Can you identify bias?

Overview:
Individual people all come to the table with bias – who we are, our experiences, our families, all influence how we see the world and make decisions. But organizations may also have biases and many are transparent about the audience and perspectives they seek to affirm. Guide students in evaluating social media and news headlines, and identify possible biases within them.

Summary:
Students will be presented with different headlines and then identify which bias is represented.

Learning objectives:
- Sharpen students' critical thinking skills while consuming media
- Understand, identify and react more thoughtfully to bias they encounter
- Be aware of their own bias and how it influences their reactions and what they create

Grade levels:
Grades 9-12

INDIANA PUBLIC BROADCASTING STATIONS

Steps:

Warm up:
Talk through the concept of bias, how everyone has it and how it intersects with media (including AI).

Part 1:
Present students with 2-4 headlines and 2-4 biases
Each headline is assigned a number, and each bias is assigned a color.
Can students match the bias to the headline?

Students grab a colored object (marble, piece of paper, etc.) and put it in the corresponding numbered container (jar, bowl, etc.)

Finding headlines and bias: You can use a recent popular topic, pulled from various news or media organizations. You can reference a media bias chart to find media organizations to pull headlines from perceived to be left, right and center. Examples of biases can be conservative, liberal, age, sensationalism, etc. We've also included opinion pieces and local news/largely balanced as options.

Part 2:
Either as a class or in small groups, talk about what got matched and why.

What types of words or phrases made you connect the bias to the headlines?

Then reveal correct matches. How did the class do?
What other types of bias exist (on social media, in conversations, in news, in advertisements, etc.)?

Close:
When encountering different media and messages, slow down and take a minute before reacting, especially on social media. Ask who created the message and why are they sharing?

Have students think about their own bias. Are there times they should think about counteracting their bias? Here are steps they can take:
- Be aware of your own bias.
- Be open-minded, don't make assumptions.
- Be aware of your emotional reactions when reading headlines and other media. Ask yourself why you feel that way and why the headline writer chose the words they did.

Extra credit activity:
Some publishers are very open about the perspective they are writing stories from. For example: The Federalist, on its "Submissions" page, says it seeks submissions from "a conservatarian angle." SocialistAlternative.org says on its homepage it is "working to build a movement for a democratic, socialist society."

Publication "About" and "Submissions" pages will often spell out exactly the kinds of stories they are looking to publish.

Additional help:
Here are some headlines we used early 2024:
[Florida Supreme Court rules to allow deceptive abortion amendment on November ballot](#) (conservative)

[Supreme Court puts Florida abortion amendment on ballot](#) (local news/largely balanced)

[Abortion rights clear big hurdle in Florida, but forced birthers are fighting dirty](#) (liberal)

[Court sides with Florida's extreme abortion ban, but at least voters now have a voice](#) (opinion)

Here are some we used in 2023:
[Judges reject Alabama's new congressional district map after lawmakers exclude 2nd Black majority district](#) (right-leaning)

[A federal court ruled that Alabama Republicans illegally diluted Black voting power. Again.](#) (left-leaning)

[Alabama's not the only state that's drawing up racist voting maps](#) (opinion)

['We had zero input': Alabama lawmaker on committee to redraw maps says he was not heard](#) (local news)