

MAKING THE NEWS

Canadian Politics and Citizenship

Grade 11, Open (CPC30)

Introduction

The media often are referred to as a “window on the world”, but it is important to ask questions about what we are seeing through this window. How are news and information presented to us? What does the “frame” of this window allow us to see? Who is deciding what stories will make the news of the day, and who benefits as a result? How does the news media affect values, beliefs, and behaviours of Canadians?

This lesson series can be used on its own as a brief investigation of the role of news reporting in politics, or it can be integrated into other units of study in the course. Students will learn that the news and information communicated by media are powerful influences on the attitudes and values of Canadian citizens, and can shape as well as reflect events.

Students will learn how news media construct meaning, how news media operate, and how readers and viewers can understand and critically assess the information they read and see on the news. They will analyse selected examples of national and international events and reflect on political and economic purposes of media production, as well as the impact of varied forms of media communication. Students also will consider values and ethics in news reporting and the challenges those working in the industry face when reporting on issues of suffering or violence.

Students will take the stance of active and informed citizens to examine news stories as *constructions* and explore the criteria that determine the stories that make the news of the day. They also will examine the relationship between form

and content in the news media, and understand how different media can report on the same event in different ways. Students will apply visual literacy skills in consideration of the “visual imperative” that dominates much of mainstream news coverage, with application to stories that may have particular market appeal to commercial media. The analysis of visuals in news reporting provides students with the opportunity to explore the concepts of “disaster pornography” and “compassion fatigue,” and the implications of these concepts for audiences.

The culminating task for this short unit is called “You Be the Editor.” Through this activity, students will synthesize what they have learned about the news, and make decisions about real new stories from two major Canadian papers, choosing the events, details, and photographs that should or should not make the news. They will reflect upon their decisions and their responsibilities as active citizens in understanding and using news sources.

Key Concepts for this Unit

- News Media can influence the values and beliefs of Canadians.
- Economic and commercial factors influence the selection and presentation of media events.
- Active, informed citizens need to read media critically, to analyse information, and to interpret information from various media.

Overall Expectations

POWER, INFLUENCE, AND THE RESOLUTION OF DIFFERENCES

- Analyse how pressure groups, media, technology, and governments influence the political process.

VALUES BELIEFS AND IDEOLOGIES

- Describe the factors [media] that shape the political values and beliefs of Canadians.

METHODS OF POLITICAL INQUIRY AND COMMUNICATION

- Analyse information gathered about current events and political trends according to the fundamental principles of political interpretation and analysis.

- Communicate knowledge, opinions, and interpretations about events, issues, and trends relating to politics and citizenship, using a variety of forms of communication.

Resources Required

- A variety of newspapers, as available. Online news services are optional.
- Selected news video clips or streamed news sources, as available.
- Black Line Masters provided.

Note to the Teacher: In order to promote critical thinking and analysis among students, some news selections should be chosen deliberately for their exceptionality (e.g., bias, slant) so that all students are able to understand that different ways of presenting information affects the message received by the reader. As much as possible, multiple sources of the same event provide clear content for comparison by students. Based on the diversity and needs/interests of the class, teachers may add additional examples for student practice. Shared and modeled reading, “Think Aloud”, and explicit instruction in the application of critical questioning are important pedagogical considerations.

Lesson One

Making the News

Curriculum Expectations

METHODS OF POLITICAL INQUIRY AND COMMUNICATION

Interpretation and Analysis

- *Detect bias, prejudice, stereotyping, or a lack of substantiation in statements, arguments, and opinions.*

METHODS OF POLITICAL INQUIRY AND COMMUNICATION

Communication

- *Express ideas, understandings, arguments, and conclusions, as appropriate for different audiences and purposes, using a variety of styles and forms (e.g., role-plays simulations, group presentations, seminars, reports, essays).*

VALUES, BELIEFS, AND IDEOLOGIES

Political Socialization

- *Analyze the variety of political messages that Canadian youth receive from key agents of socialization (e.g., the media).*

Key Concept

The news is constructed. News stories are selected, edited, and presented in deliberate sorts of ways for specific purposes. The active citizen exercises critical literacy skills when reading or viewing the news in order to understand events and trends. Media organizations are typically for-profit companies that are not necessarily being objective, reporting the 'whole' news story, or even the most important news stories.

Guiding Questions

How is our understanding and participation in the world around us affected by the news media? What factors determine an editor's selection of news stories for the day? What techniques are used by the news media to report the news?

Teaching/Learning Strategies

- As a class, ask the guiding questions to activate prior knowledge and to help students to focus on the lesson's key concepts. For example, ask, "What makes a good news story? Of all the many events that occur in a day, why are some events reported and others are ignored by media? Ask students if they have heard the phrase 'If it bleeds, it leads.' (This refers to the fact that

disasters and violence often dominate the news media because they tend to draw more viewers/readers.)

- Provide for students a copy of “What makes News?” (1.1 H), criteria for a typical news story or its subject matter. Typically, a news story or its subject matter must be the following: a) current; b) close to home; c) prominent d) visually engaging; e) of consequence to the audience; f) a topic of “human interest” or novelty.
- What makes News? Distribute the front section of a major newspaper to students, providing sufficient resources to allow students to work in pairs or in groups of three. Using the activity sheet Analysing the Front Page: Stories (1.2 H), students critically examine the front page of the paper, with particular attention to the ways in which stories are presented.
- Debrief the class to check for understanding:
 - Did all stories meet at least one of the criteria from the “What makes the News?” list?
 - Did some stories meet multiple criteria?
 - Do you think the editor made good choices?
 - Why or why not?
- Analysing a Photograph: Instruct students to continue to work with their partners to critically examine the front page of the paper, this time with particular attention to the placement and use of photographs. Using Analysing the Front Page: Photographs (1.3 H) (ref. *Think Literacy*, 7-12, 2003), analyse one front page photograph.
- As a class, review the following:
 - *Most Important Stories* - How are some stories or headlines “emphasized” through the use of text features: e.g., font style and size; language used in headlines or leads for major stories? Which stories are accompanied by a photograph? What is the impact of visuals?
 - *Use of Visuals* – Analyse the photographs or other visuals used on the front page. Note the use of and effect of the following: camera angle; lighting; featured image; captions. How are the photographs placed on the front page? What is the purpose/impact?
- Comparing Newspapers: Instruct each small group of 2 to combine with another to form new groups of 4. Provide for students a front page for the same date of a different newspaper. (Subject to availability, several front pages of different newspapers for a given day could be used.) Using a T-chart or Venn diagram on chart paper, students can compare headlines, leads,

photographs, and language of stories addressing the same topic for the day. What similarities do you note? How are the same subjects/events treated differently? How might these differences affect people's impression of what is "newsworthy" for the day?

- Gallery Walk: When groups have completed their charts, they can post them for a "Gallery Walk" in order to consolidate learning and to promote reflection on key concepts.

Materials

- Student Handout 1.1 – What Makes News
- Student Handout 1.2 – Analysing the Front Page – Stories
- Student Handout 1.3 – Analysing the Front Page – Photographs

Implications for Future Lessons/Homework

Students can access online newspaper sites to see which stories for the day are featured as "top interest". They also can see what online stories are accompanied by a streaming video or still images, and then discuss the impact of those visuals on the meaning of the story. Have students analyse differences between Canadian and U.S. news stories and reporting styles, or look at large versus small town newspapers.

Students also can examine stories about the top political issues and leaders of the day, and considering the criteria examined in this lesson, explain why these stories have received the kind of coverage they have been given.

What Makes News?

Current

The event or issue needs to be current or timely. If a story is not current or presents no new developments, it usually will be replaced by one about an event or issue that has just happened, or is just taking place.

