The New Censors

Video Length: 6:08

Lesson Description:
What happens when a third-party fact-checker like Climate Feedback labels a Facebook post as misinformation even if it's not? Explore the impact of Facebook's content moderation policies on freedom of expression and the potential biases in its system. Are we getting truth from media or just the information some people think is "best" for us?

Objectives:
Students will be able to:
- identify the reasons why Stossel's video was flagged by Facebook for "missing context."
- analyze the role of third-party fact-checkers in social media content moderation.
- evaluate the fairness and effectiveness of Facebook's policies on content censorship and its impact on public discourse.
- create a balanced argument either supporting or opposing the use of fact-checkers like Climate Feedback in moderating online content, using evidence from the video and additional research.

Concepts & Key Terms:
Bias: A tendency to favor one perspective or outcome over others, often in a way considered to be unfair

Censorship: The suppression or prohibition of speech, writing, public communication, or other information which may be considered objectionable, harmful, or sensitive

Fact-Checker: An individual or organization that verifies the factual accuracy of published information

Moderation: The process of overseeing and regulating content on a platform to ensure it meets certain standards or guidelines.

Preview Activity:
Use Think, Pair, Share to have students answer and discuss these preview questions: How do social media platforms like Facebook decide what content to show or restrict? How do fact-checkers affect the information we see on social media? Have you ever seen content online that you thought was unfairly censored or flagged? What was your reaction to it?
OR
Distribute copies of the K-W-L worksheet to the class. Have students fill in the K and W sections. After showing the video, have students complete the L section and answer the questions at the bottom of the worksheet.

Viewing Guide:
We recommend that teachers show the video twice: first to allow students to view the video and focus on the issues presented, and second to allow them to

complete the viewing guide. After they complete the viewing guide, allow students a few minutes to work in pairs to share and verify answers.

<u>Answers to Viewing Guide</u>

1. fewer
2. never
3. Climate

4. hadn't
5. support

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Viewing Guide

Name _____   Date _____

Class _____ Period _____   Teacher_____

Directions: As you watch the video, fill in the blanks with the correct words.

1. A warning from Facebook carries weight. What's worse is that now Facebook says it will show my content to _____ people.

2. I actually said climate change has made things worse. California's warmed three degrees over fifty years. Facebook's letting activists restrict my views based on things I _____ said.

3. That's how Climate Feedback gets its power. Facebook says I can appeal, but my appeal must go to _____ Feedback.

4. Zeke Hausfather is another Climate Feedback reviewer. He _____ seen the video, either.

5. Also, both scientists I interviewed emailed me afterward to say that they do _____ Climate Feedback's position.

Take a few moments to reflect on the video and answer these questions.

Why was John Stossel's video on California Wildfires flagged by Facebook?
_____

_____

_____

Was this process fair to the content creator? Why/why not? _____

_____

_____

 After seeing this, are you more or less inclined to trust information that's been labeled "fact-checked" like this? Explain. _____

_____

_____

Discussion and Analysis

1. What is the main issue John Stossel faced with his Facebook video?

2. Who flagged John Stossel's video and why?

3. How does Facebook use third-party fact-checkers to review content?

4. What did the journalist say about California's fires that led to the video being flagged?

5. Why do you think the fact-checkers did not watch the video before labeling it? Does that have implications for the accuracy of their decisions on other videos? What does that mean about the information you're getting?

6. What are some potential problems with allowing third-party fact-checkers to moderate content?

7. How does the use of fact-checkers impact the spread of information on social media?

8. Are you concerned to discover that some of these third-party fact-checking organizations have biases? Explain.

9. Is it important that people get to hear alternative viewpoints? Why/why not? Does this sort of censorship impact that? Explain.

10. What might be the consequences for a journalist when their content is flagged or censored?

11. How does the involvement of fact-checkers affect public trust in social media platforms? What about fact-checkers who are later discovered to have been wrong in their assessment of what is correct/incorrect?

