



WELLESLEY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

TEACHER CHECKLIST: SEVEN FORMS OF BIAS TO CONSIDER

DIRECTIONS: Read the *Seven Forms of Bias** described below and use the “*Questions to Consider*” and “*BIAS*” prompts that follow to screen the instructional material(s) you plan to use in your teaching. If/when any form of bias is present in the instructional material(s), please provide how you will address this issue in your teaching.

1 INVISIBILITY - *What You Don't See Makes a Lasting Impression*

The most fundamental and oldest form of bias in instructional materials is the complete or relative exclusion of a group. Textbooks published prior to the 1960s largely omitted African Americans, Latinos, and Asian Americans from both the narrative and illustrations. Many of today's textbooks and teacher created materials are improved, but far from perfect. When groups are excluded from materials, students' knowledge is left to general knowledge, chance, and stereotypes. For example, people from the following groups are often missing:

- Women
- Individuals with disabilities
- People from the LGBTQ+ community
- Members of Native American communities
- People from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds

Questions to Consider:

Who is represented in these materials?

Who is missing?

BIAS: Yes or No?

If yes, how will you address this bias in your teaching?

How will you address this bias with students?

2 STEREOTYPING - *Shortcuts to Bigotry*

Perhaps the most familiar form of bias is the stereotype, which assigns a rigid set of characteristics to all members of a group, at the cost of individual attributes and differences. Stereotypes are often negative, and even when they seem positive, they can be problematic and harmful. Some typical stereotypes include, but are not limited to:

- Men portrayed as assertive and successful in their professions, but rarely discussed as husbands or fathers
- Women as caregivers
- Jewish persons as wealthy
- Asian American students as doing well in Math and Science
- Most, if not all, students of color as socioeconomically disadvantaged

Questions to Consider:

Are stereotypes present in these materials?

BIAS: Yes or No?

If yes, how will you address this bias in your teaching?

How will you address this bias with students?

3 **IMBALANCE & SELECTIVITY - *A Tale Half Told***

Curriculum may perpetuate bias by presenting only one interpretation of an issue, situation, or group of people. Such accounts simplify and distort complex issues by omitting other key pieces of information/perspectives. For example:

- A text reports that women were "given" the vote, but does not discuss the work, sacrifices, and even physical abuse suffered by the leaders of the suffrage movement that "won" the vote
- Literature is drawn primarily from western, male authors
- Math and science courses typically reference European discoveries and formulas
- Assessment questions that depend on a student's familiarity with a specific culture or tradition

Questions to Consider:	<p><i>Are multiple perspectives or multiple sides of an issue included in these materials?</i></p> <p><i>If not, which group(s) perspectives are presented in these materials?</i></p> <p><i>Which group(s) perspectives are missing?</i></p>
BIAS: Yes or No?	<p>If yes, how will you address this bias in your teaching?</p> <p>How will you address this bias with students?</p>

4 **UNREALITY - *Rose Colored Glasses***

Many researchers have noted the tendency of instructional materials to gloss over unpleasant facts and events in our history. By ignoring prejudice, racism, discrimination, exploitation, oppression, sexism, and inter-group conflict, we deny students the information they need to recognize, understand, and perhaps some day conquer societal problems. Examples include:

- Because of affirmative action programs, people of color and women now enjoy economic and political equality with (or superiority over) white males
- Because of desegregation, all students have equal access to a quality public education
- Because of the legalization of same-sex marriage, the LGBTQ+ community no longer faces bias and discrimination

Questions to Consider:	<p><i>How do these materials address unpleasant facts and events in our history?</i></p> <p><i>Are they recognized or "glossed over"?</i></p> <p><i>How do we factor authors' imperfect personal lives into the discussion of their work?</i></p>
BIAS: Yes or No?	<p>If yes, how will you address this bias in your teaching?</p> <p>How will you address this bias with students?</p>

5 FRAGMENTATION & ISOLATION - *The Parts Are Less than the Whole*

Did you ever notice a "special" chapter or insert appearing in a text? Fragmentation emerges when a group is physically or visually isolated in the text. Often, racial and ethnic group members are inaccurately depicted as interacting with persons like themselves, isolated from other cultural communities. Fragmentation and isolation present non-dominant groups as peripheral members of society. For example:

- ▶ A chapter on "Bootleggers, Suffragettes, and Other Diversions"
- ▶ A box describing "Ten Black Achievers in Science"
- ▶ When Black History Month is the only time/place when African American culture, history, achievements, etc. are taught or considered

Questions to Consider:

Are groups physically or visually isolated in these materials?

Are racial or ethnic groups accurately or inaccurately depicted as interacting with persons like themselves?

Are the achievements of certain groups treated in such a way that their value is undermined or their presence within the group is rare?

BIAS: Yes or No?

If yes, how will you address this bias in your teaching?

How will you address this bias with students?

6 LINGUISTIC BIAS - *Words Count*

Language can be a powerful conveyor of bias, in both blatant and subtle forms. Linguistic bias can impact race/ethnicity, gender, accents, age, (dis)ability and sexual orientation. Examples include:

- ▶ Native Americans described as "roaming," "wandering," or "roving" across the land. Such language implicitly justifies the seizure of Native lands by "more goal-directed" white Americans who "traveled" or "settled" their way westward
- ▶ The use of such words as 'normal' and 'regular,' which when used to refer to one person or way of life as opposed to another perpetuates hegemony
- ▶ Such words as *forefathers*, *mankind*, and *businessman* serve to deny the contributions (even the existence) of females
- ▶ The use of idioms not commonly known to English Language Learners (EL students), such as "wearing your heart on your sleeve"

Questions to Consider:

Are there subtle or blatant forms of linguistic bias?

Who is applying labels to groups?

Does the text use labels that the group in question has embraced or has the text attributed a label?

BIAS: Yes or No?

If yes, how will you address this bias in your teaching?

How will you address this bias with students?

7 COSMETIC BIAS - “Shiny” Covers

This bias is an “illusion of equity” that suggests that a text is bias free. Beyond the attractive covers, photos, or posters, bias persists. This is a marketing strategy to give a favorable impression to potential purchasers who only *flip* the pages of books. Examples include:

- A science textbook that features a glossy pullout of female scientists but includes very little narrative of the scientific contributions of women
- A music book with an eye-catching, multiethnic cover that projects a world of diverse songs and symphonies but in actuality contains largely traditional white male composers
- A work of literature that advertises diverse characters but in actuality presents individual characters who are each stereotypes of certain cultures

Questions to Consider:

Is there genuine equity within these materials?
Is there an “illusion of equity”?

BIAS: Yes or No?

If yes, how will you address this bias in your teaching?
 How will you address this bias with students?

*These forms of bias are taken from the work of the *The Myra Sadker Foundation*; [“Seven Forms of Bias in Instructional Materials.”](#)

Wellesley Public Schools expects all teachers to review educational materials for simplistic and demeaning generalizations lacking intellectual merit on the basis of race, color, sex, gender identity, religion, national origin, and sexual orientation. If/when biases or stereotypes are depicted in educational materials, educators address these with students using age-appropriate activities and discussions to provide balance, context, and/or clarity.

-Wellesley Public School Committee Policy - IGA
 - Legal Refs: M.G.L. 69:1E
 - 603 CMR 26.05 (Access to Educational Opportunity)