THE LEARNERS TOOLKIT

The Critical Thinker's Toolkit

Critical Thinking Through Current Events

CASE STUDY: Minneapolis, January 2026

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What Do the Facts Show? Analyzing Official Claims vs. Video Evidence

Critical thinking matters most when the stakes are real.

HOW TO USE THIS UNIT

Materials: This document. Internet access for video viewing is optional. The unit can be completed using the descriptions and evidence summaries provided.

Flexibility: Activities can be selected based on available time and student age. Part 4 (Legal Analysis) is designed for grades 7–12; If you have younger students you may want to omit Part 4.

Standalone or Integrated: This unit can be used on its own or as part of *The Critical Thinker's Toolkit* curriculum. For standalone use, the Tools Quick Reference section provides all necessary definitions. For integrated use, assign this unit after completing Lessons 2–11 of the Toolkit **or** integrate it into lessons that you feel are a good fit; students can skip the Quick Reference since they will already know the tools.

UNIT OVERVIEW

For Educators

This unit applies critical thinking tools to analyze a recent event: the fatal shootings of two American citizens by federal immigration agents in Minneapolis in January 2026, and the subsequent official statements that multiple independent analyses found to contradict video evidence.

This is not a unit about immigration policy. It is a unit about:

- Distinguishing facts from interpretations
- Evaluating evidence quality
- Recognizing when official claims contradict observable evidence
- Understanding how narratives are constructed and why
- Applying media literacy tools to real events
- Understanding why people believe claims that contradict evidence (confirmation bias and identity-protective cognition)
- Examining what happens when government institutions make claims that are contradicted by documented evidence

A Note on Difficulty

This case study involves the deaths of real people. Video evidence is publicly available, and families may choose whether to view it. The events are disturbing. They are also documented by multiple cameras, with official claims that can be directly compared to observable evidence.

PART 1: THE EVENTS

January 7, 2026: Renée Good

Renée Good, 37, a U.S. citizen, poet, and mother of three, was in her car on a residential Minneapolis street. She had stopped her SUV sideways in the road while activists blew whistles to alert neighbors to the presence of immigration officers. Her dog was in the backseat.

ICE agent Jonathan Ross approached her vehicle while recording on his phone. Video shows Good saying "That is fine, dude. I am not mad at you." She had one hand on the steering wheel and the other hanging out the open window. Her wife, standing outside the car, told Ross, "Go get yourself some lunch, big boy."

Other agents approached and ordered Good to "get out of the fucking car." Good's wife called out, "Drive, baby, drive!" Good reversed slightly, then turned her steering wheel to the right—away from Ross—and began to pull forward into the direction of traffic.

Ross fired three shots. An independent autopsy commissioned by Good's family found: - One shot struck her left forearm - One shot struck her right breast (neither wound was immediately life-threatening) - One shot entered the left side of her head near her temple and exited the right side

In video widely attributed to Ross's phone, someone is heard saying "fucking bitch" moments after the final shot. Good's SUV crashed into a parked car. According to reporting, ICE agents prevented civilian medics on the scene from rendering aid. Good was pronounced dead at the hospital.

What video analyses show: Multiple independent analyses (ABC News, CNN, New York Times, Washington Post, Index on Censorship) found that Good's steering wheel was turned to the right, away from the agent, as she began to move. The autopsy finding that the fatal shot entered the left side of her head through the side window is consistent with the car being beside or past the agent—not approaching him. Minneapolis Mayor Jacob Frey stated: "Having seen the video myself, I want to tell everybody directly that is bullshit."

Aftermath: The FBI assumed control of the investigation, and state officials say their access to evidence has been restricted. Multiple federal prosecutors reportedly resigned in protest over the handling of the case. NYU law professor Ryan Goodman described the autopsy findings—particularly the head shot through the side window—as providing "strong evidence" and representing the "easiest criminal case of a willful killing."

January 24, 2026: Alex Pretti

Alex Pretti, 37, was a U.S. citizen, ICU nurse at the Minneapolis VA hospital, and had no criminal record beyond traffic tickets. He had a legal permit to carry a handgun. He was on a street in south Minneapolis using his phone to record federal agents.

According to video verified by multiple news organizations (Reuters, AP, ABC, CBS, BBC, Wall Street Journal, Bellingcat), Pretti was recording agents alongside legal observers when an agent pushed a woman to the ground. Pretti stepped between the agent and the woman, putting his arm around her. He was then pepper-sprayed and tackled to the ground by multiple agents (approximately six).

Video shows an agent in a gray jacket removing a gun from Pretti's waistband. That agent walked away from the group while holding the gun. Approximately one second after the gun was removed,

another agent fired. About ten shots were fired in roughly five seconds. Pretti was shot while pinned on the ground by multiple agents.

What video shows vs. official claims: DHS Secretary Kristi Noem said Pretti "approached" agents with a gun and "brandished" a weapon. Videos from multiple angles, verified by several independent outlets, show Pretti holding a phone—not a gun—before being tackled. The gun was removed from his waistband before shots were fired.

