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**MY WORLD LESSON #5**

# **Inside the Newsroom**

## Overview

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Students explore the jobs, workflow, and decision-making processes in newsrooms. After guided research, students take on the roles of reporters, editors, producers, and news executives. While they learn to play their roles in developing comprehensive, detailed stories, students come to recognize the essential characteristics of a functioning newsroom. Examining the criteria that news outlets use to evaluate a story's priority or when and how a story will be distributed helps students view headlines and stories in print, radio, TV, and online with a critical eye.

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

**Class time:** 45-60 minutes

**Student handouts:** “Inside the Newsroom” Informational article, “You Decide” Guided practice, Check your media literacy assessment.

**Materials:** Computer or tablet with internet connection.

## Class structure and pacing

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1. 5 minutes Class warm-up discussion
2. 10 minutes *My World* video: [“Who Decides?”](#)
3. 5 minutes Informational article “Inside the Newsroom”
4. 5 minutes Whole-class discussion of focus questions
5. 25 minutes Guided Practice
6. 10 minutes Media Literacy Assessment

## Procedure

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1. Begin class with a brief warm-up discussion.
  - **Open by displaying newspaper headlines or the front pages of news websites. Ask:**
    - Which story do you think will be read more than other stories? Why?
    - Is the story that will have the most readers the most important story? Why or why not?
  - **Explain that by the end of this lesson, they will be able to:**
    - Distinguish between news that is important for the public to know and news that is exploited purely for profit.
    - Identify news that will take a long time to develop, involve multiple sources, and require extensive editing.

### LEARNING OBJECTIVES

**Distinguish** between leading news and general interest stories.

**Recognize** the different roles (reporter, editor, producer) in the decision-making process.

**Identify** appropriate criteria for decisions about what news to include or exclude in a news report.

**Role-play** different positions (jobs) in the decision-making process.

### LESSON VOCABULARY

**coverage** *n.* reporting, investigation, description of a person, group, thing or event by media

**data** *n. (plural)* facts, statistics or information collected for analysis. Symbols gathered and stored for computer operations

**editor** *n.* person responsible for the revision and arrangement of content in a newspaper, magazine, or broadcast

**lead** *n.* a prominent news item

**newsroom** *n.* a site in a building or online where news is written and edited

**producer** *n.* person responsible for the administration and financial oversight of news production who often has input or controlling power over content

- Play the role of a someone who helps to create or produce the news.
- Discuss how digital news and social media have changed newsrooms.

2. Present the My World video segment, “Who Decides?” to introduce students to the role journalists play in deciding what is presented as news.

■ **Before the screening, ask students to note the following as they watch:**

- Different news publishers or outlets
- Who makes decisions about what is included in the news

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

3. Identify and analyze the jobs people do in a traditional newsroom by having students read the informational article, “Inside the Newsroom.”

Options for instruction are:

■ **Read each paragraph as a class. Stop to compare the characteristics of a traditional newsroom with what students saw in the video. Ask:**

- How are they the same? How are they different?
- Which social media tools might work well in a traditional newsroom?
- Why might reliable sources who are known and trusted by reporters be different from agency sources that sell news stories to reporters?

■ **Read the entire article in pairs and discuss the question, “What do the different roles do for a story?”**

4. Assess what students learned from the video and article.

■ **Ask students to work individually or in pairs to compare their notes about the video with the chart in the article.**

5. Provide an opportunity for students to apply what they have learned through Guided Practice in taking on the roles of news people.

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

■ **Teachers may wish to act as “news executives” to guide discussions.**

6. Assess what students have learned and provide them with a chance to express their views about what decisions lie behind the order and prominence of different stories.

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

■ **Allow students to consult their notes if needed for short answers.**

#### LESSON VOCABULARY

**reporters** *n.* a person who gathers and reports news for a news organization

**revenue** *n.* income (money) made by a company or organization

#### 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

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### ELEMENTARY/PRIMARY

(ages 6–11)

Explain that the way journalists gather and distribute news has changed. Use a blank version of the chart in the article (with the headings included) and have volunteers supply descriptions of what they would like to do if they worked in a newsroom. Offer sentence starters, e.g., As a reporter I would be curious about \_\_\_\_\_. I would call or send email to \_\_\_\_\_ so I can find out more about \_\_\_\_\_. I would need to check \_\_\_\_\_ so that \_\_\_\_\_. **Accept reasonable answers.**

### HIGH SCHOOL/SECONDARY

(ages 14–19)

Place students in small groups or pairs. Ask students to look at the front page of a newspaper or webpage for major news organizations. Direct students to analyze the stories on each front page and develop a list of reasons that they think explains why each story is placed where it is. Ask students how they would change the order and why. **Students should show an awareness of audience and editorial priorities.**

#### EDUCATION STANDARDS

##### Media Literacy

ISTE 3b Students evaluate the accuracy, perspective, credibility and relevance of information, media, data or other resources.

