

IS IT NEWS?

Grades 4-5 (80 minutes)

Most Americans now get their news online, and even when accessed on the website of a news organization, it is likely to come surrounded by lots of other types of information.

The Special Labor Day edition of *The Daylee Planet* newspaper (created for this activity) includes a news story, a feature story, an ad, an opinion column, a weather report, and a trivia game. The activity helps students learn what distinguishes news and also offers opportunities to introduce and practice inquiry skills by engaging in a media analysis of each of the paper's features.

The characteristics that define something as news plus plenty of opportunities to introduce and practice research and reading skills.

Pre-requisite: It is possible to do this activity as a stand-alone, but it will be more effective if students have already done the "Introduction to Lateral Reading" activity.

Students will learn

- what distinguishes news from other information sources
- how to analyze multiple types of media

Students will practice

- reading
- identifying the defining features of a news story
- asking and answering media analysis questions
- research skills

Materials: handouts, one per student of [The Daylee Planet](#); [Is It News? Handout](#); [News Analysis Worksheet](#) - Currently the handouts are only available in English. To accommodate English language learners, you may want to run the handout files through a translation program to provide access for the particular languages spoken by your students.

Step 1

With students, review the [Is It News?](#) handout. Explain that the library is filled with different types of information sources. News is a special type of information source. You can recognize it because it uses the guidelines that are on the handout.

Step 2

Distribute copies of [The Daylee Planet](#). Tell students there is only one news story. The rest are features or ads. Keeping in mind what they just learned about news, can they tell which one is the news report?

Students can work individually or in small groups (recommended if you need to pair strong and weaker readers). They'll need several minutes to scan and read the newspaper. Help anyone who struggles by having them quickly eliminate the parts that they know are not news (e.g., the meme). Then they have fewer options to weigh.

When most students have arrived at an answer, invite a few to share what they selected and why.

Step 3

Distribute copies of the [News Analysis Worksheet](#) and lead students in a close read of the news report. Have them identify the 5 Ws in the story.

Divide the class into 5 groups and assign one "W" to each. Then have each group share what they found with their classmates. After each presentation, ask if the group missed anything. Accept all answers as long as they're based on evidence from the story.

Possible answers:

Who -the people doing the prep; the story's sources

What - special preparations for Labor Day crowds

When - the day before Labor Day; Aug 31 (so it is current which is essential for news)

Where - Everytown; the park

Why - based on prior experience, leaders have reason to expect big crowds

Remind students that it is these five Ws that make it a news story and not some other type of information source (e.g., an encyclopedia article which would have more background and historical context)

Step 4

As time allows, discuss with students whether they think the article also meets the FACT standards.

Then have students complete the sources question on the News Analysis Worksheet, specifically focusing attention on source identification, credibility, and whether the sources are likely to have the right expertise to offer the information they give. Remember to probe for evidence after each response.

These sources are fictitious, but if they were real, what steps could students take to verify their credibility?

FYI - Very observant or knowledgeable students may notice some interesting names: Ivanna Laff (I want to laugh), Mac N. Cheisy (Mac & Cheese-y), Les Ludgate is an amalgam of two character names from the TV series "Parks & Recreation."

Step 5

Take each item in the newspaper one by one and lead students in an analysis. (If you only have short time periods available, lead an analysis of each component of the newspaper in a separate session)

Town Prepares for Record Numbers

If students have already done the "Is 7 a Lot?" activity, they'll be familiar with the process of determining whether the numbers in the story are a lot or a little? What would students need to know to determine their answer?

Don't Forget the Sunscreen

a. What clues immediately indicate that this is not a news article? (Be

sure that every student can read the word “sponsored” and knows what it means). Sometimes it will say “ad” instead of “sponsored.” Those two words are the first clues students should routinely look for.

Also, this ad uses a meme. Discuss what memes are. By definition, memes are commentary, so they would never be used in standard journalism unless the story was about memes. This is a good example of why it is important for students to be able to identify the type of media they are viewing/hearing/reading.

b. Analysis: What is the main claim about sunscreen? Is that claim credible? What’s your evidence? If you’re not sure, how could you find out? (An opportunity to practice inquiry and research skills).

Help students notice that despite this being an ad, the claims about sunscreen are accurate. The sponsor likely sells “reef safe” sunscreen and will make money if we all regularly use sunscreen. But that doesn’t make them wrong about sunscreen. So we don’t just dismiss the information because it comes from an ad. Instead, we ask questions about the claims and verify that they are true before making a purchase.

