

Student Activity Sheet 3-2: The Winnipeg General Strike

News reports are sometimes coloured by bias to persuade us, the readers, to share the writer's attitude towards the events being described.

Some of the details of the report of an event may be the result of *observation*, and others may be the result of *inference*, that is, a conclusion reached by making certain assumptions about the facts or reasoning about them in a particular way. Details based on observation are usually factual, while details that are inferred may be influenced by interpretation and bias.

Reprinted below are excerpts from newspaper articles that contain statements based on both observation and inference. The accounts describe an incident that occurred during the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919. The incident took place on June 10 of that year, during a riot. Coppins, the subject of the reports, was a member of a special police force hired by the City of Winnipeg after the regular police had been fired because members refused to sign an oath pledging they would not participate in sympathetic strikes or join unions affiliated with larger organizations.

Read each report carefully, and then complete the assignment that follows.

1. WAR HERO TRAMPLED BY ALIENS

The Manitoba Free Press, Winnipeg

June 11, 1919

(abridged)

(1) Lying in a cot in Roblin Hall at Tuxedo hospital is Sergt. Frederick George Coppins, V.C., who was attacked by a mob of striking aliens yesterday afternoon while performing his duties as a special mounted constable. Two bones on the right side of his chest are badly injured, but every hope is held for his recovery. He rested nicely throughout the night, and the doctors in attendance are entirely satisfied with his condition...

(2) Yesterday afternoon, with a number of his comrades, [Coppins] was doing patrol duty on Main street south. Just north of the Industrial bureau was a hostile crowd of strikers, the majority of whom, it is stated, were aliens. Coppins became somewhat detached from the rest of the patrol, when a man, said to be a foreigner, ran forward to attack the horse. Coppins headed his steed toward the man, who managed to escape into the crowd.

(3) From what can be gathered, the V.C. man was just turning his horse to rejoin the patrol when the animal was struck by a stone, which had been thrown from the centre of the crowd. The animal became unruly and Coppins, while endeavoring to pacify the beast, was dragged to the ground.

(4) Immediately, according to his own story and that of eye witnesses, he was set upon by a number of foreigners whom it is asserted kicked and jumped on the lad, who was badly injured before his comrades rode up to the rescue.

2. WINNIPEG IS DISGRACED

The Telegram, Winnipeg

June 11, 1919

(abridged)

- (5) Yesterday Winnipeg was deeply disgraced. The worst riots ever witnessed in a Canadian city took place in our principal streets. Traffic was held up; private business was paralyzed; howling mobs held
- (6) possession of the thoroughfares; thousands of bricks, stones, sticks and other missiles were hurled at the defenders of the law and human rights; scores were injured—some very seriously—and yet the Riot Act was not read!

- (7) What a thing to behold! One of the greatest heroes in the whole Empire dragged from his horse in the streets of Winnipeg and kicked to pieces by a mob of Huns!

- (8) What a thing to behold! Thousands of hostile aliens standing well back behind the crowds of British subjects and hurling thousands of missiles at the officers of the law—heroic young men who conducted themselves with a cool courage that has never been surpassed on the battlefields on which we made our sacrifices!

3. VICTORIA CROSS HERO ATTACKED IN STREET BY AUSTRIAN THUGS

The Tribune, Winnipeg

June 11, 1919

(abridged)

One of Winnipeg's greatest war heroes, a man who single-handedly charged a machine-gun nest and wiped out the crew, saving his platoon from annihilation, was struck down by Huns in the streets of Winnipeg Tuesday afternoon.

- (9) Sergt. F.G. Coppins, V.C., who returned to Canada a few weeks ago with the highest honors a British soldier can win, was dragged from his horse by alien ruffians, who, in typical Hunnish manner, kicked and trampled on him when he was down...

- (10) It was a picture that would make Lenine and Trotzky [*sic*] laugh with glee—a British V.C. hero being mauled and trampled into the ground by Germans and Austrians.

- (11) Several mounted police fought their way through the crowd and dragged Coppins to his feet...

4. A RIOT BORN OF REVOLUTION

The Winnipeg Citizen

June 11, 1919

(abridged)

At the time of writing, Sergeant Fred Coppin [*sic*], Victoria Cross hero of France, is lying in the Military Hospital and is stated to be dying ...

- (12) By the time that this appears, Coppin may be dead. Whether
- (13) he is dead or alive; whether lives or dies, the fact remains that he was kicked with intent to kill, by three Austrians—men whose blood relations he and every other returned fighter fought in France.

- (14) Coppin was dragged from his horse while he was fighting for democracy and British institutions just as truly as he fought for

- (15) them overseas. The riot of yesterday was perpetrated and kept going by alien enemies, bent upon revolution and nothing else. These alien enemies are supported and were backed by British born men...

-J.E. Rea

The Winnipeg General Strike

Assignment

Part A

Read each report carefully, then in the space provided below, identify each underlined word, phrase, or sentence as based on observation (obs.) or inference (inf.) The number of each underlined word, phrase, or sentence appears in the margin of the report.

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|----------|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. _____ | 5. _____ | 9. _____ | 13. _____ |
| 2. _____ | 6. _____ | 10. _____ | 14. _____ |
| 3. _____ | 7. _____ | 11. _____ | 15. _____ |
| 4. _____ | 8. _____ | 12. _____ | |

Part B

Quote any words or groups of words in the reports that show that the reporter is aware that his description is not based on observation.

Example

Paragraph 3 of the *Manitoba Free Press* starts with the words "From what can be gathered".

1. *Manitoba Free Press:*

2. *The Telegram:*

3. *The Tribune:*

4. *The Winnipeg Citizen:*
