

STORY EXPLORERS

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 media. Each group is responsible for gathering and analyzing the quality of the reports from their assigned media outlet(s). They use a **K-H-W-L** chart to guide their inquiry, research and reflection.

LEARNING OBJECTIVE:

Students will **develop** and refine their own personal news judgment, **collect** and **evaluate** examples of news and other information about a common subject, and **reflect** on the credibility and quality of the information they find.

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

- *What can journalists do to make sure that the information they report is accurate?*
 - *Can journalists ever eliminate all mistakes from their work? If so, how? If not, why not?*
- *Why is it important for journalists to try to be as neutral as possible in reporting and presenting the news?*
 - *What can journalists and other people who create information do to minimize expressing their personal bias in their reporting?*
- *When a publication, website or newscast makes a mistake, how should the outlet handle it? How did you come to that answer?*
- *Whose interests should journalists represent? What is the best way for them to do this?*
- *How do you know what information to believe?*
- *Are some sources of information generally more credible than others? If yes, why? If no, why not?*
 - *When you use a search engine to look for information, is the top result the most credible?*
 - *What standards should you look for in evaluating the credibility of a piece of information?*
 - *What should you do when someone shares a piece of misinformation with you?*
 - *What should you do if you mistakenly share false information?*
- *What subjects regularly covered in the news, or “beats,” are young people well suited to track and respond to when necessary?*
- *What are some ways that students can take action when they find a piece of inaccurate information?*

WORD WALL TERMS:

- Straight news
- Standards
- Credible
- Sources
- Verification
- Media
- Documentation
- Fairness

PREPARATION:

1. Review the lesson 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 lesson, 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).
3. Review 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).

LESSON:

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 (the master copy follows this lesson plan) and ask student groups to fill out the **Know** section with facts and details that they consider to be confirmed.
5. The **Heard** box should be filled in with details students have gleaned from others but about which they are uncertain.

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LESSON:

6. Be sure to clarify that if a detail that a student initially “heard” about was subsequently confirmed in some way, it should be listed under **K**now to avoid confusion.
7. Now assign each group of students one or more news outlets to research and/or track 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 time.)
 - 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 blog or other website
 - 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 **W**ant section of the graphic organizer with questions about things they want to know about 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 there any raw information about this event being shared on social media?”
9. If your students have access to the Internet in the classroom, ask each group to find and analyze as many news reports or other pieces of information about the assigned topic as possible. If you do not have Internet access in your classroom, or if you want students to complete this step outside the classroom for another reason, have each group find several examples for homework (at the local library or using the Internet at home or elsewhere).
 - For a deep analysis, students can use the News-Literate Current Events process chart. For a more expedient analysis, they can use NLP’s CHECK process as a guide. Both are included in this handbook.
 - If you prefer to devise your own method for evaluation and analysis, we recommend ensuring that it requires students to assess evidence of verification and the quality of the sourcing, as well as the presence or absence of documentation, elemental fairness and a neutral tone.
 - Remind students to use the questions they wrote in their **W** column as guides for their research.
10. 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.)
 - What they learned about the information found in their particular media assignment, 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 overt bias and errors).
11. 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.

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LESSON:

12. 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 outlet, 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, engaging with the journalist on social media, 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?

ASSESSMENT:

This evergreen lesson is intended to produce several learning outcomes, and it is designed to engage students by allowing them to select the subject of collaborative group analysis of information.

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.

NAME: _____ DATE: _____

KHWL CHART

WHAT I KNOW



WHAT I'VE HEARD



WHAT I WANT TO KNOW



WHAT I'VE LEARNED