12. In what ways might Facebook's content moderation policies be seen as fair or unfair? How are they impacting free speech?

13. What arguments could be made in favor of using third-party fact-checkers like Climate Feedback?

14. What arguments could be made against using third-party fact-checkers like Climate Feedback?

15. How might Stossel's video have performed if it wasn't flagged by Facebook?

16. Why do you think the two people John Stossel spoke to who initially said his content wasn't incorrect ultimately changed their minds later and agreed with their company's decision? How does that impact the way you think about any video/information you might come across that has a "warning label" on it?

17. Do you think the final decision about John Stossel's video was fair? Why or why not?

18. What are the impacts on our society if we cannot believe fact-checking labels on information?

19. How would you suggest improving the process of fact-checking and content moderation on social media platforms?

Discuss These Lines from the Video:

Facebook says, "This information could mislead people."

Facebook's letting activists restrict my views…based on things I never said.

Now Facebook's a private company…it *can* censor anything it wants.

It's enraging that Facebook gives these activists the power to silence one side of the debate.

People will learn to sort truth from lies.

I interviewed Shellenberger who argues: *a small change in temperature is not the difference between normalcy and catastrophe*…and Climate Feedback doesn't want people to hear that.

This issue has become very political, which is unfortunate.

Quotes for Discussion:

The only valid censorship of ideas is the right of people not to listen.
– Tommy Smothers

Without censorship, things can get terribly confused in the public mind.
– William Westmoreland

Technology and social media have brought power back to the people.
– Mark McKinnon

Censorship reflects a society's lack of confidence in itself. It is a hallmark of an authoritarian regime…   – Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart

Information is the currency of democracy.   – Ralph Nader

Whoever would overthrow the liberty of a nation must begin by subduing the freeness of speech.   – Benjamin Franklin

Activities:

1. Have students complete the K-W-L chart in class or for homework. (Recall that the K and W sections are to be completed before watching the video and the L section after watching the video.)

2. Have students complete the political cartoon activity in class or for homework.

3. Have students complete and submit the Exit Ticket as they leave class.

4. Pros/Cons comparison – We have three different graphic organizer worksheets for students to use to consider the pros/cons of social media fact-checking and censorship. Choose the format that works best for you or allow students to select the format they prefer. (PMI Chart, Argument Analysis Chart, or Pros/Cons Table.)

5. Claim Evidence Reasoning – Have students complete the CER worksheet in class or for homework. We have provided a *5 Steps to Verify Information* handout with the worksheet to use with your students.

6. In small groups, students take on the roles of fact-checkers and journalists. The journalists present a piece of news, and the fact-checkers must verify its accuracy using credible sources. Afterward, discuss the challenges faced by both roles.

7. Divide the class into two groups. One group argues for the use of third-party fact-checkers on social media, while the other argues against it. Each group prepares their arguments and presents them, followed by a class discussion.

8. Individually, students write a letter/email to Facebook's management, expressing their views on the use of third-party fact-checkers and suggesting improvements for content moderation policies.

9. Students select a recent news article and analyze it for potential bias or misinformation. They then write a short report summarizing their findings and explaining the importance of accurate fact-checking

10. Individually, students write an essay reflecting on how social media censorship impacts freedom of speech and public discourse. They should use examples from the video and other sources to support their arguments.

11. In groups, students design their own social media platform, including policies for content moderation and fact-checking. They present their platform to the class and explain their choices.

12. Students create and distribute an opinion poll among their peers, asking about views on social media censorship and fact-checking. They analyze the results and present their findings to the class.

13. Individually, students write an essay comparing different social media platforms' content moderation policies, analyzing their effectiveness and fairness.

14. In groups, students create a storyboard for a short film or documentary that explores the issue of social media censorship and fact-checking, including key scenes and dialogue.

15. Create a physical or digital "wall" where students can anonymously post opinions on controversial topics, followed by a class discussion on moderation challenges.