ISTE 5a Advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology.

##### CCSS English and Language Arts

Reading Information

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.7.5.a Analyze the use of text features (e.g., graphics, headers, captions) in public documents.

RI.8.7 Evaluate the advantages and disadvantages of using different mediums (e.g., print or digital text, video, multimedia) to present a particular topic or idea.

##### CCSS Social Studies

RH.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).

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

RH.9-10.6 Compare the point of view of two or more authors for how they treat the same or similar topics, including which details they include and emphasize in their respective accounts.

## Inside the Newsroom

**What to choose?** Every day, **reporters, editors, producers,** photographers, and videographers work individually and in teams to create and present news that audiences will find newsworthy. They attempt to decide what is most important to their audience and choose what to do if stories are competing for **coverage**. The order of a news bulletin or placement on a page—which stories are first, second, third, and so on—and the time and space given to each story are the result of carefully balancing audience interest with newsworthiness. For example, if an influential celebrity or important official dies as a result of gun violence, many news teams will make that the biggest story of the day. But what if a group of scientists reveals new evidence related to climate change at almost the same time? The editor-in-chief of a news organization might feel that the climate story should be the lead item because it contains important information that will have an impact on the entire planet. Meanwhile, the producer of a news broadcast might say that their audiences would be more interested in the gun violence story.

**So who decides what is in the news?** A news team may be large or small. It may include reporters, presenters, editors, producers, photographers, videographers, copyeditors, video editors, fact-checkers, and more at a large news organization, or it may be few people who perform multiple roles at a small local outlet. At newspapers, television stations, radio stations, and digital media centers, news teams hold editorial meetings to discuss which stories will get the most coverage or be the **lead** item. Take a look at a typical editorial process. (Note that sources are not the only way that reporters get ideas for stories.)

### Typical Editorial Process for Choosing Stories to Report

Source	Reporter	Editor/Producer	Editorial Meeting
A source contacts a reporter with a tip about an important event—or the reporter contacts known sources. Reporters must evaluate how reliable their sources are before they decide to take a story idea to their editors.	The reporters begin to research the story and contact additional sources while alerting their editors or producers to what they're doing. They may write drafts of the stories for their editors or producers to see.	Editors and producers tell the reporters what is missing or needed for the story. Editors decide who (such as photographer, researcher, etc.) should be assigned to cover the story. Senior editors begin to debate which story should lead the news.	Editors, reporters, and producers bring the stories to the editorial meeting. Senior editors and (sometimes) the editor-in-chief decide which story "leads," how much space or time to give stories, and which stories will be not used, either "shelved" or "killed."

### LESSON VOCABULARY

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**reporters** *n.* a person who gathers and reports news for a news organization

**revenue** *n.* income (money) made by a company or organization

Complex stories often require months or even years to develop. Experienced reporters take time to understand their subjects and the environments in which stories take place. They need reliable sources of information for their reporting—especially if they are in a place where they don't speak the language or know the culture.

**Changes in the Newsroom** Recent studies show that over the last ten years, **newsroom** employment has dropped by over 25%.<sup>1</sup> Most of these jobs were lost at local and national newspapers; they have lost nearly half of their employees. Now, outlets often rely on outside news agencies for information about places where they no longer send reporters. Some media commentators argue that using fewer experienced reporters and editors leads to an inevitable loss of reliable, credible professional journalists who can verify each other's information. This can result in a lack of coverage for important stories. If a story cannot be developed with useful, relevant, true, and timely information, it will lack the key facts, details, and analysis that audiences require if they are to be well informed.

**Is new technology the answer?** Some news executives and business leaders believe that technological innovation means the traditional newsroom is now out-of-date, expensive, and unable to keep to the speed of the digital age. Why hire a photojournalist to go somewhere when a local photographer can take photographs? Why spend time with multiple sources for stories that may never be reported? Further, technology means that a huge amount of **data** can be gathered on audiences, which can help understand and even predict what stories people will consume.

1. Pew Research Center Newsroom Investment. <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2019/07/09/u-s-newsroom-employment-has-dropped-by-a-quarter-since-2008/>

**Directions for Students:** Form groups of 3–5 students to take on the following roles:

- Reporters
- Editors/Producers
- Secondary sources from news agencies (e.g., an employee who reports basic news in short articles)
- Primary sources (e.g., a government official who knows something important)

Students may double up on roles in order to participate in both parts of the activity.

