



## LESSON PLAN

<b>Level:</b>	Grades 9 to 12
<b>About the Author:</b>	Matthew Johnson, Director of Education, MediaSmarts
<b>Duration:</b>	1 to 1 ½ hours, plus time for the assessment/evaluation activity
This lesson is part of the <a href="#">Reality Check</a> lesson series.	

# Reality Check: We Are All Broadcasters



This lesson is part of USE, UNDERSTAND & CREATE: A Digital Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.

## Overview

In this lesson, students consider the ways in which our own biases can prevent us from being objective. They then learn ways to recognize and account for our biases and practice these by playing an interactive online game. Finally, students learn about how public service campaigns can change social norms and create their own PSA to promote ethical sharing of online information.

## Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- Understand the impact of different forms of bias
- Learn how to mitigate bias when seeking or encountering information online
- Practice finding and verifying skills
- Consider ethical questions in an online context
- Understand how social norms can change
- Create a persuasive media product

## Preparation and Materials

- Photocopy or prepare to project the *True or False* quiz
- Photocopy the handout *5 for 5: Five Things You Can Do to Check Your Own Bias (in Under 5 Minutes)* and the assignment sheet *Don't Share Unless You're Sure*
- Prepare to project the slideshow *Informational Public Service Announcements*
- Ensure that students have internet access and are able to access *Reality Check Mission Five: We Are All Broadcasters* (<http://mediasmarts.ca/sites/mediasmarts/files/games/reality-check/index.html#/>)



## Procedure

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### True or False?

Start by having students think of something they believe strongly – not something that is provably true, like gravity, but an opinion like “apples are better than oranges” (or vice versa).

Have them think privately for a moment about how they came to that belief, if they can remember, and then have them try to imagine what it might take to change their minds on that question.

Now project or distribute the *True or False* quiz. (Alternately, you can assign it as homework the night before.) Have students indicate whether they think each of these statements is true or false.

When students have completed the quiz, go through the questions and raise the following points or questions:

1. If an opinion is connected to someone’s political or religious beliefs, they’ll never change it.  
*False. Some beliefs are strongly affected by religious or political affiliation, but in most cases people come to different views independently. Even people who hold strong religious or political beliefs don’t necessarily agree with all of the positions associated with that belief.*
2. People who know more about a topic are more likely to be able to think clearly about it.  
*False. In some topics, such as politics, people who know more about a topic are actually more prone to “directional motivation” – looking harder to information that supports what you already believe, or that argues against the position you disagree with.*
3. When people feel strongly about something, evidence against that view will just reinforce their belief.  
*Neither consistently true nor false. Sometimes trying to correct misinformation will provoke what’s called the “backfire effect,” where evidence against a position just makes people believe it more strongly. But the backfire effect seems to be limited mostly to positions that people feel strongly attached to emotionally, and only happens when the attempt to correct it triggers those emotions.*
4. People are more likely to be convinced by emotional arguments than facts.  
*Neither consistently true nor false. Arguments that engage people’s emotions can have a strong effect but it’s also important to provide enough facts to replace the old belief. Similarly, just providing facts won’t always overcome the emotional attachment people have to some of their beliefs.*
5. People may have different views about the same subject depending on the words that are used to discuss it.  
*True. Just the words we choose to describe someone can be enough to trigger the emotions connected to a topic: people who are politically conservative are more likely to be open to arguments about “climate change” than “global warming,” because they’re more likely to have heard the term “global warming” used negatively.*



6. People are more likely to be convinced by negative statements.

*False. Even when you're trying to make a negative point, it's important to phrase it as positively as possible: one expert recommends using at least three positive words or statements for each negative one. Instead of saying "vaccines don't cause autism," for instance, it would be more effective to say "vaccines have saved and helped millions of people, each vaccine undergoes dozens of tests, materials in vaccines have that people have worried about have been removed, and dozens of studies have found no link between autism and vaccines."*

7. Directly debunking false claims is the best way to change people's minds.

*False. It's not enough just to tell people that they're wrong, or even to provide information that proves they're wrong: we believe things because of the "story" they tell, so to change minds we need to use facts and emotions to tell a new story that's at least as compelling as the old one.*

8. Having more information makes it easier to make decisions.

*False. Obviously we need some information to make a good decision, but when we have too much it can just make us feel paralyzed – or more likely to pick just the things that support what we want to believe. (This may be one explanation for the findings in Question 2 above.)*

9. We're more likely to pay attention to things that fit with what we believe.

*True. This is called confirmation bias, the bias towards things that confirm what we already think or believe.*

10. Most people think they are more rational about decision-making than others.

*True. Even people who know about all of these things are likely to believe they affect other people more than themselves. That's why it's not enough to be skeptical – we have to be extra skeptical about things that support positions we want to be true, or counter things we want to believe aren't true.*

## We Are All Broadcasters

Point out that it's especially important that we be aware of our own biases because the media we use are *networked* – anyone can now post content online and reach anyone else, and we play a part in deciding how far that content goes by whether or not we share it. (If you want to explore this idea more fully, show the video "Digital Media are Networked": <https://youtu.be/b-HXiObDDnA>.)