Close to home

If the event is local in a literal sense, or “local” in terms of its North American or Western appeal, it is more likely to make the news than a story about an event or issue in another part of the world

Prominent

Prominent people, such as celebrities, politicians, and members of a royal family are usually considered important news “figures”. Events or issues themselves also need to be prominent or take place on a grand scale if they are going to make the news.

Visually Engaging

Photographs that accompany stories in the news usually are dramatic or “eye catching.” Editors and producers want images that are out of the ordinary in order to attract readers. Without visuals, many stories are not considered feature material,

Of Consequence to the Audience

Readers are interested in stories that affect them personally or that they can connect to. Stories that make the news usually are about events that have some impact on the audience.

A topic of “human interest”

In order to provide a break from the news of the day or from serious topics, news editors also like to include human interest stories in their newspapers or news broadcasts. These stories often are about events such as animal rescues, local heroes, or unusual community events.

To what extent do factors work together to determine what stories will be selected?

For example, consider the factors “Close to Home” and “Prominent.” For an event that takes place far away to replace a more local event, that event must be more extreme. For instance, a tsunami far away will be reported in local papers, but a local storm might still make the front page.

How do these sorts of decisions affect how readers understand events?

(ADAPTED FROM MASS MEDIA AND POPULAR CULTURE, VERSION 2)

Analysing the Front Page- Stories

1. How many stories are on the front page?
2. Which front-page story is most prominent? How do you know?
3. What is the second most prominent story? How do you know?
4. Refer to your What Makes the News? (1.1H) list of criteria. Why do you think these stories were chosen for the front page?
 - a) The story headlined _____ made the front page because
 - b) The story headlined _____ made the front page because
5. What are the sources of these stories?
 - Story 1 _____
 - Story 2 _____
6. Choose one headline from a front page story. Explain how each of the following criteria is used to make the headline effective:
 - Font (size, font type):
 - Language (word choice):
 - Other:
7. What impression about the event(s) is created by the selected headline? Do you think the headline is a good one for the story? Why or why not?

Analysing the Front Page - Photographs

Choose one photograph. With your partner, and using the “I See, I Think, Therefore...” strategy, analyze the photograph.

| Photograph Selected: | |
|--|---|
| I See | I Think.... (Why did the photographer make this decision? How is it used to create an impression on the viewer?) |
| <p>Content What is the picture of? What is the central visual in the picture? (person? action? setting?) What other details do you notice?</p> <p>Camera Angles High? Low? Direct?</p> <p>Camera Shots Type (close up, medium distance, long-range)? Lighting? Colour? Composition?</p> <p>Other Details</p> | |
| <p>Therefore (Explain your conclusions about the overall effect of the photograph)</p> | |

Lesson Two

Form and Content in News Reporting

Curriculum Expectations

POWER, INFLUENCE, AND THE RESOLUTION OF DIFFERENCES

Influences on Canadian Politics

- *Describe the ways in which media and technology can influence the Canadian political process (e.g., through political advertising, opinion polls, feature films, websites, databases).*

METHODS OF POLITICAL INQUIRY AND COMMUNICATION

Research

- *Collect data from a range of media and information sources (e.g., print or electronic media, government or community agencies).*
- *Evaluate the credibility of sources and information (e.g., by considering the authority, the impartiality, and expertise of the source and checking the information for accuracy, logical errors, underlying assumptions, prejudice, and bias).*
- *Organize research findings, using a variety of methods and forms (e.g., note-taking, maps, charts, graphs, diagrams).*

Key Concept

Information is communicated differently by different media. The individual medium may influence the way(s) in which information is perceived.

Guiding Questions

How does McLuhan's famous phrase "the medium is the message" apply to news reporting?

How could a story be communicated differently by different media: e.g., television, radio, newspapers, online news services?

How can the overall message of a story differ based on the medium used to communicate?

Teaching/Learning Strategies

- Introduce the lesson with McLuhan's famous quote and a brief discussion of its implications. (See 2.1 H/OH and 2.7 REF for background on McLuhan)
- Provide a comparison/contrast chart outlining basic "codes and conventions" for each medium (print news, television news, radio news). (see 2.5 H and 2.6H)

- Jigsaw Activity

Divide the class into groups of 3 students. These groups will be “home” groups. For each home group of 3, one member is assigned to be the “expert” representative for one medium – television, print news, or radio.

Instruct home groups to reform to become expert groups. Explain the following scenario, instructing groups to respond to the scenario (2.2 H) from their “expert” perspective.

A group of young environmentalists is holding an Earth Day celebration. As part of the day’s events, local politicians have been invited to speak on their environmental platform. Following the speeches, two of the young people in attendance approach one of the politicians to talk about his remarks. A verbal exchange and scuffle ensue, and the police that are present step in to control the situation.

“Expert” group task: Predict how this event will be covered by your medium (print news, radio, t.v.). How do you think the coverage will differ and why? What impact might the coverage have on people’s impressions of the Earth Day celebration?

The “experts” move to expert-specific groups of 3 or 4 students each. Working together, experts discuss the scenario and decide how their assigned medium would present the story. Experts collect notes on their discussion in preparation for returning to their core groups.

- Complete the jigsaw by having experts return to their heterogeneous home groups. In these original groups, students can compare/contrast the communication of the news based on different media.
- Suggestion: A Venn diagram, graphic organizer, or “foldable” (a sheet of paper, folded into four) can be used as an organizer to record home group discussion.
- As a class, identify key potential effects different media have on the reader’s/viewers understanding of or reaction to an event. Collect class reflections and predictions on overhead or chart paper.
- Explain to students that you are going to give them a real-life example of a media message and how the medium used may change the message understood by the views.
- Show Former US Presidents (2.3 H).

Explain to the class that here are pictures of two former US presidents. (Check for prior knowledge. Based on prior knowledge – or absence thereof – briefly explain that both were presidents; both were famous during their time for different reasons)

Explain that these two men participated in a political debate. The debate was broadcast on both radio and television. During the radio broadcasts, Nixon presented his ideas in a convincing manner. However, on television, he appeared to be uncomfortable under the hot studio lights and he was perspiring heavily. Kennedy was considered more handsome and he looked better on camera. People who watched the debate believed that Kennedy had won, while those who listened to the debate on the radio thought that Nixon had won.

More people watched the debate on television than listened to it on the radio. Kennedy won the election

- Guide a class discussion on the example provided. Key questions include the following:
 - What does this example tell us that we need to be aware of when listening to or watching political events?
 - Does television, and a politician's image or appearance, still have this kind of "power" today? Provide examples to support your response. See Canadian Politicians (2.4 H) for some Canadian examples of politicians' 'infamous' photos.
- In pairs, select a Canadian politician currently featured frequently in the news. Using Internet sources, locate photo images of that politician. With your partner, decide what visual factors or images might influence voters. Be prepared to explain your ideas.
- Depending upon students' prior knowledge, time for this activity will vary. Review Media Codes and Conventions (2.6 H).

Materials

- Student Handout / Overhead 2.1 – Quote
- Student Handout 2.2 - Scenario
- Student Handout 2.3 – Former US Presidents
- Student Handout 2.4 – Canadian Politicians
- Student Handout / Overhead 2.5 – Medium is the Message
- Student Handout 2.6 – Media Codes and Conventions
- Reference 2.7 – Marshall McLuhan

Marshall McLuhan's famous phrase "the medium is the message" certainly applies to news reporting. Each medium has its own set of "ingredients" or codes and conventions and therefore covers and presents news and information to us in particular ways. Our impression of a news story –the content—will inevitably be shaped by the medium – or form – we turn to for our news and information.

Watching a news story on television is a different experience than reading a news story, or listening to it on the radio. The way the story is "put together" or constructed and presented can have a significant effect on our interpretation of the person or event making the news.

