
MY WORLD LESSON #2

How Do Journalists Gather News?

Overview

Students explore the processes that generate the news they encounter daily. They learn to ask questions to uncover details in a news item and explore potential news sources. Students will discuss the importance of curiosity in shaping news then watch the BBC *My World* video “How Do Journalists Find the News?” to gain insight into information gathering and analysis. Students will then apply their new knowledge to finding a news item for their school or community, developing creativity and critical thinking.

Target audience: English and Language Arts, Social Studies, Media Studies. Ages 11–14.

Class time: 45-60 minutes

Student handouts: “How Do Journalists Gather News?” Informational article, Guided Practice, Check your media literacy assessment.

Materials: Computer or tablet with internet connection.

Class structure and pacing

1. 5 minutes Class warm-up activity
2. 15 minutes Information article: “How Do Journalists Gather News?”
3. 10 minutes *My World* video: [“How Do Journalists Find the News?”](#)
4. 5 minutes Whole-class discussion of focus questions
5. 10 minutes Guided Practice
6. 10 minutes Media Literacy Assessment

Procedure

1. Begin class with a brief warm-up activity.

■ **Open by presenting a scenario related to a proposed change in the school, such as a new schedule or dress code or other issue relevant to your community. Have students use all six question words (*who, what, when, where, why, how*) to create questions that would uncover details. Then discuss the role of curiosity and desire to find out more detail in gathering the news:**

- What is curiosity? Why is curiosity important to a journalist’s job?
- How is it helpful to use all six question words?
- Who could you ask these questions (about the school or community) to find answers?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Identify the processes and sources of news gathering.

Ask investigative questions using *who, what, when, where, why, and how*.

Discuss the role of intellectual curiosity in shaping the news.

Apply the purpose of responsible journalism.

■ **Explain that by the end of this lesson, they will be able to:**

- Identify the processes and sources of news gathering.
- Ask a variety of investigative questions.
- Discuss the role of curiosity in shaping the news.

2. Analyze the process of searching for stories by having students read the informational article, “How Do Journalists Gather News?”

Instructional options:

■ **Read each section as a class. Stop after each section to note and reflect on key concepts, such as:**

- The place of curiosity in news gathering
- How journalists seek more details by asking a variety of question types
- How journalists find news
- The value of a summary lead
- Methods for gathering information, evidence, and data

■ **Read the entire article in groups and discuss the question, “What are good ways for journalists to find news?”**

3. Present the *My World* video segment, “How Do Journalists Find the News?” to introduce students to professional news gatherers.

■ **Before screening, write these questions on the board. Ask students to make note of the answers as they watch the video.**

- Where might a journalist find information for a story?
- What questions do journalists ask as they research a story?
- How does being curious help journalists do their job?
- How has the internet changed the way journalists work?

■ **Ask students to share their observations.**

4. Guide students’ analysis of the topics and concepts in the video and article through whole-class or small-group discussion of focus questions.

■ **Ask students:**

- How has news gathering changed in the internet age?
- How do you think it has stayed the same?
- What skills and qualities does a journalist need?
- Where do journalists find ideas and information for stories?
- Can you think of other ways that journalists could look for stories?

■ **Model using critical thinking skills when responding or adding to student answers.**

🗨️ LESSON VOCABULARY

byline *n.* A notation that gives the name of the writer of an article

contextual *adj.* relating to the circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea

curiosity *n.* an urge to learn or know something

dateline *n.* a notation that states where and when a news article was written or filed

news agency *n.* an organization that collects news stories and distributes them to print, broadcast, and online news outlets or publishers

press release *n.* a brief written statement by an individual or organization about an event or situation

social media *n.* websites and digital apps used to create and share content among a network of users

summary lead *noun phrase.* the opening sentence or paragraph of a news article summarizing its subject; sometimes called the topline or introduction

trending *adj.* currently popular on social media websites

wire service *n.* a news agency

5. Ask students to apply what they have learned by using the Guided Practice sheet to search for local news stories as a journalist.

- **Allow students to work individually or in pairs as they brainstorm potential ways to find information for local news reports.**

- **Direct students to complete the Guided Practice handout using what they have learned from the lesson.**

6. Assess what students have learned and provide a chance to write about their views on the process of finding and gathering news.

- **Direct students to complete the assessment handout.**

- **Allow students to refer to their notes if needed when responding to the short answer questions.**

 **TIPS FROM**

 **Microsoft Education**

Create engaging learning experiences tied to this Lesson with the following free Microsoft Education tools:

Utilize Flipgrid with this Lesson

For further discussion of focus questions, post the prompts and students can share their key learnings via [Flipgrid](#). Continue the conversation on Flipgrid!

Facilitate collaborative learning

Post warm up questions from the lesson into Teams and copy the guided practice into OneNote where students can collaborate, and seamlessly upload articles and videos to evaluate different types of news. Free education collaboration tools are at your fingertips with [Office 365](#).

