Headlines and Minds

Trace how media messages and public opinion can influence each other.

10.C.4.E "Describe possible cause-and- effect relationships between mass media coverage and public opinion trends."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each detail about media coverage. Circle each detail about public opinion, then draw a numbered arrow from a coverage detail to an opinion trend it could have influenced.

Riverton's Bus Debate

1. In Riverton, a proposal to replace diesel school buses with electric buses received little attention during its first month. Then a local television station aired a two-minute report showing students boarding buses beside visible exhaust. The report included an interview with a pediatric nurse, who explained that diesel pollution can worsen asthma symptoms. Clips spread through social media, where viewers added personal stories. A weekly online poll conducted by the station showed support for the proposal rising from 41 percent before the report to 58 percent afterward. The poll did not prove that the broadcast alone changed anyone's mind.

2. Other coverage may have shaped the discussion differently. A newspaper column questioned the proposal's cost and quoted a district budget officer who said charging equipment would require planning. In the same week, a radio program hosted a bus mechanic who described training opportunities for workers. These messages offered competing frames: one emphasized health and student experience, while another emphasized expense and implementation. Residents who encountered only one source might have formed a different impression from residents who compared several sources. A later community survey found that 67 percent of respondents wanted cleaner buses, but only 46 percent supported the district's current funding plan.

3. Media coverage can influence public opinion through attention, emotion, repetition, and the sources it selects. However, opinion trends can also affect coverage. As public comments and online posts increased, Riverton reporters had more conflict, interviews, and events to cover. News organizations may have responded to rising interest rather than created it. Survey results also have limits. The station's online poll relied on volunteers, so its percentages may not represent all residents. To describe a possible cause-and-effect relationship responsibly, a reader should name the coverage, identify an opinion trend, explain a reasonable link, and note other factors or missing evidence.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. What is one possible way the television report could have contributed to the rise in support for electric buses? Use one detail from the passage and include the passage's limitation on this claim.

2. How could the newspaper column's focus on cost help explain the difference between support for cleaner buses and support for the district's funding plan?

3. Describe one way public opinion trends may have affected media coverage in Riverton.

4. Why should a reader be cautious about using the station's online poll to make a broad claim about all Riverton residents?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a three-sentence mini-analysis about a real or imagined public issue. Name one kind of media coverage and one opinion trend, explain a possible cause-and-effect link, and include one other factor or evidence limit.

ANSWER KEY

Headlines and Minds

GRADE 10 · 10.C.4.E

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each detail about media coverage. Circle each detail about public opinion, then draw a numbered arrow from a coverage detail to an opinion trend it could have influenced. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	What is one possible way the television report could have contributed to the rise in support for electric buses? Use one detail from the passage and include the passage's limitation on this claim.	**The report may have increased concern by showing visible exhaust and featuring a nurse discussing asthma. Support rose from 41 percent to 58 percent afterward, but the volunteer poll does not prove the broadcast caused the change.**
2	How could the newspaper column's focus on cost help explain the difference between support for cleaner buses and support for the district's funding plan?	**The cost-focused column may have led some residents to support cleaner buses but worry about the expense or planning required for the current funding plan.**
3	Describe one way public opinion trends may have affected media coverage in Riverton.	**As public comments and online posts increased, reporters had more conflict, interviews, and events to cover, so rising interest may have led to more coverage.**
4	Why should a reader be cautious about using the station's online poll to make a broad claim about all Riverton residents?	**The poll relied on volunteers, so the people who chose to respond may not represent all Riverton residents.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

After the student newspaper published interviews about crowded lunch lines, support for adding a second lunch period rose in a school poll from 38 percent to 55 percent. The interviews may have made the problem more visible and encouraged students who had experienced it to support the change. Because the poll was voluntary and a parent meeting also discussed the issue, the article alone cannot be credited with the shift.

Accept claims that use cautious language, such as may have influenced, when they connect specific coverage to a specific opinion trend. Students should also identify a reasonable alternative factor, limitation, or missing evidence rather than treating correlation as proof.