To Think About

Think about a recent news story in print or on television that affected you. What made the story interesting? Pictures? Words? Sound? Eye Witness accounts? Other elements?

Scenario

A group of young environmentalists is holding an Earth Day celebration. As part of the day's events, local politicians have been invited to speak on their environmental platform. Following the speeches, two of the young people in attendance approach one of the politicians to talk about his remarks. A verbal exchange and scuffle ensue, and the police that are present step in to control the situation.

“Expert” group task

Predict how this event will be covered by your medium (print news, radio, t.v.). How do you think the coverage will differ and why? What impact might the coverage have on people's impressions of the Earth Day celebration?

Former US Presidents

Richard Nixon



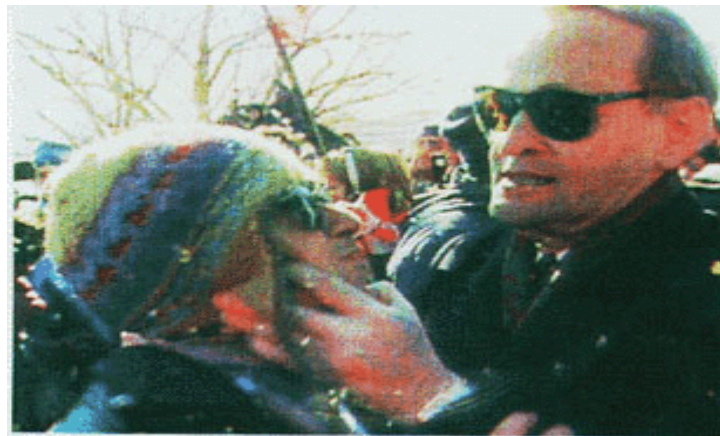
John F Kennedy



Canadian Politicians



Reform Leader Stockwell Day was well known for press photographs that some Canadians seemed to find inappropriate or silly. In particular, the Canadian news media often referred to this famous 'wetsuit' photo as a way to criticize Day's fitness as a political leader.



A famous photo of Prime Minister Jean Chrétien showing him seizing a protester during 1996 Flag Day celebrations. While some critics used this candid photo to criticize Chrétien, some Canadians seemed to approve of Chrétien's actions.

“The medium is the message.”

Each medium has its own set of “ingredients” or codes and conventions and therefore presents news and information to us in particular ways. Our impression of a news story –the content— inevitably will be shaped by the medium – or form – that we turn to for our news and information.

Watching a news story on television is a different experience than reading a news story, or listening to it on the radio. The way the story is “put together” or constructed and presented can have a significant effect on our interpretation of the person or event making the news.

Consider this list of “ingredients”, or codes and conventions, found in a variety of media:

- **television and film** – camera shots and angles, editing, lighting, on-location footage, sound, news anchor commentary, tone of voice, language
- **newspapers** – headlines, font size, visuals, vocabulary
- **radio** – news anchor commentary, vocabulary, tone of voice, sound effects

Media Codes and Conventions

| Media Codes and Conventions | Examples |
|---|----------|
| <p style="text-align: center;">Television and Film</p> <p>Camera shots and angles (high, low, direct, close-up, pan)</p> <p>On-location footage</p> <p>Sound</p> <p>News anchor commentary</p> <p>Voice (tone, pacing, volume, expression)</p> <p>Use of editing</p> <p>Language (dramatic, simple, euphemistic, sensationalist)</p> | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Newspapers</p> <p>Headlines</p> <p>Font</p> <p>Visuals (photos, graphics, cartoons etc., types of shots, camera angles, images included/excluded)</p> <p>Placement of visual on the page</p> <p>Vocabulary (connotation, denotation)</p> | |
| <p style="text-align: center;">Radio</p> <p>News anchor commentary (does the anchor express an opinion? How does the anchor's delivery affect the message?)</p> <p>Vocabulary (connotation, denotation)</p> <p>Voice (tone, pacing, volume, emphasis)</p> <p>Sound Effects (music, real background noise)</p> | |

Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980)

Marshall McLuhan, once referred to as the "Oracle of the Electronic Age", is perhaps best known for his phrase turned into book title, *The Medium is the Massage* [FYI: 'Massage' is not misspelled.]. As director of the Center for Culture and Technology at the University of Toronto, McLuhan rose to fame as a "guru" of media culture. McLuhan's contribution to the field of communication study was widely acclaimed by popular standards while simultaneously being dismissed by those in academic circles. According to Rogers, "During his lifetime McLuhan did more than any other individual to interest the general public in communication study" (p. 489). Gary Wolf, writing in *Wired* magazine, painted a portrait of McLuhan as "a critic and an academic rebel", prone to incredible pronouncements and humorous quips.

McLuhan was a master of aphorisms, and like Heidegger, he loved wordplay. The title of his best-selling book *The Medium is the Massage* is no exception. Maybe he was making a statement about the way that the media massage or pummel us, or perhaps he was making a pun on the new "mass-age." In any case the underlying notion is that the message is greatly impacted by the delivery system. Some would understand this position to be the ultimate in media determinism. If the content is obliterated by the channel, "what" we say is of little importance-only "how" we chose to deliver it. McLuhan's belief in technological determinism is obvious by his phrase, "we shape our tools and they in turn shape us" (quoted in Griffin, 1991, p. 294).

McLuhan believed that the print revolution begun by Gutenberg was the forerunner of the industrial revolution. One unforeseen consequence of print was the fragmentation of society. McLuhan argued that readers would now read in private, and so be alienated from others. "Printing, a ditto device, confirmed and extended the new visual stress. It created the portable book, which men could read in privacy and in isolation from others" (McLuhan, 1967, p. 50). Interestingly, McLuhan saw electronic media as a return to collective ways of perceiving the world. His "global village" theory posited the ability of electronic media to unify and retribalize the human race. What McLuhan did not live to see, but perhaps foresaw, was the merging of text and electronic mass media in this new media called the Internet.

(<http://www.regent.edu/acad/schcom/rojc/mdic/mcluhan.html>)

Lesson Three

Detecting Bias in the News

Curriculum Expectations

METHODS OF POLITICAL INQUIRY AND COMMUNICATION

Research

- *Evaluate the credibility of sources and information (e.g., by considering the authority, the impartiality, and expertise of the source and checking the information for accuracy, logical errors, underlying assumptions, prejudice, and bias).*

Interpretation and Analysis

- *Detect bias, prejudice, stereotyping, or a lack of substantiation in statements, arguments, and opinions.*

Key Concept

All media are constructions, written and produced by someone for particular purposes. Active citizens need to consider the source(s) of information in order to make informed decisions.

Guiding Questions

- What is bias?
- How is bias communicated in the news?
- Is all information biased?
- What strategies can readers or viewers use to detect bias in the news?
- How can bias in the news media affect political issues in Canada?

Teacher's Notes (Background)

We often think of news reporting as objective – as a presentation just of the facts. In reality, however, news reports may contain some bias despite a reporter's best intentions to create a fair and balance account of an event or issue. There may be times when not all of the facts are available. Other times, all of the parties involved in an event or a dispute may not be available for comment. Considering the source of the story is important, as sometimes a subtle bias is created in order to promote a particular agenda or belief. In all cases, it is important to remember the key concept that all media – including the news media – are constructions.

