

**Historical Analysis Activity 15**

Analyzing Secondary Sources

LEARNING THE SKILL

Historians are faced not only with detecting bias in the presentation of historical events, but also with presenting their findings as objectively as possible. While prejudice is uncovered fairly easily during research and study, bias may be more difficult to identify. One way of detecting bias is to investigate the validity of evidence that supports possibly biased claims. When reading, look for clues that signal bias, such as grandiose claims or use of *hyperbole*, or exaggeration.

PRACTICING THE SKILL

DIRECTIONS: Read the following excerpt from Chapter 15 about Senator Joseph McCarthy. Then, using your knowledge from the chapter, answer the questions that follow on a separate sheet of paper.

McCarthy's use of sensationalist charges was not new. When he ran for the Senate in 1946, he accused his opponent, Robert M. La Follette, Jr., of being "communistically inclined." McCarthy did not provide any evidence to support his accusation, but it helped him win the election.

1. If you had heard Senator McCarthy make this remark about La Follette, would you have accepted its accuracy or questioned it? Explain.
2. How did Senator McCarthy use the accusation he made to his advantage?

APPLYING THE SKILL

DIRECTIONS: Check local newspapers or the Internet for bias or prejudice in coverage of a specific situation or event. When determining the bias, ask yourself whether the perspective of the reporter is obviously slanted and whether there exists another, more objective perspective. If so, what might that perspective be? Why do you think that perspective is not addressed in the report? Present your findings on a separate sheet of paper by describing how the bias is presented. Be sure to provide a copy of the article or Web site you are citing.