

Unit: Choose the News

This unit guides students as they explore how the news is chosen, becoming more informed and critical news consumers as they deepen their understanding of the process by which the free press operates. It includes pre- and post-visit activities designed to bracket the Choose the News NewseumED class, plus a class-specific Newseum gallery guide. Through these experiences, students get a chance to try being editors and reporters, laying out their own newspapers and investigating what's news in their community and beyond.

Note: You can find additional activities, worksheets and handouts related to Choose the News by searching EDTools on NewseumED.

OBJECTIVE: Students understand the process by which news stories are selected for publication and the impact of this process on their understanding of the world around them.

TARGET AUDIENCE: Elementary and middle school

GUIDING QUESTIONS

- What is news and how does it affect our daily life?
- Who decides what's news? Does everyone agree?
- Why does news differ from one community to another?
- Why is it important to understand the process behind the news?

KEY TOPICS AND SKILLS

- The role of the free press in our daily lives
- How the news is made
- Current events
- Media literacy
- Collaborative decision-making

UNIT CONTENTS

1. Before Your Visit
 - **My Local News:** Students learn how to conduct historical and oral research in their communities to discover how the news reflects the readership's interests.
2. During Your Visit
 - **NewseumED Class – Choose the News:** Go behind the scenes to discover how newspaper editors decide what to put on their front pages. Students work in teams to design their own front pages in a race to make deadline.
 - **Choose the News Gallery Guide:** Students go through the Today's Front Pages Gallery to understand how the content of a front page reflects community interests, concerns and values.
3. After Your Visit

- **The Medium Shapes the Message:** Students analyze different news sources to gain an understanding of how today's diverse media environment shapes the information we receive.



Before Your Visit: My Local News

Students learn how to conduct historical and oral research in their communities to discover how the news reflects the readership's interests.

GRADE LEVEL: Elementary and middle school

TIME: More than 90 minutes

MATERIALS: My Local News worksheet (download), copies of at least one local newspaper's front page (print or online), computers with Internet access

PREPARE

1. Print copies of the worksheet, one for each student.
2. Bookmark websites with local census reports. Possible sources include:
 - <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/index.html> (contemporary census data)
 - <http://mapserver.lib.virginia.edu/> (historical census data)

DO

1. Ask: What do you know about your community? Who lives there? What are their interests?
2. Distribute the worksheet and give students time to complete the census activity.
3. Have students identify a local resident to interview and prepare five questions to ask this person.
4. For homework, students interview the resident, then analyze a local newspaper.

DISCUSS

As a group, students compare and contrast their findings. Questions include:

- How similar or different are residents' interests? Why do you think that is?
- What news source are residents most likely to read for local news? Other news?
- How closely do the front page stories reflect your interviewee's interests? The common interests of the residents?
- Based on the census data, how closely do you think the front page stories respond to community interests? Explain your reasoning.
- How well do the news sources cover topics interesting to you? If you can't find stories that interest you, how could you change that?

During Your Visit: Gallery Guide

Students go through the Today's Front Pages Gallery on Level 6 to understand how the content of a front page reflects community interests, concerns and values.

GRADE LEVEL: Elementary and middle school

TIME: Under 30 minutes

MATERIALS: Choose the News Gallery Guide (download)

After Your Visit: The Medium Shapes the Message

Guide your class through a discussion to analyze different news sources, helping students gain an understanding of how today's diverse media environment shapes the information we receive.

AUDIENCE: Elementary and middle school

TIME: 30-60 minutes

MATERIALS: Four types of news media from the same day, The Medium Shapes the Message worksheet (download)

PREPARE

1. Have available or print four copies of four news media types (one copy per group). Possible sources include:
 - A local newspaper
 - The front page of a newspaper in another state (available daily at www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages)
 - A homepage of an international news site (for example: www.bbc.com, www.xinhuanet.com/english or www.aljazeera.com)
 - A page from a blog (for example: www.pressthink.org or www.drudgereport.com)
 - A printout of a news-based Twitter feed (for example: PBS NewsHour at @Newshour, The Wall Street Journal at @WSJ)
2. Print copies of The Medium Shapes the Message worksheet, one per student.

DO

1. Break your class into four groups. Give each group a copy of the local newspaper, a printout of each of the other three types of media and The Medium Shapes the Message worksheet.
2. In groups, students analyze each media type and complete their worksheets.

DISCUSS

Compare and contrast students' findings. Possible prompts include:

- Which news media that you looked at seems to cover the most stories? The least? Why?
- Who do you think the audience of each news source is? How are their demographics similar/different?
- In the case of stories that appear in more than one place, how does the coverage differ from one source to the next? Why is it different?
- How does the content and layout (content organization) of online news organizations differ from that of print news sources? From social media sources?
- Why do these front pages and home pages feature different stories?
- Which source is most reliable? Least reliable? Most likely to be the first to have breaking news? How do you know?
- What will future media will look like? Will they resemble something today, or go in a totally new direction?