



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 9 to 12
About the Author: Adapted from *News is Not Just Black and White*, a workbook created by the Canadian Newspaper Association (CAN)

The Front Page

Overview

This is the second of five lessons designed to teach students to think critically about the way aboriginal peoples and visible minorities are portrayed in the press. "The Front Page" begins by helping students to identify and understand the different aspects of the newspaper. Using these skills, students will then collect and identify front-page news stories and categorize them according to subject matter. Special emphasis will be placed on their representation of visible minorities.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- understand the purpose and structure of daily newspapers
- understand terminology associated with newspapers
- become aware of the importance of the front page of the newspaper
- become aware of the types of stories and elements that typically appear on the front page of a newspaper
- understand the role played by editors in determining story selection and placement
- recognize bias and slant in written work
- recognize the differences between fact and opinion
- become aware of the ways in which ethnocultural minorities are represented in newspapers

Preparation and Materials

Each group will need one week's worth of front pages from a local daily newspaper that features front-page stories.

Photocopy the following handouts:

- *Functions of a Daily Newspaper*
- *News Judgment*
- *The Editorial Page*
- *Advertising*
- *Front Page Worksheet*



Procedure

Introduction:

Newspapers are more complicated than they first appear. News stories, wire copy (stories not written by newspaper staff), advertorials and editorials often look remarkably similar, and even appear on the same page of the paper. Yet they all serve a different purpose.

The newspaper's front page is its showpiece, containing what editors feel is the most important news of the day. For this reason, it's a good place to start a class investigation.

Distribute the following handouts:

- *Functions of a Daily Newspaper*
- *News Judgment*
- *The Editorial Page*
- *Advertising*

Discuss the handouts with students:

- How does an editorial differ from a news story?
- What guidelines do reporters use in deciding what is news?
- What is the difference between 'hard' and 'soft' news?

Activity

- Break the class into small groups of three to four students. Each group should select a recorder and a spokesperson to report on their findings at the end of the exercise.
- Distribute *Front Page Worksheet* to students.
- For one week, each group will save all the news stories from the front page of the local newspaper. Using the worksheet provided, students will categorize them by subject matter (for example: crime, federal politics, local politics, sports).
- Each group must keep track of the following:
 - The number of front page stories about ethnocultural minority groups.
 - How people from ethnocultural minority groups are portrayed.
 - Whether or not they are depicted favorably, and the reasons why this might be so.
- Students will each choose one story they think is the most important story of the week and explain why it was chosen.
- Have each group present their findings to the class.

Evaluation

- Completed worksheets and group presentations.



Functions of a Daily Newspaper

The daily newspaper, in its role as the free press, serves several functions in the community:

- A newspaper informs by supplying facts, figures, charts, maps, photos and illustrations.
- A newspaper educates, going beyond the basic facts to in-depth analysis in opinion pieces, feature stories, columns and editorials.
- A newspaper entertains with humorous columns, leisure features, comics and puzzles.
- A newspaper provides a print marketplace for advertisers and prospective customers.
- A newspaper provides a record for historians and members of a community researching local history.

Types of News: Hard news and soft news

News can be divided into two general categories: hard news and soft news.

Hard news refers to a story in which time is a factor. In a hard news story, the task of reporters and editors is to get the details of the event (what happened? to whom? when? where? why? and how?) into the newspaper as quickly as possible - either the same day or the following day at the latest.

Soft news is usually not time sensitive. Nor is it necessarily related to a major event. A daily newspaper strives for a mixture of local and national, hard and soft news so its pages will have variety and offer something for every interest.

Fact versus opinion

A newspaper's primary purpose is to provide reliable information to its readers. To do so, it must maintain certain standards. A reporter has to write from an objective point of view.

To convey information fairly, a reporter must let the facts speak for themselves. That's not to say opinion has no place in newspapers.

Opinions supporting or opposing policies and ideas have a place on the editorial page and are regularly aired by columnists. If opinions are to have any value, they must be supported by facts.

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News Judgement

Trying to define what constitutes news is a delicate business. Some of the key factors include:

Impact: Is the only factory in town closing down? That has a bigger impact than two people being laid off, so it's bigger news. A disaster is big news because of its impact, leaving people hurt and homeless.

Conflict: A demonstration for animal rights in which people peacefully march and chant slogans is not a major news story. But if a confrontation develops between the protesters and a fur coat merchant, and someone gets hurt, it becomes a major story because the level of conflict has increased.

