

## **What is your sphere of influence?**

Source: National Ag in the Classroom Program, Deb Spielmaker

When it comes to current events and real-world issues in science and society, students often have difficulty sorting fact from opinion and viewing issues from multiple perspectives. It is important for students to understand that opinions are often based on biases, beliefs, and values rather than facts and evidence. The Common Core State Standards promote using evidence to approach and address conflicts, issues, and differences of opinions. Agricultural issues are relevant and provide students with an opportunity to evaluate evidence and inference, and to incorporate the viewpoints of others to address plausible solutions to complex problems.

To demonstrate and explore different points of view, write down the numbers 1-4 or 1-6 on a ball, like they would appear if the ball were a die. Explain to the students that the ball represents an issue or event such as the safety of genetically modified food or the causes of the Vietnam War. Holding the ball, ask students on the opposite sides of the room and in front of you which number(s) they see. After they state the number, ask “Are you sure you see that number?” Then ask, “If the ball is representing the same issue, why are each of you seeing different numbers?” Explain that each person has a “point of view” and that when looking at or discussing issues people may use facts, opinions, or personal biases to defend and persuade others to see her or his point of view.

Resolving issues and evaluating situations requires that we look at the viewpoints of others to arrive at workable solutions, to form realistic conclusions, or to make our own evidence-based decisions. Have a ball, and remind students that it is okay to disagree!

## **Sphere of Influence Tips**

As students evaluate information to make their own conclusions, they may need some guidances concerning credible sources. Here are a few tips:

1. Recognize the differences between published and unpublished information. Just because it is published, doesn't make it credible. Be careful when evaluating internet sources.
2. Consider the date of the publication. Are the facts presented still relevant?
3. Check out the authors and their credentials. Look at other publications by the same authors to determine any biases and consider the organizations they represent. Is there a conflict of interest?
4. Determine if cited facts in a publication are derived from credible, published, peer reviewed, objective sources.
5. Look for concurrence of facts between credible sources.
6. Evaluate the organizations or the author's use of a particular media choice and tone. Is he or she trying to incite, market to, or manipulate a particular audience? What stake does the author have in getting the reader to agree with him or her?
7. Is the source of information selling a product or service?

## Using “What is your sphere of influence?” in evaluating information

Divide the class into groups of 3-4 students

Each group will select an article, news story, or video

As a group, answer questions 1- 7 using information provided by the resource and doing research for background information.

Topic/Article/News Story/Video \_\_\_\_\_

Group members \_\_\_\_\_

- 
- 1. Recognize the differences between published and unpublished information. Just because it is published doesn't make it credible. Be careful when evaluating internet sources.**

Is this published or unpublished: \_\_\_\_\_

- 2. Consider the date of the publication. Are the facts presented still relevant?**

What is the date of the resource \_\_\_\_\_

- 3. Check out the authors and their credentials. Look at other publications by the same authors to determine any biases and consider the organizations they represent. Is there a conflict of interest?**

Who wrote or produced the resource? \_\_\_\_\_

Is there background information about the person/group that presents a conflict of interest or concern?

- 4. Determine if cited facts in a publication are derived from credible, published, peer reviewed, objective sources.**

Are the facts from credible sources? \_\_\_\_\_ Yes      \_\_\_\_\_ No

Where are they from?

**5. Look for concurrence of facts between credible sources.**

Which sources concur (agree) on the facts?

**6. Evaluate the organizations or the author's use of a particular media choice and tone. Is he or she trying to incite, market to, or manipulate a particular audience? What stake does the author have in getting the reader to agree with him or her?**

Does the source use the media to reach a particular audience?

Does the source benefit from the audience agreeing or believing the information?

**7. Is the source of information selling a product or service?**

As a group, the students will discuss all seven questions and conclude whether the information is accurate. Each group will present their summary to the class by introducing the resource, giving a brief answer to each question, and summarizing their group's conclusion on the accuracy of the resource.