

Incredibly Hard to Tell

Written by Beth Thornton

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A recent study from [Pew Research](#) indicates that Americans struggle to tell fact from opinion even within the same article. In the past, newspapers had clearly marked sections designated as News, Opinion, Sports or Entertainment and the distinctions were obvious. Today, as articles are shared online and out of context, the lines are blurred. The recent release of *Incredibles 2* has resulted in lots of media coverage – everything from financial reports to movie reviews.

Let's see if students can tell what's fact and what's opinion.

AHA! It can be hard to tell and some articles contain both!

Grade Level: 7-10

Materials: Forbes article on *Incredibles 2* is written like a financial report but is also a movie review. The author is a media columnist who reports on the film industry.

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/scottmendelson/2018/06/20/box-office-incredibles-2-scores-record-27m-tuesday/#7c02cc9157ae>

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 message differently.

Key Question #4: What values, lifestyles and points of view are included or omitted?

Core Concept #4: Media have embedded values and points of view.

Activity: Have your students read the Forbes article. Ask for a show of hands indicating if this is an opinion piece or a news report. Have a few students explain their reasoning. Then offer the descriptions below and talk about ways to identify fact vs. opinion.

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News is fact-related and verifiable. Often includes statistics and/or quotes from experts. Usually written by a professional journalist, word choice tends to be descriptive rather than emotional. The goal is to inform readers by reporting who, what, when, where.

Opinion (or Editorial) pieces are written by individuals tasked with presenting their side of the story. Often in the form of a column or a review. The goal is to sway the reader to the author's point of view.

It's helpful to know who authored the piece and what their job title is: reporter, columnist, news anchor, talk show host, activist, etc. This will give you some indication of their role and purpose. It is not uncommon, as seen in the Forbes article, that columnists also provide facts. News articles should include facts only.

Ask your students: Are lines blurred? Is it hard to tell? Why is the distinction important? Why does it matter? Are both types of information interesting? When sharing information online, should it be noted if you are sharing news or opinion? Use the Key Questions and Core Concepts in your discussion.

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