UNIT 5.09

HOW CAN ONE PERSON INFLUENCE A COMMUNITY?

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Can one person influence a community?

Journalists’ Responsibilities About Rumors and Accusations

SHARON WRIGHT: Good day, student viewers! This is Sharon Wright, reporting to you today with thoughts about the elections we just held—or should I say survived? Each side declaring the opponent was evil or dangerous to sway people’s votes... Isn’t there a better way to hold election campaigns? As a journalist, I’ve always aimed to find out the truth and tell it. But all the accusations and rumors during the recent campaigns made me wonder: What impact do accusations and rumors have on what people believe? Aren’t journalists like us partly responsible, and is there something we can do about it? Reid, any thoughts on this?

REID MOORE: I agree with your assessment of the elections, Sharon. Elections are an essential part of our democracy, but what is said in campaigns can distort the truth and even damage good people’s reputations. And I think you’re right that we, members of the media, can be responsible for transmitting some of these negative messages. I’m remembering an incident some decades ago when an elected official managed to hurt many people’s reputations across the United States—even destroyed people’s lives. Do you remember what Wisconsin Senator Joe McCarthy did in the 1950s?

SHARON: That was a little before my time, Reid, but I’ve certainly read about the dark days of McCarthyism in the history books. Can you give us a little history lesson?

REID: Well, in the 1950s, there was so much tension after World War II between the United States and the Soviet Union that the whole period was called the Cold War. The government of the Soviet Union had a political system based on Communism. Senator McCarthy from Wisconsin claimed that the Communists were trying to take over the American military and the government. He publicly accused many American citizens of being or associating with Communists, and even of being spies for the Soviet Union. Many of these people lost their jobs and their good reputations.

SHARON: But why were the American people swayed by the accusations he made?

REID: Good question, Sharon. I think people believed him because they were so afraid of the Soviet Union and worried that this might really happen—even though Senator McCarthy had no solid evidence against anyone! People were afraid that if they spoke up, he would declare that they too were Communist spies!

SHARON: Was anyone brave enough to speak up against his false declarations?

REID: Fortunately, the great journalist Edward R. Murrow had the courage to tell the truth and denounce Senator McCarthy and his false accusations. He collected evidence against the Senator for many years, which he was brave enough to present to the American public on television. He helped stop the false accusations, but a lot of damage had already been done to many people’s lives and reputations.

SHARON: Well, we journalists owe Mr. Murrow a debt of gratitude for speaking up with the truth. You know, Reid, talking with you today reminds me of what we can learn from our own history. Maybe during our next elections, I’ll do a better job as a journalist of speaking up when people start spreading rumors or making accusations without evidence.

REID: I’m with you, Sharon. It’s our responsibility to make sure rumors don’t get spread because we reach so many people with our newscasts.
SHARON: I'll make sure to do the same in my own personal life as well. But before I do, I have a quick question for you, Reid: I heard that you were applying for a new job. Tell me it isn’t so!

REID: Don’t believe what you hear, Sharon! Nothing but rumors, my friend!

SHARON: What a relief! This is Sharon Wright, signing off!

Discussion question: Have you ever heard a rumor on television about someone famous? Did you believe it? Why or why not?
Four students enter Ms. Waldrin’s fifth-grade class together just before the bell rings. Cassandra is talking excitedly; Eddie is shaking his head; and Omar and Ingrid have worried looks on their faces. They are talking about Roy, a fifth-grade student in another class.

Line

1. **Cassandra:** I’m sure Roy stole the smartphone because I heard something about it from Steven, and Steven ought to know because he knows about *everyone!* He said he heard it from someone else—he didn’t say who—but I know he thinks Roy did it.

2. **Omar:** Cassandra! I can’t believe you just helped spread such a terrible rumor. Sounds to me like Steven’s *swaying* people’s opinions about Roy to be popular, and now you are too. Steven’s just playing on kids’ fears about people stealing our stuff in school. Roy’s really upset by what people are saying about him. This just isn’t right. He’s a great guy. And I guess I could be judged guilty too, because I’m *associated* with him.

