

Watching Big Brother

What George Orwell's 1984 Teaches about Bias and Manipulation

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Grade Level	12th Grade	**Time Frame**	375 minutes
Subject	English/Language Arts	**Duration**	8 periods
Course	A.P. Literature and Composition, British Literature		

Essential Question

How does the manipulation of truth and information in 1984 reflect the dangers of media bias in shaping public perception and reality? In what ways does Orwell's concept of propaganda and surveillance in 1984 parallel modern challenges in maintaining freedom of thought in an age of biased media?

Summary

At a time when truth itself seems under siege, this comprehensive lesson bridges Orwell's dystopian masterpiece with today's media landscape. Students begin to develop their media literacy by evaluating real versus fake news through a Walking Vote activity, then explore logical fallacies and propaganda techniques using a Doublethink Detector card game. They analyze media bias across the political spectrum and examine how authoritarian governments like North Korea and Venezuela mirror 1984's totalitarian control. Through research on countries organized around Orwell's fabricated Ministries, students scrutinize parallels between fiction and reality to develop media literacy and learn to recognize information manipulation. Through Fishbowl discussions and Choice Board projects, students critically examine government power, censorship, and propaganda to deepen their own freedom of thought.

Snapshot

Engage

Students use a Walking Vote strategy to determine whether news articles are authentic or false.

Explore

Students play a card game to identify logical fallacies and bias in media, and apply critical thinking skills to evaluate media articles for bias.

Explain

Students use the Categorical Highlighting strategy to compare the novel *1984* and the United States, and study aspects of North Korea in an article and short videos.

Extend

Students research countries with information manipulation challenges similar to North Korea, summarize, and present their findings.

Evaluate

Students conduct a modified Fishbowl to analyze connections between *1984* and countries in the real world, synthesize their understanding in a Six-Word Memoir, and collaborate on Choice Board projects.

Standards

Oklahoma Academic Standards: English Language Arts (Grade 12)

12.3.R.5: Evaluate how authors writing on the same issue reached different conclusions because of differences in assumptions, evidence, reasoning, and viewpoints, including examining rhetorical appeals, bias, and use of logical fallacies.
12.7.W: Create engaging multimodal content that intentionally enhances understanding of findings, reasoning, and evidence for diverse audiences.

Attachments

- Choice Board—Watching Big Brother.docx
- Choice Board—Watching Big Brother.pdf
- Doublethink Detector Cards Key—Watching Big Brother.docx
- Doublethink Detector Cards Key—Watching Big Brother.pdf
- Doublethink Detector Cards—Watching Big Brother.docx
- Doublethink Detector Cards—Watching Big Brother.pdf
- Fallacies in Propaganda and Fake News—Watching Big Brother.docx
- Fallacies in Propaganda and Fake News—Watching Big Brother.pdf
- H-Chart—Watching Big Brother.docx
- H-Chart—Watching Big Brother.pdf
- Jihyun Park—Watching Big Brother.docx
- Jihyun Park—Watching Big Brother.pdf
- Lesson Slides—Watching Big Brother.pptx
- Manipulation of Information—Watching Big Brother.docx
- Manipulation of Information—Watching Big Brother.pdf
- Ministries Posters—Watching Big Brother.pdf
- Ministries—Watching Big Brother.docx
- Ministries—Watching Big Brother.pdf
- Political Spectrum—Watching Big Brother.docx
- Political Spectrum—Watching Big Brother.pdf
- Rubric—Watching Big Brother.docx
- Rubric—Watching Big Brother.pdf
- Thinking about Bias—Watching Big Brother.docx
- Thinking about Bias—Watching Big Brother.pdf
- Walking Vote Posters—Watching Big Brother.pdf

Materials

- Lesson Slides (attached)
- Copies of George Orwell's novel *1984* (one per student)
- Walking Vote Posters (attached; one set of two)
- Fallacies in Propaganda and Fake News handout (attached; one per student)
- Doublethink Detector Cards (attached; one set per group)
- Doublethink Detector Cards Key (attached)
- Political Spectrum handout (attached; one per student)
- Thinking about Bias handout (attached; one per student)
- H-Chart handout (attached; one per student)
- Jihyun Park article (attached; one per student)
- Manipulation of Information handout (optional; one per student or group)
- Ministries Posters (attached)
- Ministries handout (attached; one per student)

- Choice Board handout (optional, attached; one per student)
- Rubric handout (optional, attached; one per student)
- Chart paper
- Markers
- Highlighters in 2 different colors (enough to have one of each for each student)
- Sticky notes
- Index cards or notebook paper, cut into 3” x 5” pieces

Preparation for the Lesson

Reading structure for this lesson:

- Students should not begin reading *1984* until **after** the Engage and Explore sections, when they should read Books 1 and 2.
- Book 3 should be read before beginning the **Extend** section.

Print, cut out, and laminate the **Walking Vote Posters** and **Doublethink Detector Cards** for use in this and future lessons.

Print the four **Ministries Posters** and hang them up around the classroom for students to refer to while reading the novel.