Prominence: Are celebrities or politicians involved in a story? If so, it's a bigger story. A failed marriage in the Royal Family is a big headline around the world, but the same problems, if they happened to your next-door neighbour, wouldn't even make the local paper.

Proximity: If your newspaper is in Timmins, Ontario, and a homeless person freezes to death on Timmins' main street one winter night, that's big news. But if your newspaper is in Whitehorse, Yukon, you are not as interested in a death in Timmins, because it isn't close to your readers.

Freshness: News has a short shelf life. If a development happened an hour before the paper's deadline, it's bigger news than if it's 24 hours old.

Novelty: There's a saying that "if a dog bites a man it isn't news, but if a man bites a dog, that's news." Human interest: Related to novelty. Stories about the 96-year-old who swims in the ocean every morning, winter and summer, or about the family with 20 foster children and how they cope, are of interest to readers.

These factors are all a part of news judgement.

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The Editorial Page

The editorial page is one place in the newspaper where opinion is not only permissible, but encouraged. The editorial page is dominated by comment and analysis rather than objective reporting of factual information. It is here that the opinions of the newspaper's editorial board are put forth in editorials and that readers can put forth their opinions in letters to the editor.

Opinions of newspaper staff members and outside correspondents appear in bylined columns, usually located on the facing page, called the "Op-Ed" page. The Op-Ed page also contains analysis and background pieces. At some newspapers the editorial and Op-Ed page may be combined.

A typical editorial page consists of the following items:

Editorials: although written by individuals, unsigned editorials reflect the corporate opinion of the newspaper's editorial board. The viewpoint expressed is usually the result of consensus among the editorial board members.

- Letters to the editor
- Editorial cartoon
- Columns
- Bylined pieces by newspaper staff.

Some newspapers divide this material between an editorial page and the Op-Ed page.

Purposes of the Editorial Page

The editorial page provides a forum for the opinions of readers and editorial staff in order to:

- provoke thought and discussion
- influence the actions of public officials
- campaign for reform and specific proposals
- provide background and analyze events
- serve as a community voice

Letters to the Editor

The letters section is the readers' forum. It gives readers space to react to domestic and foreign news, criticize or praise editorials and columns, question the judgment of editors, and offer personal comments on the human condition.

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Advertising

Types of Advertising

There are three basic types of advertising in the newspaper. They are: display, classified and advertorial.

- **Display advertising:** Display advertisements appear in various sizes on most pages throughout the newspaper. They contain artwork and other information that informs the customer about a business, a product or a service. Display advertising can be sub-divided into local or retail and national advertising. local retail advertising emphasizes merchandise, products or services available at stores or businesses in the community. National advertising consists of ads that generally promote country-wide operations such as Chrysler or Air Canada.
- **Classified advertising:** Classified ads are placed by individuals wishing to advertise goods and services available or needed. The ads, as their name implies, are grouped according to the product or service type. Classified advertisers are billed by the word or the line. As a result, classified ads are generally brief and descriptive.
- **Advertorial sections:** Most newspapers print supplements combining advertising geared to a particular theme with stories relating to that theme. Such supplements are called "advertorial" or are labelled as special advertising features. These supplements are produced by the advertising department. The editorial department is not involved in writing the stories in these advertising features. These supplements are an important source of revenue for newspapers and provide useful information for the readers. However, they are not news and should not be confused with news.

How Advertising Helps the Newspaper

Advertising accounts for approximately 80 per cent of a newspaper's revenue. Advertising is very important to the newspaper publisher. The quality of the newspaper, its news coverage and its printing plant rely heavily on advertising revenue. A newspaper tries to maintain a ratio of 60 per cent advertising to 40 per cent news.

The amount of space sold to advertisers determines the number of pages in the newspaper each day. Advertising is placed on the page first and the space remaining becomes the newshole. Editors will arrange the stories to be printed to fit the newshole.

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Front Page Worksheet

Story Categories	Federal Politics	Local Politics	Crime	Business / Economics
No. of Stories				
Story Categories	Sports	Education/ Health	Culture	Human Interest
No. of Stories				

Answer the following questions:

- How many of the front page stories were about ethnocultural minority groups?

- How were the people from ethnocultural minority groups portrayed? Were they depicted favourably? Why?

- What story do you think was the most important of the week? Who would be most interested in that story? Explain your choice.

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