

***The Changing American Newsroom***

A lesson on challenges news media face in adapting to a digital age

***Summary***

This lesson explores the changing culture of the newsroom, especially in light of new media technologies. As news gathering and reporting changes, so does our concept of what news is, and our expectations for traditional journalism. Students will discuss perceptions of news coverage and will reflect on their own role as news consumers. This is the second in a week-long unit on news literacy.

***Objectives***

* Students will understand the changing dynamics of today’s newsrooms in order to conceptualize the role of news in contemporary society.
* Students will identify the main challenges in today’s newsrooms.

*Common Core State Standards*

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| **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.8** | Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning. |
| **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.5** | Analyze in detail how an author’s ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter). |
| **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. Access to online video with audio capabilities. This video is approximately 15 minutes long.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/newswar/view/16.html>

2. Viewer response guide (at end of lesson)

3. Comparison chart—old and new media

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

**1. Building background**—15 minutes

Discuss with students the kind of balance in content they expect to see in traditional news media (newspaper, evening news, etc). If students are already familiar with news values (timeliness, proximity, prominence, conflict, consequence, human interest, etc.), this might be a shorter discussion. Remind students that traditionally, news media seeks to strike a balance between publishing what people want to know about, need to know about, and should know about.

Write “want, need, and should” up on the board in three columns, and ask students to give you examples of recent stories that fall under each category. As they provide examples, list them under the proper category. If one category seems to have many more stories, discuss why that is. (Likely, the “want” category will have a longer list.)

Discuss their perceptions of whether the news media covers more “wants, needs, or shoulds” in the daily news. Does it depend on the medium (TV, online, or newspaper?).

Explain that the 15-minute video they will view next discusses some of the new ideas of what “news” looks like, and the challenges that go along with try to meet user demand and meet profit quotas. Tell students to take notes if they want to because they will answer four short questions after the movie is over.

**2. Activity**—15 minutes

Watch “A New Definition For What’s News”

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/newswar/view/16.html?c=2qt>

**3. Reflection**—20 minutes

Ask students to write quietly for the next 20 minutes, responding to all four questions below. They can use their own personal experiences to explain their responses, but they should be sure to write at least 4-5 sentences per question. If they finish early, have the start the follow-on exercise detailed below.

**4. Follow-on assessment**—take home

Ask students to write their own “consumer code of ethics.” This should be a list of 5-10 things they will do, actions they will take, or habits they will adopt in order to be more engaged and informed news consumers. For each item, they must describe the action and then explain in 2-3 sentences why it is important and what the goal of the action is. The next day, have students tape their codes to the classroom wall and sign their names as a pledge to adhere to this code for one week. In one week, have a follow-up discussion about the exercise. What went well? What didn’t? Was it easy? What fell through the cracks? What did they learn?

**“A New Definition For What’s News”**

A viewer response guide for PBS *Frontline’s* segment on what is news

1. During the introduction, one newscaster says: “We’re judging journalism by the same standards that we apply to entertainment. That may be one of the greatest tragedies in the history of journalism.” Respond to this statement. To what standards is he referring? Why are those standards a bad fit for journalism?

2. A producer of John Stewart’s *Comedy Central* said that the show’s success is really a reflection of other people’s/news organizations’ failures. What do you think he means here? How are news organizations failing?

3. The same producer describes today’s media as “horrible news, broadcast horribly.” Is this too cynical? Are we putting too much pressure on journalists to keep us informed when we, too, share the obligation and responsibility to be well-informed citizens?

4. ABC President David Westin said “News is what’s important to people.” What if what’s important to people isn’t useful or current? How do journalists create content that addresses this dilemma or balances out what people need to know, want to know, and should know?