

## LESSON PLAN

### Looking at News

This lesson is part of *USE, UNDERSTAND & ENGAGE: A Digital Media Literacy Framework for Canadian Schools*: <http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/digital-literacy-framework>.



**LEVEL:** Grade 2 to 5

**DURATION:** Variable

**ABOUT THE AUTHOR:** This lesson was created by elementary educator Ginie Waller. Parts of this lesson have been adapted from *News and Stuff*, by Don Hale (1996), produced by the Ontario Newspaper in Education Association.

### Overview

The newspaper offers a fun and useful tool to learn about the workings of print media. In this lesson, students learn basic information about newspaper journalism through guided class discussion and group and individual activities.

### Learning Outcomes

*Know:* Students will learn the following essential domain knowledge:

- Reading media: Different forms of news stories; features of a news story.
- Consumer awareness: How “newsworthiness” is defined by the news industry, how news outlets appeal to different needs and audiences
- Media representation: What is included or left out of media works affects what we see as important or unimportant

*Understand:* Students will understand the following big ideas/key concepts:

- Media are constructions: Media creators make particular choices to achieve specific purposes
- Media have social and political implications: Media works are “frames” that shape our views of reality
- Media have commercial considerations: The content of a media work is influenced by the norms and functions of its industry, its makers’ business model and the desires of its audience
- Each medium has a unique aesthetic form: Genre conventions influence how creators make and audiences interpret a work; media makers draw and direct audiences’ attention using specific techniques

*Do:* Students will *understand* how genre and purpose influence media makers' choices, and engage with the impact of media representations on our view of reality. In an optional activity, students use appropriate technology to create a media work.

## Preparation and Materials

Prepare to display or distribute the following handouts:

- *What Makes the News?*
- *What's in the News?*
- *Who's in the News?*
- *What Sells the News?*

Prepare to display, distribute a news story from [CBC Kids News](#) or show a clip from CBC Kids News on [CBC Gem](#).

## Procedure

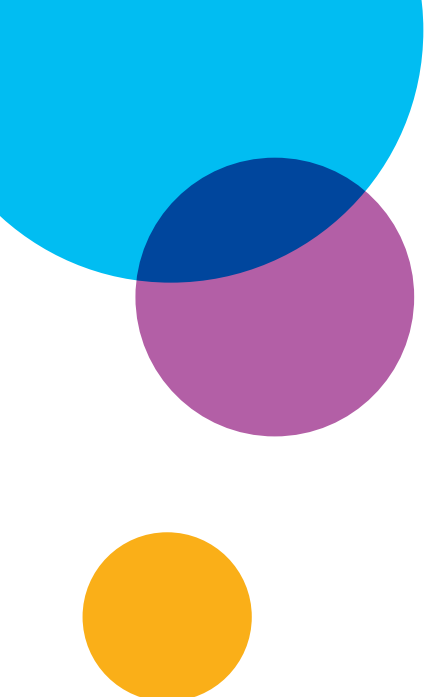
*Each of these activities introduces students to a different digital media literacy question relating to news. You can deliver them in a single session or spread out over several days, depending on what works best for your class.*

### WHAT IS NEWS?

Start by asking students whether or not they read a newspaper, watch or listen to TV or radio news, or regularly visit an online news source. For those who do, ask which outlets they read, watch or listen to. For those that don't, ask: Where do you get your news?

Tell students that most young Canadians are likely to say they heard about a news story because somebody shared it with them on social media or video sites such as TikTok or YouTube, and feel that news will “find them” if it's important. Younger kids also often hear about news stories from their family members or classmates. Sometimes this can be a bit like the game “Telephone” because important details may be changed or left out by the time a news story gets to you!

Ask students: Is it important for kids to know about the news? Why or why not?



Point out that while some news stories don't seem very relevant to kids, others are. Some news topics, like science or the environment, may be even more important to kids because they're about things that will happen in the future!

### WHAT MAKES THE NEWS?

Ask students: What exactly *is* news, anyway? What do we mean when we use the word “news”?

Make sure that two answers come up:

First, we can talk about *news outlets* like newspapers, TV and radio news, and online news sources (either the online versions of TV or print news, like the CBC News website, or news outlets that only exist online.)

Second, we can talk about *news* as a *kind* of media. What's the difference between news and other media like TV shows, movies, social media or documentaries?