Teaching/Learning Strategies

- Before beginning this activity, check that all students understand the meaning of “bias”.
- Use the Agree/Disagree Opinion Rating Scale (3.1 H). Distribute copies of the Agree/Disagree Opinion Rating scale or provide a copy on overhead. On their own, students rate their opinions along the scale, in response to each of the statements provided. This activity provides an Anticipation Guide for the upcoming lesson.
- Distribute A Guide for Detecting Bias – Critical Reading (3.2 H).
- **Note to Teacher:** For this activity, it is recommended that the teacher pre-select at least one or two examples that reflect clear bias or strong writer’s “slant”. Point out language, visuals, or labeling of groups or individuals that may suggest bias. (Depending on the needs of the class, the teacher may want to select very obviously biased examples to begin with and go on to use more sophisticated examples once students have had the opportunity to observe and practise.) Using a “**Think Aloud**” strategy, model for students reading strategies used to detect bias.
- Select one or more examples, either print or video excerpts that reflect a clear slant or bias. Using a “shared reading” or “shared viewing” approach with students, analyse one sample. Make board notes about this sample. Pause regularly to check for student understanding. Work through some other samples with the class, using the shared reading example on the board as a guide.
- *Additional extension:* Select a news article about a current political issue. Using the article as a shared reading selection, apply strategies to consolidate concepts and vocabulary. Post the shared reading sample and label it so that students can use it as a reference for the rest of the unit.
- Provide samples of print articles or television or documentary reports, preferably Canadian in origin. In small groups, have students analyse the selected sample(s) for bias, using A Guide for Detecting Bias – Critical Reading (3.2 H) to guide their thinking.
- Have students return to their Agree/Disagree Rating Scale (3.1 H), and make any revisions they would like to make, based on their analyses of news articles.

Materials

- Student Handout 3.1 – Agree/Disagree Opinion Rating Scale
- Student Handout 3.2 – Guide for Detecting Bias – Critical Reading

Agree/Disagree Opinion Rating Scale

Instructions: Read each of the statements. Reflect on your own opinion on the statement and then rate yourself from **Strongly Agree** to **Strongly Disagree**.

a) News stories in newspapers are more likely to be accurate than news stories presented on television.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|----------|--------------------------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Strongly Agree | | | | Strongly Disagree |

b) Local newspapers are not able to provide accurate news information on international events.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|----------|--------------------------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Strongly Agree | | | | Strongly Disagree |

c) The television public is more interested in being entertained than in knowing information; they don't pay much attention to t.v. news.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|----------|--------------------------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Strongly Agree | | | | Strongly Disagree |

d) The public is going to get the least amount of information from radio news because they can't see the events happening.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|----------|--------------------------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Strongly Agree | | | | Strongly Disagree |

e) In order to understand the news, people should get their information from more than one medium.

| | | | | |
|-----------------------|----------|----------|----------|--------------------------|
| 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| Strongly Agree | | | | Strongly Disagree |

Guide for Detecting Bias – Critical Reading

| Strategic Questions to Ask While Reading | Yes | No | Not Sure |
|--|-----|----|----------|
| <p>Who is the reporter? What do you know of the reporter’s background that might influence the position or selection of information? Does the reporter seem credible?</p> <p>Is the reporter connected with any particular organization that might have a specific interest or concern?</p> <p>Who is represented in the text? Who is ignored? How are individuals or groups presented?</p> | | | |
| <p>What is the reporter’s (or news team’s) purpose? To provide information? To convince you of a position? To encourage you to take action? Does the reporter or news agency stand to gain anything personally (e.g., sales, political advantage, etc.) by writing this text? If so, what?</p> <p>What is the overall message of the story?</p> <p>What facts are provided to support this message?</p> <p>Are there visuals included? What message do the visuals convey?</p> <p>What sources are used? How are those sources cited? Do they seem credible? Are there sources that seem to be “left out”?</p> | | | |
| <p>When was the story published? Under what circumstances? Should any special considerations be included as you read the story or article, based on time and circumstances of publication?</p> | | | |
| <p>Where is text published? Who owns the publication? Do you know whether the owner might have any direct or indirect connection to the event or issue?</p> <p>Where is the reporter (or news team) in relation to the event? Is the reporter personally involved in any way?</p> | | | |
| <p>Why did the reporter write the article? Who is likely to have paid to have the article published? Why?</p> | | | |
| <p>How does the reporter present details or arguments? Do all sides seem to be represented? Does the reporter acknowledge counter-arguments or alternative points of view? If so, how?</p> <p>How much time or space is the story given?</p> | | | |
| <p>Language: Is the language used neutral or does the language contain strong connotations or assumptions? If so, why? What kinds of words and phrases are used to describe individuals, groups, or particular ideas? Are any “labels” used? If so, to what effect?</p> | | | |

Lesson Four

The Power of Visuals

Curriculum Expectations

METHODS OF POLITICAL INQUIRY AND COMMUNICATION

Interpretation and Analysis

- *Detect bias, prejudice, stereotyping, or a lack of substantiation in statements, arguments, and opinions.*

Communication

- *Express ideas, understandings, arguments, and conclusions, as appropriate for different audiences and purposes, using a variety of styles and forms .(e.g., role-plays simulations, group presentations, seminars, reports, essays).*

VALUES, BELIEFS, AND IDEOLOGIES

Political Socialization

- *Analyze the variety of political messages that Canadian youth receive from key agents of socialization (e.g., the media).*

Key Concept

Visual images can be powerful influences on people's perceptions of events, and therefore are major influences on Canadian politics.

Guiding Questions

How are film footages or visuals used in news media? What ethical, moral or political issues arise when media record tragedies or disasters? When does news coverage become “sensational” or exploitative? Is there a difference? Under what circumstances should a reporter or a photographer be prevented from taking pictures or reporting details of a story (e.g., personal lives of politicians)? Does the public always have “a right to know”?

Teaching/Learning Strategies

- Distribute Statement Strips (4.1 H) to students. Give pairs two minutes to discuss the statement provided. Then, invite students to share their various statements and views.

Sample Statements:

- It is important for news agencies to provide images of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, or floods.
- It is important for news reports to provide video footage or photographs of war zone operations. (Should pictures of the dead be included?)

- News reports should not include visual coverage of acts of violence (murder, gang violence).
- News reporters should be prevented from taking photographs or recording video footage of certain events (e.g., politician's private lives).

Select topics appropriate for the class. Orchestrate discussion to help students to engage with the issue of visual text as news and the potential impact of visuals.

- **Alternate option:** Show film footage of a natural disaster. Collect students' responses to selected key questions.
- Use Famous Events (4.4 H) or provide pictures of famous events (e.g. Kim Phuc, the collapse of the World Trade Centre, etc.). Students, in their groups, discuss the impact of the visual. As a class, decide to what extent news reporters and editors should have boundaries regarding the reporting of events such as disasters or tragedies.
- Provide students with the handout Disaster Pornography (4.2 H), and discuss the definition. Ask students to reflect on the implications of "disaster pornography."

Suggested questions:

- What are the implications of this kind of coverage for us as citizens? To what extent might it affect our sense of civic duty and responsibility?
- How might this coverage affect what we expect of government leaders in response to these kinds of events?
- Have students each write a brief reflective response on one of these provided topics: Suggest ways in which reporters can avoid disaster pornography, OR explore to what extent governments should interfere with such coverage, and explain why or why not.
- Depending upon the class, a more thorough investigation of Disaster Pornography can be included. See Disaster Pornography: Extension (4.3 H) to help to direct that inquiry. These are the questions on that handout:
 - What are the consequences for us as viewers or "consumers" of these images?
 - How might these images affect how people feel about the subjects of the photographs?
 - Do the images influence how we see ourselves in relation to the subjects? In other words, how is the viewer "positioned" in relation to the subject or victim? What is the effect of this positioning?
 - Can you identify any concerns or problems with the relationship established between the viewer and the subject through the photographs? What are the messages and values being conveyed through the photos?