3. **Ingrid:** I agree with what you said about fear, Omar. Some of the stuff some kids bring to school is pretty expensive. Remember when we used to come to school with just backpacks and pencils in second grade? Not much to steal there! But now smartphones and iPads are another story, and some students are afraid they’ll lose something valuable.

4. **Cassandra:** Right—and that’s why we’ve got to be careful about students like Roy taking our stuff.

5. **Ingrid:** Cassandra! Why are you so suspicious of Roy? And why would you believe something you don’t have evidence for? I know Roy and his family; they’re all really nice. But the real reason we shouldn’t believe the rumor is not that we know Roy but that we don’t have any evidence that he did it in the first place!

6. **Cassandra:** But he has a new phone he’s been showing everyone.

7. **Ingrid:** Roy does have a new phone, and it looks just like the one that got stolen, but I know he saved up for it and bought it himself. But now he doesn’t care about the phone; he cares about his reputation. Your reputation is the most *essential* part of you.

8. **Eddie:** Why does Roy care what people think of him? If I worried all the time about what everyone thought of me, I wouldn’t be able to keep straight what I believe, what I’ve done, and what I want to do.

9. **Ingrid:** So you wouldn’t care if someone accused YOU of stealing their smartphone?

10. **Eddie:** No, I wouldn’t. I’d know I didn’t do it, and that’s enough for me. I would just ignore the whole thing.

*Reader’s Theater continues on the next page.*
Reader's Theater, continued

Can one person influence a community?

11 Ingrid: Whoa, Eddie! This isn’t just about you! Don’t you care how Roy feels? We’re all part of a community here, you know.

12 Eddie: Wait a minute, Ingrid. You’re distorting what I said. I care about him, but I think he cares too much about what others think. If he didn’t care so much, the whole thing wouldn’t be such a big deal.

13 Ingrid: Sorry. Maybe you’re braver than the rest of us about stuff like this, but I think it’s wrong to let this continue. I think we should all denounce this and all other rumors. I mean, if people are convinced Roy’s a thief, he could get in a lot of trouble down the road. People will think he’s guilty every time something goes missing. What if I got Roy to show people his receipt for the phone he bought and a note from his mother—that would be great evidence!

14 Omar: I think that’s a great idea, Ingrid. But I think we should just trust people.

15 Cassandra: Well, I’m going to get a new lock for my locker. Who knows what Roy will do next?

16 Eddie: Cassandra, I wish you’d make up your own mind instead of being swayed by other people. Are you going to start rumors about me because I associate with Roy?

17 Cassandra: I would not!

18 Eddie: Come to think of it, Cassandra, you seem to be under Steven’s spell; could it be that you have a crush on him?

19 Cassandra: I do not!

20 Eddie: I’ve got pretty good sources...

21 Omar: Hold it! I have an idea: How about we declare our class a rumor-free zone?

22 Ingrid: I like it! Let’s go try to sway Ms. Waldrin to support Omar’s rumor-free zone idea! Are you in, Cassandra?

23 Cassandra: Okay, but I’m still suspicious of...

24 Omar: Not another word! Let’s go!

Turn and Talk:
What would you do if there were a false rumor going around about you? Would you fight to protect your reputation or ignore the rumors since you knew they were not true?

_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________________________
Think back on the characters from the Reader’s Theater. What do each of the characters think about this rumor? Check the box next to the correct statement that describes each character’s perspective. Using evidence from the Reader’s Theater, make sure that you can explain why you chose your statements.

**Eddie** thinks that:
- Roy is guilty of stealing the smartphone as well as many other items that are missing.
- People shouldn’t care what others say about them or accuse them of doing.
- Cassandra is blaming Roy because she is covering up the fact that she is the actual thief.

**Omar** thinks that:
- There is no way that Roy stole anything because he knows Roy well.
- People shouldn’t bring their smartphones to school in the first place.
- Roy could have stolen the phone because Roy has stolen things before.