16. In the video, John Stossel says, "Now Facebook's a private company, it can censor anything it wants…" This is referencing the fact that the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution begins with "Government shall make no laws…" That means that private companies can restrict (to a certain extent) freedoms protected in the First Amendment. However, it's been shown that the government and the big tech companies have worked cooperatively with government entities which requested that social media outlets "squash" the conversations about certain topics it doesn't want the public discussing.

    In this activity, students will work in small groups to research and present instances where social media platforms have been asked or influenced by government entities to censor certain viewpoints and information. Each group will be assigned a specific case study (e.g., requests to remove content related to political campaigns, misinformation about public health, or posts during civil unrest). Groups will gather information about the case, including the government's rationale, the platform's response, and the public reaction. After researching, groups will present their findings to the class. After presentations, facilitate a class debate on whether social media platforms should be subject to First Amendment constraints given their increasing role in public discourse and potential government influence. Conclude with students writing a short reflection on how to balance free speech, misinformation concerns, and the role of private companies in public communication.

    To get you started, here's a list of possible issues your students can investigate:

    (NOTE – Some of these take place in other countries that don't have the same Constitution as the U.S. However, foreign demands for social media censorship can help students learn that threats to free speech are a global concern and help them understand the need for open discourse and debate.)

    - **Hunter Biden Laptop Story**: Twitter and Facebook's temporary suppression of a New York Post article about Hunter Biden's laptop before the 2020 U.S. presidential election. How might this have impacted the election?
    - **COVID-19 Misinformation**: Various instances where social media platforms were asked to remove or flag content related to COVID-19 treatments and vaccines that were deemed false by health authorities. Explore issues that have now become known as true – for example, that Ivermectin does work against COVID, or that the vaccine didn't prevent individuals from getting and/or spreading the virus.
    - **Russian Interference in Elections**: Facebook and Twitter's removal of accounts and content linked to Russian interference in the 2016 U.S. presidential election.