FYI, If you need more information on “reef safe” sunscreen, check:
<https://www.oceansociety.org/resources/blue-habits-tips/reef-safe-sunscreen-our-guide-to-ocean-friendly-sun-protection/>

Labor Day History

This article is informational, but not news. It gives background information that provides context for current events, but it isn’t reporting on any specific current event.

FYI, A good site for verification of this information is:

<https://www.dol.gov/general/laborday/history>

Trivia

Newspapers often include things for fun to attract the attention and engage potential readers (e.g., crossword puzzles or other games). In this case, trivia is a great excuse to teach research skills. Can students verify a classmate’s (or your) answer? What resources does your library or school have that could help them find an answer and what do they need to know to use those resources?

Trivia Answer Key

(information source: U.S. Dept. of Labor
<https://www.dol.gov/>)

What is the youngest age that kids can get a job?

A: The Fair Labor Standards Act sets 14 as the minimum age for most non-agricultural work. However, at any age, youth may deliver newspapers; perform in radio, television, movie, or theatrical productions; work on the family farm or in businesses owned by their parents (except in mining, manufacturing or hazardous jobs); and perform babysitting or perform minor chores around a private home.

Who was Frances Perkins?

A. Perkins was the first woman to hold a Cabinet position. She was Secretary of Labor in the administration of President Franklin D. Roosevelt from 1933-1945.

What is the current minimum wage?

A: The minimum wage – that is, the least that a typical worker can be paid for an hour of work – is \$7.25 per hour, but many states have set their own minimum wage at a higher rate. Invite students to investigate what the minimum wage is in your state. If they worked for an hour at that rate, what

could they buy? A bicycle? An ice cream cone? Robux (and what could they purchase with that amount)?

Weather Map

This doesn't exactly fall into the traditional journalism 5 Ws. It is a prediction rather than an account of past events, but it is always new information. With older students, this might make for a fun debate: Are weather reports news?

Opinion

The phrase, "but it should" in the first sentence immediately marks this as an opinion, not fact. Help students see that opinions are statements of what people think, but they still need to be grounded in verifiable evidence. Ask them to identify the evidence that the newspaper's editors use to back up their belief that people should pay more attention to Labor Day.

If they haven't already, you might also guide students to notice other details and what they suggest about the paper: The masthead, the publisher information, the explanation of why it's free, the choice of images, the use of headlines and subheaders. What messages do students take away from these pieces of information?

Throughout this lesson invite students to notice the difference between the news story and all the other things in the paper. At the end of the lesson remind students that news is a unique form of information that, by definition, reports on things that are current and unusual. Things that happen every day aren't "new" so the news isn't a good source for that type of information.

For example, if students go back and look at the paper's news report on preparations, they can infer that there were people in the park everyday during the summer, but it was only on the holiday that

thousands were expected. That makes the holiday unusual and, therefore, newsworthy.

CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

Collaborate with a particular grade level to have students produce their own newspaper, perhaps including special editions for other holidays.

Make social studies connections by connecting with teachers to help students do the research to create a Labor Day “backgrounder”: What essential roles did workers play in key moments of U.S. history (e.g., Who were the workers that built the first intercontinental railway and the trains that ran on it, and who mined the coal that fueled the trains)? What percentage of the workers were immigrants? Which countries did they come from? Who were the essential workers that lived in and built your community? What types of jobs did they have? How do those jobs compare to the jobs that people have today? Over time, how have popular media portrayed those jobs or workers? What sorts of workers do you see in media today? Which important workers are missing from popular media?

Distribute the News and Key Questions handouts to teachers and help them find news articles related to core curriculum topics. Then encourage them to have students use the handouts to as a guide to analyzing the articles or any discussion of current events.

AASL Standards Correlations

A. VI. 3. Evaluating information for accuracy, validity, social and cultural context, and appropriateness for need.

B. I. 1. Using evidence to investigate questions.

B. III. 1. Using a variety of communication tools and resources.

C. I. 1. Interacting with content presented by others.

C. V. 3. Expressing curiosity about a topic of personal interest or curricular relevance.

D. I. 2. Engaging in sustained inquiry.

D. I. 3. Enacting new understanding through real world connections.

D. III. 1. Actively contributing to group discussions.