Extend and connect

ELEMENTARY/PRIMARY

(ages 6–11)

Explain that journalists ask questions to gather news. Write *who*, *what*, *where*, *when*, *why*, and *how* on the board. Tell students that most questions journalists ask include one of those words. Prompt students to imagine a news story about a new animal at the zoo. Write an example question on the board, such as *What is the animal's name?* Give students cards and ask them to write down questions they might ask to learn more about this event.

HIGH SCHOOL/SECONDARY

(ages 14–19)

Discuss how news is gathered from electronic sources today. Ask students for examples of stories that could be researched on the internet (for example, a drought in Africa for international news or flood damage for local news). Ask students: How could you narrow the search to develop a more specific story? How could you use question words to focus your research? (For example: Who are the officials or scientists who might give a journalist a statement about conditions in the area? What weather patterns contributed to the drought or flood? When has this happened before? Where are the people who were affected? Why did this happen?) Solicit examples of other stories that might start with an internet search.

EDUCATION STANDARDS

Media Literacy

ISTE 3a Plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.

ISTE 3b Locate, organize, analyze, evaluate, synthesize, and ethically use information from a variety of sources and media.

ISTE 3d Build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.

CCSS English and Language Arts Reading Informational Texts

RI.6.1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

RI.6.7 Integrate information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words to develop a coherent understanding of a topic or issue.

RI.7.3 Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).

RI.8.2 Determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas; provide an objective summary of the text.

CCSS Social Studies

RH.6-8.1 Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

RH.6-8.3 Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies (e.g., how a bill becomes law, how interest rates are raised or lowered).

RH.6-8.7 Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

How Do Journalists Gather News?

The news we see, hear, and read begins every day with the judgment of journalists. Curiosity and a desire to share what they've learned drive journalists to find and gather the news.

News is happening everywhere, all the time; it could be a natural disaster, conflict, election results, the start of an epic journey or the end of a ball game. The journalist's job is to establish the facts of what has happened or is happening, using various sources of information. Data and documents can be useful **sources**. Or, a source can be a person involved in the story that the journalist speaks to by phone, social media, or in person. Even journalists can be sources of information if they witness an event.

Where Do Journalists Find Potential News?

A potential news story could come from anywhere. But some journalists have assigned topics or specialized areas such as politics or the arts that they cover. Sometimes they are limited to a geographic area. Notice when a particular writer is frequently listed in the byline of certain types of articles; it is a good indicator that the journalist has that assignment if not explicitly stated. (Note that not all articles are "signed" or have the writer's name attached.) The journalist's assignment shapes and guides the search for news.

International journalists might have to go to areas of conflict and risk their personal safety to get a story. They will talk to people and develop local sources of information. Local journalists might listen to police and fire scanners, attend city or town council meetings, or talk to superintendents and teachers' union presidents or people in the community. They too may have a source or two in City Hall, pointing them toward matters of general interest. By getting to know the people and places where they work, journalists build knowledge and relationships to help them source news stories.

Journalists assigned to a specific section of news, such as sports, entertainment, or science and technology will need to work in slightly different ways. They might cover scheduled events by attending and reporting on what they saw and heard in person. A science journalist will have a particularly research-driven job, reading scholarly journals or conducting refined internet searches, but will also need to travel to locations, see for themselves and talk to people in order to find a news story. Meanwhile, a sports reporter following a baseball team

LESSON VOCABULARY

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trending *adj.* currently popular on social media websites

wire service *n.* a news agency

from city to city will need to not only understand the game, but have a deep knowledge of the history and statistics of the sport in order to give the readers context. The deeper the knowledge and understanding journalists have of their subject, the better journalists can explain the significance of events to readers.

As the use of electronic media becomes more commonplace, journalists often get ideas for news stories from the internet and from social media applications such as Facebook and Twitter. The trending feature on social media allows a journalist to see which topics are spiking in popularity and interest. Comments by friends, celebrities, politicians, and business leaders can provide insights into events and lead journalists to unexpected stories that they then need to verify or debunk.

But in many cases journalists find news by talking to people they already know and trust and sometimes people they have never met. Some people call newsrooms and offer tips about something or someone positive; otherwise, that might not come to light. Often, newsrooms receive press releases which are official statements from individuals or organizations announcing something important, or making an official statement about something that has happened.

What kinds of questions do journalists ask?

Almost every news story is built around answers to questions that begin with ‘who’, ‘what’, ‘when’, ‘where’ and ‘why’. ‘How’ is also likely to come up in most interviews, research efforts, or observations. You can often work backwards to find the questions that were answered in any given piece of news.

The following sentence is a **summary lead**, a concise statement about an event, opening a story with its most important details: *Firefighters from three stations fought a fast-moving fire that destroyed a warehouse in Providence Monday night.*

That one line of information is the result of several questions that uncover important details.