**Ingrid** thinks that:
- Until there is evidence that proves Roy is a thief, he should not be accused.
- Eddie stole the phone and is blaming Roy for his own crime.
- No one should own a smartphone in the fifth grade.

**Cassandra** thinks that:
- Steven is someone she can’t trust to tell the truth.
- Roy is being denounced unfairly, and she is organizing a protest to defend him.
- Steven has to be right about Roy because he’s popular and people tell him everything.

**Discussion question:** What is your perspective on how to best deal with rumors and false accusations?

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**Word Study**

A Closer Look at Our Focus Words

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<th>Word Study</th>
<th>Can one person influence a community?</th>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>declare</th>
<th>sway</th>
<th>distort</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
<td>(verb) to state publicly</td>
<td>(verb) to influence or change someone's opinion; to move or swing gently</td>
<td>(verb) to change something (a fact, an image, or a process) so that it is no longer true or fair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Turn and Talk</strong></td>
<td>What might a candidate <strong>declare</strong> after winning an election?</td>
<td>How could you <strong>sway</strong> your parents to let you stay up late?</td>
<td>Do you think that money sometimes <strong>distorts</strong> friendships?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Forms of the Word</strong></td>
<td>declaration <em>(noun)</em> the act of declaring; announcement</td>
<td>swaying <em>(adjective)</em> moving to music; moved by the wind</td>
<td>distortion <em>(noun)</em> the act of distorting or twisting facts or images</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Choose a picture</strong></td>
<td>Which of these signs <strong>declares</strong> that it is important to vote?</td>
<td>Which of these pictures shows a tree <strong>swaying</strong>?</td>
<td>Which of these images <strong>distorts</strong> what a cow looks like?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognates</strong></td>
<td>declarar <em>(Sp)</em></td>
<td></td>
<td>distorsionar <em>(Sp)</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FUN FACTS</strong></td>
<td>The word <strong>declarative</strong> is used to describe a sentence that is a statement rather than a question. For example, “I am going to sleep now” is a declarative sentence.</td>
<td>In some states, before a trial begins, lawyers from both sides interview potential jurors. They want to know who they can emotionally <strong>sway</strong> with their evidence.</td>
<td><strong>Distort</strong> comes from the Latin <em>distortus</em>, which means “twisted.” Amusement parks sometimes have a funhouse filled with mirrors. The mirrors are entertaining because they <strong>distort</strong> how people look.</td>
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## Word Study, continued

### Can one person influence a community?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>essential</th>
<th>denounce</th>
<th>associate</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Definition</strong></td>
<td>(adjective) necessary, central</td>
<td>(verb) to criticize strongly</td>
<td>(verb) to spend time or be connected with someone; to link one thing or idea with another</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Turn and Talk</strong></td>
<td>What do you think are essential qualities of a friend?</td>
<td>Is there a policy in your school you would like to denounce?</td>
<td>What kinds of activities do you associate with summer vacation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Other Forms of the Word</strong></td>
<td>essence (noun) the most important part of something that makes it what it is</td>
<td>denunciation (noun) the act of denouncing someone or something</td>
<td>association (noun) a group of people organized for a purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Choose a picture</strong></td>
<td>Which of these is essential for running?</td>
<td>Which of these pictures shows someone denouncing someone?</td>
<td>Which of these pictures do you associate with school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cognates</strong></td>
<td>essentiel (Fr)</td>
<td>denunciar (Sp)</td>
<td>associado (Por)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FUN FACTS</strong></td>
<td>Many plants have essential oils that can be used for their fragrance or for well-being.</td>
<td>Denounce, like pronounce and announce, is derived from the Latin stem nuntius, meaning “messenger” or “person who brings a message.”</td>
<td>Associate is related to the words social, society, and soccer. The well-known phrase “guilt by association” means that if you keep company with someone who is guilty of something, people will conclude that you are guilty too.</td>
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</table>
Dear Journal,

I don’t know what to believe. We hear stories and rumors about battles here or there—but no one knows for sure what is happening. It amazes me how powerful a simple whisper can be. One moment, we hear news that the British are winning the war. Then the next day we hear that they are losing badly, and we are the victors. Our understanding is distorted because there are so many versions of the events. Master John rages when he hears these differing stories.

