

Story explorers

Educator Instructions

Summary

As a class, students select an event or issue in the news that interests them, then split into research teams to collect and analyze coverage of the subject from different news organizations. Each group is responsible for gathering and analyzing the quality of the reporting from their assigned media outlet(s). They use a K-H-W-L chart (below) to guide their inquiry, research and reflection.

Essential questions

- Do news media sometimes cover a subject too much? Do they sometimes cover other subjects too little?
- What steps do credible news organizations take to try to make sure what they report is accurate?
- Are some sources of information more credible than others? Why or why not?
- Whose interests should journalists represent? What is the best way for them to do this?
- What subjects regularly covered in the news (or news “beats”) are young people well suited to track and analyze?
- What are some ways that you can take action when you find a piece of inaccurate information?

Word wall terms

[Straight news](#)
[Standard](#)
[Credible](#)
[Documentation](#)
[Sources](#)
[Verification](#)
[Fairness](#)
[Newsworthiness](#)

Preparation

1. Review this activity and decide how many class periods you would like to devote to it. To teach this lesson in a single period, you will need to eliminate or combine some steps
 - To expedite the activity, we recommend combining steps 1-3 and creating collections of news and other information for student groups to examine in step 7.
2. Make copies of NLP’s K-H-W-L chart (or your own adaptation). A master copy of this chart is attached as the last page of this activity.
3. Prepare a short list of events or issues that have been in the news over the last month that you think would interest your students (in case they struggle to identify one in discussion).

Learning objective

I can explain what makes an issue or event newsworthy to me, and can collect and evaluate news reports about such subjects.

Suggested grade level(s):

7-9, 10-12+

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Activity

1. As a “Do Now”, ask students to write down three news stories or newsworthy events from the last month that they feel are relevant or important to them.
2. Ask students to discuss their lists in small groups and collaborate to decide on one story to nominate as the most important and relevant.
3. Elicit all groups’ nominations and write them on the board, then use whatever method you prefer to have students decide on a single story that is most important and relevant to them as a class. This can involve discussion, consensus or voting. (If a single story or event gets a clear majority of nominations from small groups, you may decide to skip this step.)
4. Hand out NLP’s K-H-W-L chart and ask student groups to fill out the **Know** section with facts and details about their selected subject that they consider to be confirmed.
5. The **Heard** box should be filled in with details students have “heard” from others – including rumors or speculation on social media – but about which they are uncertain.
6. Be sure to clarify that the chart should reflect the current moment. In other words, if a detail that a student initially “heard” about was subsequently confirmed in some way, it should be listed under **Know**.
7. Now assign each group of students one or more news outlets to focus on as they analyze coverage of the story or event that the class selected. (If the story is very recent, it may still be developing. If this is the case, you should consider allowing students to track the story over the course of two or more classes/days.)

Depending on the nature of the story (local, regional, national, international) you may want to assign the small groups some or all of the following:

- local television news (network affiliates)
 - local newspaper
 - local news radio
 - local or community digital news outlet
 - community social media page(s)
 - news coverage from around the state or region
 - national network television news
 - national cable television news
 - coverage by nationally read newspapers, news magazines or websites
8. Now have students fill out the **Want** section of the graphic organizer with questions about things they want to know related to the subject and/or their assigned media beat. For example, “Did the local news lead with this story?” or “Is the perspective of a young person included in the newspaper reports about this subject?” or “Is everything I **Know** (consider to be confirmed) included in the pieces from this source?”
 9. Once their research and analyses are complete, each group should:
 - Go back to the items in their **K** section and circle anything written there that they discovered to be either false or unconfirmed;
 - Go back to the items in their **H** section and circle anything written there that they discovered to be either false or unconfirmed, and to put a box around anything written there that they confirmed as true in their research;
 - Complete the **L** box on their graphic organizers with the following two types of outcomes:
 - » What they **learned** about the subject or story (details they were not aware of, details they previously believed but were proven false by their research, things they heard about the subject that were either verified or proven false by their research, etc.)

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- » What they learned about the coverage of their assigned news source, including:
 - a. How much focus or attention the subject received;
 - b. Whether statements and assertions were well-supported;
 - c. If the information was fair and accurate (free of what they feel is overt bias and demonstrable errors).

Note: Because bias in news is a subjective determination – and our personal biases often cause us to perceive bias in news, especially when details or views we don’t agree with are represented in a story – we encourage you to take time to guide students to reflect on their initial perceptions of coverage.

Also note: The “[Understanding Bias](#)” lesson on NLP’s Checkology virtual classroom provides students with a strong understanding of news media bias.

10. When their charts are complete, have each student group share the highlights from their research and analyses – especially such notable outcomes as details that they thought were true but were proven false, any errors or instances of clear or overt bias that they found in coverage, or any other aspects of the research process that the group found highly engaging, surprising or interesting.
11. Have students use the reflection space on the second page of the K-H-W-L chart in one of the following ways, or devise your own reflection prompt:
 - What questions do you still have about the subject you researched and the way various media outlets covered it? What could you do to find good answers to these questions?
 - If you and your classmates found errors or overt bias in one or more news outlets, what do you think you should do next?
 - » **Teachers:** If students find errors, overt bias or other problematic elements in the information they review during this assignment, please consider urging them to take action by writing a letter or email to the editor, respectfully engaging with the journalist on social media or over email, creating a blog post or other public statement documenting the issues or some other response.
 - What is the most important thing you learned during this assignment? What would be an effective way to share what you learned with your friends and family?
 - Did the information you gathered and analyzed differ significantly from the information the other groups in your class found? If so, how did they differ? If not, why do you think this is?

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Assessment

This evergreen activity is intended to produce several learning outcomes, and it is designed to engage students by giving them a choice about the subject of their analysis.

When students fill out the two initial boxes (**K** and **H**), you might try to encourage them to reflect on their current ways of knowing. How do they know that the items they placed under **K** are accurate and confirmed? Where did they hear the details that they placed under **H**? Do they lend varying amounts of credence to the things they hear, depending on the source? Why or why not?

The questions students write under **W** are intended to help keep this activity student-centered and to help students draw their research into focus. The more time you spend helping your students refine the questions in their **W** columns, the more thoughtful and productive their research will tend to be. You may even want to give each student two copies of the chart so they can revise.

The **L** section of the chart is a space for students to self-assess and a place for you to gauge the effectiveness of the selected subject as a driver of news literacy learning. If students struggle to find items to write under **L**, it is not necessarily an indication that they did anything wrong. They may have known a great deal about the subject coming into the assignment or may just need some help articulating what they learned.

Finally, we strongly recommend that you have students take note of how many of the original details in their **K** and **H** sections were proven false. This will vary from student to student, but those with a high number of mistaken impressions and inaccurate rumors in those two boxes have an opportunity to learn a particularly important news literacy lesson as they reflect on this assignment and their own information habits.

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KHWL Chart

What I **know**



What I've **heard**



What I **want to know**



What I've **learned**

