



# GeauxVote Smart!

## Louisiana Citizenship Education Program

Louisiana's Old State Capitol  
Museum of Political History  
[www.sos.la.gov/osc](http://www.sos.la.gov/osc)

## MEDIA AND PROPAGANDA

Political parties and candidates use the media to present information to the public, to shape public opinion and to gain public support.

Smart voters listen to speeches and media advertisements as well as read newspapers and watch news coverage to make wise decisions when they vote. Smart voters know that it is important to evaluate the accuracy, or truth, of everything they read and hear.

Some of the ways smart voters evaluate information includes

- Separating fact from opinion
- Detecting bias in statements
- Evaluating sources of information
- Identifying propaganda

### What is the media?

The word “media” has many meanings. As used here, media refers to different types of communication. Newspapers, books, television and radio are examples of different types of media. Media also refers to the press or news reporting agencies.

The media plays an important role in the political process by

- Identifying political candidates
- Informing the public about important issues
- Writing editorials and creating political cartoons
- Reporting about different points of view

- Monitoring, or watching, public officials and informing the public about their actions and policies

The media has a responsibility to report news openly and without bias, that is, without slanting the news coverage to influence public opinion for or against a candidate or issue. It is important that the media report stories accurately and evenly by hearing and reporting all sides of the story. It is important for journalists and reporters to check their sources for accuracy to enable citizens to make the best possible decisions about their government. In addition, it is important that the media report stories using reliable facts and not opinions.

### How can I recognize bias in news stories?

Citizens have the responsibility to challenge the media to be fair and accurate in their news coverage. To check for bias in news stories, ask the following questions

- Who or what is the source of the information? Is the source reliable?
- As appropriate, does the story include different points of view (young and old; men and women; support as well as opposition; diverse religious, ethnic and political views, etc.)?



- Does the news coverage include the views of the people involved in or affected by the story?
- Does the coverage include the use of stereotypes or negative/loaded words or expressions that could influence public opinion?
- Do the photos, camera angles or photo captions influence your feeling for or against a person or issue?
- Does the headline match the story? Many people read just the headline. Exaggerated or sensational headlines can mislead the public about the facts.

If you detect bias in a news story, you can call or write the reporter or journalist or write a letter to the editor.

### How can I tell fact from opinion?

A fact is something that is true about a person or issue and can be tested or proven. An opinion is what someone thinks about a topic or issue. Opinions sometimes include phrases such as

- I think
- He/she/you should
- It is obvious

Try It. Which of the following statements are factual and which statements are opinions?

1. Math is the most important subject in school.
2. Louisiana citizens elected Huey Long governor of Louisiana in 1928.
3. If you have a cold, you should stay home from school.
4. Louisiana voters should vote to raise taxes in the next election.
5. Thomas Jefferson was the third man to serve as president of the United States.

### What is propaganda?

Propaganda is presenting information in such a way that it affects the way people think or act.

Candidates make many promises about the things they will do if elected. Explore the Influencing the Public slideshow (<http://www.sos.la.gov/Portals/0/Outreach/pptnotes.pps>) and Influencing Voters puzzle (<http://www.sos.la.gov/Portals/0/Outreach/propaganda.pdf>) to identify some ways candidates influence voters and shape public opinion.

### Activities

1. Use a newspaper or other printed material to find three examples of facts and three examples of opinion.
2. Use newspapers, television advertisements, billboards and other types of media to find examples of propaganda. Identify the techniques you find. In a small group, discuss how successfully the techniques shape public opinion. Do the techniques appeal to particular groups?
3. Choose an item to advertise. Use one or more types of propaganda and create an ad, poster or short skit to sell your product. Present your ad to the class.
4. Analyze specific campaign advertisements and other tactics to identify propaganda and bias.



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### LESSON PLAN

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<b>Grade Levels</b>	Middle and high school
<b>Time</b>	Adapt to meet needs
<b>Overview</b>	The introductory reading and supporting activities encourage classroom conversation and investigation about the role of the media in shaping public opinion. Teachers are encouraged to adapt the materials and activities to meet the needs, grade level and interests of their students.
<b>Focus Question</b>	How can citizens use the media to “GeauxVote Smart?”
<b>Materials</b>	Media and Propaganda reading
<b>Preparation</b>	Make copies of the reading, one per student

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### Benchmarks and GLEs

#### Eighth Grade

- Describe ways by which citizens can organize, monitor, or influence government and politics at the local, state, and national levels (C-1D-M4)
- Explain the importance of being an informed citizen on public issues, recognizing propaganda, and knowing the voting issues (C-1D-M5)

#### High School Civics

- Analyze the use and effects of propaganda (C-1B-H5)

### Vocabulary

1. bias
2. editorial
3. fact
4. media
5. monitor
6. opinion
7. propaganda
8. stereotype



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3. Choose an item to advertise. Use one or more types of propaganda and create an ad, poster or short skit to sell your product. Present your ad to the class.
4. Analyze specific campaign advertisements and other tactics to identify propaganda and bias. Prepare a poster that shows how candidates use propaganda techniques to influence the way people vote.