I am proud that my cousin Benjamin decided to join the British forces, although I know it means that I might never see him again. A British victory may be the last hope for our freedom and the freedom of the next generation. Master John threatens us and then tries to sway us with bribes in exchange for information about where cousin Benjamin went and who he is associated with now, but no one is telling. Let him rely on rumors about Ben’s whereabouts.

Last weekend, there was a big celebration because the colonies came together and signed a document that declares our independence from Great Britain. Within this new document, there is a declaration that reads “all men are created equal.” Am I the only person to think this document is a lie? All men are equal? What about us?

Oh, Journal! Imagine a world where that was true and slavery in all its forms was denounced by everyone! Sadly, I have accepted that most people in the colonies essentially have the distorted belief that people like me are to be treated like property. I have no hope, Journal, that Master John will ever believe “all men are created equal.”

One last thing, Journal: I have met a young man named Samuel who was recently brought from another state to work on the farm. He is so intelligent and such a gentleman, and I spend my day looking forward to eating dinner next to him in the common house. It makes my heart less heavy to have Samuel as a new friend.

Yours, Grace
Journals and Journeys, continued

Can one person influence a community?

Turn and Talk: Cousin Benjamin decided to fight with the British during the Revolutionary War. Which side would you fight on and why?

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Informational Text

Can one person influence a community?

The Declaration of Independence

In America, July 4—Independence Day—is a day of celebration. It was on that day in 1776, while still in the middle of the war, that the 13 colonies accepted the Declaration of Independence, declaring they were free and independent states. Written by Thomas Jefferson, a wealthy Virginian who would later become the third president of the United States, it includes these inspiring words: “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.”

To many of the signers of the Declaration, “all men” did not include African Americans. Over half of the people in Virginia were enslaved, and slavery was legal throughout the colonies.

Although Jefferson denounced slavery in his first draft of the Declaration of Independence, many of his associates disagreed with his perspective. His final draft did not mention slavery at all. Despite his opposition to slavery, Jefferson himself owned about 100 enslaved people, who did the work in his home, in his businesses, and on his 5,000 acres of land.

Enslaved people were an essential part of the country’s growing economy: They built buildings and grew crops like cotton and tobacco. Since enslaved people were not paid for their work, owners of enslaved people kept all of the profits. Even though Jefferson and others felt that slavery was morally wrong, they did not take action against slavery because they feared that ending it would threaten America’s economic future.

Although the words “all men are created equal” did not lead to the abolition of slavery in 1776, they continued to be associated with the idea of abolishing slavery. In 1780, Massachusetts used these words in its new constitution to free all of the enslaved people within the state. Almost 100 years later, President Abraham Lincoln used these same words when he argued that slavery should be abolished. Finally, in 1865, under President Lincoln’s leadership, the American government passed the 13th Amendment to the Constitution, which outlawed slavery once and for all in the United States.

Discussion question: Can you think of a time when people said one thing but acted in a way that went against what they said?
Day 5

Article

Can one person influence a community?

Young People Who Sway Us To Act

Take a look at two young people who are making a difference by swaying others to take action.

In the first grade, Peter Larson learned that $500 could prevent a family from becoming homeless for a month, so Peter declared that he would sleep outside in a cardboard box to raise money and awareness about homelessness. In the first year of his mission Peter only raised $100, but he could not be swayed to give up. The next year, Peter returned to his cardboard refrigerator box and slept outside (in cold Minnesota) from November 12 through December 31. People started to notice Peter’s dedication and donated money to his cause. Peter’s final year of sleeping outside was 2011. He set a goal to raise $100,000 to help 50 families with their housing needs. On his fundraising website Peter wrote, “It’s hard to think about how the kids in those families are getting by, and that some of them go to school with me.” Peter’s actions have inspired others to support his cause and even start their own sleep outs!

