The Same News
Can Be Different

By comparing foreign newspapers with the New York Times, students at Minerva DeLand School in Fairport, New York, are learning firsthand how cultural perspectives differ.

As teachers of 9th and 10th grade Enriched English, we wanted to do something exciting for students, something that would challenge them to work actively with language. How could we help them appreciate the power of the written word? How could we get them to question the printed word? How could we give them practical experience in critical thinking? How could we enable them to teach one another?

After much contemplation, we had an inspired idea. We would subscribe to a number of foreign newspapers (in English translation) and design lessons to stimulate our students to suspect and detect cultural bias. We would use a few newspapers from each continent, published and translated in the country of origin: Germany, England, the U.S.S.R., India, China, the Philippines, Zimbabwe, New Zealand, Argentina, Nicaragua, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. We wanted students to draw their own conclusions about the style, slant, and validity of each paper.

Getting the newspapers would be easy, we thought. We were wrong. First, we called the local news agencies. They could provide only the Times.
Students compared a foreign article with an American article on the same subject to analyze differences and determine biases.

Through this project, students became aware of the plurality of opinions that exist in the world.

**The Lesson in Progress**

In the library, each group worked at its own table. As the groups spread out and developed their own work styles, we heard animated discussions. Students were surprised by the stories included by some papers and omitted by others.

Following their worksheets, students first worked independently to analyze three issues of a newspaper: they located the country of origin on a map, named three of its major cities, and found its population. Next they read, summarized, and determined the bias of three major headline stories. Then they perused an entire issue for an overview of the paper's composition and format. Next they summarized editorials and stories of particular interest and determined the paper's chief foreign and domestic concerns.

After completing their individual analyses, students worked in groups to complete items 1-5 on the overall...
group analysis sheets (fig. 1). This took no more than one class period. During the next few class periods, students again worked independently to complete item 6. This item required comparing a foreign article with an American article on the same subject to analyze differences and determine biases. Students were occasionally frustrated trying to locate comparable articles in the American press; Newsweek, Time, USA Today, and the New York Times were the best resources. Once the students located an article, they were excited; they didn't want any help!

Class time was allotted for students to present their work on the items in Figure 1, including the transparencies prepared for item 6. In this way, students' work was "published." The groups' frequent comments on one another's presentations showed their deep interest. Students were thinking, sharing, learning—and enjoying it. We were enjoying it, too. This was teaching as we wanted it to be.

**Student Feedback**
When all the presentations had been completed, the students were given a questionnaire. We first asked, "What in general did you learn from all this?" Students' responses included:

- "Bias can be reflected in what is printed or in what is not printed."
- "One incident can be told in many different ways."
- "Different types of governments expose issues to different extents."
- "There are common concerns among rival nations."
- "Many foreign papers withhold or twist information to keep the people content."

- "I learned how biased American newspapers are."
- "Different countries find different things important."
- "My views on important topics were one-sided."

We next asked students about the specifics they had learned. Their responses included:

- "Most articles in the Buenos Aires paper were taken from other countries."
- "The London Sunday Times is much like the New York Times."
- "American papers do not include European opinions on world issues."
- "Other countries see Libya as a victim of the U.S."
- "The London Times contains no cigarette or alcohol ads."
- "Pravda doesn't report any crimes."
- "I was surprised by the abortion and lottery ads in the Free Press Journal (Bombay)."
- "Pravda presents such an ideal society, the citizens must not believe it because they know their lives are far from perfect."

From these responses, we knew we had met our objectives: they had learned about cultural bias and the power of words through reading, thinking, writing, speaking, and listening. Unanimously, the students believed the unit was worthwhile and recommended that it be continued. This response confirmed our belief that the project had been as stimulating for the students as it had been for us.

The project achieved another important purpose: students confronted the plurality of opinions that exist in the world. They learned that perspectives differ and that the same events can mean different things to different peoples. With this heightened awareness, students came to recognize their own biases. Comparing the same news in different newspapers helped our students become better citizens at home and in the world.

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**Fig. 1. Overall Group Analysis**

1. Was there any story and/or incident that seemed to take precedence in your papers? If so, explain the story.
2. What were two other important issues related in the paper? Explain briefly.
3. Explain the general makeup of the paper.
4. Relate any unusual, interesting, and/or stimulating stories.
5. Other comments.
6. Each member of the group must prepare a transparency addressing the following:
   a. Choose one article from your newspaper. (Each person choose a different subject.)
      Write a summary sentence.
   b. Read an article on the same subject in an American newspaper or magazine.
   c. What are their similarities?
   d. What are their differences?
   e. What is the bias of each?

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**For Information**

To subscribe to Pravda in English translation, contact Associated Publishers, Inc., 2233 University Ave., Ste. 225, St. Paul, MN 55114.


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