

3.11 Aspects of Truth

Aim

- To help the student understand that every story has several possible truths
- To help the student realise that none of these truths are perfect but that every reporter should choose the truth that seems to reveal a story as fully and fairly as possible.

Materials Required

- A copy of the poem for each student

Procedure

• Read the poem (or make the students learn it by heart and act it out, some could play the elephant and others the six blind men):

• *It was six men of Hindostan
• To learning much inclined,
• Who went to see the Elephant
• (Though all of them were blind),
• That each by observation
• Might satisfy his mind.*

• *The First approached the Elephant,
• And happening to fall
• Against his broad and sturdy side,
• At once began to bawl;
• "God bless me! but the Elephant
• is very like a wall!"*

• *The Second, feeling of the tusk,
• Cried, "Ho! What have we here
• So very round and smooth and sharp?
• To me 'tis mighty clear
• This wonder of an Elephant
• Is very like a spear!"*

• *The third approached the animal.
• And happening to take
• The squirming trunk within his hands
• Thus boldly up he spake;
• "I see", quoth he, "The elephant
• Is very like a snake!"*

The fourth reached out an eager hand,
And felt about the knee
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he;
'Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree!"

The fifth who chanced to touch the ear,
Said: "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan!"

The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope,
Then seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope!"

*And so three men of Hindostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!*

John Godfrey Saxe

• Questions for the students:

1. Did the blind men describe the elephant accurately or not?
2. Who or what is the elephant in real life?
3. What do you think is the point this poem is trying to make?

Input

- Millions of things are happening around the world and each of us is aware of and understands only a small minute part.
- We are limited by our perceptions of space, country, culture, and other biases.
- Because of this our interpretations are true, only to a limited extent.
- It is important to note that all media are interpretations of reality and therefore are only partially true. No media, no message can claim to be the whole truth.
- This is all the more reason for us to be open in our communication to accept another's point of view, because the more we listen to another's view point, the more we are able to understand the diverse viewpoints pertaining to an event or issue. Just as an investigative agent who is pursuing the criminal case needs to get as much evidence as possible before he can arrive at a conclusion about what caused the crime and why it happened.
- Fanaticism is the result of promoting one's own viewpoint to the complete discredit of all others. History has ample evidence to show how wars were fought

simply because people held fanatical viewpoints concerning territory, ideology, creed, culture, class, idiosyncrasies, etc. Their fanaticism did not allow those who differed to propagate their preferences.

Review

1. Millions of things are happening around the world and each of us is aware of and understands only a small part of it.
2. We are limited by our perceptions of space, country, culture, and other biases.
3. No media, no message can claim to be the whole truth because they are interpretations of reality and therefore only partially true.
4. Thus, we should be open in our communication to accept others' points of view, because the more we listen to different view points, the more we are able to understand the diverse viewpoints pertaining to an event or issue

Reflection

In what way does fanaticism still present itself in Africa today? What kind of laws can help ensure freedom of expression and respect for those opinions?

Relevant Skills

The teacher presents a magazine Advertisement. The details of the product being advertised should not be disclosed. Ask the class to say what they think is being advertised. Note the different answers pointing to the same thing.

NB/ It would be advisable to use a foreign magazine whose advertisement is not previously known by the students.

Resources

BOSCOM-INDIA. 'SHEPHERDS' FOR AN INFORMATION AGE. Matunga: Tej Prasarini, 2000.