Create a Parking Lot poster on chart paper or designate a Parking Lot in the classroom for the Explain section.

20 minutes

Engage

Teacher's Note: Preparation

Prior to the lesson, hang the Walking Vote Posters for the Walking Vote activity. You may choose to print another set to hold up during the activity to indicate whether the news headlines are true or false. For classes that are less willing to participate or if you must shorten the activity, students can hold up one finger for the articles they think are real and two fingers for those they think are fake/satirical. For virtual or absent students, have them write “real” or “fake news” next to each title. This activity should be fun; encourage appropriate comments and laughter.

Use the attached **Lesson Slides** to facilitate the lesson. Begin by displaying **slides 1**–**4** to present the title, essential questions, and the learning objectives in as much detail as needed.

Display **slide 5** to introduce the Walking Vote strategy, and point out the **Walking Vote Posters** that indicate one side of the room as “Real or Authentic News” and the other as “False or Fake News.” Show **slide 6** and tell students to move to the side of the room that best answers their judgement about the news headline: whether it is true, authentic news, or false news and satire. Inform students that they must choose a side and be able to defend their answer. If they choose to stay in the middle of the room, they must explain why. Continue showing **slides 7–22** one at a time, allowing time for feedback.

75 minutes

Explore

Display **slide 23** and distribute the **Fallacies in Propaganda and Fake News** handout. Explain to students that propaganda and fake news often rely on logical fallacies to influence and manipulate audiences. As a class, read each type of fallacy and examples by clicking through the bullet point animations on the slide, stopping to take questions or clarify any misconceptions. (Note that the first example for each fallacy is an example from *1984*.)

Teacher's Note: Kinds of Fallacies

Encourage students to keep the Fallacies in Propaganda and Fake News handout at hand while reading the novel, to recognize fallacies found throughout the book that they will apply later in the articles and research.

You may choose to implement a verbal game over the course of the unit in which students call out "Fallacy!" when they recognize a fallacy in an argument.

Transition to **slide 24** and the Doublethink Detector card game activity. Put students into groups of 3 or 4 and distribute a set of the **Doublethink Detector Cards** to each group. Taking turns, students will choose a card from the stack of fallacies and read the information on the card. The team decides what kind of fallacy the card indicates and justifies their choice with evidence. On the Fallacies in Propaganda and Fake News handout, each student should record their group's answers and justifications. Once completed, use the Inverted Pyramid strategy, in which a group of four join another group of four to discuss their answers. Continue joining groups until the whole class is back together to discuss the answers and their justifications.

Pose the question, "What does it mean to be on the left or on the right of an issue?" Show **slide 25** to play the short video, "The Political Spectrum" and guide introductory discussion.

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=XJA3EhyVPc0

Teacher's Note: Global Politics

This video was made for Canadian audiences but was chosen for its excellent summary of the political spectrum. All information in the video is valid for U.S. residents, and indicates that these ideas are not unique to the United States. This is a good time to note the similarities and differences of global politics.

When finished, display **slide 26** and hand out the **Political Spectrum** infographic or, alternatively, direct students to the infographic online. Conduct an I Notice, I Wonder discussion and record student answers on chart paper. Take this time to explain what it means to "lean left" versus to "lean right," as well as what it means to remain neutral. It's important that the instructor **remain unbiased** when addressing student questions and comments. Remind students that this infographic will help them determine the answers to the next activity.

Display **slide 27** to show students the video "How to Detect Bias in Media."

Embedded video

https://youtube.com/watch?v=6R6-2_8m4Co

Distribute the **Thinking about Bias** handout and give students time to scan the document. Display **slides 28–29** and conduct a brief discussion about developing critical media literacy skills. Then pass out the **H-Chart** and transition to **slide 30**. Using the H-Chart handout, ask the students to read the provided articles in the Left, Center, Right HIVE and decide if each article is biased left, biased right, or neutral. Explain to students that they will write the title of the article under the position of bias, and a reason(s) for each choice. At the bottom of each column, students will jot down any reason that helped them make their decisions. This can include word choice, facts used, etc.

Teacher's Note: Reading

Assign Books 1 and 2 of *1984* to be read.

50 minutes

Explain

Display **slide 31** and explain the Categorical Highlighting strategy. Distribute the **Jihyun Park article** and lead a teacher read-aloud or have students read silently, stopping to clarify or answer questions. Direct students to use two highlighters to mark what relates to *1984* in one color and what relates to the United States in another color. Allow enough time for students to finish reading and highlighting. When they are finished, allow them to pair up to discuss the Point of Most Significance from the article.

Teacher's Note

If highlighters are unavailable, you may ask students to put symbols for each color, like a star for the United States and a square for *1984*.

Discuss as a class what students highlighted related to the novel and to the United States. Ask students if they felt that some things could apply to both and why.

Display **slide 32** to introduce students to the TED talk video in which Yeonmi Park [not the same Ms. Park as the article] speaks. Before starting the video, ask the students what they think she will speak about based on the article they read. Consider using closed captioning, and start the video.