Explain to students (you may wish to write this one the board):

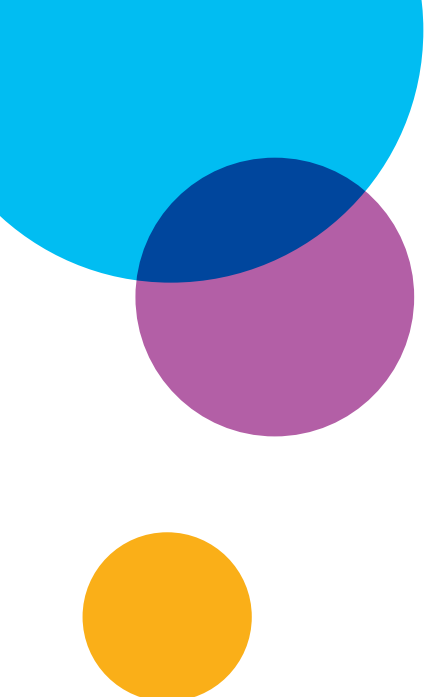
- To be news something has to be *true* (unlike a TV show or a movie)
- To be news something has to be *recent* (unlike a documentary)
- To be news something has to be *unusual* (“When a dog bites a man, that isn’t news. When a man bites a dog, that’s news!”)
- To be news something has to be *important* to the audience reading or watching it.

Now, show students (either in a photocopy or onscreen) a news story from [CBC Kids News](https://www.cbc.ca/kidsnews/) (<https://www.cbc.ca/kidsnews/>). (For younger students, you may wish to show them a video news clip instead: <https://gem.cbc.ca/media/cbc-kids-news/s01>)

Ask students: What made this *newsworthy*? What recent event did it connect to? Why is it unusual? Why would it be interesting to the intended audience (kids)?

Now explain the a good news story answers five questions, sometimes called the “5 Ws”: *Who*, *What*, *When*, *Where* and *Why*.

Distribute the handout *What Makes the News?* and go through it with the class. Reread or rewatch the news story and have students identify each



of the Ws in it using the handout. (Older students may be able to do this as short answers. With younger students you may wish to do this as a whole-class activity.)

### WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

Now ask students: What is the difference between *facts* and *opinions*?

Make sure students understand that a fact is a statement that *could* be proven true or false. Something does not have to be true to be a factual statement! “The moon goes around the Earth” and “The moon is made of cheese” are both *fact statements*, but only the first one is true.

An opinion, on the other hand, is something that you *believe*. It cannot be fully proven or disproven but it can be *supported* with facts. For instance, you could say “We should protect bats (opinion) *because* bats eat mosquitoes (fact).”

Now distribute the handout *What's in the News?* and read through it with the class. Ask students what they think is the difference between *news* articles, *opinion* articles and *explainer* articles, based on these examples. (Older students may be able to do short written answers before responding. With younger students you will probably want to do this as a whole-class discussion.)

Make sure that students understand that a *news* article will mostly include facts. It will not include the reporter's opinion but may *quote* opinions from people the reporter interviewed: for example, when the astronomer is quoted as saying this is “the most important discovery in 100 years” that is their *opinion*.

An *opinion* article, on the other hand, is all about the writer's opinion, but will usually include *facts* that support that opinion (and may also include facts that challenge it.) For instance, the writer of this article is using the fact of the moon cheese discovery to support their opinion that we should support the space program. An opinion writer will also often *quote* people who support or challenge their opinion.

In an *explainer*, on the other hand, the writer gives their opinions about what the facts *mean* but does not take sides. In this example, the writer says how they think the moon cheese discovery will affect different groups, but does not give an opinion about what anyone should do. Explainers often include *quotes* from experts.

Explain to students that news articles and explainers are expected to be *objective*, which means they do not favor one side or another of an issue. Opinion articles are not objective but should be *fair* to each side of the issue they're writing about.

### WHO'S IN THE NEWS?

Now tell students that even if a news article is *objective*, it doesn't necessarily give the whole picture. Like all media, news articles are *frames* that show you only part of reality. When they ask and answer those "5 W" questions, reporters and editors choose which facts to include, what people to interview, and which quotes to use. The choices they make can affect what they think about the story, and about the world.

Project or distribute the handout *Who's in the News?* and ask: Who and what is named in this story? (*The elephant, Kindani; the place where it happened, Sheldrick Elephant Nursery in Nairobi, Kenya.*)

Who is not named that you think should be? (*This is a trickier question because, after all, anyone or anywhere might have been named. Prompt students to think about who was involved in this story and who was affected by it, and consider if any of those people were left out. If students still need prompting, point out that while we see his picture the reporter who was tickled by the elephant, Alvin Kaunda, was not named.*)

Tell students that while this is a lighthearted example (and Kaunda was named in the full article), researchers who study the news have found that people are more likely to say an issue is important if they have often seen it in the news. That means that we are *less* likely to think that something (or someone, or someplace) is important if we *don't* see it in the news.

### WHAT SELLS THE NEWS?

Now ask students: How do they think news outlets make money?

Distribute the handout *What Sells the News?* Explain that most news sources make money in one of three ways: from selling single copies of print newspapers, from subscriptions (people pay to access the website or to have a copy of the newspaper delivered every day) and from advertising.)

