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| |  | | --- | | **Unit plan: Knowledge and Politics** | | **What?**  In this unit, students learn about knowledge and politics. The lessons place a particular emphasis on concepts such as facts, truth, reason and perspective in politics.  **Why?**  A deeper understanding of both the dangers with dogma and relativism in politics will foster critical thinking when faced with real-world manifestations of things such as “post-truth” politics, logical fallacies, manipulation of facts and statistics, partisanship and power.  **How?**  Through a blend of creative thinking activities and explorations of key concepts, students are led to the analysis knowledge questions. | | |  |  | | --- | --- | | KEY terms: | Perspectives, reason, logical fallacies, pragmatism, power, fact, truth, statistics, partisanship, power, propaganda. | | ATL:Learner profile/internationalism | Thinking skills (creativity)  Collaboration  Communication  Thinkers, reflective.  Importance of perspective.  Politics around the world. | | CONNECTIONS: | Knowledge and the knower (core theme), knowledge and language (option), Group 1 (1984, politics and alternative facts, [see this article](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2017/jan/24/george-orwell-1984-sales-surge-kellyanne-conway-alternative-facts)). | |

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| TOK concepts |  | Assessment link |
| Truth, evidence, objectivity, justification, perspective. |  | Exhibition practice: finding objects on “Knowledge and Politics”. |

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| **Lesson 1** | **Lesson 2** | **lessonS 3 and 4** |
| Post-truth politics. | Rational politics? | What a year! |
| *Main ideas* | *Main ideas* | *Main ideas* |
| Theories of truth, “post-truth politics”, “alternative facts”, dogma, relativism. | Irrational politics, partisanship, logical fallacies, what makes a political argument “reasonable”? | Perspectives and facts, manipulation of statistics and data, selection bias, how to unpick a flawed political argument. |
| *linked resources* | *linked resources* | *linked resources* |
| Powerpoint 1, Student handout 1  [TOK 2022: Knowledge and politics](https://tok2022.weebly.com/knowledge-and-politics.html). | Powerpoint 2, Student handout 2.  [TED ed: Do politics make us irrational](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yOoOL9PC-o)?  [25 Logical fallacies made by politicians](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KRywWsnxXfo).  [Article: So, you think reason guides your politics? Think again.](https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2012/may/17/reason-politics-jonathan-haigt) | Powerpoint 3 |

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| Lesson progression and suggested activities |
| **Lesson 1: Post-truth Politics**   1. **Warm-up activity: Discussion of the following** [**video interview with Conway**:](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VSrEEDQgFc8)   What does this video suggest regarding the importance of truth and facts in (current) politics?   1. C**reative and critical thinking: what if?** *Activity based on Ryan’s Thinker keys.*  * Divide the class in half. * One half explores question A, the other half question B:   A: What if there was no room for facts in politics?  B: What if we could only use facts in politics?   * Tell students to explore possible consequences of each statement, as well as consequences of these consequences. * Some of these consequences can be likely or realistic, whereas others might be more hypothetical, or even humoristic. * Ask students not to hold back and explore “[Butterfly effect](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Butterfly_effect)” style chain-reactions of consequences. * Students write possible answers on large pieces of paper or tables. It could look a bit like this:   Teacher X could become the government’s minister of finance and manipulate the stock market.  We could make up economic data to suit our personal goals.  Teacher X would be very rich.  *Science would not matter when making medical political decisions.*   * After 10-15 minutes, let each group look at the explorations of the other. * Recap by stressing the importance of facts and truth in politics despite the obvious dangers with dogma. * Research skills: ask students to search and share real (historical) world examples of both issues with dogma and disregard for facts in politics.  1. **What is truth?**   Collaborative brainstorming task   * Ask students to write key concepts related to the word “truth” on the large class whiteboard or walls.   Tip: Students do this simultaneously (no need to raise hands). This removes barriers from learning.   * In smaller groups, students choose 5 key terms of their choice, from the key terms that have been collated on the large class whiteboard. * Ask each group to use these key terms to create a definition of the concept “truth”. * Let each group look at the other group’s definitions of “truth” and encourage the discussion of strengths and weaknesses of each proposal. * Explain the notion of “post-truth” in politics. *(“Relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief." -Oxford Dictionary-).*  1. **Theories of truth**  * Explain different theories of truth with the help of the powerpoint and its activities. * Allow students time to make notes and add definitions to their glossaries. * Ask students to discuss which theory of truth politicians tend to rely on and why (link with warm-up activity).  1. **Plenary discussion of knowledge questions (think-pair-share) and follow-up activity.**   After an initial verbal discussion (think-pair-share), students choose one question from the options below and write a 250-word response in their TOK journals or student handouts, using examples form the real world to illustrate their points.   * + 1. In what ways is factual evidence sometimes used, abused, dismissed and ignored in politics?     2. Is it ever justifiable for a politician to act without having good grounds or evidence for doing so?     3. Given access to the same facts, how is it possible that there can be disagreement between experts on a political issue?     4. Why do facts sometimes not change our minds?   **Lesson 2: Rational politics?**   1. **Warm-up question: Are you ever biased?***Think-pair-share.* 2. **What shapes my political views?**  * Ask students to write as many factors as possible that shape their political views. * Follow-up discussion of knowledge question:   To what extent are our political views shaped by society, family backgrounds, education or social class?   1. **How knowledge questions about politics manifest themselves in the world around us (research and assessment practice exhibition link):**  * Ask students to choose either knowledge question a or b (See below).   What role does emotion play in the formation of political affinities or voting decisions?  How might emotive language and faulty reasoning be used in politics to try to persuade and manipulate?   * Tell students to search for one real world example that relates to their knowledge question. * Encourage students to present their example in a visual form (link with exhibition practice). Possible examples might include:   a propaganda poster, a tweet by a president, a transcript of a speech, a gravestone of a political hero, the cover of a magazine etc.   1. **TED ed Video and note-taking: Do politics make us irrational?**   Show students [this video](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8yOoOL9PC-o) and encourage them to make notes about the key terms.  Allow them several minutes after watching the video to look up definitions for key terms, re-watch parts of the video and clarify key-terms.   1. **Logical fallacies:**  * Explain some important logical fallacies (see powerpoint). * Ask students to link fallacies with statements (see handout).  1. **Reflection activity:** How might I be able to reach better conclusions when faced with political knowledge in the future? What bias should I be aware of? How could I uncover flawed arguments? How should I select my news better?   **Lessons 3 and 4: What a year!** | |
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1. **Warm-up and link to previous lessons: Glossary of key terms and concepts**