Distribute the handout *5 for 5: Five Things You Can Do to Check Your Own Bias (in Under 5 Minutes)* and go through it with the class.

Have students use the handout to help them complete [Reality Check Mission Five: We Are All Broadcasters](#).

Students may do this alone, in pairs, or as a whole class at your discretion.

When students have completed the game, ask them:

- What was the correct rating, and what action went with it? (*No way to be sure/Do nothing for now.*) How close were they to it?



- What were some clues that led them to their decision?

*The most important reason to be skeptical was that the story was something most of us would like to be true (that procrastinating is a sign of intelligence.) Investigating deeper mostly led to dead ends or to things that didn't give clear evidence on one side or another.*

- What were some clues that might have been misleading?

*There were definitely some reasons to be skeptical: the source the story appeared in didn't have a good track record, and the journal the original study appeared in didn't have much of a profile. On the other hand, if you didn't look closely you might mix up "Toronto University" with the University of Toronto – but that confusion by itself isn't evidence that the story is unreliable either.*

- Why was it better not to share or debunk this story?

*Because it was hard to get any firm answers about whether the story was true or not, it's better not to spread the story further. (Even if the original study is true, we don't have any way of knowing if the article is representing its findings accurately.) At the same time, we don't have enough information to positively debunk it.*

### Assessment/Evaluation: Public Service Announcement

Tell students that everyone takes part in deciding whether a fake or misleading story spreads or not. That means that while it's important for each of us to make good decisions, we also have to promote a *social norm* of careful, ethical sharing.

Explain to students that it is possible to change a whole society's mind about things: you can give examples such as drinking and driving and smoking, which both became much less common and viewed more negatively in a fairly short time, as well as wearing seatbelts and keeping cats indoors, which both became more common. Sometimes these changes in social norms happen on their own, sometimes they're caused by media portrayals (including advertising), and sometimes they happen in part because of deliberate *public service campaigns* aimed at changing people's attitudes.

Explain to the class that a good PSA does three things: it makes readers *aware* of the issue, gives them a reason to *care* about the issue, and gives them *useful information* to help them address the issue. Print PSAs can use both text and images to do these things.

Project the slideshow *Informational Public Service Announcements* and go through the slides with the class. For each one, ask students:

- 1) What issue is the PSA about?
  - “Spot the Signs”: Long-horned beetles
  - “It’s This Easy...”: Rabies
  - “Help Protect the Manatee”: Manatees



- 2) How does it make the reader *care* about the issue?
- “Spot the Signs”: text (it tells you the beetle kills trees); graphics (big red text suggests danger; beetle with the slash over it suggests action.)
  - “It’s This Easy...”: the text (“It’s this easy to pick up rabies”) and graphics (a cute kid holding a cute puppy) work together to make you concerned.
  - “Help Protect the Manatee”: text (the direct address to the reader makes them feel like they can be part of the solution); graphics (a cute manatee and even cuter baby manatee make you want to protect them.)
- 3) How does it *inform* the reader about how to address the issue?
- “Spot the Signs”: text (it tells you what to do – “Spot the Signs. Stop the Spread” – and gives you a link to a website for more information); graphics (pictures that help you recognize when a tree is infected.)
  - “It’s This Easy...”: text (gives you information on how rabies is spread and what to do if an animal bites you.)
  - “Help Protect the Manatee”: text (gives you information on how to avoid disturbing manatees in different situations, and a link to a website for more information); infographics (the “Manatee Zone” sign highlights the most important information.)

Distribute the handout sheet *Don’t Share Unless You’re Sure* and go through the assignment with the students.



## True or False: How People Change Their Minds

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Select True or False for each of the statements below.