That means that news outlets have to appeal to their *audiences*: they need to convince people to pay to read them, and to convince businesses that their ads will reach the right audience.

Explain that news outlets have three different ways of appealing to audiences:

They can be *fun* and entertaining

They be accurate and give you lots of facts so that you feel *well-informed*, and

They can make you *root for your side*—whether that’s a sports team, your country, your identity (*Star Wars* fan, cat person, K-pop lover, etc.), your political beliefs, and so on.

Distribute or display the handout *What sells the news* and ask students: Based on these front pages, which of these newspapers wants to entertain you? (*C—there’s nothing newsworthy about this story except that it’s entertaining.*) Which one wants to make you feel well-informed? (*B— it has stories on lots of different topics, with lots of facts just on the front page.*) Which one wants you to root for a “team”? (*A—it even describes a 1-1 tie as a “win” for the US team.*)

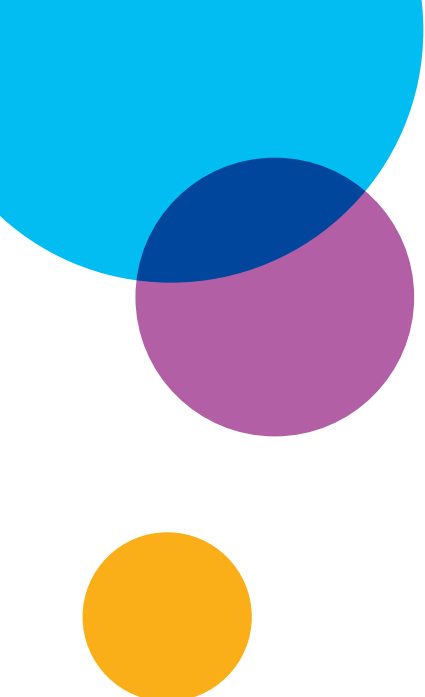
Tell students that many news outlets have a motto that helps to get across their selling point. For instance the *New York Times*, an outlet whose selling point is based on *informing* its readers, has the motto “All the news that’s fit to print.” The *Mail on Sunday* has the motto “A newspaper, not a snooze paper” to show that it is going to be fun and the *Wairapa Times-Age* (from New Zealand) shows it’s on your side with its slogan “Your region. Your paper.”

Explain to students that most outlets offer a mix of those three things. That mix is the outlet’s *selling point*.

Optional activity for older students: Return to the CBC Kids News website and ask students to consider its selling point. How much is it trying to seem fun? How much is it trying to make you well-informed? What “teams” or identities is it appealing to (kids, Canadians) and how does it appeal to those identities? Why do you think they chose that selling point to appeal to its audience (kids)?

## MAKING THE NEWS

Now tell students that you will be making the front page of a class newspaper together.



Have the class brainstorm a list of at least ten possible news stories, based on things that have happened in your class, your school, and your community. Remind them of the three types of news articles — news, opinion, and explainer — but point out that opinion articles and explainers usually have a “news hook” that connects them to a news story. (For instance, the “news hook” in the examples in *What’s in the News?* was the moon cheese discovery.)

*You may choose to have students brainstorm in groups and then share their lists with the whole class if you prefer.*

Now have students evaluate each possible article for “newsworthiness” based on the factors you discussed earlier:

- Is it true?
- Is it recent?
- Is it unusual?
- Is it important? (Remind them the question is not whether these stories would be included in a “real” news outlet, but whether they’re things that would be of interest to them and their friends and family.)

Next, have students discuss what they think their newspaper’s *selling point* will be. How much does their audience want to be entertained by a news outlet? How much do they want to be *informed*? How important is it for them to feel a news outlet is *on their side*?

Based on the discussion, have the students choose five news stories. For each of the five stories, have students write a headline and subhead (like in the *What’s in the News?* handout) as well as a lede paragraph that contains the “five Ws.” (*Depending on the age of your students, you may want to assign each story to a group or to do this as a whole-class activity.*) Finally, have the class choose a name for your news outlet and a motto that reflects its *selling point*.

*Optional:* Assemble the articles into a print or online newspaper and share with students and families.



## EXTENSION: WACKY MEDIA SONGS

### *Fake News*

Ask students: What's the difference between news and other media?

Show students the TVOKids Original video [Fake News!](#)

After the video, ask: What are some of the things Ava suggests doing to find out if a news story is reliable? (Find out where it came from and if they're a reliable source of news.)

What are some places reliable news comes from? (Print newspapers, TV news broadcasts, websites of reputable news organizations.)

### *Fact vs. Opinion Showdown*

Ask students: What do you think a "fact" is? How is it different from an opinion?