* Ask students to collate a collaborative glossary of the key terms we have seen so far that relate to knowledge and politics. Use technology to create this shared document (eg Google drive).
* Ask students to discuss which TOK concepts are particularly relevant to this theme and why (choose between **evidence, certainty, truth, interpretation, power, justification, explanation, objectivity, perspective, culture, values, and responsibility**)

1. **Collaborative brainstorming (simultaneously on large writing spaces such as whiteboard, walls etc)**

Ask students the following question:

* What happened in the world in the year so far?

Students can research and recall “facts” and things that happened.

Clarify that we are looking for things on a global, national or regional scale rather than a personal level (not “my pet cat died” etc).

* Ask students which 3 events represent the year best to them?

TIP: Leave the brainstormed facts displayed on the board as you will need them later in the lesson.

1. **Link to language, power and thought. (Possible link to English literature lessons, group 1 IBDP):**

Ask students whether some facts might be inconvenient to certain politicians.

Ask students whether some facts might be convenient to some politicians.

Ask students which facts could be altered, presented differently, or manipulated in order to present them in a better light. How could this be done?

(TIP: Make explicit links to TOK concepts and the collaborative glossary so students can practice using this new vocabulary in context).

1. **Core activity:**

* Divide the class into 4 groups.
* Allocate each group a political persona (eg a particular President or leader of a country).

TIP: Be sensitive to the political climate of your host country, if necessary.

* Ask students to discuss how each brainstormed “fact” would (or would not) suit your political persona’s agenda.
* Ask students how one could manipulate these “facts” and “events” to suit the persona’s political agenda.
* Let students research how they would represent the year so far, if they were the political persona in question. What would they need to manipulate? How could they do this? (group work, research task: find sources, statistics, data, studies, “expert opinion” etc).
* Ask students to create a speech for their political persona. They should mention key events of the year, but use things such as fallacious reasoning, manipulation of statistics, selection bias, and other techniques to present themselves favourably. Encourage the use euphemisms and pejorative language.

TIP: This activity asks students to put things such as fallacious reasoning into action. Explain that you don’t want to teach students how to be manipulative. On the contrary, by putting fallacious reasoning and political manipulation into action, you want to arm your students so they can uncover manipulative political discourse and see through fallacious reasoning. The aim is to prepare all students to become critical thinkers and give them the tools to uncover propaganda and bias.

1. **Presentation of the speech, and Q&A of the press: role-play activity (whole class).**

* Each group should select one person who will deliver the speech in character. (TIP: students may bring props/costumes for dramatic effect).
* The other students of that group should act as political advisors, who need to address questions from “the press”.
* Each group comes to the front of the class to present the speech (dramatic activity): one student as the leaders, the others as political advisors.
* The other students of the class listen and represent “the press”. They make notes during the speech and devise interesting and challenging questions that aim to unpick the manipulation that took place and seeks to uncover political propaganda.
* After the speech, the press asks questions to the political advisors (who should answer).
* When finished with one round, the next group presents their speech etc.

1. **Summative reflection activity:** Students write in their TOK journals what activity they did and which TOK concepts they explored whilst doing so. Students reflect on what they have learned from the activity and how they aim to think critically when faced with political discourse in the future.