

Lesson 1.1: What Is Newsworthy?

Subjects

Journalism, Language Arts, Social Studies

Estimated Time

One 45-minute class period

Grade Level

Upper Elementary, Middle and High School

Materials

Copies of [Worksheet 1.1](#) for every student

Warm Up Activity

News and Information

1. Ask students “What news stories are important in your life?” and write their answers on the board.
2. After a list of 10 (or so) news stories ask the class to rank which news stories are the most “newsworthy”. Your result should be that you have identified the most and the least newsworthy stories.
3. Now ask the class to reflect on their rankings and identify criteria they used to pick the most and least newsworthy stories. What did the top three stories have that the bottom three don’t?
4. Ask the class if they think there is a difference between information and news? What about news makes it different from plain old information? Have class brainstorm as many differences as they can and write their criteria on the board. Then go back to their list and label each story on the board as either an “I” for information or an “N” for news.
5. Now pass out [Worksheet 1.1](#) and go over the five values that journalists use to decide if something is newsworthy. Ask students to complete column three by drawing or writing an example of that row’s value.
 - Timeliness Proximity
 - Conflict and Controversy
 - Human Interest
 - Relevance
6. Revisit the labeling of either “I” or “N” on the class list of stories and ask students to reevaluate their choices. Did anything need to be changed? Also, have students reevaluate their rankings-based on newsworthiness- and see if anything has changed. Discuss as a class, if there were changes, why there were changes or they had mislabeled a story to start with.

Main Activity

Above the Fold/Centerpiece Stories

1. Teach students where to look for newsworthy stories. On page two of Worksheet 1.1 are the following definitions and image examples of two key terms in newsworthiness. Review them with students.
 - **Above the fold** - in a position where it is seen first, for example on the top half of the front page of a newspaper or in the part of a web page that you see first when you open it. (Source: [Oxford Learners Dictionaries](#))
 - **Centerpiece story** - an item or issue intended to be a focus of attention. In online journalism it is the story that viewers see first on the webpage. (Source: [Oxford Dictionaries](#))
2. Place students in small teams and instruct them to go online and find three examples of newsworthy stories and complete the tables on their “Newsworthy Examples” handout. Students are to pick their best story example and share it with the rest of the class.
3. Point out the headlines for each story. Ask the students if the headline accurately reflects the content of the story? Have them come up with alternative headlines.
4. Have each team share out their best newsworthy example to the class and have them defend and explain why their article is the best. Students will then vote for the most newsworthy story.

Targeting an Audience

1. Explain to students that what’s newsworthy depends on the target audience, to some extent. A target audience is the particular group of people to which an advertisement, a product, a website or a television or radio program is directed (Source: [Cambridge Dictionary Online](#)) For example, what’s newsworthy to a 15-year-old will be different from that of a senior citizen. What’s newsworthy to a city dweller may be less newsworthy to one who lives in a small town.
2. Have students discuss the target audience for the stories they thought were interesting vs. stories they rejected. Point out that many news outlets are producing stories for adults. Talk about how news stories would be different if they were targeted at kids. *Optional: look at sites that are targeting kids such as [Time for Kids](#) and [CNN Student News](#). Remind students that these sites are produced by adults based on what they think kids will like. Ask if these sites do a good job of tailoring news for kids, how would they do it differently.*
3. Have the students find two stories that are directed at different audiences. Have students reflect with the person next to them on how they knew which audience the clip was targeted for and then discuss answers as a class.
4. For fun, play a game where students act out an example story and the class has to guess which audience it is intended for. To make it harder try it charades style.

Standards

ISTE: Media Concepts, 4.0 Students will demonstrate the ability to use research, writing, and analytical skills to conceptualize, develop, and present an idea; design a project; make a valid judgment

Common Core Standards:

Reading for Informational Text

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author distinguishes his or her position from that of others.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how the author acknowledges and responds to conflicting evidence or viewpoints.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.6 Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text in which the rhetoric is particularly effective, analyzing how style and content contribute to the power, persuasiveness or beauty of the text.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.7.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of a specific word choice on meaning and tone.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.8.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including analogies or allusions to other texts.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language of a court opinion differs from that of a newspaper).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.11-12.4 Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including figurative, connotative, and technical meanings; analyze how an author uses and refines the meaning of a key term or terms over the course of a text (e.g., how Madison defines faction in Federalist No. 10).