



**WIKIMEDIA**  
UK

# Wikimedia in Schools Series

## **Gaps in Open Knowledge**

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## Notes for Teachers:

Before completing this session we recommend looking at the [Introduction to Wikimedia](#) handout for context. This should take about 10 - 15 minutes and is designed to give students an understanding of Wikimedia and Wikimedia projects before beginning the Wikimedia in schools series.

The lessons in the series can be completed in any order, and each is a stand-alone lesson. However, completing the whole series will give students a deeper understanding of digital and media literacy, and how to use these skills to increase democratic and civic engagement and for positive social change.

All answers given in the teacher copies are suggestions, and other answers may be equally suitable.

If you have any questions about the delivery of this session please contact our Education Lead [sally.latham@wikimedia.org.uk](mailto:sally.latham@wikimedia.org.uk).

You can also sign up to our [newsletter](#) here to see ideas and best practice from other schools.

The Wiki Teacher Community also has a [Facebook group](#) which you can join.

Remember to join our [mailing list](#) for updates on webinars and events.

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## Session Objectives:

- ★ Students should understand the meaning and importance of open knowledge.
- ★ Students should understand the concept of systemic bias, and why this applies to the open knowledge ecosystem.
- ★ Students should understand how systemic bias applies to Wikipedia, using the gender gap as an example.
- ★ Students should be able to identify knowledge gaps on Wikipedia.
- ★ Students should understand the importance of actively contributing to the open knowledge ecosystem.

## Session length:

1 hour without online activity.

1 hour 20 minutes with online activity.

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## Activity 1: Recap on open knowledge and Wikipedia



1. What is the meaning of 'open knowledge'? Compare your answer with another class member.

From Introduction to Wikimedia handout:

Also known as free knowledge, open knowledge is knowledge that is free to use, reuse and redistribute without legal, social or technological restrictions.

2. Write down three facts about Wikipedia. Compare your answers with another class member and add down new points.

Wikipedia is a free, online encyclopedia written and maintained by a community of volunteers known as Wikimedians.

Wikipedia is the largest, most read reference work in history.

Wikipedia has over 500 million visitors and 18 billion page views per month.

Wikipedia is a collaborative project, where anyone can contribute.

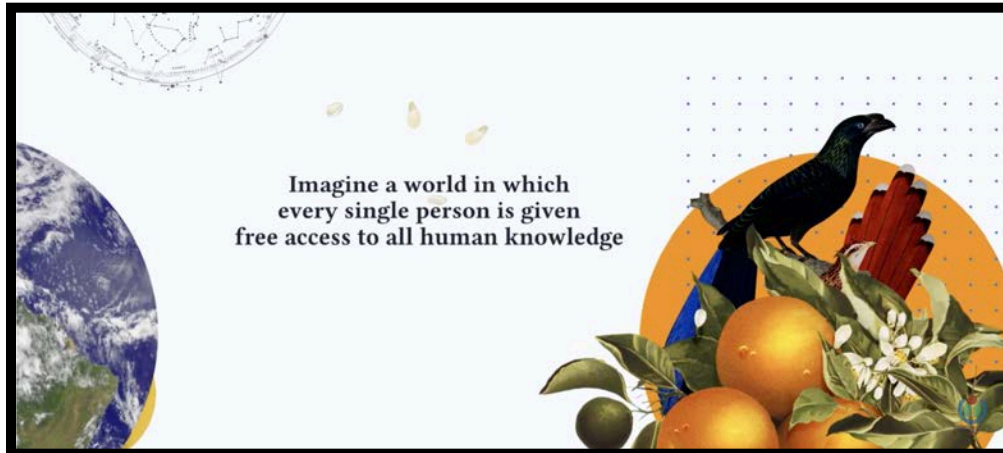
Wikipedia strives for a neutral point of view, without bias or opinion.

Wikipedia strives for articles to be verifiable, meaning that they have reliable sources.

Wikipedia is closely monitored by the community, including administrators, to remove incorrect or unverified articles or edits, and vandalism is typically reversed in less than 5 minutes.

There are over 300 different Wikipedias in different languages

Watch the following [video](#) and note down any interesting points:



Notes:

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## Knowledge gaps and systemic bias

### Key Terms:

#### Systemic bias

The inherent tendency for a system to produce particular outcomes.

In other words, a system has a built-in characteristic which makes it likely to favour a particular result.

In the case of online information, this may mean that information about, and perspectives of certain groups of people are more likely to be shown.

Although anyone can edit and contribute to open knowledge, there are still barriers that prevent some people from contributing to Wikipedia. These barriers may include a lack of access to technology, a lack of digital skills, a lack of time, lack of confidence and a lack of recognition.