1. If an opinion is connected to someone's political or religious beliefs, they'll never change it.  
*True or False?*
2. People who know more about a topic are more likely to be able to think clearly about it.  
*True or False?*
3. When people feel strongly about something, evidence against that view will just reinforce their belief.  
*True or False?*
4. People are more likely to be convinced by emotional arguments than facts.  
*True or False?*
5. People may have different views about the same subject depending on the words that are used to discuss it.  
*True or False?*
6. People are more likely to be convinced by negative statements.  
*True or False?*
7. Directly debunking false claims is not a good way to change people's minds.  
*True or False?*
8. Having more information makes it easier to make decisions.  
*True or False?*
9. We're more likely to pay attention to things that fit with what we believe.  
*True or False?*
10. Most people think they are more rational about decision-making than others.  
*True or False?*



## Don't Share Until You're Sure

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For this assignment you will be creating a PSA (public service announcement) message to promote the message that people should not share anything online unless they're sure that it's accurate and not misleading.

Remember that your PSA should:

- Make your audience aware of the issue
- Show your audience why they should care about the issue
- Give your audience clear steps they can take to do something about the issue.

This PSA is designed to be spread on social media, so you will also write a short paragraph or point-form notes explaining:

- What audience you are targeting with your PSA (People your age? Older people? Younger people?)
- What social network your PSA was designed for
- Why you chose that social network for the message and audience
- How you plan to use the social network's features to spread your message



## Task Assessment Rubric

	<b>Learning Expectations</b>	<b>Achievement</b>
<p><b>Use</b></p> <p>Skills and competencies that fall under “use” range from basic technical know-how – using computer programs such as word processors, web browsers, email and other communication tools – to the more sophisticated abilities for accessing and using knowledge resources, such as search engines and online databases and emerging technologies such as cloud computing.</p>	<p><i>Finding and Verifying:</i> locates, organizes, analyzes, evaluates, synthesizes and ethically uses information from a variety of sources and media</p> <p><i>Community Engagement:</i> advocates and practices safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology uses social media and participative technology uses digital media to be part of a community exhibits leadership as a digital citizen</p> <p><i>Making and Remixing:</i> communicates information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats</p>	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>
<p><b>Understand</b></p> <p>“Understand” includes recognizing how networked technology affects our behaviour and our perceptions, beliefs and feelings about the world around us.</p> <p>“Understand” also prepares us for a knowledge economy as we develop information management skills for finding, evaluating, and effectively using information to communicate, collaborate and solve problems.</p>	<p><i>Finding and Verifying:</i> demonstrates understanding that anyone can publish on the Web, so not all sites are equally trustworthy and beliefs that affect healthy choices</p> <p><i>Ethics and Empathy:</i> demonstrates understanding of the social nature of digital media and technologies shows understanding of the concepts of ethical behaviour and online ethics</p> <p><i>Community Engagement:</i> shows awareness of the discourse on both the issues and the opportunities involved in new media understands the wider context of digital tools in a 'digital age' characterized by globalization and networks</p> <p><i>Creating and Remixing:</i> identifies conventions and techniques appropriate to the form chosen for a media text they plan to create selects and uses applications effectively and productively (e.g. chooses the most appropriate technologies according to the task) shows an understanding of the forms and techniques of the medium and genre: the chosen topic, issue and solution were clear the product displayed an insight into a topic</p>	<p>Insufficient (R)</p> <p>Beginning (1)</p> <p>Developing (2)</p> <p>Competent (3)</p> <p>Confident (4)</p>



	<b>Learning Expectations</b>	<b>Achievement</b>
<p><b>Create</b></p> <p>“Create” is the ability to produce content and effectively communicate through a variety of digital media tools. It includes being able to adapt what we produce for various contexts and audiences; to create and communicate using rich media such as images, video and sound; and to effectively and responsibly engage with user-generated content such as blogs and discussion forums, video and photo sharing, social gaming and other forms of social media.</p> <p>The ability to create using digital media ensures that Canadians are active contributors to digital society.</p>	<p><i>Finding and Verifying:</i> creates new critical or analytical worlds</p> <p><i>Community Engagement:</i> participates in society through online engagement in democratic actions (eg lobbying, petitions, parliament) identifies and participates responsibly in online networks that foster positive community knows how to use social media and social networks to promote results of their work</p> <p><i>Creating and Remixing:</i> effectively applies the forms and techniques of the medium and genre creates original works as a means of personal or group expression produces media texts for specific purposes and audiences, using a few simple media forms and appropriate conventions and techniques</p>	<p>Insufficient (R) Beginning (1) Developing (2) Competent (3) Confident (4)</p>

## 5 for 5: Five Things You Can Do to Check Your Own Bias (in Under 5 Minutes)

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Checking online info doesn't have to be hard, and it doesn't have to take a long time – but you do have to do it every time you want to share something, or you might make a decision based on it.

One of the hardest parts of getting good info online is that if you go looking for info that supports what you already believe, the internet will give it to you. That's why it's important to spot your own biases and make sure you're looking at the whole picture.