- What information about the event do these kinds of photographs fail to explain or reveal to us?
- In order to avoid creating examples of disaster pornography, what might a reporter consider doing when covering stories of disaster or suffering? Based on your response to this question, look for news coverage that you believe represents an alternative to disaster pornography. What makes this coverage different? Explain your response with examples.

Materials

- Student Handout 4.1 – Statement Strips
- Student Handout 4.2 – Disaster Pornography
- Student Handout 4.3 – Disaster Pornography: Extension
- Student Handout 4.4 – Famous Events

Statement Strips

| |
|---|
| <p>It is important for news agencies to provide images of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, or floods.</p> |
| <p>It is important for news reports to provide video footage or photographs of war zone operations.</p> |
| <p>News reports should not include visual coverage of acts of violence (murder, gang violence).</p> |
| <p>News reporters should be prevented from taking photographs or recording video footage of politicians outside their office jobs (on their private time).</p> |
| <p>Families of victims of crime should have the right to prevent news agencies from publishing photographic evidence of those events.</p> |
| <p>Photographs of politicians participating in activities outside their jobs (e.g., shopping with their families, playing sports, etc.) can influence how people vote in elections.</p> |
| <p>People can't help but believe what they see. Pictures will influence people's views and opinions, even when other information is presented.</p> |
| <p>The public wants to be entertained. The news has to entertain as well as give information or nobody will pay attention.</p> |
| <p>News coverage of global events is important to global improvement. Citizens of all coverage can become involved in action on a global level.</p> |

Disaster Pornography

Some critics of the news argue that, because of the public's demand for "visuals", the stories that will get the most and best coverage are frequently the stories that have dramatic or shocking visuals. If a story doesn't have "great pictures", then it may not receive attention.

The dependency on visuals has led many critics to be concerned about "disaster pornography"—or the exploitation of suffering for profit.

To Think About...

1. Under what circumstances might news reporting become "disaster pornography"?
2. What are some of the implications of this kind of reporting for active citizens? To government?
3. How can the public's values and opinions be influenced by this type of reporting?
4. How might this coverage affect what we expect of government leaders in response to these kinds of events?

Disaster Pornography: Extension

Somali doctors and nurses have expressed shock at the conduct of film crews in hospitals. They rush through crowded corridors, leaping over stretchers, dashing to film the agony before it passes. They hold bedside vigils to record the moment of death.

When the Italian film actress Sophia Loren visited Somalia, the paparazzi trampled on children as they scrambled to film her feeding a little girl—three times. This is disaster pornography. (Media and Values, 1993)

To Think About ...

1. Why is this situation considered to be an example of disaster pornography? Be specific. Include details of the stories to support your response.
2. With a partner, discuss other examples of disaster pornography that you have seen in news coverage. What makes these examples controversial?

Famous Events



(above) The Red River in southern Manitoba floods regularly. A massive flood extending from mid-April to early May 1997 flooded 1950 km² of land and resulted in the evacuation of 30 000 Manitobans. Some 8600 troops were mobilized to assist civil authorities.



(above) The Ontario-Québec ice storm of January 1998 caused the deaths of 25 persons through hypothermia, asphyxiation and fires induced by overheated stoves.

Student Handout 4.4



(above) The Halifax Explosion of December 1917 probably ranks as Canada's most famous disaster and, epidemics aside, the worst single misfortune in our history. Property damage exceeded \$35 million and over 1600 persons were killed when the munitions ship *Mont Blanc* exploded in the largest pre-nuclear man-made blast in history. This is an example of the devastation along Campbell Road.



(above) Before modern immunization programs and vaccines practically eliminated epidemics in Canada, thousands of deaths resulted from outbreaks of smallpox, cholera, typhus, influenza and other contagious diseases. In 1953 polio affected more than 8000 Canadians, killing 481; the next year, with the Salk vaccine coming into use, the death toll fell to 157.

<http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com/index.cfm?PgNm=TCE&Params=A1ARTA0002313>

Lesson Five

The Impact of News Coverage

Curriculum Expectations

VALUES, BELIEFS, AND IDEOLOGIES

Political Socialization

- *Analyze the variety of political messages that Canadian youth receive from key agents of socialization (e.g., the media).*
- *Evaluate ways in which the main agents of political socialization (e.g., the media) influence ways in which Canadians participate formally and informally in politics.*

METHODS OF POLITICAL INQUIRY AND COMMUNICATION

Research

- *Collect data from a range of media and information sources (e.g., print or electronic media, government or community agencies).*
- *Evaluate the credibility of sources and information (e.g., by considering the authority, the impartiality, and expertise of the source and checking the information for accuracy, logical errors, underlying assumptions, prejudice, and bias).*

Key Concept

The values and political actions of citizens can be influenced by the amount of coverage of selected events. Informed citizens need to reflect critically on their own responses to events.

A case study of “compassion fatigue” is used as an illustration of the potential effects of extensive or intense coverage of events.

Guiding Questions

- What is the term “compassion fatigue”?
- How is it related to “disaster pornography”?
- Should news reporters and editors have stricter controls on what they can and cannot use to communicate the news?
- How can readers and viewers protect themselves against “disaster pornography” or “compassion fatigue” and still remain informed on important issues in the news?

Teaching/Learning Strategies

- Have students predict the meaning of the term “Compassion Fatigue”. Ask, How do you think it relates to “Disaster Pornography?”

Alternative activity: Show students photographs of a selected event of significant intensity. Ask students, Do you think that intensive coverage of an event can actually reduce people’s response to the importance of the event? Do you think viewers can develop “immunity” to the seriousness of events over time? (e.g., environmental issues, anti-smoking campaigns, anti-bullying campaigns, etc.)

- Collect student responses to set the tone for the upcoming lesson.
- Using a shared reading approach, read the selection, “Compassion Fatigue” (5.1 H). Ask students questions to assess prior knowledge and to engage them in critical thinking: To what extent do you think “compassion fatigue” is a genuine problem for audiences? Why or why not? From your own experience why does some news coverage result in compassion fatigue? What consequences among voters and citizens might result from compassion fatigue (e.g. taking action, support for government policies, public opinion of an event/situation)?
- In pairs or in small groups, students examine one or more selected examples of the coverage of a major news event: e.g., Hurricane Katrina for either disaster pornography or compassion fatigue. To what extent do the definitions of disaster pornography or compassion fatigue apply to the coverage of these tragedies? What other ingredients might the news coverage omit or include avoiding compassion fatigue? Students can use the “Both Sides Now” chart (5.2 H) to help them to organize their thinking.
- **Optional Extension:** Select a major disaster or sensational event that has occurred recently in North America. Imagine what would happen to the news coverage of the story if it had happened somewhere else. What factors would have gone into the news media's decisions about how much coverage it would have received? To what degree would "compassion fatigue" have impacted the way that you and other viewers responded to that coverage?
- Distribute Three-Way Interview organizers (5.3 H).
- Have groups of three choose (or number) one person to be the interview subject, one person to be the interviewer, and one person to be the observer. Have the interviewer ask the interview subject to answer briefly the following questions:
 - Describe your understanding of compassion fatigue and how it can influence public opinion.
 - Explain to what extent you think that compassion fatigue affects you personally, with regard to civic duty and responsibility.
 - Explain how it might affect government decisions.