Source: https://iocp.ejoinme.org/Peter_Larson

Sarah Kavanagh is a vegetarian, so she checks food labels for products associated with animals. In 2012, 15-year-old Sarah read an ingredient on the label of a Gatorade bottle that she didn’t recognize: brominated vegetable oil (BVO). Sarah discovered that BVO was a potentially dangerous chemical and was used in 1 out of 10 drinks sold in the United States. Sarah started a petition to denounce the use of BVO and sway companies to stop putting it in their drinks. She argued that other countries banned BVO, so it must not be an essential ingredient. Over 200,000 people signed Sarah’s petition, and then two of the largest beverage companies in the U.S. declared that they would stop using BVO in their drinks!

Discussion question: Peter and Sarah have very different goals and distinct stories. Nonetheless, is there something similar about their actions?
Math

Can one person influence a community?

Rumors and Denunciations!

On the morning of Rebecca’s first day of sixth grade, Derrick, Rebecca’s older brother, looked over her schedule and noticed her math teacher’s name: Mr. Appleton. “Mr. Appleton is the meanest and hardest teacher in the school. Everybody fails his class and has to go to summer school,” declared Derrick as he dashed out of the front door. Rebecca was upset that Derrick had denounced her teacher, and felt that her school year had been essentially ruined. But before she could be swayed completely, Rebecca decided to ask some of her classmates whether they had heard the same news about Mr. Appleton. Maybe her brother had distorted the truth. Or worse, maybe he was right. On the school bus, Rebecca told three friends what her brother said about Mr. Appleton. Before the school day had begun, each of those three friends told three friends of their own. And then those friends each told three more friends.

1. Draw a diagram to figure out how many students in all can be associated with Rebecca’s rumor. Include Rebecca in your final number.

2. There are 120 students entering sixth grade. What fraction of the students heard the rumor? Write the fraction in its simplest form.

3. Half of the students who heard the rumor believe it is true. One fifth do not believe it is true. The rest of the students are not sure whether it is true or false. How many students are not sure whether the description of Mr. Appleton is true or false?

Discussion questions:

Did Rebecca do the right thing by sharing the rumor with her classmates? What could she have done differently to figure out if the rumor was true?

Epilogue: Mr. Appleton is now one of Rebecca’s favorite teachers. He is strict and has high standards, but Rebecca has never done better in math class!
Can one person influence a community?

**Distorting the Truth: The Salem Witch-Hunts**

What is a *witch-hunt*? A long time ago, it really did mean hunting for a person who could be blamed for causing a bad event through the evil use of witch powers. We still use the term today, even though most people believe there is no such thing as witches. Today, the term *witch-hunt* means the act of seeking out someone to blame as an enemy, even if there is no evidence of their guilt. When people are upset over a bad event, they sometimes look for a person to blame, and they spread rumors about that person to others.

In previous units, you learned about the power of fear. When people are scared, they sometimes do things they normally would not do or they agree with things they normally would not agree with. Fear can *sway* people to think about other people and events in a *distorted* way. Fear often plays a role in the successful spread of rumors.

One event that shows how dangerous rumors can be is the terrible story of the Salem Witch Trials. Let's review what happened: In 1692, Salem was a port town in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Two young girls from Salem named Abigail and Elizabeth began behaving strangely. Abigail was 11 years old, and her cousin Elizabeth was 9 years old. Instead of their usual sweet behavior, the girls would scream and throw things and act violently. The girls' parents finally called a doctor to have them examined. No matter what he did, the girls' wild behavior continued. Because the girls' behavior was so strange, the doctor *declared* it must be the work of witches. And from this unfounded conclusion, a tragic set of historical events followed.

After the doctor's diagnosis that the girls' behavior was the work of witches, people became scared. They pressured Abigail and Elizabeth to name the people they closely *associated* with who might have witch powers. The two girls *denounced* three women as witches: an enslaved woman who lived in Abigail's house, a homeless beggar woman, and a poor old woman (none of whom had anyone to defend them). Others also began to *denounce* people they suspected to be witches.

