Did you see what I saw?

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We all experience the same events differently and therefore we report on them differently, too. In this exercise, students will observe an event and then discuss their different choices for reporting what happened. In the end, the class will view a videotape of the event to see if their reports stuck to the facts, or if they included personal bias and opinion.

AHA!: There’s a difference between fact and opinion.

Grade Level: 6-9

Key Question #1: Who created this message?

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed.

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people experience the same media message differently.

Materials: Cell phone or video camera for filming, and ability to project video onto large screen.

Activity: Before defining fact or opinion, ask three students to participate in a role-play scenario in front of the class. Only the three participants will know what’s happening. One of the participants will quietly film the role-play using a smart phone or video camera. Have one student sit at a desk reading a book with a set of keys on the floor next to his/her chair. Do not have the student place the keys – the instructor should set the scene before the students arrive at class. Another student will walk in, pick up the keys and continue walking out of the room without any interaction between the two students. That’s it. Stop filming.

The remainder of the students play the role of news reporters. Ask them to spend a few minutes writing a headline and 2 or 3 sentences about what they just observed. Ask several students to
share their headlines and text with the class. Then define fact and opinion:

**Fact** is something known with certainty that can be objectively verified. A journalist covering a news story is sent out to gather facts – who, what, where, when. The journalist is not meant to add his/her own meaning to the facts but rather to write down or broadcast everything they see in great detail. Facts are descriptive in nature and can be supported by evidence.

**Opinion** is a belief or conclusion not necessarily substantiated by positive knowledge or proof. This is where the person relaying the story guesses, speculates, or fabricates the details about what happened by interjecting his or her own interpretations or judgments. (Strongly held preconceived opinions are referred to as **bias**).

Next, show the video just recorded by the student (without commentary), to remind your class of what they actually observed. Help your students identify where they intermingled their own opinions with the facts. Why did they include opinions? Did anyone write that the keys were lost or stolen? That the individuals were good, bad or misguided? That the student left with the keys to go somewhere specific? Explain how personal bias, past experience, stereotypes, or a desire to sensationalize contribute to the blurring of lines. Discuss the consequences of presenting opinion as fact. Does it matter? Do you care? Why?

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