

Lesson 2: How can language divide us?

Context

References to the PSHE Association Programme of Study

Key stage 4 Core theme 2: Relationships

- to recognise when others are using manipulation, persuasion or coercion and how to respond
- the role peers can play in supporting one another

Key stage 4 Core theme 3: Living in the wider world

- the unacceptability of all forms of discrimination, and the need to challenge it in the wider community, including the workplace
- to think critically about extremism and intolerance in whatever forms they take
- to recognise the shared responsibility to protect the community from violent extremism and how to respond to anything that causes anxiety or concern

This is the second in a series of four lessons. It aims to help young people understand the impact of editorial choices in the media and how articles and comments in mainstream media and social media can distort the ways people think. The session aims to teach media literacy through the lens of understanding how minority groups can feel marginalised due to media manipulation of public opinion.

The lesson plan is based on a one-hour lesson. While it is always important for PSHE education lessons to be pacy, it is equally important to meet the needs of your pupils. More may be gained from spending longer on exploring in-depth an activity that has fired up discussion and imagination, so long as you are comfortable leading the discussion and feel that the pupils are progressing towards the lesson objectives.

Neither this, nor any of the other lessons, is designed to be taught in isolation, but should always form part of a planned, developmental PSHE education programme.

<p>Learning objectives</p>	<p>Pupils:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ recognise how language used in the media affects our emotions and viewpoints ▪ critique new information, accounting for bias
<p>Intended learning outcomes</p>	<p>Pupils can:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ identify persuasive, divisive and/or manipulative language in the media, including social media ▪ explain the impact of marginalisation of minority groups through the media ▪ evaluate source material, assessing it for bias and explaining the impact of any bias
<p>Resources required</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Box or envelope for anonymous questions ▪ Resource 1: <i>Perceptions table</i> – 1 per pair, or 1 per pupil if they will be sticking it into their books ▪ Resource 2: <i>Newspaper article</i> – 1 per pair ▪ Resource 3: <i>Plenary pictures</i> – display on PowerPoint or 1 per group ▪ Large sheets of paper and marker pens for group work
<p>Climate for learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Consider any sensitivities and prior knowledge about specific pupils' circumstances. ▪ Signpost local and national support groups or helplines. ▪ Invite pupils to write down any questions they have, anonymously, at any time, and collect them in using an anonymous question box or envelope. This should be accessible during and after every lesson. ▪ Establish or reinforce existing ground rules. Add or emphasise any that are especially relevant to this lesson. <p>See the <i>Teacher's notes</i> guidance document for further details.</p>
<p>Key vocabulary</p>	<p>bias, media, alienation, perceptions</p>
<p>Starter activity / baseline assessment</p> <p>5 mins</p>	<p>Introduction</p> <p>Explain that today's session focuses on the role of the media (both mainstream and social media) in reflecting and shaping our opinions. It is important to ensure that strong ground rules are in place for this lesson, so time should be taken to revisit and reinforce the class contract or ground rules.</p> <p>Reconnecting and baseline assessment activity</p> <p>This task reconnects pupils with and builds on learning from Lesson 1 on the causes of extremism.</p>

Share the following quote from a journalist on the increase in a sense of alienation amongst second-/third-generation migrants:

'Is it really sustainable for a whole generation to feel that to earn the right to fully belong in this country, a lifetime of being British is apparently not enough?'

Brainstorm as a class (through whole-class questioning, post-it notes or graffiti wall) the following set of questions:

- a What does it mean to have a British identity?
- b Can a person have more than one identity?
- c Is there a division in society due to race and religious discrimination?
- d How might a sense of division and alienation lead to extremism?
- e How can individuals work to end the sense of division that some feel in our community?
- f Do you think that a journalist posing this question is helping society or is having a negative impact? Why?

The discussion on question **f** should help you gauge the extent to which pupils have a rounded understanding of the impact of language and the power of the media to persuade and direct public opinion.

Core activities

20 mins

Representation of minority groups in media and social media

Give out Resource 1 (*Perceptions table*). Working in pairs, pupils discuss and note down what they already know about the way that different groups in society are represented by the media. Take feedback, asking where they have gained these perceptions from.

Using the same sheet, ask pupils to discuss and note down what they think the reality of the situation might be. It is possible that some pupils will say that the media portrayal of certain groups is quite accurate. It is therefore important to use this opportunity to dispel myths using the following notes.

Portrayal of teenagers in relation to crime:

- The Hertsmere Young Researchers Team commented that:
'The media portrays young people more negatively than positively, which leads to the public forming an unbalanced perception of the behaviour and attitudes of young people. Negative reporting causes a greater fear of the issue than the actual reality of the reported problem and enhances stereotyping. Imbalanced negative portrayal of young people in the media has a damaging effect on young people and the community in which they live.'
- Their research on perceptions of the number of young people carrying knives is perceptive and helpful in understanding this issue further. For example, 18 out of 225 murders involved teenagers with knives, but this was not proportional to the level of concern amongst

the public.

