

## **Following a Story for Reliability (Trayvon Martin Shooting) -- News Literacy Lesson**

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### **AIM**

How do we know if a news story is reliable? How can we evaluate the reliability of news reports, examining the Trayvon Martin - George Zimmerman (story)?

### **Objective**

At the end of the lesson, the students will be able to:

- identify the type of report presented
- judge its reliability, based on news deconstruction process/steps
- understand the importance of following a news story over time

### **News literacy terms to be incorporated:**

- Direct v. indirect evidence
- Truth and Verification
- Balance, fairness, bias, context

### **Learning Standards Met in the Lesson**

*New York State Standards:*

- Standard 1: History of the United States
- Standard 5: Civics, Citizenship and Government

*Common Core Standards:*

- **RH.11-12.2.** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.
- **RH.11-12.3.** Evaluate various explanations for actions or events and determine which explanation best accords with textual evidence, acknowledging where the text leaves matters uncertain.
- **RH.11-12.6.** Evaluate authors' differing points of view on the same historical event or issue by assessing the authors' claims, reasoning, and evidence.
- **RH.11-12.7.** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats and media (e.g., visually, quantitatively, as well as in words) in order to address a question or solve a problem.

- **RH.11-12.8.** Evaluate an author’s premises, claims, and evidence by corroborating or challenging them with other information.
- **RH.11-12.9.** Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

### **Values/Life Skills:**

Students will learn critical thinking skills through the evaluation of news reports, after being equipped with evaluation tools. They can apply this to other news stories and information in the future. It will also reinforce the importance of not trusting the first/single source read to give the full story.

### **Suggested Vocabulary:**

- Fairness
- Balance
- Corroboration
- Verification
- Authoritative

### **Introducing the Lesson**

- Begin with Image/ illustration: Side-by-side photos of Martin and Zimmerman- Martin in “hoodie” photo, next to Zimmerman in sober “mugshot” type shot (images that were initially shown when story broke). *Ask students:* What’s your first impression of each person, based on these images? Why?
- Next, listen to the edited 911, call followed by the actual 911 call. *Ask Students:* How can sound be deceptive? Why?

### **Strategy for the lesson:**

1. After the introduction activities students will be placed in groups of 3-5 students. Students will each be responsible for either watching a news report or reading a news story. They will complete the Deconstruction Worksheet for their piece.
2. Next, each group will present a summary of their group’s news report and the instructor will ask them questions regarding the Deconstruction Worksheet.
3. After each group presents, group members will write on the board the main things they know after deconstructing their assigned piece.

4. After all of the groups present the students will look at all of the things they “knew” on the board. Do any items have to be crossed out in light of new information?

### **Pivotal Questions:**

- How can we assess the reliability of news?
  - What do I know?
  - How do I know?
  - What don't I know?
- What evidence did you find the most compelling? The least compelling?
- Why might this story be important to follow even if the trial has not yet happened?

### **Lesson Summary:**

Do you have a fuller picture of what happened that night now that you have looked at a variety of sources? Did the “truth” change over time?

### **Lesson extensions and connections:**

Follow up activities could include:

- Students continue to follow progress of story over time, as it continues to develop.
- Students connect this case to the 2nd Amendment. This lesson could open with the question for George Zimmerman, did the gun make this situation better or worse?
- Students could then read more about “Stand Your Ground” laws.
- Did the SYG laws protect Zimmerman?
- Do you think these laws should be constitutional? Students could read a variety of news stories to help them debate this topic.

### **Attachments, materials and sources:**

- **Trayvon Martin Neighborhood Watch Shooting: 911 Tapes - ABC News 3/18/12**  
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4IV9sr3GVw>  
*TV report by a major news network relating the events of the night Trayvon Martin was killed a few days after the incident. Example of a piece that was not particularly balanced or fair.*

- **Trayvon Martin: a typical teen who loved video games, looked forward to prom - Miami Herald 3/22/12**  
<http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/03/22/v-fullstory/2708960/trayvon-martin-a-typical-teen.html>  
*Newspaper story providing more background on Trayvon Martin. Example of “burying” a potentially significant piece of information related to fairness/balance is shown in paragraphs 9-10 (numbers inserted in text), which mention Martin’s “nonviolent behavioral issues” in school, as well as the fact that he had been suspended for 10 days.*
- **George Zimmerman: Prelude to a shooting - Reuters 4/25/12**  
<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/04/25/us-usa-florida-shooting-zimmerman-idUSBRE83O18H20120425>  
*Newspaper story providing more background on George Zimmerman. Provides evolution of events preceding the shooting. Example of “burying” a potentially significant piece of information is shown in paragraphs 15-18 which describe a series of recent break-ins which have taken place in the community, several involving teenagers of color.*
- **New Evidence in Trayvon Martin Shooting - MSNBC 5/16/12**  
<http://video.msnbc.msn.com/nightly-news/47453093#47453093>  
*TV report by a major news network a couple of months after the shooting. Results of coroner’s report on Martin are released, as well as a medical examiner’s report on Zimmerman released by his doctor. Example of progression of a story.*
- **Lead Detective in Trayvon Martin Case Reassigned - WFTV News 6/26/12**  
<http://www.wftv.com/news/news/local/lead-investigator-trayvon-martin-case-transferred-/nPfWf/>  
*TV report by a local station (Orlando, FL), near the site of the shooting in Sanford, FL. Example of progression of a story, as well as revealing differences in reports done by local vs. a national news outlet.*