



## LESSON PLAN

**Level:** Grades 4 to 6

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# Reporter For a Day

## Overview

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This lesson focuses on how to write a newspaper story, and what may influence the information selected. The lesson begins with a review of the "5 Ws," and how journalists use these elements to craft topical, interesting and relevant news stories. In addition, students also learn about other elements that journalists must consider when they write news stories. Once students understand these elements, they will apply their knowledge to stories from newspapers, and to stories of their own. In addition, students learn about impartiality in news reporting by studying the differences between hard news, soft news, and opinion pieces.

## Learning Outcomes

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Students will demonstrate:

- an ability to write a short newspaper story
- an ability to dissect and understand the "news" stories in newspapers
- a knowledge of the different kinds of newspaper stories (hard and soft news, and opinion pieces)
- an awareness of how journalists and editors can "slant" a story

## Preparation and Materials

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See *Looking at Newspapers: Introduction* for introductory classroom discussion and activities.

- Before class, collect international, national or local newspapers. These may be available at a discount price from the publishers; or you can simply ask students to bring the most current editions from home.
- Photocopy *Tips for Writing a Good News Story*

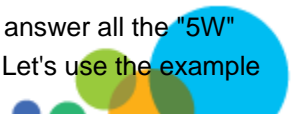
## Procedure

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### 1. Review the 5 Ws

### Guided Discussion

A newspaper story is almost always about people who do things. These stories are supposed to answer all the "5W" questions - who, why, where, when, what - so that readers will be able to **understand** the story. Let's use the example of your last class party:



- Why was the party held?
- When did it take place?
- Where was it held?
- Who was there?
- What happened at the party?

If you answer all these questions in your story, the person reading it shouldn't have to ask any more questions - they'll know everything about the party. You also don't want to wait too long to report on this story, as people aren't interested in an event that happened months ago. When time is a factor, the story is called **hard news**. A **soft news story**, or feature story, has fewer time constraints, and is usually not related to a major event.

Pique the student's interest by looking at the news in terms of current events. Give them time to browse through the paper and clip articles on topical happenings - for example a space mission, the Olympics, or a "hot" political story. Students should keep several articles in a folder to use in the following activities. The articles can include news stories, photographs, quotes from well-known people, sporting events, editorials, or human-interest stories.

- What is meant by **current events**?
- Why do we want to read about current events?
- Why are current events important for society as a whole? How do these stories shape society?

### Activity

Take one of the hard news stories you cut from the paper and underline the *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, and *why* - using a different colour for each.

- Did the story contain all the five Ws?
- What information was missing? What other or extra information was included in the story?
- Did this make the story more interesting?

### 2. What else makes a newspaper story?

The five Ws are a very basic tool for putting stories together. Reporters always ask themselves many questions when writing stories, to be sure that they have all the answers to make the stories interesting for the readers.

Prompt students to elaborate on the following elements:

**Location (where):** Where does this event take place? Newspaper readers often buy newspapers for local news, because events that take place in their town may have a direct impact on them and editors often want to focus on such close-to-home news.

**Time (when):** When did this event happen - just now, or two weeks ago? Newspaper readers like to keep on top of things. They like to know what's going on that same day.

**People (who):** Would you rather read a story about the government, or the people on whose behalf it makes decisions?



Newspaper readers prefer to read about ordinary people like themselves. They can relate more to a person than an institution such as a school or a ministry. Stories should be about the people **within** those institutions.

**Emotion (what and why):** Newspaper readers love stories about the way other people feel about things. What made the people in the story feel the way they do?

- Choose a story from the newspaper and read it.
- Underline with a red marker the details you feel are important.
- Use a blue marker to underline the details that are helpful.
- With a green marker, underline the information you feel is least important.

As a class, discuss:

- Do you find this story interesting?
- Why or why not? (*Think of the five Ws and the questions above to help you decide.*)
- If you wanted to, how would you change the story?

### Writing Activities

Now it's your turn to write a newspaper story. Writing a newspaper story is not only fun, it's easy! You just have to make sure you answer all the possible questions, always thinking of the five Ws. After that, everything else will fall into place.