- They found there was a greater focus on teen vs teen violence, even though this is the least common form of knife violence. They also noted that the media tended to hype teen knife crime by constantly referencing other similar crimes, despite there being no link between them. 'Can you imagine if this was done every time there was a case of domestic violence resulting in murder? Or every time there was a drunken street brawl?'
- They also discussed the portrayal of the student fees march, which was labelled as 'riots' due to the poor behaviour of a select few. For the full report, see:

<https://www.hertsmere.gov.uk/Documents/08-Parks--Leisure/Children--Young-People/Final-Report---Unbalanced-negative-media-portrayal-of-youth.pdf>

Portrayal of city bankers:

- A report by consulting firm Cicero Group stated: '... "banker-bashing" has become a cultural pastime across the Western world. Banks, and other financial institutions by association, are often portrayed as no longer trustworthy or a social good ... Negative print headlines and broadcast debates have shaped the public's image of banking ...'
- Reporting on their survey, '94 per cent of those surveyed believe the UK retail banking sector is negatively or very negatively portrayed by the media ... 71 per cent of respondents believe there is a degree of hysteria in the media's portrayal of the UK retail banking sector. Just 8 per cent disagree with this view.'
For the full report, see: http://www.cicero-group.com/Research-Analysis/Cicero_UK_Bank_Rep_Report.pdf
- A researcher tracked seven new recruits to banking firms. He found no evidence of the 'party lifestyle' suggested by films like *The Wolf of Wall Street* – '... most of the young bankers that I followed ... worked 100 hours a week, they never saw their friends ...'.
- While the banking industry was implicated in the recent recession, it is important to note the huge income from the financial and insurance services even during this economic downturn. For example, they contributed £126.9 billion to the economy in 2014. In 2013/14, the banking sector alone contributed £21.4 billion to UK tax receipts (House of Commons Report).

Portrayal of migrants:

A report by UCL found that:

- Recent immigrants (those who arrived after 1999) were 45% less likely to receive state benefits or tax credits than UK natives over the period 2000-11. They were also 3% less likely to live in social housing.
- Over the same period, recent immigrants from within the EU have

on average contributed 34% more in taxes than they have received as transfers. In contrast, over the same period, the total of UK natives' tax payments were 11% lower than the transfers they received.

- In 2011, 32% of recent EU immigrants and 43% of recent non-EU immigrants had a university degree. The comparable figure for UK natives is 21%.
- The estimated net contribution of immigrants increases even more if one considers that immigration helps in sharing the cost of public expenditure among a larger pool of people, thus reducing further the financial burden for UK natives.

For more details, see: <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/news/news-articles/1113/051113-migration-report#sthash.A8FEfBMa.dpuf>

Portrayal of terrorists and extremists:

- 78% of arrests for terrorism offences were of people who considered themselves British or who had British dual nationality.
- During 2014-15, although it is true that the majority of people imprisoned for terrorism-related offences were Muslim, 'of the 70 people in prison for domestic extremism/separatism the majority (39) considered themselves to be Christian, and 26 considered themselves to have no religion. All but one person considered themselves to be of "White" ethnicity, and 94 per cent considered themselves to be of "British" nationality.'

For the full report, see:

<http://www.breitbart.com/london/2015/09/10/uk-terrorism-stats-97-are-muslim-majority-of-domestic-extremists-are-christian/>

- The majority of terrorist incidents in the UK occurred in Northern Ireland, although the threat level in mainland Britain from similar incidents has reduced.

Find out more from:

<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/mar/22/terror-attack-data-rise-brussels-explosions>

<https://www.mi5.gov.uk/threat-levels>

- Police counter-intelligence is reducing the number of high-profile incidents that occur, reducing the threat level for the majority.

There is a list of terrorist incidents over the years on:

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_terrorist_incidents_in_Great_Britain

To review, ask pupils how the media presentation of stories may have fuelled divisions in our communities.

If time allows, revisit the learning from Lesson 1 to allow young people to reflect on the alienation that discrimination can lead to, and how this contributes to extremism.

20 mins

Learning to be a critical consumer of information

Explain that we are being given information all the time from a great many sources. Sometimes the information is purely factual (eg a bus timetable) but more often there is a degree to which the source of the information (eg an advertiser, journalist, politician, contact on social media) aims to influence our response to that information. We need to become 'critical consumers of information'.

Ask pupils how they interpret the phrase 'critical consumers of information'.

If necessary, explain that a 'consumer' could be defined as 'someone who buys goods or services' and a 'critical consumer' could be defined as someone who asks questions, compares products, listens to others' opinions, reads reviews from trusted sources and weighs everything up carefully before buying a product or signing up to a service. So a 'critical consumer of information' is someone who applies the same principle to the information, thoughts, ideas and beliefs they are being asked to 'buy into' by the media, including social media.

In pairs or small groups, ask pupils to read the *Newspaper article* (Resource 2) and consider, based on what they know, whether the original article in *The Times* and this response piece are reliable.

