

LITERACY LINK 19 READ ALOUD: Differentiate Fact & Opinion



SKILLS MINI LESSON (approximately 10 minutes)

Connect (1 minute)

- Do you think that college sports recruiters should be allowed to buy lavish gifts for top high school athletes in order to lure them to their college? Why or why not? (Answers will vary.)
- Did you just give me a fact or your opinion? (opinion) Why is it an opinion? (It is my personal belief; other people might believe differently.)
- Today I'm going to read aloud to you from an editorial about a 2003 legal case in which two Salt Lake City men were accused of bribing members of the International Olympic Committee (IOC). Together, we'll differentiate between fact and opinion and talk about how writers strengthen their opinions with facts.

Read Aloud and Model (5 minutes)

- Listen carefully as I read the following editorial. I'll pause to point out key strategies that will help you tell the difference between fact and opinion.

The Salt Lake City Case: Court-Approved Corruption? by Rebecca Shane

Yesterday, U.S. District Court Judge David Sam threw out the case against Tom Welch and Dave Johnson, supposed civic leaders, who were indicted on charges of bribing International Olympic Committee officials. It was, to my way of thinking, a court case about principles.

- Let's stop here. Remember that I'm reading you an editorial, an article that expresses someone's opinion. That doesn't mean an editorial contains no facts. On the contrary, solid facts *should* support opinions—that's what makes the writer's opinion reliable.
- So I ask myself, "What are Ms. Shane's opinions and what are the facts?" I reread the title. The second part is a question: *Court-Approved Corruption?* It's a sarcastic question that already lets me know Ms. Shane's general opinion of the judge's decision in the case. Then she presents basic facts in the first sentence. It's a provable fact that Judge Sam threw out the case. The charges against the defendants are also provable. But I notice that Ms. Shane called Welch and Johnson "supposed" civic leaders. That's sarcastic too, and lets me know the writer doesn't think they're civic leaders at all! The phrase "to my way of thinking" signals that it's Ms. Shane's opinion that the court case is one of principles. I'll continue reading now.

The government's case against Welch and Johnson rested on evidence that they gave lavish gifts and other extra benefits to IOC officials for the purpose of bribing them to select Salt Lake City over other cities under consideration to host the 2002 Olympics. Their case could be proven because the men left a paper trail—evidence that showed they paid for trips to Disneyland, stopovers at Paris hotels, guns—a whole other shady question—shopping sprees, and even college scholarships for IOC members' relatives.

What I take strong objection to is the message at the heart of the defendants' case. They argued that giving such gifts was "business as usual" in the Olympic bidding process, and that

other countries did it too. Yes, that's a legitimate defense if ethical behavior and principles of fair conduct are thought to be of no consequence. But by accepting Welch and Johnson's argument, Judge Sam showed himself to be no more principled than the corrupt defendants.

My nine-year-old son has tried the Welch and Johnson defense on me many times. "But Mom, all the other kids are doing it." My answer to him is always the same: "That doesn't make it right." Judge David Sam should have let the jury decide if Welch and Johnson were right.


- In the first paragraph I read this time, Ms. Shane describes the case against the defendants and details the gifts they provided the IOC officials. These are all provable facts. But I notice she managed to get in an opinion when she mentioned, that the matter of giving away guns was a "shady question." That was her opinion. Someone else might disagree.
- In the two paragraphs that followed, Ms. Shane gets to the heart of her opinion. "What I take strong objection to" is a clear statement of personal opinion. Ms. Shane's objection reflects her own belief. She goes on to support her opinion by arguing that the defense was based on a premise that did not take ethical considerations into account. To strengthen her opinion, she compared Welch and Johnson's defense to that of a nine-year-old boy trying to get his way. That was effective, I thought, and Ms. Shane supported her opinion well.


Engage (2–4 minutes) (Individual)

- What's *your* opinion of the editorial writer's opinion?
- You know the facts of the case, the basis of Welch and Johnson's defense, and the verdict. Write two or three sentences answering the question I'm about to write on the board: *Do you agree with Judge Sam's decision to throw the case out? Why or why not? We'll come back to your sentences later.*

Review (1 minute)

- An opinion is someone's personal belief and can differ from another person's belief.
- A fact is provable by evidence. When reading opinions, you should look for strong facts and examples that support those opinions. Consider these when forming your own judgments about an opinion.

 **INDEPENDENT READING (25–30 minutes)** As students read today, have them list in their Journals any opinions they run across, whether that of an author or the subject of a biography. Ask them to then list the facts or examples that support that opinion.

 **SHARE (10 minutes) (Whole Class)** Tell students that now they'll discuss the sentences they wrote in the Engage activity. Alternate sides by having a student who agreed with the editorial writer read aloud his or her sentences, and then ask a student on the opposing side to read his or her sentences. Continue to share examples, but leave time for students to further argue for their point of view. If everyone in the class shares the same opinion, argue for the opposite point of view. Encourage students to try to persuade you to change your mind.