- **Capitol Riot Content**: Social media platforms removing posts and accounts related to the January 6, 2021, U.S. Capitol riot.
- **Hong Kong Protests**: Twitter and Facebook removing accounts suspected of being part of a Chinese government disinformation campaign during the 2019-2020 Hong Kong protests.
- **Myanmar Military**: Facebook's ban on Myanmar's military accounts following the 2021 coup and ensuing violence.
- **Tiananmen Square Anniversary**: China's government requesting the removal of content related to the Tiananmen Square massacre on platforms like WeChat and Weibo.
- **India's Farmer Protests**: Twitter complying with the Indian government's request to block accounts and tweets related to the 2020-2021 farmer protests.
- **Turkey's Censorship of Kurdish Content**: Twitter and Facebook removing content at the request of the Turkish government related to Kurdish independence and activism.
- **Uganda's Election**: Facebook's removal of accounts linked to the Ugandan government ahead of the 2021 elections.
- **Iran's 2009 Election Protests**: Twitter's compliance with requests to suspend accounts spreading information about the 2009 Iranian election protests.
- **Saudi Arabian Dissent**: Twitter's suspension of accounts critical of the Saudi government, allegedly influenced by Saudi authorities.
- **Russian LGBTQ+ Content**: Russia's requests for social media platforms to remove content promoting LGBTQ+ rights, in line with its anti-LGBTQ+ laws.
- **Egyptian Revolution 2011**: Social media platforms being pressured to remove content related to the Egyptian revolution.
- **French Hate Speech Law**: Compliance with France's requests to remove content that violates its laws on hate speech and Holocaust denial.
- **German Network Enforcement Act**: Facebook and Twitter's removal of content in compliance with Germany's NetzDG law targeting illegal hate speech.
- **Australian COVID-19 Rules**: The Australian government's request for platforms to remove misinformation about COVID-19 restrictions and vaccines.
- **Pakistan's Blasphemy Laws**: Facebook's compliance with Pakistan's request to remove content deemed blasphemous.
- **Vietnam's Dissident Posts**: Facebook and Google's removal of posts critical of the Vietnamese government at its request.
- **Thailand's Royal Insult Law**: Social media platforms complying with Thailand's requests to remove content insulting the monarchy, in line with its lèse-majesté laws.
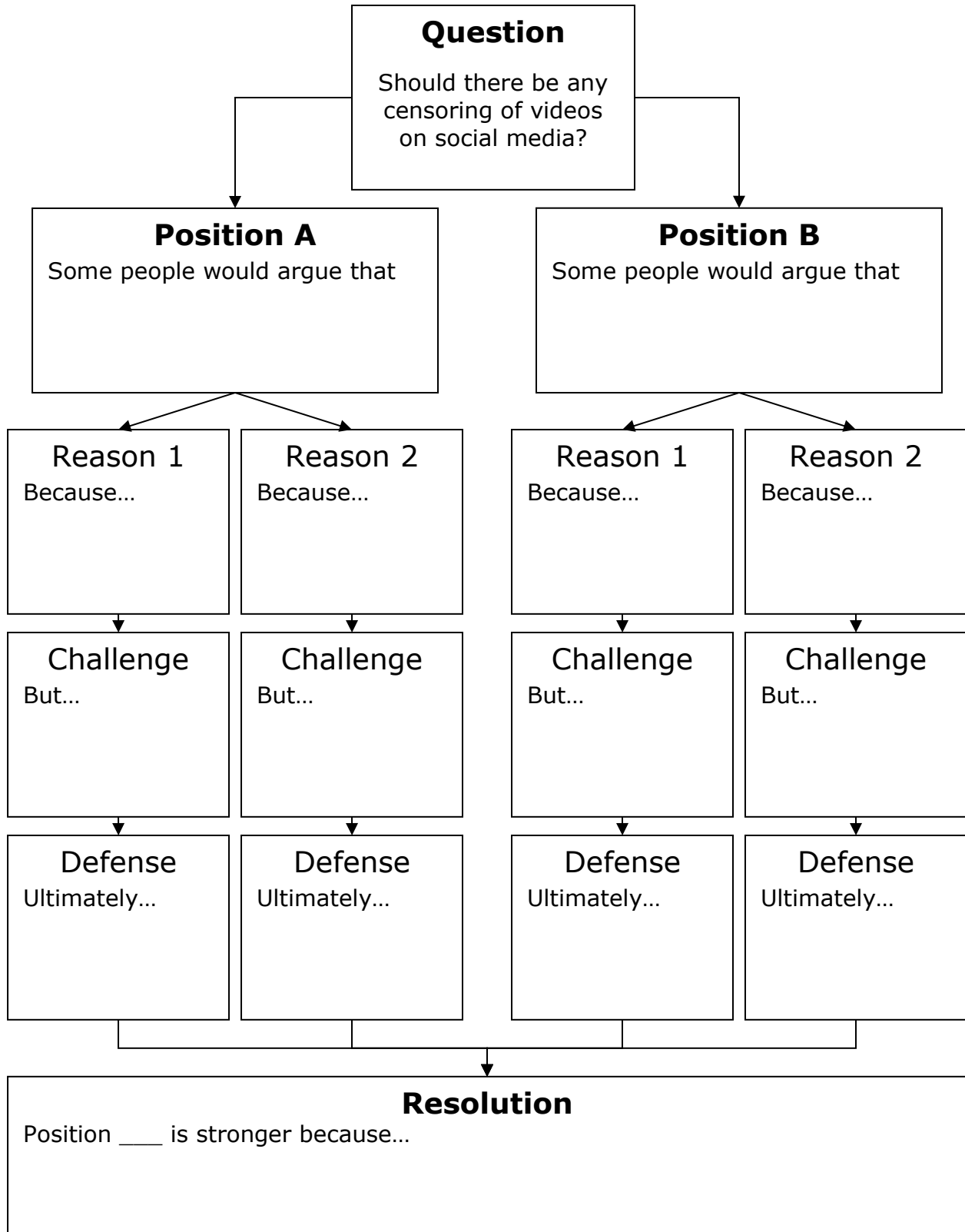
Name _____   Date _____

Class _____ Period ____   Teacher _____

The New Censors
Argument Analysis Chart

Directions: Use the flow chart below to layout the arguments for and against censoring videos on social media platforms, and to challenge and defend those arguments.