- What are the factors we might consider which make them more or less reliable? Consider neutrality/bias, expertise of the writers and the reputation of the relevant organisations.

Teacher note: The original Times article is available to download but its use in full in lessons could reinforce negative discourse rather than challenge it, so pupils should base their discussion on the elements of the Times article written in the comment piece alone.

Original *Times* article:

- *Neutrality/bias* – The newspaper writes to appeal to its readership, which affects its neutrality. Editorially, *The Times* is often considered to be a right-wing-leaning paper and therefore has a strong opinion on immigration issues. It is also aware that sensationalist reporting sells papers. The article has relied on quotations from some experts with affiliations to anti-immigration organisations.
- *Expertise of the writers* – The organisation has used a reputable study in writing the article. However, the writer is not themselves an expert in demographic studies nor, as far as we know, in statistics.
- *Reputation of organisations* – *The Times* is a respected newspaper with a wide readership.

Response article:

- *Neutrality/bias* – The website's main purpose is to reduce Islamophobia through challenging reporting of such issues – there is therefore a bias as regards the article's aims and in the writing style.

- *Expertise of the writers* – The organisation focuses on Islamic issues and their reporting, so has detailed knowledge about the situation. However, the writer is not themselves an expert in demographic studies.
- *Reputation of organisations* – The organisation is less well respected with a smaller readership.

You could ask the class what their feelings on this issue are now that they have a more critical understanding of the media reporting on such issues.

10 mins

Critical consumer of information checklist of questions

In pairs or small groups, ask pupils to come up with a list of questions that they could ask themselves whenever they are faced with new information they need to evaluate.

Take feedback and draw together all their ideas into one class list on the board. Responses might include the following (if they do not come up, you may want to suggest them):

- Who is the source? (Is it an advertiser/journalist/friend/politician/campaigner/someone else?)
- Is this a 'credible' source of information? (This might need to be explained further with questions such as 'Who is the most credible source of information on how to treat spots: your parent, a doctor or a cosmetics advertiser? Why?')
- Why are they telling me this? (Is it to make me buy something/buy into an idea/change my mind/believe something?)
- Is this fact or someone's opinion?
- If it claims to be factual, what is the evidence to support the 'facts'?
- Is the information accurate? How do I know?
- Is there a different way that these 'facts' could be interpreted?
- Is this a complete picture or has anything been missed out?
- Does anyone stand to gain anything from my believing/being persuaded by this information? Who? What would they gain?
- Is anyone saying anything different about this topic? If so, what?

**Plenary /
Assessment for
and of learning**

5 mins

Plenary and assessing progress

Show pupils one of, or ideally both pictures from social media (Resource 3). Ask what they would take from the picture(s). What would this lead some people to believe?

Using their new tools of critical appraisal of sources, ask pupils to assess the picture. Show pupils the follow-up picture if using the second stimulus. Explain that the first version with the 'photoshopped' placard was spread widely via social media. Ask pupils how this might increase both the likelihood of someone believing the photo to be genuine and the effect of the photo on viewers' beliefs and opinions.

<p>5 mins</p>	<p>(Ideas might include being more likely to believe something if a friend or someone whose opinion you value has shared it; reading others' comments on the photo might inspire people to voice stronger and stronger opinions; the sense that if thousands of people have 'shared' something it must be true, etc.)</p> <p>You could use the following questions to sum up today's lessons:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a How can the media reporting of issues affect public opinion?b How can people have a more balanced approach to issues in their communities?c How does media bias impact on extremism?d Based on your learning today, what can you as individuals do to reduce extremism? <p>Self-assessment</p> <p>Ask pupils to write a sentence or paragraph explaining why it is important to be a critical consumer of information and what this means in practice. As an extension, pupils could consider the barriers to knowing and understanding 'the truth'.</p> <p>Ask pupils to add any additional ideas in another colour on their starter <i>Key concepts</i> diagrams from Lesson 1 on the causes of extremism. This can be kept as evidence of progress as it shows pupils' deepening understanding of the variety of factors which create a climate where extremism can flourish.</p> <p>Signposting further support</p> <p>Ensure that pupils know who can help them with any issues which have come up for them in today's session – eg their tutor or head of year. If pupils have concerns about someone's behaviour, they can contact the NSPCC or their local police station (by calling 101), who can refer the case to specialists on the Channel support team. Inappropriate online content can be reported at: https://www.gov.uk/report-terrorism</p> <p>Either ask all pupils to write down these details (making it optional will deter pupils who may not wish to be seen to be writing them down), or provide them on a handout, and/or display them prominently around the school.</p>
<p>Extension activities / Home learning</p>	<p>Ask pupils to bring in examples of alarmist or biased reporting, particularly on terrorism and extremism issues.</p> <p>Watch and explore the issues raised by the speaker in this TED talk on the media reporting of Islam: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nRz6PBDHJqc</p>