- Other?
- Switch roles, so that a new person in the group is interviewed. Compare opinions.
- Debrief Three-Way Interview.
- **Note:** The teacher may choose to select from the following options, or to integrate the activity with content related to another aspect of the course in order to address additional course expectations.
- Write a letter to the editor of a major newspaper in which you express your opinion of the news coverage of one of the news events examined in class. Refer to the factors that influence news reporting and explain the impact for us as global citizens. See Letter to the Editor – Rubric (5.4 H).
- In groups, survey the major news items of the day using major papers, news broadcasts, and the Internet. Based on the stories available, create your own mock up of the front page for a major newspaper, including the stories that you believe should make the news. Include appropriate visuals. Present your front page to the class, explaining the reasons for your choices. Account for any differences between the pages developed by the groups. Consider the interests and the priorities of the students involved. Do these factors influence their decisions? See Rubric for Designing Front Page of Newspaper (5.5 H).
- Report on a major issue facing young people today. Consider such issues as drinking and driving, bullying, or discrimination. How can you report on this issue in a way that won't result in compassion fatigue for your audience?

Materials

- Student Handout 5.1 – Compassion Fatigue
- Student Handout 5.2 – Both Sides Now
- Student Handout 5.3 – Three-Way Interview Organizers
- Student Handout 5.4 – Letter to the Editor – Rubric
- Student Handout 5.5 – Rubric for Designing Front Page of Newspaper

COMPASSION FATIGUE

Compassion fatigue is the unacknowledged cause of much of the failure of international reporting today.... What does compassion fatigue do? It acts as a prior restraint on the media. Editors and producers don't assign stories and correspondents don't cover events that they believe will not appeal to their readers and viewers....

...Compassion fatigue reinforces simplistic, formulaic coverage. If images of starving babies worked in the past to capture attention for a complex crisis of war, refugees and famine, then starving babies will headline the next difficult crisis. Compassion fatigue ratchets up the criteria for stories that get coverage....

Journalists reject events that aren't more dramatic or more lethal than their predecessors. Or through a choice of language and images, the newest event is represented as being more extreme or deadly or risky than a similar past situation. Compassion fatigue tempts journalists to find ever more sensational tidbits in stories to retain the attention of their audience. Compassion fatigue encourages the media to move on to other stories once the range of possibilities of coverage has been exhausted so that boredom doesn't set in. Events have a certain amount of time in the limelight, then, even if the situation has not been resolved, the media marches on. Further news is pre-empted. No new news is bad news."

(Susan D. Mieller, *Compassion Fatigue: How the Media Sells Disease, Famine, War and Death*
(New York: Routledge, 1999)

Both Sides Now

| Disaster Pornography | Key Question | Compassion Fatigue |
|--|--|---------------------------|
| Evidence | To what extent does the event reflect evidence of the media problem? | Evidence |
| Conclusion | | |
| Reflection (What are the implications for me as a viewer? As an active, informed citizen?) | | |

Three-Way Interview

Speaker One (Summary)

Speaker Two (Summary)

Speaker Three (Summary)

Observer's Notes

Letter to the Editor – Rubric

| Criteria | Level 1 (50-59) | Level 2 (60-69) | Level 3 (70-79) | Level 4 (80-100) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| <p>Knowledge / Understanding <i>Structure</i> – understanding of formal letter form <i>Content</i> – understanding of relevant facts, ideas; relationship between facts</p> | limited evidence of understanding of form, relevant facts, ideas, relationships | some evidence of understanding of form, relevant facts, ideas, relationships | considerable evidence of understanding of form, relevant facts, ideas, relationships | thorough evidence of understanding of form, relevant facts, ideas, relationships |
| <p>Thinking <i>Planning skills</i> – thoughtful selection and use of relevant facts, opinions related to the event or topic <i>Processing skills</i> – logical analysis of event or topic; clear, accurate support for hypotheses or conclusions</p> | <p>demonstrates limited evidence of understanding of relevant facts; uses analysis, supported hypothesis or conclusions with limited effectiveness</p> | <p>demonstrates some evidence of understanding of relevant facts; uses analysis, supported hypothesis or conclusions with some effectiveness</p> | <p>demonstrates considerable evidence of understanding of relevant facts; uses analysis, supported hypothesis or conclusions with considerable effectiveness</p> | <p>demonstrates thorough evidence of understanding of relevant facts; uses analysis, supported hypothesis or conclusions with a high degree of effectiveness</p> |
| <p>Communication <i>Expression and organization</i> – logical organization, clear expression <i>Purpose and audience</i> – voice, style shows awareness of purpose and audience <i>Conventions</i> – grammar, spelling, punctuation, usage appropriate for a newspaper editorial</p> | <p>expresses and organizes ideas; communicates for purpose and audience; uses conventions with limited effectiveness</p> | <p>expresses and organizes ideas; communicates for purpose and audience; uses conventions with some effectiveness</p> | <p>expresses and organizes ideas; communicates for purpose and audience; uses conventions with considerable effectiveness</p> | <p>expresses and organizes ideas; communicates for purpose and audience; uses conventions with a high degree of effectiveness</p> |
| <p>Application <i>Application of knowledge</i> – applies knowledge of the construction of news stories to arguments and evidence in the editorial <i>Making Connections</i> – makes relevant connections between personal knowledge of the event and of news conventions and the position taken in the editorial</p> | <p>applies knowledge with limited effectiveness makes relevant connections with limited effectiveness</p> | <p>applies knowledge with some effectiveness makes relevant connections with some effectiveness</p> | <p>applies knowledge with considerable effectiveness makes relevant connections with considerable effectiveness</p> | <p>applies knowledge with a high degree effectiveness makes relevant connections with a high degree of effectiveness</p> |

Rubric for Designing Front Page of Newspaper

| Criteria | Level 1 (50-59) | Level 2 (60-69) | Level 3 (70-79) | Level 4 (80-100) |
|--|---|--|---|--|
| Knowledge <i>Content</i> | -limited understanding of the factors that influence the stories that make the news of the day (1-2 examples) | -some understanding of the factors that influence the stories that make the news of the day (2-3 examples presented) | -thorough understanding of the factors that influence the stories that make the news (3-4 examples) | -exceptional understanding of the factors that influence the stories that make the news (4-5 examples) |
| Inquiry/Thinking | -limited insights into the issues and challenges surrounding news reporting -limited insights into the consequences of choice on access and range of perspectives being presented in the news -limited awareness of the impact of choice on audiences | -some insight into the issues and challenges surrounding news reporting -some insight into the consequences of choice on access and range of perspectives being presented in the news -some awareness of the impact of choice on audiences | - strong insight into the issues and challenges surrounding news reporting - strong insight into the consequences of choice on range of perspectives being presented in the news -strong awareness of the impact of choice on audiences | -exceptional insight into the issues and challenges surrounding news reporting -exceptional insights into the consequences of choice on range of perspectives being presented in the news - exceptional awareness of the impact of choice on audiences |
| Communication <i>Presentation and Delivery</i> | -limited evidence of planning and preparation -voice and diction was somewhat appropriate for the intended audience | -tone and voice were appropriate for the audience -diction was appropriate | -tone and voice were very appropriate and effective for the audience and medium -presenters were very articulate and expressive | -tone and voice were highly appropriate/effective for the audience and medium -presenters were exceptionally articulate, clear and expressive |
| Application <i>Production and Creativity</i> | -format of front page was followed -little connection to target audience -use of visuals and elements of design is limited | -format of front page was followed and target audience given some consideration -some creative use of visuals and elements of design | -format of front page was impressive -connection to target audience is strong -creative use of visuals and elements of design | -format of front page was impressive and very appropriate for audience -very creative and appropriate use of visuals and elements of design |

Lesson Six

You Be the Editor

Curriculum Expectations

METHODS OF POLITICAL INQUIRY AND COMMUNICATION

Communication

- *Express ideas, understandings, arguments, and conclusions, as appropriate for different audiences and purposes, using a variety of styles and forms (e.g., role-plays simulations, group presentations, seminars, reports, essays).*
- *Use appropriate terminology to communicate political concepts, opinions, and arguments.*

POWER, INFLUENCE, AND THE RESOLUTION OF DIFFERENCES

Influences on Canadian Politics

- *Describe the ways in which media and technology can influence the Canadian political process (e.g., through political advertising, opinion polls, feature films, websites, databases).*

Key Concepts

The editor of a news agency often is considered as a 'gatekeeper' with the power to decide what will be news and how this news will be reported. Therefore, a very small group of individuals have considerable impact on how the news media affects Canadians.