Clip out a headline without reading the story. Write your own short story for that headline. Remember to answer the 5 'Ws,

OR

- Write a newspaper story about something that recently happened at your school. Maybe it's a bake sale, or a play day, or maybe a band came to your school to play a concert.
  - Go over the handout *Tips for Writing a Good News Story*. Remember to always:
    - Answer the five Ws.
    - Keep it interesting.
    - Interview at least one person, and quote what they say in the story.
    - Use lots of description to tell your story. If you're talking about a bake sale, was the food delicious? If you're writing about a play day, was it really hot outside? If a band played a concert, what kinds of instruments did they bring with them?
- Find a partner who wrote about the same event and read his/her story. How was it different? If you wrote about the bake sale, did you both find the food delicious? Did you express any personal viewpoints about the event? Reporters need to make sure they do not let their personal viewpoints influence a news story; but point of view may be used to make the story more interesting.



### 3. Impartiality

You may have noticed that the writer can change a story's meaning, or "slant." Many different people write stories for newspapers: reporters, correspondents, feature writers, freelancers, columnists, and news agencies such as Reuters or the Canadian Press. They each approach a story from a different vantage point, but they must try to stay impartial - reporting both sides of an issue, and using language that's balanced and fair.

- Find an event reported in two different papers, by different reporters or news agencies. (Teachers may want to do this ahead of time, and make copies for the class).
- Read both accounts of the event. Do they express the same point of view? Is it an impartial or neutral point of view?
- Opinion should not appear in a news story. Do the authors state their opinions, or is the story "slanted" in some other way?
- How are the stories different? Why? Do they represent the people involved in the story in a fair manner?

Sometimes reporters or journalists influence the slant of the story, and often the editor plays a role in how the story is written, or which story goes into the paper. Wording can change the bias of the story very subtly. Journalists try to be accurate, fair and impartial, but using certain words can change the meaning and elicit a certain response in the audience.

Sometimes readers want to hear another person's opinion. This kind of story in the newspaper is called an **opinion piece**. Some examples of opinion pieces are:

- letters to the editor
- editorials
- regular columns by the same author, such as an advice column
- book and movie reviews

### Activity

Read Dr. Seuss's *Green Eggs and Ham*. Discuss how we may be influenced by what we read, or hear, without experiencing it first-hand.

- Ask students: have you ever seen a movie that you heard was good, but that you didn't like when you saw it?

Read a review for a movie your students haven't seen.

- Does the review make them want to see the movie?
- Discuss what kind of information the reviewer includes, such as an outline of the plot and the characters. Does the reviewer's personal opinion convince us that it would be a good movie to see?
- Have the students write a review for a movie they've seen, and try to convince their readers to go see that movie.



### Other classroom activities

Now that the students are familiar with the newspaper, try a scavenger hunt. Ask students to look for:

- a headline with the name of a politician
- a human interest story
- an editorial
- an advice column
- a local news story
- an international news story
- a letter to the editor
- a news story critical of the government
- an educational article
- an article on the environment
- a sports story

Ask students to clip the articles and sort them into the categories of **hard news**, **soft news** and **opinion pieces**.

- Discuss the future of newspapers in light of the Internet. Have students look at newspaper Web sites. How are they different from printed newspapers? Do you expect newspapers to exist into the next century? Why or why not?

### Evaluation

- Newspaper story
- Movie reviews
- Newspaper scavenger hunt



## Writing a Good News Story

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Before you start to write:

- Think about the purpose of your story: in a news story it will most likely be to inform the audience.
- Do some research and conduct interviews, remembering to take notes and write down useful quotes.

As you write:

- Use active verbs to show what's really happening
- Tell the really interesting information first
- Follow this outline:

### First paragraph

Try to hook the reader by beginning with a funny, clever, or surprising statement. Go for variety - try to begin your article with a question or a provocative statement. In your first one or two sentences, address the issues of who, what, when, where, and why.

### Second/third/fourth paragraphs

Give the reader the details by expanding on the five Ws. Include one or two quotes from people you interviewed. Write in the third person (he, she, it or they). Remember to stay objective, and never openly state your own opinion. Use quotes to express others' opinions.

### Last paragraph

Wrap it up, and don't leave the reader hanging. Try ending with a quote, or a catchy phrase, or a neat summing-up.