Show students the TVOKids Original video [Fact Versus Opinion Showdown](#)

After the video, ask: Can something be a fact and still be wrong? (A fact is something that can be proven – but not all facts are proven to be true. "The moon is made of cheese" is a fact statement, but it's not a true fact.) How do we know which opinions are more convincing? (You can never totally prove an opinion is true, but you can use facts to show that one opinion is more convincing than another.)

### *Creating a Brand!*

Before the video, ask students: What does it mean when we talk about a "brand" in ads?

Show students the TVOKids Original video [Creating a Brand!](#)

After the video, ask: Can you think of any ads that try to make you like the brand instead of telling you what's good about the product? What are some ways that they do that?

### *I Want Your Clicks!*

Before the video, ask students: Have you ever seen a headline on a website or a video title that made it look more interesting than it really was? How did it do that?





Show students the TVOKids Original video [I Want Your Clicks!](#)

After the video, ask: What are some of the ways that clickbait gets you to click on a link?

Why do they do that? (They get paid when you see the ads on the page.)

How can you make sure not to click on a bad link? (Think before you click on anything. On a computer, you can also hover the pointer over a link and the web address will appear. That tells you if you're leaving the website.)

Look at a newspaper or a magazine, or the website of a reliable news source. Can you find any headlines that use the clickbait tricks from the video? How are they different from a clickbait site? (All news outlets use headlines to make you interested in reading or watching a story. The difference is that headlines on "clickbait" sources are actually misleading, and that they don't do their own reporting – they just retell news stories from other sources.)

### *Frame It!*

Frames aren't just for pictures! When we tell a story, we choose what parts to keep in and what parts to leave out. What we keep is "in the frame". Every type of media has a kind of invisible frame, too! Get in the frame with Ava!

Before the video, ask students: What kinds of choices do you think people make when they make media, like filming a movie?

Show students the TVOKids Original video [Frame It!](#)

After the video, ask: What's the difference between looking out a window and seeing something framed in media?

How can the media frame sometimes be misleading?

Watch the video [House Hippo 2.0](#). How does it use the media frame to make the hippo look real?

# LOOKING AT NEWS



## What Makes the News?

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A good news story answers five questions: **Who?** **What?** **When?** **Where?** **Why?**

Take a look at a news story and list the answers to those questions.

A. **Who** is the story about?

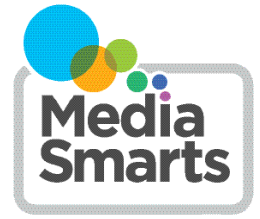
D. **Where** did it happen?

E. **Why** is it important?

B. **What** happened that is news?

C. **When** did it happen?

# LOOKING AT NEWS



## What's in the News?

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There are three kinds of news articles: news stories, opinion stories and explainer stories. Look at these examples and see if you can tell how they are different.

### A. News

## **Moon made of cheese, scientists say**

**“Most amazing discovery in a hundred years,” Chief Astronomer  
at Cheshire Observatory says**

### B. Opinion

## **Moon cheese discovery shows why we need to support the space program**

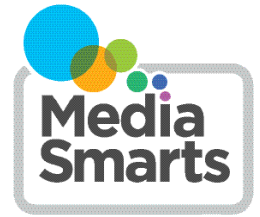
**Why are we letting people on Earth go hungry when there's a  
whole planet of cheese just a rocket ride away?**

### C. Explainer

## **Moon cheese: How will it affect you?**

**New discovery could change the world for cooks, farmers, mice  
and more**

# LOOKING AT NEWS



## Who's in the News?

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Who and what is named in this story?

Who is not named that you think should be?

A screenshot of a Twitter post from the AFP News Agency (@AFP). The post features a video thumbnail showing a baby elephant with its trunk raised, appearing to tickle a man in a red and blue jacket who is holding a microphone. The video title is "VIDEO: A baby elephant called Kindani tickles a Kenyan journalist as he reports from the Sheldrick Elephant Nursery in Nairobi". The video has 224.3K views and a duration of 0:24. The caption below the video reads "Baby elephant interrupts Kenyan reporter".

**AFP** AFP News Agency ✓  
@AFP

**VIDEO: A baby elephant called Kindani tickles a Kenyan journalist as he reports from the Sheldrick Elephant Nursery in Nairobi**

0:24 224.3K views

**Baby elephant interrupts Kenyan reporter**

# LOOKING AT NEWS

## What Sells the News?

Which front page says the paper wants you to *have fun*?

Which one says it wants you to be *well-informed*?

Which one wants you to *root for your side*?



Which of these newspaper slogans is selling *fun*?

Which is saying you'll be *well-informed*?

Which is saying it's *on your side*?

"Your region. Your paper." (*Wairapa Times-Age*)

"A newspaper, not a snoozepaper." (*The Mail on Sunday*)

"All the news that's fit to print." (*The New York Times*)