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## History through Headlines

*The powerful effect of media and its bias then and now.*

### Objectives:

Students will analyze how newspaper reports regarding the battles of Lexington and Concord influenced public opinion and actions on both sides of the Atlantic in 1775.

Students will explore the differences between fact and opinion and discern bias in the media.

**Materials needed:** Internet access with classroom projector, or preferably, a classroom set of computers. Paper and pencil for each student.

**Estimated time:** 50 minutes

**Background information:** Students should already have a fair understanding pertaining to the historical context of the battles of Lexington and Concord.

**Introduction:** “Today we are going to look at two different perspectives of the battles of Lexington and Concord. Specifically, we are going to examine a Colonial newspaper report on the battles, and then we will look at an article about the incident reported in the *London Gazette*.”

### Questions for discussion: (2 - 3 minutes)

1- What do you think will be different about the reports from these two papers?

### Independent Practice: (25 minutes)

Students will read and analyze the articles pertaining to the battles at Lexington and Concord in (First) *The Massachusetts Spy*, May 3rd, 1775 edition. <http://www.teachushistory.org/node/333>  
(Second) *The London Gazette*, June 6th, 1775 edition.

<https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/11568/page/1>

As students read **each** of the above articles they will record responses to the following questions and prompts on their individual piece of paper: (Responses to *The Massachusetts Spy* on one side of their paper, and responses to *The London Gazette* on the other side.)

- 1- How does this article describe the British troops and their behavior?
- 2- How does this article describe the Colonial militia and their behavior?
- 3- List at least three exaggerated claims made in this article.
- 4- List at least two historical facts left out of this article.
- 5- According to this article, who fired the first shot?

6- Referring to the article's final paragraph, what words are used to describe those who were involved in the battles? Which side is described by these words?

**Class Discussion / Guided Practice: (15 minutes)**

Questions for discussion:

- 1- Pertaining to the **Massachusetts article**, what was "not exactly truthful?"
- 2- How and why do you think these claims helped the Colonists propaganda?
- 3- What do you think was the political preference of the author who wrote this article?
- 4- What do you think were the author's motivations in writing this article?
- 5- If this was the only report regarding the incidents at Lexington and Concord you came in contact with, what would likely be your opinion of the British troops? The Colonial Militia? The impending and widening war?
  
- 5- Pertaining to the **London article**, what was "a little off?"
- 6- How were the British soldiers made to look in this article? Why?
- 7- How were the Colonists made to look in this article? Why?
- 8- According to this article, who was the aggressor?
- 9- If this was the only report regarding the incidents at Lexington and Concord you came in contact with, what would likely be your opinion of the British troops? The Colonial Militia? The impending and widening war?

**Conclusion (Explain): (5 minutes)** The media has long been a very powerful tool. Often the media is biased, or in other words, "one sided." They may let their personal biases and political preferences influence their reporting, and thus sway the facts, without their audience even realizing it. The articles we have looked at today are good examples of biased media, and obviously we know what influence they had on their intended audiences. While we can, and often will look at various forms of printed and broadcast media to learn about historical events and current issues, we must learn to discern media bias and distinguish fact from opinion. If we do not learn to do this, just like those in Massachusetts and London in the summer of 1775, we may be oblivious to the whole truth.

Furthermore, it is sometimes hard for us to understand how people in the past could believe that things such as slavery and Indian eradication were justified beliefs and movements. Studying original sources such as newspaper reports give us an inside look into the culture and beliefs of people **in their time**. By doing this, we are able to see events through not just our own judgemental eyes, but their eyes as well. By literally reading the things they read, we are able to see what prompted their beliefs and decisions. The things we read and see influence our beliefs and actions, and thus future generation's history. Journalism and the media have power to influence us, and therefore, our history.