Official Claims vs. Video Evidence

Renée Good

Official Claim	Who Said It	What Video/Autopsy Shows
Good "weaponized" her vehicle	DHS Secretary Noem	Video shows steering wheel turned right, away from agent
Good tried to "run over" agents	President Trump	Autopsy shows fatal shot entered side of head through side window
Good committed "domestic terrorism"	DHS Secretary Noem	No evidence provided; label applied within hours
Agent was "hit by the vehicle"	DHS Secretary Noem	Video shows no visible impact; agent remained standing

Alex Pretti

Official Claim	Who Said It	What Video Shows
Pretti "approached" agents with a gun	DHS Secretary Noem	Video shows Pretti holding a phone, not a gun
Pretti "brandished" a weapon	DHS Secretary Noem	Video shows gun in waistband until agent removed it
Pretti intended to "massacre" officers	Border Patrol Commander Bovino	No evidence provided; claim made within hours
Pretti was a "domestic terrorist" / "assassin"	Stephen Miller, Kristi Noem	No evidence provided; labels applied within hours
Agent fired "defensive shots"	Official statements	Video shows gun removed approximately one second before shots; Pretti pinned by multiple agents

Activity 6: Evidence Quality

PART A: Renée Good

Compare evidence sources:

Official Statements: - Source: Officials whose agent shot Good - Directness: Secondhand (officials were not eyewitnesses) - Verifiability: Many claims contradict video and autopsy - Consistency: Claims about “hitting” the agent not supported by visible evidence

Agent’s Own Video + Independent Autopsy: - Source: The agent himself recorded video; autopsy by independent pathologist - Directness: Firsthand recording; physical examination - Verifiability: Video verified by multiple news organizations; autopsy conducted by credentialed expert - Consistency: Video and autopsy align—both show car turning away, shot through side window

PART B: Alex Pretti

Official Statements: - Source: Officials whose agents shot Pretti - Directness: Secondhand - Verifiability: Key claims contradicted by multiple videos - Consistency: Claim of “brandishing” contradicted by video showing phone in hand

Multiple Bystander Videos: - Source: Multiple unrelated witnesses - Directness: Firsthand recordings from multiple angles - Verifiability: Verified by Reuters, AP, BBC, CBS, ABC, NPR, Wall Street Journal, Bellingcat - Consistency: Videos from different angles show same sequence of events

Discussion Question

When the agent’s own video (Good case) or multiple independent videos (Pretti case) contradict official claims, how do you evaluate which source is more reliable?

Applying the Toolkit

1. **What I Know vs. Story in My Head:** What do we actually know about Lemon's and Fort's actions at the protest? Which claims in the charges rely on assumptions rather than verifiable evidence?

2. **Fact vs. Interpretation:** Lemon and Fort were present at the protest as journalists, both filmed the demonstration, and both were arrested eleven days later (facts). Officials claim they "interfered with a religious service" and "participated in the demonstration" (interpretations). What evidence would be needed to support those interpretations?

3. **Know vs. Believe:** What evidence would officials need to *know* the claims in the warrant are accurate? What remains unknown?

4. **Assumptions:** What assumption links a journalist's presence at a protest to participation in unlawful conduct? What assumption would be required to conclude the arrests were retaliatory?

5. **Evidence Quality:** How does arresting journalists who were documenting events affect the directness, verifiability, and completeness of evidence available to the public?

6. **SIFT:** How do different outlets report the Lemon and Fort arrests? Do they cite primary documents or rely on official statements? What differences appear in framing?

ANSWER KEY AND SAMPLE RESPONSES

Part 2: Cognitive Bias Activities

Activity 1: Confirmation Bias

Why might someone choose NOT to watch video evidence?

Watching evidence that might contradict your beliefs creates discomfort. If you have already decided what happened, watching evidence that contradicts your conclusion threatens your sense of being right. People often protect themselves from this discomfort by avoiding the evidence entirely.

Why do people who watch the video tend to reach similar conclusions?

Video provides observable facts that are harder to reinterpret than secondhand descriptions. When people see the same evidence directly, their conclusions converge because they are responding to the same observable reality rather than filtered descriptions.

Activity 2: Identity-Protective Cognition

Why might smarter people be better at rejecting threatening evidence?

Intelligence gives people more tools for constructing arguments. A smarter person can generate more reasons why threatening evidence might be wrong and construct more elaborate explanations. Intelligence is a tool—it can be used for truth-seeking OR for defending beliefs.

Part 3: Tool Application Activities

Activity 5: Fact vs. Interpretation

The key insight is that "steering wheel turned right" and "holding a phone" are observable facts. "Weaponized," "intended to massacre," and "defensive" are interpretations that require evidence beyond what is observable—and in these cases, the observable evidence contradicts the interpretations.

Activity 8: Causal Reasoning

Good case: The official causal chain breaks at Link 2. If the car was turning away (video) and the fatal shot came through the side window (autopsy), the claim that the agent was threatened by the car coming toward him is not supported.

Pretti case: The official causal chain breaks at multiple points. Video shows Pretti holding a phone, not "approaching with a gun." Video shows the gun was removed before shots were fired, undermining the claim of "defensive" action against an armed threat.

Activity 9: Two Kinds of Disagreement

The key teaching point: When officials say Good drove "at" the agent but autopsy shows she was shot in the side of the head through the side window, this is not a perspective difference. It is a factual dispute that physical evidence can resolve.