Embedded video

https://youtube.com/watch?v=mLzTo-y8Ef0

Depending on your focus, you may prefer to show students part of the video Interviews with Kang Chol-hwan.

Embedded video

https://youtube.com/watch?v=btsOOs3P-kQ

After viewing, ask students if there was anything that surprised them. Distribute sticky notes and ask students to write how the video's description of North Korea made them think about what it looks like and sounds like, and how they felt about North Korea after reading the article about Jihyun Park and listening to Yeonmi Park. Have students post their sticky notes on a designated Parking Lot.

Teacher's Note: Reading

Assign Book 3 of *1984* to be read.

180 minutes

Extend

Transition to **slide 33**. Explain to students that they will be researching countries with difficulties similar to those of North Korea.

Instruct students to pick from provided countries and begin researching. Have them take notes of any similarities to the book or any quality or trend students notice that are present in the United States. They must provide facts and make note of the bias they found in their research, noting any fallacies.

Students will be researching from the following list. You may choose to pass out the optional handout **Manipulation of Information**.

- **Venezuela** – The Maduro regime has undermined democratic institutions through electoral manipulation, repression of opposition, and centralized control over key state functions.
- **Turkmenistan** – The president wields unchecked power, enforces a personality cult, and controls media and civil life tightly.
- **China** – The Communist Party exercises centralized authority, suppresses dissent, and uses mass surveillance and censorship.
- **Iran** – A theocratic regime led by the Supreme Leader limits civil liberties and cracks down on opposition and protest.
- **Belarus** – President Lukashenko has ruled for decades with heavy repression of opposition, media control, and electoral manipulation.
- **Russia** – The Kremlin consolidates power through electoral control, media dominance, and criminalization of dissenting voices.
- **Syria** – Under Assad, the state used brutal repression and military force to maintain authoritarian rule amid civil war.
- **Saudi Arabia** – The monarchy controls political expression, restricts civil liberties, and punishes critics harshly.
- **Myanmar (Burma)** – The military junta exerts strict control after a coup, violently repressing opposition and democracy movements.
- **Angola** – While nominally democratic, the ruling MPLA has maintained power for decades using state control of media, limited political freedoms, and alleged electoral irregularities.
- **Nicaragua** – President Ortega has consolidated power by dismantling democratic checks, suppressing opposition, and tightly controlling elections and civil society.
- **Other** (a student-suggested example)

Distribute the **Ministries** handout and explain to students that they will independently engage with articles and videos about three different countries' governments. As they read and view, students will complete the Ministries handout. If possible, they will write observations and quotes from texts/videos in each of the appropriate Ministries categories. These observations and/or quotes should reflect issues that are present in countries that lean toward totalitarianism while recognizing that some of them are also current issues in the United States. Move to **slide 34** to review the example. Decide as a class if anything from the example should be underlined for being similar to *1984* or circled because it is present in the U.S.A.

Remind students as they are researching that only factual information should be included in the chart and students should append an asterisk (*) to anything they note as bias that they find in their research. Students should also take note of any fallacy they encounter during their research.

Transition to **slide 35**. When students have completed their research, have them write a 30-Second Expert summary statement about the observations they recorded on the Ministries handout.

50 minutes

Evaluate

Move to **slide 36** and review the discussion norms with the class. Add any additional norms needed as you discuss the importance of listening and speaking when engaging in conversations. Allow students to share their observations about the Ministries, totalitarian governments, *1984,* and our own government in a modified Fishbowl Socratic seminar.

Begin the seminar by putting their desks into a large circle so all students can see each other. Hand out a sticky note or index card to each student. Have each student verbally share their 30-Second Expert statement with no discussion. After all students have shared their statements, ask them to write down on their sticky note or card two higher-level questions about something they heard from their peers' research. Have the students put their questions in a bowl.

You will play the role of the facilitator at the beginning of the discussion. Possible questions to start the discussion include:

- Do you see any parallels between the world of *1984* and our own society or government today? If so, where?
- How does propaganda in *1984* compare to the way information is shared or distorted in our world today?
- How do language and censorship shape public thought in *1984*? Can we see similar influences in real life?
- What similarities did you discover between the countries you researched and *1984*?

Once the process is familiar, select a few students who can facilitate the discussion. The facilitator does not participate in the discussion but can ask questions along the way to prompt deeper discussion and understanding. Have the facilitator draw questions from the 30-second Expert bowl and encourage students to answer and discuss before moving on to the next question.

Display **slide 37.** After reading, researching, and discussing key issues in *1984* and the real world, have the students write a Six-Word Memoir summarizing their attitude toward key themes in the lesson: government, bias, censorship, etc.

Alternate or additional Evaluate: Unhide **slide 38**, distribute the **Choice Board** and the **Rubric** handouts, and present the Choice Board activity. Students are to be assigned or pick groups of 2 to 4 people and choose one of the options. They may use YouTube, a camera, or any other approved platform to create their findings involving *1984*, North Korea, the countries they researched, and the findings of other students that were shared.

Allow time for students to work on their presentations and share them with the class.

Resources

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