Guiding Questions

How important is the editor of a magazine or newspaper to the way the news is presented? How can news agencies operate as advocates for one position or another? What influence can a particular reporting position by a news agency have on the opinions and possible political actions of Canadians?

Teaching/Learning Strategies

- Organize students in small groups or use rows, depending on convenient classroom seating arrangements.
- Provide one sheet of 11 x 17 or suitably sized paper to each person.
- Provide the scenario: *Assume that you are the editor of a large news publication or network. On your own, write as many things as you can think of in the time provided that would be of interest to you as an editor.*

- Pass the paper to the next person. Ask that person to read the previous student's list and add any ideas he or she can.
- Pass the paper to the next person. Ask that person to write a question beside any one idea that he or she finds interesting.
- Pass the paper. Ask that person to write one or more comments beside any selected idea(s).
- **Note:** additional turns can be added, as per teacher's purposes. Then return the papers to the original owner.
- Debrief the activity to consolidate what students know or think they know about the role of an editor.
- Suggested Introductory Notes: *Editors, often referred to as one of the "gatekeepers" of the news, face tough choices. Every day they must determine the stories that we'll see and hear, and they make their choices from hundreds of stories about people and events from around the world. Sometimes their choices are routine: the decision to include a story is an easy one if it is about a major political event, for example, or even a winter storm. Sometimes their decisions are not so easy, as they grapple with stories that may have a serious impact on the people involved—stories that may affect people's safety, privacy or dignity.*
- Explain the Activity: To learn just how challenging the position of an editor can be, you will try your hand at making decisions about six news stories. These stories are taken from the Montreal Gazette and the London Free Press. For each scenario listed on the handout, you are given 2 choices. Consider the material from the previous lessons on making the news and the factors that influence the stories that make the news. The information from these lessons will help you to make your choices.
- Once you have completed your discussion, select the **two** scenarios that you think are the most thought-provoking or interesting from an editor's perspective. For each selected, write a paragraph explaining your choice and why you think it will make an excellent news story.
- Hand out You Be the Editor (6.1 H). In pairs, students read and discuss the examples provided.
- Once students have had the chance to discuss and make their choices, debrief the activity, having several students identify and explain the choices they have made.
- The following questions may be used to help to guide class discussion during debriefing:
 - Compare your responses to these stories with your peers' responses.

- Is there a consensus in response for some of the stories?
- Why do you think this is the case?
- Reflect on your role as editors and audiences by discussing the questions below:
 - What is the purpose of a newspaper, or of a televised news broadcast?
 - What is the role of an editor?
 - Should the entire truth always be told?
 - At what point does a person's right to privacy conflict with a public's right to know?
 - When should an editor decide not to print a photograph or article?
- **Note:** The teacher may choose to select from the following consolidation activities or to integrate the skill with content elsewhere in the course in order to address additional course expectations.

1. *Writing an Opinion Paragraph*

On their own, students select the **two** scenarios that they think are the most interesting and thought-provoking. In a well written paragraph for each, students are to identify their choices and clearly explain why each selection should or should not be published. Students can use The Opinion Paragraph: Student Self-Assessment (6.2 H) to guide their writing.

2. *Decision-Making/Direct Instruction*

Provide students with a copy of From the London Free Press (6.3 H). In pairs, have students read and consider each of the scenarios provided, noting their responses, and then compare the responses from editors and readers. Think about the differences between reader and editor opinions. Why do you think such differences exist?

Debrief the activity, asking students to volunteer their answers and explain their thinking.

3. *Speaker's Corner*

In pairs, students prepare a "'Reader's Viewpoint' in response to one of the statements provided on Speaker's Corner (6.4 H). Then, students present their statements orally, either live or on camera. Speaker's Corner Rubric (6.5 H) is provided.

- **Statement One:** "The hardest choices are not between good and bad. They are between differing outcomes which appear to have equal merit" (*London Free Press*, 1995).

- **Statement Two:** Newspapers and television news organizations must vigorously oppose all forms of censorship of the news. Governments should simply have “no say” in what can and cannot be made available to the public,
 - **Statement Three:** News publications are, basically, commercial enterprises. It is the responsibility of the paying reader/ viewer to demand clear and complete information on events. You get what you pay for: if you pay for entertainment, then don't be offended when you don't get all the facts.
 - **Statement Four:** Governments are responsible for the protection of their citizens. Governments must actively monitor the type of information provided by media.
- In a reflective paragraph, students explain:
 - Why they selected the specific statement
 - What strategies they used to formulate their response (e.g., compare the statement to examples from previous lessons to formulate an opinion, considered pro/con factors, to what extent their opinion is supported by evidence)

Describe to what extent s/he thinks that his or her Speaker's Corner response would influence others to think similarly. Why?

Materials

- Student Handout 6.1 – You Be the Editor
- Student Handout 6.2 – The Opinion Paragraph: Student Self-Assessment
- Student Handout 6.3 – From the London Free Press
- Student Handout 6.4 – Speaker's Corner (statements)
- Student Handout 6.5 – Speaker's Corner Rubric

You Be the Editor

1. A copy editor handling a story about the growing business empire of home-decor queen Debbie Travis writes this headline: *Debbie Does Real Estate*. It's a play on the title of a risqué 1978 movie. As the page is about to go to press, a female copy editor suggests this headline is in poor taste. The night editor agrees and the headline is changed to *Hot Property/Buy Me*.

Would you have:

- Changed the headline? It was in poor taste.
- Used the original? Get a life, editors; it was just a fun headline.

2. When the trial of B.C. pig farmer Robert Pickton started, it became clear that some of the details would be extremely gruesome. Gazette managers decided not to report much of the detail, considering it unnecessary. Some editors disagreed, arguing that readers need to know just what happened in the trial of a man who may be Canada's worst-ever serial killer.

Would you have:

- Published the details? The public needs to know.
- Limited the details? We just don't need to know everything.

3. A reporter is writing an obituary of a respected member of the community, who has a widow and three daughters. A man calls to say he is the son of the deceased as the result of an extramarital affair and wishes to be so identified in his father's obituary. Some checks convince the reporter that he is indeed the man's son, but all three daughters are adamantly against this being reported. The widow has no objection.

Do you:

- Include the illegitimate son in the story?
- Agree not to upset the daughters, and leave out the fact?

Student Handout 6.1

4. A reporter is covering a municipal court, and hears a case involving a woman who is convicted of shoplifting. The case will merit only a very short story. As she leaves the court, the woman approaches the reporter and asks that her name not be reported. "My mother is very sick, and the shock of this could kill her if she finds out," the woman says. The reporter verifies that the mother is, indeed, very ill. She consults her editor.

Would you:

- Use the story? If we agree not to publish names of convicts, the principle of an open court system is compromised.
- Suppress the story, or not name the woman? It's not a violent crime and the consequences could be out of proportion.

5. When deposed Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein was hanged, the event was recorded by cellphone and the images of the convicted dictator gallow-bound and then hanged hit the Internet almost immediately. Eventually, the images were distributed by various wire services to newspapers worldwide. The Gazette published the photos.



Would you have:

- Published the photos? It is major news, after all.
- Not published? Some readers will find them disturbing and barbaric.

6. An advertisement for the movie *Cashback* is submitted to The Gazette for publication. It features a topless woman holding a grocery-store basket. The Gazette publishes the picture with a black bar containing the film company's website, printed over the woman's breasts. La Presse printed the ad as it was submitted.



