

"Hey, I Didn't Say That!": Using Quotes in Context

General

Grade Level

High School

Author Info

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Type of Lesson

Challenge

Type of Project (Individual/Group/Both)

Individual

Duration

60-90 minutes

Challenge Question

When taken out of context, quotes can have an entirely different meaning from what was originally intended. What would be the consequences of taking a quote out of context? Why would someone decide to do it? You are the campaign manager for a historical figure of your choice who has had a quote taken out of context. After you have done your investigation through the sources, your task is to do damage control and create a campaign poster that demonstrates how a single quote from a larger passage can be taken out of context and what it actually means.

Rationale

This assignment will challenge students to think critically about how quotes, current and historic, can be taken out of context to change the meaning. Students will explore and use primary sources from the

website to complete this challenge.

Notes to Teacher

This assignment can be adapted to the abilities of the class. Students can utilize the quotes that are supplied. Documents can be removed or substituted according to the needs of the class. This may be a useful exercise in a unit about political processes, campaigns, news media as well as the process of writing about historical events and figures. The duration, scope, and type can be modified in this project. Students can draw from the quotations provided if you feel that finding a new quote would be too challenging. It may also be useful to limit students to a particular subject or figure when searching for quotes.

Possible extension: post student projects to the showcase. Assign students to review their classmates posters at home prior to the next class. At the beginning of the next class, have students vote for the most persuasive poster/ candidate.

Steps

1. Explore the resources in “My Collection.” For each item in the collection, first read the quote and reflect on what it means. Write down your reactions on loose leaf paper.
2. Next, open the transcript and read the quotation in the text (which will be highlighted). Reflect on the meaning of the entire passage. Who is the audience? What was the purpose of the document? What type of document is it? Is there a difference in the meaning between the quote and the full transcript? Record your answers on your paper.
3. Answer the following questions on your paper.
 - How have these various quotes been taken out of context?
 - What might be the consequences of taking a quote out of context?
 - Why would someone want to take a quote of context?
 - Why is it important to critically think about a quote and a document before making an assumption?
4. Visit “Explore” to find a new quote from a historical figure that could be taken out of context. Click on the gold “Browse Collection” tab and filter the sources to first locate a quote and then find supporting documents and images. Add these to your collection.
5. As the new campaign manager for your historical figure, use “Create” to design a campaign poster that shows the misinterpreted quote. Then use evidence from the passage to show what your historical figure intended. Images, text boxes, and word clouds are all welcome on your poster.
6. After creating your poster, add a text box and write a short essay explaining your understanding of why it is important to consider the context of a quote. What does the quote lose by removing the context, and why it is important to understand the context of the quote? Use your reflections from the previous steps to write your response.