



6. Fact, opinion, bias.

When we study the past it is important to know whether a source we are looking at can be trusted. How much we can **trust** a source is called its **reliability**. There are many **factors** that help us to **determine** whether a source is reliable, and to do this we must understand the difference between fact and opinion, and understand what bias is.

A fact is something that really happened; it is the truth about an event or person.

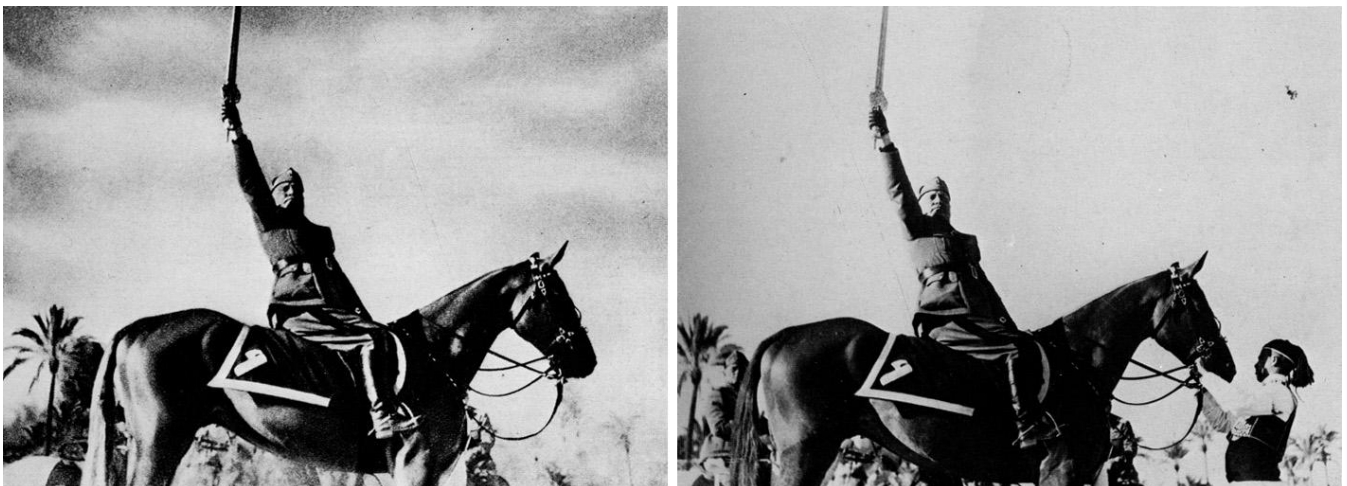
An opinion is someone's point of view about what has happened.

An example of a fact could be *The Ancient Olympic Games were held in 776 BC*. This is a fact because **historical** records show us that it is true.

An example of an opinion could be *The Ancient Olympic Games was the best sporting event in history*. This is an opinion because it is only a point of view.

Knowing that something is an opinion is important because sometimes sources contain bias. Bias occurs when someone has a **prejudice**, or is trying to present information that is **favourable** to one point of view. You may harmlessly do this yourself when describing your favourite sporting team. Sometimes people lie, other times they leave out important facts that might be useful. This happens in a courtroom, or with police witness statements, and it happens with historical witnesses as well.

Sometimes photographs are **altered** – today we would say “photo shopped” - to present a **distorted** view of history. Below is a picture of Italian dictator Mussolini. Can you spot the changes?



Knowing when something is biased helps us to work out how reliable a source is. The source may still be useful in telling us about the past, but historians need to know when something is a fact, or an opinion.



Activities

Comprehension Questions

Before you start, define the terms in **bold**.



1. What is important to know about a source?
2. What word do we use for how much we can trust a source?
3. What is a fact?
4. What is an opinion?
5. Why is knowing something is an opinion important?
6. When does bias occur?
7. How can photos be misleading?
8. Why is it important to know when something is biased?

Thinking Questions

1. Look at the two photos. Each is of Italian WW2 dictator, Mussolini.
2. What are the differences?
3. Why do you think the changes were made?
4. How useful are these photos to an historian?