In the following year, almost 200 people were arrested for being witches, 20 of whom were executed. Essentially, all a person had to do was *denounce* someone as a witch, and then that person would be arrested and questioned. It was as easy as that to *declare* a person a witch. Sometimes when one person was arrested, his or her *associates* would be arrested as well. On one occasion even a four-year-old girl was accused and questioned as a witch!

This continued until the governor's wife was questioned as a witch. The governor then decided the trials must stop, and he eventually released all of the accused from prison by May of 1693. In 1957, over 250 years later, Massachusetts publicly apologized for the Salem Witch Trials. And in 1992, 300 years after the trials, a memorial was built for the innocent people who died as a result of those trials.

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**Discussion questions:**

Who do you think is responsible for the Salem Witch Trials? Abigail and Elizabeth? The girls' families? The doctor? The townspeople in Salem? The governor of Massachusetts?

What action might each have taken to prevent this tragedy?
How can we distinguish rumors from facts?

**Scenario:** My best friend, Alyse, arrived at school with an astonishing tale. She declared that she had seen a spaceship hovering outside her window. Some kids called her “crazy” while others said she was lying to get attention. She showed us a picture she had taken of the spaceship with her mother’s phone, but it was just a blurry flash. There was a story in one of the local papers about a strange object appearing in the sky, but no other newspaper reported the event. I want to believe her. Alyse is so sure of what she saw. What rule should I use to judge Alyse’s story?

- You can only trust a rumor or story to be true if you see evidence of it yourself.
- You can trust that a rumor or story is true if the person who tells it to you is trustworthy.
- You can only trust a rumor or story to be true if you learn about it from multiple trusted sources (such as websites, radio, and television).

What perspective do you agree with? Why?

____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________
How can we distinguish rumors from facts?

Use this space to gather notes before and during the debate.

Notes:

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Can one person influence a community?

How can we distinguish rumors from facts?

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<tr>
<th>Use of focus words</th>
<th>Tally how many times the focus words were used.</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>declare ________</td>
<td>distort ________</td>
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<td>sway ________</td>
<td>essential ________</td>
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<tr>
<th>Fairness</th>
<th>Did everyone get an opportunity to speak?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>□ yes □ no</td>
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<td>Examples:</td>
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<tr>
<th>Norms</th>
<th>Did everyone follow the debate norms?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Examples:</td>
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<tr>
<th>Debate</th>
<th>Was the debate interesting?</th>
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<td>□ yes □ no</td>
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<td>Why?</td>
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<tr>
<th>Arguments</th>
<th>What arguments did others use?</th>
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<tr>
<td>Examples:</td>
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SCENARIO:
Imagine that you are a famous journalist like Edward R. Murrow (he was mentioned in the newscast). You recently heard about Alyse’s encounter with a UFO. As a good journalist, you will investigate this event by reviewing multiple sources of evidence. The sources of evidence that exist to support or refute Alyse’s claim are the following:

EVIDENCE:
1. Interview: Alyse shares her personal experience.
2. Photo: Alyse provides a blurry photo on her mother’s phone.
3. Interview: Alyse’s family and friends say she’s always been trustworthy and responsible.
4. Interview: Two schoolmates think that Alyse was mistaken.
5. Interview: Alyse’s neighbors heard a strange noise that night.
6. Interview: Air traffic controller says there was no strange activity detected on radar near Alyse’s town.
7. Interview: UFO expert Nick Pope, former head of Britain’s UFO Project, declares that Alyse’s description of the UFO is consistent with other UFO sightings.
8. Police logs: Four anonymous calls were received reporting a strange object in the sky.
9. Article: Local newspaper picks up information from police logs.

WRITING PROMPT:
After reviewing the existing evidence, choose to support or not support Alyse’s claim.
State your position:

☐ I support Alyse’s claim because ...

☐ I don’t support Alyse’s claim because ...

On the next page, explain how the available evidence supports your position.
Use focus words to make your writing more compelling.
Can one person influence a community?

Now, check your writing.

Did you...

☐ write your own opinion about the issue?

☐ give reasons to support your opinion?

☐ include focus words to make your writing stronger?