**Part 1 (8–10 minutes)**

- Step 1: The sources quickly scan news agency stories online to find three newsworthy events or to make up fictional news scenarios. The sources alert the reporters of the story ideas.
- Step 2: The reporters ask questions about the stories that will need to be researched and verified, such as *What happened? When did this happen? Who was involved? Who was responsible for \_\_\_\_? Are there witnesses? What is the impact of \_\_\_\_? Why did this happen? Why is this important for the public to know?*

**Part 2 (10–15 minutes)**

- Step 3: Each group attends an editorial meeting to present their ideas to the editors/producers. The group discusses the merits of each idea.
- Step 4: The editors/producers make the final decision about the order in which the stories will be reported. They must give reasons.
- Step 5: The group decides on a headline and collaborates to write a first sentence for the lead story.
- Step 6: Each group shares their news items with the whole class or post to a class bulletin board.

Part 1		Part 2	
Source: Story Events/Ideas	Reporter: Questions	Editor: Why Is This Story Important?	Headline and First Sentence of the Story (Print & Digital Media)
<p><b>Sample: Meteorologists at a conference reveal new findings:</b></p> <p>1) <i>Tropical storms are more frequent and more powerful</i></p> <p>2) ...</p>	<p><b>Sample:</b></p> <p><i>Who revealed the findings?</i></p> <p><i>What is their supporting data?</i></p> <p><i>Why is this important?</i></p>	<p><b>Sample: Meteorologist say that action is necessary to prevent...</b></p>	<p><b>Sample: Scientists Agree Action is Needed</b></p> <p><i>The World Meteorological Organization met on Thursday to discuss its most recent findings about changing weather patterns.</i></p>

**1. Who creates the news?**

- a. reporters and researchers
- b. editors and producers
- c. photographers and videographers
- d. all of the above

**2. Why does a complex news story sometimes take a long time to develop?**

- a. Journalists need time to research the subject and find credible sources.
- b. Journalists have to coordinate the schedules of many people working on the story.
- c. Journalists prefer to wait to publish a story until it will be of interest to the audience.
- d. All the above

**3. What is the purpose of an editorial meeting?**

**4. Discuss how newsrooms have changed in the past ten years.**

**5. Use your notes, organizer, memory, experience, and imagination to “modernize” the traditional model for a newsroom. Think of technology you could use and people (sources) you could consult. Use the sentence starters as needed.**

<b>Source</b>	<b>Reporter</b>	<b>Editor/Producer</b>	<b>Editorial Meeting</b>
If I worked at a news agency I would use _____ to help me _____.	If I were a reporter, I would text my sources with questions such as _____.	As an editor I would ask my reporters to be sure to _____.	I think a story about _____ is more important than a story about _____. We should use _____ as a headline.

**6. REFLECT** Think about the function of each of the roles discussed in this lesson. Write a paragraph explaining which position (job) you would like to do. Provide clear explanations for your choice.

## Answer key

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1. Who creates the news?

- a. reporters and researchers
- b. editors and producers
- c. photographers and videographers
- d. all of the above**

2. Why does a complex news story sometimes take a long time to develop?

- a. Journalists need time to research the subject and find credible sources.**
- b. Journalists have to coordinate the schedules of many people working on the story.
- c. Journalists prefer to wait to publish a story until it will be of interest to the audience.
- d. All the above

3. What is the purpose of an editorial meeting?

***To decide how much coverage stories will receive and which story will be the lead***

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4. Discuss how newsrooms have changed in the past ten years.

***Newsrooms use fewer reporters and editors. They rely more on targeted audiences and data.***

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5. Use your notes, organizer, memory, experience, and imagination to “modernize” the traditional model for a newsroom. Think of technology you could use and people (sources) you could consult. Use the sentence starters as needed.

Source	Reporter	Editor/Producer	Editorial Meeting
If I worked at a news agency I would use <b>Twitter</b> to help me <b>stay up to date with my news.</b>	If I were a reporter, I would text my sources with questions such as <b>please provide details about the hurricane you witnessed.</b>	As an editor I would ask my reporters to be sure to <b>verify their sources.</b>	I think a story about <b>water shortages in California</b> is more important than a story about <b>the first day at work for a teenager.</b> We should use _____ as a headline.

6. REFLECT Think about the function of each of the roles discussed in this lesson. Write a paragraph explaining which position (job) you would like to do. Provide clear explanations for your choice.

***Responses will vary. Accept all reasonable answers.***

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