. Encourage students to focus on general online behaviour rather than sharing sensitive personal experiences.

In preparation for watching the film in class, ask students where they usually get news or information from online. Invite them to share times they noticed headlines or posts that seemed exaggerated, one-sided, or strange.

Introduce key terms:

Media bias: when news or online content is presented in a way that favours a particular perspective.

AI-generated content: text, images, or videos created by artificial intelligence (AI) which can look real but may be misleading or false.

While watching

There are 'pause points' in the video for students to engage in tasks. You can either pause at these suggested points (you will need to manually pause the video to give your students enough time to complete these tasks) or watch the film through and try the activities afterwards.

Activity 1

The first task challenges students to analyse two reports that have been written about an online video that has been manipulated using AI to fabricate a story. They should discuss in groups:

- How does the specific language and overall tone changes the story being told?
- What is each report trying to make you feel or think?

Give students a maximum of five minutes for discussion followed up with whole class feedback. This could include:

Article 1

- Language & tone: Dramatic, emotional, and judgemental; words like “out-of-control rage”, and “appalling” make the story feel shocking.
- Intended effect: Makes the reader feel fear, anger, and concern about safety at the skate park.
- Students might note that this article neglects to inform readers that the video has been manipulated using AI. This could be an example of bias by omission.

Article 2

- Language and tone: More neutral, highlighting that the reports use an AI manipulated video. Still refers to the behaviour of the skateboarders as “terrible”.
- Intended effect: Encourages more critical thinking and to question the origins of the source. Focuses on the broader issues, rather than an immediate emotional reaction.
- This could be an example of confirmation bias, using this isolated incident to reinforce existing beliefs.

Activity 2

The second task requires students to ‘become the journalist’. They are challenged to choose a simple, neutral statement (examples are within the video) and, in groups, re-write it twice; firstly with a positive spin and followed by a negative spin.

Possible responses might include:

1. Healthy food only in the canteen

- **Positive spin:** School takes a big step for student wellbeing! All fast food removed from the canteen to give pupils healthier, more nutritious choices.
- **Negative spin:** School bans all fast food! Students forced to eat boring salads and sandwiches—no choice left. Who decided this was a good idea?

2. New attendance-tracking app

- **Positive spin:** Smart new app helps students keep track of attendance easily and stay organised. Attendance just got simpler!
- **Negative spin:** School spying on every move! New app logs students daily; privacy concerns ignored. Are we under constant surveillance now?

3. Fridays timetable-free for home study

- **Positive spin:** Exciting news! Fridays are now timetable-free so students can focus on home study, catch up on work, or explore interests.
- **Negative spin:** School scraps Friday lessons! Students left at home with no structure—learning could suffer. Is anyone thinking about education quality?

After watching

Reflection and personal strategy: Students write a short paragraph on how they will approach news and online content differently after watching the video. Which strategies will you use to spot bias or AI content? How will you check if a story is real before sharing it?

Where next?

BBC Bitesize's [Other Side of the Story](#) resources are designed to help students navigate fake news and misinformation and be more critical and curious about what you see and share online.

There are several relevant pages relating to media bias that you could set students for independent study or explore as a class:

- [What can The Celebrity Traitors teach us about unconscious bias?](#)
- [What is bias and how can it influence your decisions?](#)
- [What is confirmation bias?](#)
- [What is unconscious bias? Watch celebrities try to work out what this theory means and their experiences of it as they face the Confession Pod](#)
- [Is social media biased or balanced?](#)
- [Are you biased? Test yourself with our biased bingo quiz](#)
- [“Everyone thinks reality TV stars are airheads!” How to spot and challenge your own unconscious bias](#)

Curriculum notes

This film will be relevant for several curriculum areas:

Citizenship and PSHE Key Stage 3 and 4: considering the impact of media messages on individuals and society; developing informed opinions and responsible participation in digital communities; encouraging critical thinking about current events and online debates.

Computing Key Stage 3: understanding how online content, including AI-generated material, is created and spread; learning to identify misleading or manipulated information; practising responsible, safe, and ethical use of digital tools.

English Key Stage 3 and 4: analysing texts and media to evaluate bias, perspective, and reliability; understanding how language, tone, and structure influence meaning and reader perception; developing skills to critically evaluate sources an