FROM QUESTIONS TO NEWS	
Who was involved?	Firefighters from three stations
What happened?	A fast-moving fire destroyed a warehouse.
Where did it happen?	In Providence, Rhode Island.
When did it happen?	On Monday night.
How did it happen?	Such stories will often cite the cause of the fire, known or otherwise, not long after the lead.

What are the means and methods of data collection?

The internet has, of course, revolutionized data collection. Stories of much greater depth and detail can be written on tight deadlines, with answers of all kinds including **contextual** information at everyone's fingertips. For example: *Does this local incidence of heart disease represent a trend? How does what has happened in the last five years compare to the previous decade? How is this community statistically different from those nearby or further away?* Popular search engines such as Google, Bing, and Ask.com are powerful tools in the hands of a journalist, not only for tracking down details about a possible news story, but also for finding witnesses or participants in significant news events and finding statistics to support or explain claims. The internet might have the data to flesh out a story, or to put the situation in perspective. Without online research, such questions would be challenging to answer in a hurry.

Among the traditional sources journalists rely on for gathering news stories are news agencies. A **news agency** is a large organization that gathers, writes, and distributes news from around the nation or the world. News agencies, sometimes called **wire services**, do not publish news for the general public to read. Instead, they distribute their news stories to local, national, and international news publishers including newspapers, radio and television broadcasters, and government agencies. These secondary news outlets pay the news agency subscription fees for access to the agency's news stories. In this way, local and national journalists can learn about up-to-the-minute breaking news from far-flung places they would otherwise not have access to. To tell where and when a news agency story was filed, look at the **dateline**, which is text at the beginning of an article that lists the location and date. As with other print sources, the articles prepared by news agencies may lead a journalist to other news stories.

Directions: Begin the search for new stories close to home. Use the chart below to develop local possibilities.
 (The first row provides sample answers.)

Where could you go to look for news?	Why might that be a good place to go?	Who would you first talk to?	How would you begin?	What kinds of questions would you start with?
<i>The principal or head teacher's office.</i>	<i>The school leadership is always planning new programs and initiatives.</i>	<i>His or her administrative assistance, to request an appointment.</i>	<i>By practicing interview skills with friend or family.</i>	<i>Do you have any new programs or plans slated for the next school year? What can you tell me about those programs?</i>

1. Which statement best describes an essential characteristic shared by many successful journalists?
- a. the education to know the answers to questions that arise when looking for news
 - b. a curiosity that drives them to identify potential news stories all around them
 - c. a driving need to persuade people to view events from their perspective
 - d. excellent personal contacts in different community organizations

2. Which statement best describes a journalist's assignment?
- a. the journalist's instinct for finding newsworthy stories
 - b. the sources a journalist uses when researching stories
 - c. the rigorous research process that responsible journalists use to verify stories
 - d. the subject area or territory that a journalist is responsible for monitoring for stories

3. Identify three types of sources that a news journalist might use to find a story?

4. What is the value of a summary lead?

5. How has the internet changed the way some stories are researched?

6. Write four questions you might ask as a journalist doing a story about the launch of a new cell phone.

Who _____ What _____
When _____ Where _____

7. **REFLECT** Think about the purpose of journalism. Journalists have a responsibility to the public to uncover and share important, or newsworthy, information. How does this affect news gathering?

Answer key

1. Which statement best describes an essential characteristic shared by many successful journalists?

- a. the education to know the answers to questions that arise when looking for news
- b. a curiosity that drives them to identify potential news stories all around them
- c. a driving need to persuade people to view events from their perspective
- d. excellent personal contacts in different community organizations

2. Which statement best describes a journalist's assignment?

- a. the journalist's instinct for finding newsworthy stories
- b. the sources a journalist uses when researching stories
- c. the rigorous research process that responsible journalists use to verify stories
- d. the subject area or territory that a journalist is responsible for monitoring for stories

3. Identify three types of sources that a news journalist might use to find a story?

Answers will vary. Possible answers: personal contacts, public officials, tips from public, talking with people, internet searches, new agencies

4. What is the value of a summary lead?

Answers will vary. Sample answers: A summary lead concisely delivers the most important information in a news story, at the top of that story.

5. How has the internet changed the way some stories are researched?

Answers will vary. Sample answer: The internet puts a vast storehouse of information at a journalist's fingertips. Internet research adds breadth and depth to news gathering and writing.

6. Write four questions you might ask as a journalist doing a story about the launch of a new cell phone.

Who _____ What _____

When _____ Where _____

Answers: Who is bringing the product to market? What is the product? What does it do? When will the product be available? Where is the product made?

7. **REFLECT** Think about the purpose of journalism. Journalists have a responsibility to the public to uncover and share important, or newsworthy, information. How does this affect news gathering?

Answers will vary. Sample answer: Journalists ask more questions and try to find out as much as they can about an event or story so they can give more accurate information to their readers. Their sense of responsibility might help them to push harder for answers.