

***Understanding News Literacy***

A primer to introducing news literacy concepts in your classroom

***Summary***

This is the first of five lessons in a week-long unit that explores news literacy concepts. In this lesson, students are introduced to the fundamental conventions of news literacy and are asked to reflect upon their own expectations for today’s news media.

***Objectives***

* Students will learn the basic concepts of new literacy to determine what skills they must refine to become better news producer and consumers.
* Students will understand why news literacy is important for citizens in today’s democracy.

***Common Core State Standards***

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| CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.9 | Analyze seminal U.S. documents of historical and literary significance (e.g., Washington’s Farewell Address, the Gettysburg Address, Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech, King’s “Letter from Birmingham Jail”), including how they address related themes and concepts. |
| CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.8 | Gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation. |
| CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6 | Determine an author’s point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose. |

***Partnership for 21st Century Skills—Student Outcomes***

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| *Skills* | *P21 outcomes* |
| Critical Thinking | 1. Reason effectively 2. Use systems thinking 3. Make judgments and decisions |
| Communication | 1. Communicate clearly |
| Information Literacy | 1. Access and evaluate information 2. Use and manage information |
| Media Literacy | 1. Analyze media |

***Length***

50 minutes

***Materials/Resources:***

1. White board and screen projector with audio

2. Class set of “Main Concepts of News Literacy”—found at end of lesson

***LESSON STEP-BY-STEP***

**1. Building background**—15 minutes

Write the text of the First Amendment on the white board for students to reference. If you have not yet covered the First Amendment in your class, discuss with students the idea of the free press as a check on government. We expect that the news media, as part of the press, will tell us about important things going on in our country. We expect that because we can’t be on Capitol Hill for every Congressional hearing, someone in the media is doing that for us. We entrust them, as their job, to look at what the government is doing and warn the people if something doesn’t seem right.

Explain that the news media has often been the source of some of the most important information—including Watergate (may need to explain this one), the Pentagon Papers (also might need to be explained), and the war on Iraq. But more recently, as digital media has changed our understanding of the press and the profit models for how the press sustains itself, traditional journalism is struggling.

“News literacy” is one way we can understand the traditional conventions of journalism, the current state of the news media, and our role as media consumers. This week, we’re going to learn more about what, exactly, news literacy is all about.

**2. Understanding the concept**—10 minutes

Write the terms “news” and “literacy” on the board next to each other, with space underneath for descriptors. Ask students to first define what news is (information, knowledge, current and relevant facts, etc). Then, ask students to define literacy (the ability to read and write, to understand a specific knowledge area, to comprehend information about a subject). Given these two words, what, then, do they assume is meant by the phrase news literacy?

As one organization puts it, “To be news literate is to build knowledge, think critically, act civilly and participate in the democratic process.” —Robert R. McCormick Foundation

Essentially, news literacy is the process of making oneself an informed, participatory, engaged, conscious news producer and consumer. It means we don’t sit in the passenger seat anymore when it comes to understanding how the news media affects our world and what we can do about it.

**3. Think-Pair-Share—**10 minutes

Pair students up, and have them take turns reading the news literacy concepts found on the handout. As they read each concept, students should stop and discuss whether they agree with that concept and why. They can discuss any personal experiences with information or media that have shaped their perceptions of these concepts.

Next, assign each pair one of the main concepts, and instruct them to come up with a specific, recent news media example that illustrates that concept. They will share this example with the class during the last 15 minutes. For instance, for number 4, one pair of students might remember how Twitter users posted many tweets with inaccurate information about the Boston marathon bombing.

**4. Contextualize and present**—15 minutes

Go around the room and allow each group to share their recent news media example and explain how it relates to the news literacy concept they were assigned. Other students can offer feedback on how well this example relates, or they can expand on that example with additional information.

**Main Concepts of News Literacy**

Created by Baruch College Professor Geanne Rosenberg and Alan Miller, director of the News Literacy Project, in collaboration with Dean Miller, director of Stony Brook University’s News Literacy Center, and Tom Rosenstiel, founder and director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism. Reprinted with permission—for educational use only.

1. Informed citizens are essential to good government and free society.
2. There is a public value to sharing accurate, newsworthy information.
3. The Internet has changed how people receive news information and now people have to take a more active role in becoming well informed and sharing accurate information.
4. Accurate information is available online, but so is poor quality, misleading information.
5. The Internet makes it possible to independently fact check and verify information by looking at multiple information providers.
6. In assessing accuracy of information, it is important to consider who is providing it and their sources and whether the information includes verifiable facts and key perspectives as opposed to opinions and unsubstantiated conclusions.
7. To be well informed, one should get news from multiple outlets representing different perspectives.
8. It’s important to follow a story over time to be able to trust the information.
9. Some news and information has a strong bias, and there are ways to recognize this.
10. One should be skeptical of information based purely on anonymous or biased sources.
11. It’s important to be aware of one’s own biases and assumptions and seek reliable information that challenges one’s own views.
12. It is important to be open minded rather than having fixed opinions that can’t be changed even with new facts.