

Facts or Fiction

A routine to increase awareness of the many issues of truth and what to consider when exploring the truth of something.

Select a news item, an image, something that has happened to you, or an event in history and ask:

- What do you **perceive** is being conveyed by this?
- Who would **decide** to convey this message? Why?
- How else could this be **interpreted**?
- What do you **believe** is true in this? What makes you think that?

PURPOSE

What kind of thinking does this routine encourage?

Too often, information can be accepted at face value without any supporting evidence. This routine is designed to explore the complexity of the realm of truth. It encourages slow looking, perspective taking, seeking supporting evidence, and analysis to uncover the core and accuracy of information. Some questions that might emerge as students use the routine are: Is there supporting evidence? Are many facts and figures reported? Does it fit with what you have learned before? Never be afraid to ask questions.

APPLICATION

When and where can I use it?

The routine can be helpful to show students that images or information presented are not always truthful accounts of events. One suggestion for doing this is to select an image showing that if only part of it was visible, different 'truths' could be interpreted. Cut the image into separate pieces, show only a part of it at a time as if each piece was a stand-alone complete picture, facilitate a discussion on what can be seen and thoughts/interpretations of what is happening, and then show the complete image and compare with initial thoughts. Alternately, show only one of a sequence of images or read only part of an article initially, discuss it and then complete the sequence.

LAUNCH

What are some tips for starting and using this routine?

- The routine can help awaken students to the idea that facts or fiction within a story, image, report can be influenced by the agenda of the photographer, author and/or editor of the information. Identifying possible purposes of a message can provide insights into who is “sending” the message. Why do you think this image/story was communicated? Who would benefit from this “message” being in the public arena? What impact do you think it may have? After giving yourself, your students, or colleagues time to think about this, ask whether your original impressions changed. What other messages are being perceived? **Circle of Viewpoints** and **Step Inside** thinking routines could also assist in discussions throughout this routine and highlight different perspectives of the same information/image.
- Students often ask “What are the facts” and “Can there be more than one truth?” From a definitional standpoint, in the end there cannot be more than one truth on a particular point, e.g. either smoking doesn’t cause cancer or it does (more precisely, heavy patterns of smoking increase the chances of cancer to such-and-such a degree). But there’s a big catch to this: what’s really true and what we entirely reasonably think is true at the moment are quite different things. What we now reasonably think is true sometimes turns out to be wrong later. Also, at a given point in time, different people may take different ideas as true. However, it is important for students to appreciate that what we reasonably take as true today may turn out to be wrong later; disagreements about what’s true are normal and sorting out evidence is often a challenging and complex long-term endeavor.

FACILITATION

This activity is recommended for the following learner age ranges:

- Elementary School
 - 30 minutes to 1 hour
 - Heavily facilitated by peer/teacher/caregiver
- Middle School
 - 30 minutes to 1 hour
 - Lightly facilitated by peer/teacher/caregiver
- High School
 - 30 minutes to 1 hour
 - Lightly facilitated by peer/teacher/caregiver

This thinking routine was developed as part of the PZ Connect project at Project Zero at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Explore the full PZ Thinking Routine Toolbox at pz.harvard.edu/thinking-routines.