

# Refugees in the media

## Activity sheet

The role of the media in helping shape public opinion in relation to refugee and asylum seekers and many issues has long been debated.

The Australian Journalists' Association's Code of Ethics describes the role of journalists as:

**Respect for truth and the public's right to information are fundamental principles of journalism. Journalists describe society to itself. They convey information, ideas and opinions, a privileged role...**

**1a.** Is this reflected in how news and current affairs journalists report on refugees and asylum seekers? Or do journalists, editors and newspaper proprietors actually shape public perceptions and opinions about refugees and asylum seekers? Discuss the language used in newspaper articles to describe refugees and asylum seekers with your classmates.

Consider the following points:

- *Language is a crucial tool for legitimising political agendas. Has the language used in recent media reports and commentaries on refugees and asylum seekers positioned the reader to accept certain political agendas or viewpoints?*
- *Newspapers often use labels and titles to describe people, places and events. For example, a person can be referred to as an 'illegal' or an 'asylum seeker.' The use of positive or negative words or words with a particular connotation can strongly influence the reader.*
- *Who are the spokespeople for the issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers in the news? Is one group represented more often than others? Who has the dominant 'voice'?*
- *How do the 'mainstream media' portray activist groups who are campaigning about refugee and asylum seeker issues?*
- *What kinds of 'experts' have you read, seen or heard quoted speaking about refugees and asylum seekers recently? Has the media offered 'experts' on all sides of the debate?*
- *Has the recent media coverage of refugees and asylum seekers encouraged negative attitudes towards these groups within Australian society? How can this be assessed?*
- *Has the news media been accurate, fair, responsible and effective in recent coverage of refugee issues in Australia? Why/why not?*
- *If the media is said to be a reflection of society, it follows that different forms of media are written to appeal specifically to particular audiences. Do broadsheets such as the Sydney Morning Herald or tabloid newspapers such as The Daily Telegraph present refugees issues in a different manner to each other?*

**1b.** At the end of your discussion, write a list of words which have been used to describe refugees and asylum seekers in recent newspaper articles you have read.

Terminology – language to describe refugees and asylum seekers	
Refugees	
Asylum seekers	

After you have identified your list, use *Face the Facts – Questions and Answers about Asylum Seekers and Refugees* to find definitions and clarify any areas of confusion.

2. Undertake an audit of at least two newspaper articles about issues relating to refugees and asylum seekers. The articles you explore should come from different newspapers and should relate to a similar event or issue. For example explore several articles about refugees or a immigration detention centre.

A table has been included below to assist you with your audit. Identify words used to describe refugees and asylum seekers in the articles you have read

Newspaper audit	Article 1		Article 2	
	Positive	Negative	Positive	Negative
Sort the words you have discovered into two categories; positive and negative words				
What perspectives and attitudes towards refugees and asylum seekers does the article create for the reader?				
How do the images included with the article affect your perceptions of the articles you have read? Do the images influence meaning?				
Is the article fair? Does it present both sides of the debate?				