Here are five things you can do in less than five minutes to check your own bias. (Most will take you less than two minutes!)

1. Ask why you want to believe it (or debunk it), and why you want to share it. Keep these common biases in mind:

*Filling in the puzzle:* We have a natural tendency to pay more attention to things that fit with what we already believe (and to doubt things that don't) so we need to be extra-skeptical of things we feel strongly about.

*Not wanting to make waves:* Most of us prefer not to get into arguments with our friends and families, so sometimes we'll choose not to accept things that would conflict with what they believe.

*Paying more attention to unusual things:* We have a natural tendency to be more worried about rare, dramatic events like plane crashes than more common ones like car crashes. Less common things are also seen as more *newsworthy* (a plane crash will almost always make the news, while a car crash almost never will.)

*Not wanting to admit we don't know:* A lot of the time we jump to conclusions even if we don't have enough information to make an informed decision. (This may explain why people who know more about a subject are actually more likely to fall into some of these traps!)

2. When doing a search, pick your terms carefully to avoid bias. Different groups often use different words to describe the same thing, and that can influence the results you get. For example, scientists are more likely to use the term "climate change," while people who don't believe that climate change is happening more often use the term "global warming." The wording you choose will influence what results you get, so sometimes you need to do a bit of research at a general information source like Wikipedia before you even choose your search terms. If you think you may be getting biased search results, look for different ways of phrasing your search terms.

Don't phrase your search as a yes-or-no question, either: the results will be more likely to support a positive answer. For example, if you search "Are waffles better than pancakes" you will get results weighted in favour of waffles; if you search "Are pancakes better than waffles," you will get a page of results explaining why pancakes are better.




3. Don't let algorithms decide what results to show you. Search engines, social networks and video-sharing sites like YouTube are all designed to deliver what's most relevant to you – which they do by tracking what you read, what you watch, what you click on, what you purchase, and where you go online (among many other things) and feeding it to an algorithm that 'decides' what content you get to see. This can be a good thing, but it's also likely to reinforce your biases by showing you mostly things that you *want* to see, or to lead you to misleading content by showing you things that you're likely to react strongly to.

The best way to avoid this is to limit the ways in which they can collect data about you, so that they're less able to build a profile. To do this, you can:

- Make a habit of using Incognito or Private Browsing mode in your browser
  - Change your settings to limit tracking in browsers such as Chrome, Safari, Firefox and Edge
  - Use a non-tracking search engine such as DuckDuckGo, SwissCows or StartPage
  - Install a blocking plugin such as PrivacyBadger
  - Set the ad tracking and feed preferences in your social network and search engine accounts to not deliver customized content
4. Let yourself cool down before sharing or responding to anything. A lot of the platforms we use are designed to make us react quickly, but it's better to take a little more time to decide. Here are some good ways to tell whether you'd really want to share something:
    - Imagine yourself explaining your position to someone. A lot of the time, we expect the people we're sharing with to agree with us. Thinking about how you'd make your case to someone who doesn't know anything about the topic can help you sort out how much your opinion is based on facts and how much on emotion.
    - Think about other perspectives on the topic. Try an empathy exercise and imagine what someone who believed the opposite might say.
    - Make yourself wait two minutes. Just taking a short break can help you have a better sense of whether this is something you really want to share or not.
  5. Don't share unless you're sure. Make a habit of not sharing anything that you're not sure is true. Remember that thanks to the networked nature of the internet, all of us are broadcasters of information: that means that we play a big part in whether or not misinformation spreads.





**INFORMATIONAL PUBLIC  
SERVICE ANNOUNCEMENTS**

# SPOT THE SIGNS

## STOP THE BEETLE

The black and white Asian longhorned beetle kills trees by eating its way in and out, leaving egg laying sites and exit holes on the tree.