Would you have:

- Use the original picture? This is the 21st Century, you guys should lighten up.
- Use the covered-up picture? Images like that do not belong in a general-interest newspaper.

The Opinion Paragraph: Student Self-Assessment

| Paragraph Organization and Development | Yes | No |
|---|-----|----|
| Is my topic sentence clear, concise and supportable? | | |
| Does the first supporting detail, example or explanation relate clearly to my topic sentence? Is it logical and convincing? | | |
| Does the second supporting detail, example or explanation relate clearly to my topic sentence? Is it logical and convincing? | | |
| Does the third supporting detail, example or explanation relate clearly to my topic sentence? Is it logical and convincing? | | |
| Have I included sufficient detail, example or explanation in my developing sentences to prove to my reader that my opinion is a valid one? (If, "No", then add more detail) | | |
| Do my sentences connect smoothly, one idea leading to the next so that my reader can follow my thinking? | | |
| Does my paragraph include a strong, interesting concluding sentence? | | |
| Have I checked spelling and grammar so that my paragraph is well edited? | | |
| Overall, is my paragraph interesting and convincing? | | |

FROM THE LONDON FREE PRESS

1. A prominent community leader dies suddenly of a heart attack, leaving his immediate family and many friends and associates in shock. A newspaper photographer is assigned to cover the large funeral which is attended by many community leaders. The photographer returns with a selection of pictures, including one taken near the graveside of the grief-stricken widow being embraced by her daughter. Do you:

A. Publish the graveside photo because it is the most compelling of those taken and reflects the sense of loss shared by the community.

Readers 35%

Editors 95%

B. Choose another more routine shot showing pallbearers carrying the casket.

Readers 65%

Editors 5%

Readers comments:

"Grieving is a private family affair."

"Expressions of grief should not be made public."

"Though I believe in the right to privacy, a funeral of a community leader is usually a public affair and the scene could easily have been seen first hand."

"His wife, no doubt, had a lot to do with his prominence; showing her genuine grief is good for the community and good for her as well."

"Definitely run the graveside photo because it speaks louder than words. By publishing a routine photo you'd be doing just that - publishing a routine photo that's nothing but redundant. The loss to the community and the family can best be expressed by the photo and is obviously more newsworthy. Of course, if the family request that you don't, then don't."

2. While a man sits watching television in his living room in one of the city's more affluent suburbs, a drive-by sniper shoots through the front window and wounds him, but not seriously. He persuades police not to release his name and address to the news media because he doesn't know whether he was an intended or random target. He'll feel safer if he isn't identified publicly. One of your reporters manages to come up with the man's name and address. Do you:

A. Identify the man and give his street address, keeping in mind other residents in the neighborhood may want or need to know, perhaps to protect themselves because the shooting may have been random. A couple of homes a few kilometres away are also targets the same night.

Readers 20%

Editors 76%

B. Accede to the man's fears and withhold his identification and address, simply giving the general area of the city in which the shooting occurred.

Readers 80%

Editors 24%

Readers comments:

"Give street name but not the house number."

"Don't risk placing this person's life in jeopardy."

"Identifying the man will warn other residents to take precautions in the event the shooting"

Student Handout 6.3

was intended. I am serving the public by publishing his name and address. The man may possibly be involved in criminal activity."

3. A local politician addresses a group of his constituents and tells a raw, sexual joke in the process. Several in the audience are greatly offended and walk out. Your reporter's story of the speech includes a reference to the walkout and retells the joke, with explicit language, so readers can make their own judgments about the protest. Do you:

A. Decide the joke's impact can only be conveyed by using the exact language, and let it be published, even though you know many readers will be offended.

Readers 38%

Editors 60%

B. Decide readers don't need to know explicit details and take it out of the story.

Readers 62%

Editors 40%

Readers comments:

"A dirty joke is a dirty joke. Who wants details?"

"It has already offended once. Sufficient to say the joke was raw, sexual and ? inappropriate."

"The impact of the story cannot be conveyed unless the story is told, then readers can decide if they would have walked out or not."

"Some people think a joke formula forgives the teller of everything. Giving exact wording (using suitable dashes) may help offenders to see themselves as they are."

4. A children's puzzle book that was to be removed from stores because of its racist content shows up on the shelves of some local stores. A reporter outlines the situation and reports the comments of a minority group, which considers the material highly offensive. The book's distributor agrees the material is racist and promises to ask all merchants who hadn't yet complied to remove it from sale, but has no way of forcing compliance. Your reporter describes the book in detail and includes some of the offensive terms it uses to describe the minority. Do you:

A. Include the specific details of the book, including the offensive wording so that readers may understand its racist content and know what to look for and guard against.

Readers 34%

Editors 48%

B. Decide the story naming the puzzle book, the store where it was found and a general description of content is sufficient, without the need for giving readers explicit details of offensive language.

Readers 66%

Editors 53%

Readers comments:

"Print what is really stated. The readers can decide for themselves. Changed or left out it will keep readers wondering."

"Give examples of offensive racist statements. The buying public should be made aware."

Speaker's Corner

Statement One:

"The hardest choices are not between good and bad. They are between differing outcomes which appear to have equal merit" (*London Free Press*, 1995).

Statement Two:

Newspapers and television news organizations must vigorously oppose all forms of censorship of the news. Governments should simply have "no say" in what can and cannot be made available to the public,

Statement Three:

News publications are, basically, commercial enterprises. It is the responsibility of the paying reader/ viewer to demand clear and complete information on events. You get what you pay for: if you pay for entertainment, then don't be offended when you don't get all the facts.

Statement Four:

Governments are responsible for the protection of their citizens. Governments must actively monitor the type of information provided by media.

Speaker's Corner Rubric

| Criteria | Level One | Level Two | Level Three | Level Four |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| <p>KNOWLEDGE demonstrates knowledge of the topic of expressing an opinion on the newspaper ; is able to support opinion with fact, personal experience, logical illustration, description or example</p> | Limited knowledge of topic; the speaker's opinion is supported in a limited way | Some knowledge of the topic; the speaker's opinion is supported and is somewhat effective | Considerable knowledge of topic; the speaker's opinion is supported effectively | Thorough and insightful knowledge of topic; the speaker's opinion is supported very effectively |
| <p>THINKING - demonstrates critical thinking about the topic; effectiveness of argument, description, or illustration; suggestions and solutions to problems</p> | Limited use of critical thinking related to the topic; limited attention to suggestions and solutions to problems | Some use of critical thinking related to the topic; some relevant suggestions and solutions to problems | Considerable use of critical thinking related to the topic; several relevant suggestions and solutions to problems | Thorough use of thinking skills related to the topic; insightful, relevant suggestions and solutions to problems |
| <p>COMMUNICATION - demonstrates understanding of purpose and audience; clear voice, eye contact, pacing, demeanour effective for a Speaker's Corner</p> | Uses oral communication skills related to purpose and audience in a limited way | Uses some oral communication skills related to purpose and audience effectively | Uses oral communication skills related to purpose and audience effectively | Uses oral communication skills related to purpose and audience very effectively |
| <p>APPLICATION - makes connections between classroom reading/discussion reading and Speaker's Corner comments; - makes relevant connections between self and/or daily life and the topic discussed; provides a convincing, effective argument, description, or illustration for the topic</p> | Applies topic/ content to relevant contexts and uses some appropriate presentation components with limited effectiveness. | Applies topic/ content to relevant contexts and uses clear, appropriate presentation components with some effectiveness | Applies topic/ content to relevant contexts and uses very appropriate presentation components with considerable effectiveness | Applies topic/ content to relevant contexts and uses highly appropriate presentation components with a high degree of effectiveness |