

A Tale of Two Schools

By Lorenza Arengo Yarnes

There are many stories being told in the mass media, from TV comedies to billboard ads, but perhaps nowhere are the stories more believed and less questioned than when it comes to the news media. Even though the stories journalists tell may be more informational than entertaining, they are still constructed messages with embedded values and points of view. The misleading assumption that news can be communicated without bias, stresses the need for students to engage with the stories they see and hear in news media to question the perspectives and information being represented and omitted. This lesson helps students recognize the constructed nature of news as students create two school newspapers that report the same stories but tell two very different tales.

Objectives: Students will be able to...

1. create different photographs using photographic techniques of camera angles, lighting, and composition.
2. write non-fiction stories about people they interview.
3. write creative fictional stories about real people in imaginary situations.
4. create two school newsletters that portray a fictional version and a non-fictional version of people at their school.
5. understand that all messages have embedded values and points of view (ML Core Concept #4).

Material/Preparation:

1. Camera
2. Paper
3. Computer with MS Office or other writing program
4. Printer
5. Chart paper
6. Markers

Teaching Strategies:

- I. Discuss journalism and photojournalism
 - Review previous lessons about the three photographic techniques of camera angle, lighting, and composition. (See MediaLit Kit™ lesson Guide 2A)
 - Discuss the differences between fiction and non-fiction and ask:
 - ? How can we know if something is real or made up?
 - ? What are some techniques that writers and photographers use to make their stories appear believable?
 - Chart student ideas in a Venn diagram, separating the techniques we associate with non-fiction vs. fiction. In the overlapping center, list the techniques that could be used for both.

II. Planning the project

- Explain to the class that they will try out some of the ideas just discussed by creating two school newspapers, one fictional and the other non-fiction.
- Break the class into teams of 3 to 4 students and generate a list of people at school whom they would like to interview and photograph for the newspaper.
- As a whole class, discuss the different people they want in their newspaper and negotiate which teams will be responsible for which people. Each team should have one person to photograph and interview.
- Have each team design a plan for how they will go about this project:
 1. Plan how and when to contact the subject to see if this person is willing to be interviewed and photographed. Explain to the subject that you will be making a non-fictional story about them and a fictional story about them. If they agree, set up a place and time for the interview and photographs.
 2. Discuss how to photograph the subject to be able to make two different photographs, one realistic and flattering and other more creative and unusual.
 3. Create a list of questions for the interview; include questions that will provide factual information needed as well as questions that might generate intriguing stories of interest to other readers.

III. Photographing & Interviewing

- Each team will need to take a camera and paper with their questions and to write the answers from the interview. Before sending the teams out on their own, practice an interview in the class with everyone watching and critiquing.
- Once the groups feel ready to go into the field, review the basics of courtesy and proper behavior. Make a plan for what they can do if someone in their group starts to goof off or not pay attention. The more you can plan ahead for possible problems the more likely each group will be successful.
- After each team returns, have them discuss with the whole class how their interviews and photograph sessions went.

IV. Bringing it together

- Once all the student teams have conducted their interviews and taken the photographs, have them work together to write up their stories. They should first write the non-fictional story based on information they learned from the interview or other sources.

- Next, writing the fictional story should be a fun creative activity where each group works together to create the most outlandish story that is fun and strange but not insulting to the subject.
- Once the photographs have been printed, chose pictures that best illustrate each of the two stories. Try to find images that are very different and work well with the text.
- Creating the newspaper can be done in many ways. If a computer with MS Word is available, the stories can be pasted into columns or text boxes and then the photographs can be inserted. Another option is to create a giant class newspaper in which the stories and photographs are placed on a large bulletin board on the wall that is designed to look like a newspaper page.
- One newspaper could be created with both fictional and non-fiction story and photographs side by side or two separate newspapers could be created, one telling the non-fictional version and the other a parody of the news with the funny photos and fictional stories. Be careful to label the fictional version as a parody, just so everyone understands the intent of the newspaper.

V. Reflection

- Have students think about the differences in the two newspapers they created.
- Discuss ML Core Concept #2, Media messages are constructed using a creative language with its own rules” and Core Concept #4, “Media have embedded values and points of views” by asking the students Key Questions #2 and #4:
 - ? What techniques are used to attract my attention?
 - ? What lifestyles, values and points of view are represented or omitted in this message?

California State Standards

Language Arts:

Reading (Literary Response and Analysis)

3.3 Determine what characters are like by what they say or do and by how the author or illustrator portrays them.

Writing Applications

2.3a Write personal and formal letters, thank-you notes, and invitations: Show awareness of the knowledge and interests of the audience and establish a purpose and context.

Listening and Speaking Strategies

1.8 Clarify and enhance oral presentations through the use of appropriate props (e.g., objects, pictures, charts).

Analysis and Evaluation of Oral and Media Communications

1.10 Compare ideas and points of view expressed in broadcast and print media.

1.11 Distinguish between the speaker’s opinions and verifiable facts.