This means that the knowledge, traditions, stories and languages of some communities are missing from Wikipedia and the broader internet. This is a form of systemic bias, as when we search online for information we are more likely to get knowledge and perspectives from some individuals and communities than others.

Systemic bias in online information can be **explicit bias**, where the information itself or the sources used are biased. Or it can be **implicit bias**, where the information about a certain community is missing altogether.

Although Wikipedia strives for a neutral point of view, these biases still exist.

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## Who is missing from open knowledge?

### **Key Terms:**

#### **Global South:**

A group of countries that make up the majority of the world's population. They are typically less wealthy, less industrialised and less technologically advanced. Many of these countries are found in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania.

The 'average' Wikipedian (someone who contributes to Wikipedia through editing or creating articles) is white, male, good with technology, speaks English, aged 15 - 49, from a predominantly Christian country and from outside the global majority.

For example, in 2024 only 14% of active editors on Wikipedia identify as female<sup>1</sup> and only 20% of biographies on Wikipedia are of women.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Community\\_Insights/Community\\_Insights\\_2024\\_Report](https://meta.wikimedia.org/wiki/Community_Insights/Community_Insights_2024_Report)

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## Activity 2: Why does diversity matter?



### Key Terms:

#### Diversity:

In open knowledge, diversity refers to the inclusion of different and varied people and perspectives, both in the production of knowledge and in its content.

If there is little diversity in who contributes to open knowledge, it is more likely that systemic bias will occur.

Let's have a closer look at the characteristics of the 'average' Wikipedian. Why do these characteristics matter, and who might be getting overlooked?

In your pairs or small groups, look at the table on the next page.

Pick three of the characteristics of the 'average' Wikipedian and explain why you think this might lead to systemic bias in Wikipedia.

Then in larger groups or as a class, try to write something down for every characteristic. We have completed one for you to get you started.

<b>Characteristic of the 'average' Wikipedian</b>	<b>Why might this lead to systemic bias?</b>
Male	<i>The knowledge and perspectives of those identifying as females may not be represented online.</i>
White	<i>The knowledge and perspectives of non-white communities may not be represented. Students may identify issues with colonialism and what counts as knowledge. Non-white historical figures may not be represented.</i>
Good with technology	<i>People who aren't confident with technology are not represented. This might include the elderly, people with certain disabilities or those who did not have a formal education.</i>
English speaking	<i>English Wikipedia will have more articles than other Wikipedias. Sources that are not in English will be overlooked.</i>
Aged 15 - 49	<i>The knowledge and perspectives of younger teens and children will not be represented, nor will the knowledge and perspectives of older people, especially the very elderly.</i>
Lives in a predominantly Christian country	<i>Non-Christian religions may not be represented, or may be presented in a way that lacks understanding.</i>
Outside the global majority	<i>Those countries in the global majority that are less wealthy and technologically advanced may not have their knowledge and perspective represented. Students may again mention colonialism.</i>

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## Activity 3: Searching for knowledge gaps.



Have a look on Wikipedia now. Pick something that interests you, or your hometown.

Is the article representative? Is there anything or anyone missing? What could be done to improve it?

Try to come up with at least one example in your pair / group, and make some notes below:

*If students struggle for ideas, consider asking them to look at pages such as 'British philosophers' or 'football' to illustrate the gender gap.*

*'Engineer' is a good example of the absence of non-white engineers.*

*Students may want to look at the page for their local area and see if it is a good representation of where they live, including the lead photograph.*

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## How can I help to make open knowledge more diverse?

When open knowledge doesn't include all individuals and communities, this increases misunderstanding and polarisation. By becoming a Wikipedian you can learn to edit articles and create new articles to increase diversity in the areas you know it is needed.

You could look at the [online tutorials](#) or complete the [Wikipedia Adventure](#) to teach yourself editing skills.

Your teacher can also arrange for a workshop with Wikimedia UK.

## Evaluation and Feedback

We would be very grateful if you would fill in this [short teacher evaluation](#) for the session, so that we can improve the Wikimedia in Schools series of resources.

If you are happy to provide anecdotal feedback on how you found the session and resources this would also be gratefully received. Please contact Sally Latham at [sally.latham@wikimedia.org.uk](mailto:sally.latham@wikimedia.org.uk).

Many thanks for taking part in this pilot!

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## Appendix:

Link to video on Wikimedia and Open Knowledge:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P2HiRf-TPTU>

Online tutorials on how to edit Wikipedia:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Contributing\\_to\\_Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Contributing_to_Wikipedia)

Link to the Wikipedia Adventure activity:

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:The\\_Wikipedia\\_Adventure](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:The_Wikipedia_Adventure)