

 **Skills Reinforcement Activity 13**

Detecting Bias

Detecting bias can help you assess the accuracy of information that you read, hear, or view. Suppose you watch a television interview featuring several candidates for

state or national office. By applying the skill of detecting bias, you can distinguish appeals for your support based on fact from appeals based on emotions.

DIRECTIONS: Read the following excerpt from American poet Walt Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*, published in 1871. Then answer the questions below in the space provided.

In business (this all-devouring modern word, business) the one sole object is, by any means, pecuniary [monetary] gain. The magician's serpent in the fable ate up all the other serpents; and money-making is our magician's serpent, remaining to-day sole master of the field. The best class we show, is but a mob of fashionably dress'd speculators and vulgarians. True, indeed, behind this fantastic farce, enacted on the visible stage of society, solid things and stupendous labors are to be discover'd, existing crudely and going on in the background, to advance and tell themselves in time. Yet the truths are none the less terrible. I say that our New World democracy, however great a success in uplifting the masses out of their sloughs, in materialistic development, products, and in a certain highly-deceptive superficial popular intellectuality, is, so far, an almost complete failure in its social aspects, and in really grand religious, moral, literary, and esthetic results. In vain do we march with unprecedented strides to empire so colossal, outvying the antique, beyond Alexander's, beyond the proudest sway of Rome. In vain have we annex'd Texas, California, Alaska, and reach north for Canada and south for Cuba. It is as if we were somehow being endow'd with a vast and more and more thoroughly-appointed body, and then left with little or no soul.

CHAPTER 13

1. What point about American culture does Whitman make through his reference to the magician's snake?

2. What tone does Whitman create through phrases such as "fashionably dress'd speculators and vulgarians" and "uplifting the masses out of their sloughs"?

3. According to Whitman, how is American democracy both a success and a failure?

4. What bias about society is expressed in this excerpt?