**SPOT THE SIGNS. STOP THE SPREAD.**



Egg sites



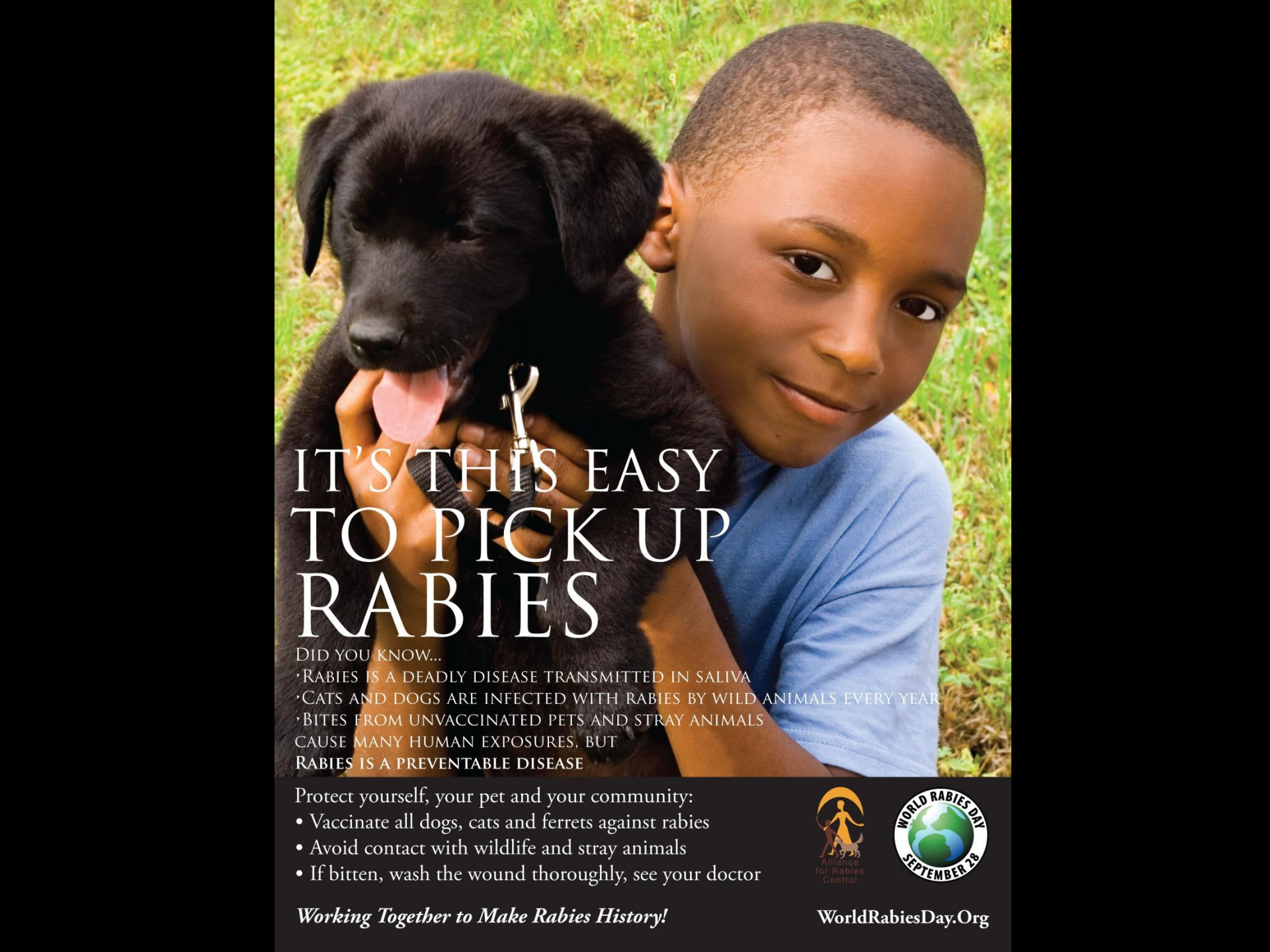
Frass



Dime-sized holes



**ASIAN  
LONGHORNED  
BEETLE.com**

A young boy with short hair, wearing a blue t-shirt, is holding a black puppy. The puppy has its tongue out and is looking towards the camera. The background is a grassy field.

# IT'S THIS EASY TO PICK UP RABIES

DID YOU KNOW...

- RABIES IS A DEADLY DISEASE TRANSMITTED IN SALIVA
- CATS AND DOGS ARE INFECTED WITH RABIES BY WILD ANIMALS EVERY YEAR
- BITES FROM UNVACCINATED PETS AND STRAY ANIMALS CAUSE MANY HUMAN EXPOSURES, BUT RABIES IS A PREVENTABLE DISEASE

Protect yourself, your pet and your community:

- Vaccinate all dogs, cats and ferrets against rabies
- Avoid contact with wildlife and stray animals
- If bitten, wash the wound thoroughly, see your doctor

*Working Together to Make Rabies History!*



[WorldRabiesDay.Org](http://WorldRabiesDay.Org)



# HELP PROTECT

# the Manatee

## Remember

- Snorkeling gear may increase your chances of a memorable experience since scuba bubbles may scare manatees
- Observe from a distance while in or on the water
- Do not pet or chase manatees
- Avoid excessive noise and splashing
- Do not attempt to feed manatees



For more tips on how to safely enjoy manatees, please visit:  
<http://myfwc.com/wildlifehabitats/managed/manatee/>



beadiver.com

