

Forestry Issues: Critical Thinking



Activity Info

Level: grades 7 to 9

Subject: media literacy

Skills: Internet research, observation, analysis and critical thinking

Duration: class period

Group: 3 to 5 students per group

Setting: classroom or computer lab

Preparation: none



Summary

Students will research organizations and their mandates as they relate to sustainable forest management. They will try to identify biases in materials regarding a specific forest-related issue.



Learning Outcomes

Students will research and discuss groups involved in forest-related issues, identify a specific forest issue and analyse the materials that different groups produce about the subject, and through this, develop improved critical thinking and media literacy skills.



Background

Every day we deal with issues where opinions vary — from the effects of global warming to gun control to school uniforms. Often we form our opinions based on our reactions, or those of our friends, to the way in which these topics are presented to us. But is this a valid way of forming an opinion? People, whether intentionally or not, present information in biased ways to reflect their own beliefs, or to convert others to their points of view.

In forestry there are wide ranging views, especially about topics such as clearcutting and old growth forests. When you are trying to form your opinion about any subject it is important to look at the information that is presented to you, to recognize the view of the person or organization that produced it and to look out for ways that it might be manipulated to affect your response. Once you do this, you will be better able to judge the information and to make your own decisions based on critical thinking and a balanced interpretation of the actual facts.

1. In small groups, use the Internet to look up the organizations who signed the 1992 Canada Forest Accord [see page 4 also]:

- federal, provincial and territorial Ministers responsible for forests [excepting Quebec and Nunavut]
- Canadian Pulp & Paper Association
- National Aboriginal Forestry Association
- Canadian Nature Federation
- Council of Forest Industries of British Columbia
- Wildlife Habitat Canada
- Canadian Forestry Association
- Canadian Institute of Forestry
- Association of University Forestry Schools of Canada
- Canadian Wildlife Federation
- Canadian Federation of Woodlot Owners
- International Woodworkers' Association - Canada
- Prince Edward Island Nature Trust
- Maritime Lumber Bureau
- Ontario Forest Industries Association
- Alberta Forest Products Association.



Hint: You may want to assign only a few students per group and to include Greenpeace, the Sierra Club or similar group to add their perspective.

- a] Who makes up each group and what are the group's stated goals?
- b] Briefly explain how their goals relate to Canada's forests.

2. **Select two groups with differing goals.** Select a controversial topic [e.g. old growth forests, clearcutting, pesticide use or other] and print off one page from their website that deals with it. Using these, work in groups to identify the possible biases in the way the information is presented by each organization [see *Some Things to Look For*, on page 14].

You may find that some groups are fairly balanced but, if you feel an organization's information is biased, check further. Sometimes




authors use shocking or provocative writing to get you to think.

You may — or may not — discover more balanced, factual information upon which to base your opinion. And, of course, by looking at a number of differing views, you will be even better equipped to make this decision.

Some Things to Look For

Are they presenting facts or simply opinions?

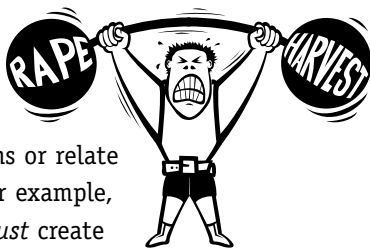
 If they are presenting facts, how good are they? Who did the research and how good are the studies? For example: If you get information from two sources — one a small, independent study of 20 people in one locality, and another coming from 5 cooperative studies by university researchers using 1,200 subjects, which seems a more credible source?



Are the facts relevant to the circumstances?
Remember, you cannot compare apples and oranges — do the facts presented relate to the issue?

But, Mom, everybody else is!

Sound familiar? It doesn't work on your mom and it shouldn't work on you. Are the authors trying to get you to believe something simply because a large number of others do? They know it is difficult to have an opinion that differs from others and, by making it seem like "everybody" agrees with them, they hope to sway your opinion.



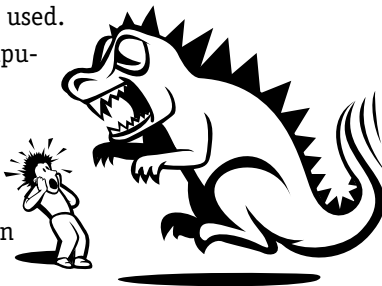
The Power of Words

Words evoke certain emotions or relate to certain points of view. For example, *rape*, *destruction* and *holocaust* create different emotions than *harvest*, *manage* and *plan*. While the first set of words is easy to identify as biased, it is important to realize that the second set of words may be skewed, too, depending on how the words are used and whether they accurately portray the reality. Look for the types of words and the visual images that the authors have used.

Are they using words to manipulate you?

Big, Scarey, Monsters

Are they threatening that something terrible will happen if you do not believe as they do? Watch for statements like these that are not backed up by facts. These are scare tactics. We need to be open to other people's concerns but we also need to recognize if these concerns are genuine.



Learning to Work Together

Model Forests are about partnerships and about involving groups with, sometimes, very differing views. In British Columbia's Long Beach Model Forest [LBMF], the partners came to the table straight from a bitter battle over clearcutting in Clayoquot Sound that had attracted the world's attention and led to dramatic changes in the way the area's forests were managed. Their first step in working together was to develop common goals.

In the past, outside experts would come into the Model Forest, collect data, and then take the information away. Information about wildlife, timber, water quality, recreation, cultural values such as First Nations place names, economics and tourism — was kept in the government and company offices in Victoria or Vancouver. The partners — members of First Nations and other local communities, environmental groups, the logging companies McMillan Bloedel and Interfor, and Pacific Rim National Park — recognized that local people needed access to the same information as forest managers and decided to set information sharing as their goal. To do this, the Model Forest provided Internet access and support for the development of the Geographic Information System [GIS] for the First Nations of Hesquiat, Ahousaht, Tla-o-qui-aht, Toquaht and Ucluelet and other partners.

The GIS project now trains local people to use new technology and it requires that outside experts involve them in their research and add their data to the local, community-accessible database.

This project creates an important foundation for sustainable forest management by laying the groundwork for equitable participation in decision-making and by helping to build trust and respect among partners with differing views.