Question

Should there be any censoring of videos on social media?

Position A
Some people would argue that

Position B
Some people would argue that

Reason 1
Because…

Reason 2
Because…

Reason 1
Because…

Reason 2
Because…

Challenge
But…

Challenge
But…

Challenge
But…

Challenge
But…

Defense
Ultimately…

Defense
Ultimately…

Defense
Ultimately…

Defense
Ultimately…

Resolution
Position ____ is stronger because…

Name _____   Date _____

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Claim Evidence Reasoning Activity

Claim: What is the claim from this video (the one labeled "lacking context" by Climate Feedback/Facebook) that you are evaluating?

Evidence: What evidence is presented (or can you find) in support of the claim?

Reasoning: How does the evidence support (or dispute) the claim?

5 Steps to Verify Information

1. Evaluate the Source

- Check the credibility of the source. Is it a well-known and respected outlet? Look for information about the author and the organization's reputation.

2. Cross-Check Information

- Verify the facts by comparing them with multiple reputable sources. See if other reliable sources are reporting the same information.

3. Check for Bias

- Assess the content for any potential bias. Look for loaded language or one-sided arguments. Consider the source's potential motives or interests.

4. Examine the Evidence

- Look for supporting evidence, such as data, expert quotes, and references. Reliable information will be backed by verifiable facts and sources.

5. Verify Dates and Context

- Ensure the information is current and relevant. Check the publication date and consider the context in which the information was presented.

Name _____   Date _____

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The New Censors
Pros/Cons Table

Directions: After reviewing the video and discussing it in class, complete the chart below.

CHOICE	PROS	CONS
#1 - Maximize free speech by allowing all videos, unrestricted.		
# 2 - Use "independent" reviewers to fact-check video and add labels to some.		

Which of the two choices above is more important? In a brief paragraph, explain why.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Name _____   Date _____

Class _____ Period _____   Teacher _____

The New Censors
K-W-L Chart

Directions: Complete the **K** and **W** sections prior to watching the video. After you have seen the video, complete the **L** section and answer the questions below the K-W-L chart.

K	W	L
What I know about content moderation by social media platforms…	What I want to know about content moderation by social media platforms…	What I've learned about content moderation by social media platforms…

How might this type of content moderation affect public trust in media and social platforms? _____

_____

How does this situation reflect the challenges of balancing information accuracy and freedom of expression? _____

_____

_____

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The New Censors
PMI Chart

P = Plus: What might be some positive effects of content management on social media?
M = Minus: What might be some negative effects of content management on social media?
I = Interesting: What is interesting about content management on social media?

+ Plusses +	- Minuses -	I

Should social media platforms be responsible for the accuracy of information posted by users on their platforms? Why or why not?

_____

_____

How can individuals critically evaluate information they encounter online considering these fact-checking issues? _____

_____

_____

The New Censors
Political Cartoon Activity

Directions: Use the political cartoon to answer the questions.

What message is the cartoon trying to convey about the control of information on the internet? _____

_____

_____

How does this cartoon relate to John Stossel's experience with Facebook? _____

 _____

_____

_____

How does this cartoon illustrate the concept of censorship and its impact on free speech? _____

_____

_____

Does this impact only content creators or everyone? Explain. _____

_____

_____

_____

Name

Admit One

Should social media platforms use third-party fact-checkers? Why or why not?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Admit One

EXIT TICKET

Name

Admit One

Should social media platforms use third-party fact-checkers? Why or why not?

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Admit One

EXIT TICKET

Name

Admit One

Should social media platforms use third-party fact-checkers? Why or why not?

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Admit One

EXIT TICKET