



LESSON PLAN

Level:	Grades 11 to 12
About the Author:	"Television Newscasts" was adapted from a teaching unit created by Gord Forsythe, of the Scarborough Board of Education in the 1992 Supplement to the AML Anthology, produced by the Association for Media Literacy .
Duration:	2-3 hours

Television Newscasts

Overview

"Television Newscasts" helps students develop a critical awareness of how television news is shaped and manipulated and how they, as audience members may be affected by this. Students will conduct a survey about media sources of news; keep a "news log" throughout the unit of study; identify and discuss how a TV newscast is constructed; identify and discuss the use of entertainment in TV news; identify, discuss and compare the values and ideologies presented in a variety of Canadian and U.S. TV newscasts, at the local and national levels; produce a complete school newscast, as a team; and identify and analyse the processes involved in their production and how these relate to the key concepts studied in this unit.

Learning Outcomes

Students will:

- demonstrate critical thinking skills by identifying bias and by analysing explicit and implicit messages in television news
- analyse the relationship between television newscasts and their audiences
- identify the characteristics of a television news broadcast
- analyse how the language and visuals used in television news influences the interpretation of messages
- compare their own and others' responses to television news

Preparation and Materials

In accordance with copyright laws, pre-record national and local news telecasts from American and Canadian television stations.



Procedure

How television news is constructed

The Characteristics of the People on Television News

Show a number of TV newscasters and/or reporters (with or without sound).

- Can students identify some common characteristics?
- Discuss what messages these people transmit through their appearance and voice.
- How does TV journalism differ from radio and print journalism?

The Characteristics of the News Set

After viewing a portion of a selected newscast, discuss the set used.

- What does it look like?
- What are its elements?
- Why are they used?

Discuss possible alternatives -- news delivered from an armchair, podium, bar, parking lot, church -- and their possible meanings.

Compare different newscasts. Examine the use of colour, lighting, background sound, camera angles, shots as well as the use of the teleprompter. Students may experiment by trying to read from notes without losing contact with their audience.

(At this point, it might be useful to show the film *Broadcast News* (or selected clips) and then discuss the concepts dealt with in the unit so far.)

The Use of Visuals in the News

- View a selected newscast and chart each news story, according to the following headings: type of visual used; duration; location (local, national, international). Consider some of the following questions:
 - Are the locations appropriate to the story?
 - What other locations could have been used?
- Show a portion of the news with sound only.
 - What type of language is used?
 - How and why is it used?
 - What do the visuals do to and for the story?



TV News and the Question of Depth

- Note the length of each story in a newscast. Pick one story and compare its coverage in a newspaper, preferably the edition closest in time to the newscast. What differences exist? Why?
- Give students 15-20 stories with descriptions of the accompanying visuals. Ask them to draw up an outline of a newscast, stating the order, length of stories, visuals used, together with a rationale for their choices.
- Examine the *jolts per minute* on TV news, compared with commercials and regular programming.
- Discuss the entertainment aspects in a selected newscast. Why are these included? Have students view a particular newscast and then discuss:
 - Would they make the newscast more or less entertaining?
 - How would they do that? Why?

Conflict, Violence and Sensationalism in TV News

Ask students to consider some of the following questions:

- Based on the newscasts seen so far, what are the most common types of stories presented?
- How is conflict used in news stories?
- Do sensationalism and violence make news?
- Why is "bad" news shown so often?
- Do you enjoy violence and sensationalism in the news?
- What effects does it have on you?
- Is it ethical to use such content to attract viewers?
- Examine the wording used in newscasts. How might it contribute to sensationalism? Try to write a news story by exaggerating the sensational aspects.
- Ask students to write a "good" news story. Discuss its interest level.
- Based on stories in today's newspaper and on what the students have learned thus far, predict the top five news stories for tonight's six o'clock news and how each story will be treated.

(At this point, it might be useful to show the film *Network* (or selected clips) and then discuss the concepts dealt with in the unit so far.)

TV News Presents a Distorted/Selected Picture of the World

Ask students to discuss:

- What is news?
- What is news on television?
- Who decides what stories, people, events should be on the news?
- Who owns the stations and networks?



- Can TV news show us the "real" world?
- Can TV news be objective?

(For further ideas, see the section "The Politics of Truth" in the NFB film *Constructing Reality*.)

The Differences Between Canadian and U.S. TV Newscasts

- Compare the news coverage of the same event (acid rain, trade disputes, Prime Ministerial or Presidential visit, etc.). Do you see any differences in language, perspective, attitude? Any other differences?
- Have the students write a news story for a Canadian newscast, then the same story for a U.S. newscast. Discuss the differences, including differences in commercial aspects and advertiser influences.
- Do a full-scale comparison of a Canadian and U.S. newscast. Discuss the practice and implications of getting U.S. film and tape feeds. Is it important to get a Canadian perspective?
- Watch segments of CBC's Newsworld. How do its techniques differ from those used in regular newscasts? Do we see the Canadian perspective?
- Have students compare an hour of evening news from CNN, to that same hour's news reporting on CTV's Newsnet or CBC's Newsworld.

Note: When analysing newscasts, teachers may wish to include weather and sports, or leave those for independent study.

Activity

Television News Production

Have students plan, script, rehearse and produce their own school newscast. At the end of the production, ask them to comment on their own processes of production and how the concepts studied in this unit were applied.

Evaluation

- news log
- written analysis/comparison of events
- group reports
- individual and group role-playing assignments
- group production

