

READING ACTIVITY

Critical Reading* (Facts Vs Opinions)

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- Objective** : Enabling readers to distinguish facts from opinions to understand an author's aim, tone and bias, and not to be misled by regarding opinions as facts. (The basic aspect of critical thinking is the ability to sift facts from opinions. Opinions often masquerade as facts and facts are also twisted to offer certain kinds of opinion.)
- Participation** : Individual.
- Material** : Any text – Example: 'The Sporting Spirit', an essay by George Orwell
- Preparation** : Reading consciously to identify facts and to segregate them from opinions and attempting to understand the writer's viewpoint

Procedure:

- Read the title of the essay (**The Sporting Spirit**) and gather your own views on national and international sports events and the feelings they trigger among the players and spectators of different nationalities.
- As you read along, look for factual details and the way Orwell analyses and offers his opinions. Interestingly, this essay has only one fact – a brief visit of the Dynamo football team – a leading Moscow football team in 1920's – to England and the four matches it played against the 'all-England team'. This fact is stated in the first line of the essay itself.
- Identify Orwell's opinions on the football game, for example, when he states, "... the result of the Dynamos' tour, in so far as it has had any result, will have been to create fresh animosity on both sides." This expresses explicitly his negative attitude towards the game. The entire essay is about his opinion not merely on football but also on different games and sports, such as cricket and boxing conducted all over the world. His point of view emerges distinctly when he states, "Serious sport has nothing to do with fair play. It is bound up with hatred, jealousy, boastfulness, disregard of all rules and sadistic pleasure in witnessing violence; in other words, it is war minus the shooting", besides several other expressions, such as "mimic warfare", "orgies of hatred", "savage combative instincts" and "feelings of rivalry" – he thus establishes his dislike for competitive sports.
- Find out how his opinions are substantiated with evidences which may convince a non-critical reader to believe them as truths but a critical reader would know that they are Orwell's personal views. There are many sports enthusiasts who would turn his arguments upside down to establish that sporting events are vital for international relationships and to promote sportsmanship. So, as a discerning reader, one has to read a text cautiously to separate facts from opinions.

Learning outcomes:

- 1) Learners realize that every printed version does not contain the ultimate truth, so they need to discern the facts from opinions using their critical thinking ability.
- 2) Learners recognize that they need to infer from any given text some of the unstated aspects, such as the author's attitude, tone and bias, and that critical reading is required to be able to do this.

Further reading:

Any material to separate facts and opinions for critical understanding – newspapers and magazines deftly mix these two aspects, and readers have to be cautious not to be misled; they have to form their own opinions. Editorials are classic examples of opinions offered based on certain facts.

*Critical reading:

A non-critical reader reads a text as statements of facts and accepts them unquestioningly as truths. Such readers are often unable to distinguish opinions from facts, so they treat them as facts.

A critical reader, on the other hand, does not take anything at face value but questions a text, analyses and infers meaning. To a critical reader, a text is a creation of an author with a particular perspective, substantiating it with a selection of certain facts. "... a story has as many versions as it has readers. Everyone takes what he wants, or can, from it and thus changes it to his measure. Some pick out parts and reject the rest; some strain the story through their mesh of prejudice; some paint it with their own delight." – John Steinbeck, *The Winter of Our Discontent*.