
CHAPTER 3

INDIVIDUAL FREEDOMS: FREEDOM OF THE PRESS

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The theme of individual freedoms is extremely broad; it can accommodate animated discussions on the freedom of speech, freedom of the press, freedom of assembly, freedom of religion, freedom of conscience, and the all-encompassing freedom of expression. This chapter concentrates on select issues related to freedom of the press. While exploring the reliability, truthfulness, and biases of television, radio, news magazines, and the Internet (to name a few news sources), students will not only develop an understanding of some of the issues related to freedom of the press, but they will also improve their language abilities. Teachers can use the proposed lesson by itself or design a series of connected lessons that explore freedom of the press in more detail. An even more elaborate thematic unit could be developed and extended over a longer period of time. The lesson plan ideas presented here are meant to serve as a starting point for teachers interested in exploring the theme of individual freedoms, in particular freedom of the press, with their students.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

It has been said that the 21st century will usher in the Information Age, a time when technologies will give people easy and rapid access to information of all kinds. With every year, new (and old) technologies bring the promise of greater information exchange. In addition, increasing numbers of people around the world have access to television, radios, computers, the Internet, and information that reaches them via satellites and cables.

At the same time, the Information Age brings with it numerous challenges. The Information Age raises new issues about media responsibility, honest journalism, the rights of the public to be informed, and the impact of information access on civic life. The Information Age also provokes questions about the truthfulness, reliability, and biases of news coverage. In addition, it focuses attention on the freedom to give and receive information, which the Universal Declaration of Human Rights declares a basic human right.

This chapter of the Civic Education volume focuses on select issues related to one individual freedom, specifically freedom of the press. Freedom of the press is often defined as the freedom to (a) write or report what one wants, (b) express one's opinion, (c) explore new ideas, (d) share different points of view, and (e) criticize or support people and ideas. Yet, freedom of the press does not simply give individuals the ability to report whatever they please, it also grants individuals the power to choose what to report, what not to report, and the extent, tone, and manner of reporting.

Proponents of freedom of the press cite numerous benefits including the following:

It promotes individual growth and human dignity; the right to express one's ideas and communicate with others contributes to one's growth as a person. The right to consider other people's views and opinions also contributes to individual growth.

It is important for the advancement of knowledge; new and improved ideas are likely to be developed in societies that allow free discussion, debate, and the consideration of multiple perspectives.

It is a necessary component of representative governments; freedom of the press is crucial in both determining policy and checking how well governments carry out their responsibilities.

It facilitates peaceful social change; the right to express oneself freely provides an outlet for individuals trying to influence public opinion by persuasion rather than violence.

It is essential for the protection of all individual rights; the ability to express oneself allows people to speak out against the violation of one's rights by others or by the government.

The challenges related to freedom of the press, however, are many. When contemplating freedom of the press, one must consider if and when limits and restrictions are advisable. Should freedom of the press be absolute? Should freedom of the press be limited to protect individual privacy, people's reputations, and national security? Should journalists be allowed to report lies? What should be reported when there is limited space, for example, in a newspaper or limited time, like on a television news broadcast? These provocative questions do not have any straightforward answers. Nonetheless, consideration of questions such as these and discussions of related issues are critical for those of us entering the Information Age.

CLASSROOM APPLICATIONS

The following 50-minute lesson plan highlights select issues related to the theme of this chapter: freedom of the press. Teachers are encouraged to adapt this lesson to the language and content learning needs of their students. Adjustments can easily be made so that the lesson matches the needs of lower- or higher-proficiency English language learners.

Preliminary Lesson Planning

Materials:

Create a handout for Activity 2. (Use [Appendix A](#) as a model.) Add news items to the list (or adjust those that are currently listed) to stimulate student discussion and debate.

Student grouping decisions:

Decide on procedures for grouping students for Activities 1 and 2; participants will remain in the same groups for both activities. It is recommended that groups have four participants each. If a large class size makes groups of four unrealistic, form larger groups. The lesson plan suggests that each member of the group be assigned a special role (e.g., chairperson, recorder, reporter, responder). For larger groups, be prepared to assign additional roles such as a checker of understanding (one who makes sure everyone in the group understands what is being done and said); a cheerleader/encourager (one who offers encouragement and praise for contributions of group members); a turn-taking monitor (a person who makes sure all members participate); a voice/noise monitor (a person who asks students to either speak up or speak more quietly). If appropriate, make up tentative lists of group members. Make last minute adjustments when it is determined which students are actually in class.

Vocabulary considerations:

Consider the vocabulary that students need to know to complete the lesson successfully. Determine which vocabulary items the students already know and which items they will need to have explained. Some important terms, and their definitions, are included in a glossary in [Appendix B](#). Items listed in the glossary are written in **bold** print the first time they are mentioned in the lesson plan.

Warm Up Activity (5 minutes)

Purpose: To draw upon students' background knowledge

Procedures:

1. Ask students the following question: Where can we get information about local, national, and world news? List student responses on the blackboard. (Possible student answers include newspapers, news magazines, television, radio, the Internet, friends, and family.)
2. Before asking the next question, add "1st choice" and "2nd choice" to the blackboard so that the blackboard looks something like this:

	1st choice	2nd choice
Newspapers		
News Magazines		
Television		
Radio		
Internet		
Friends		
Family		

3. Conduct an informal class survey. Ask students "Which news sources do you prefer? What is your first choice? What is your second choice?" Read off each news information source listed on the blackboard, one at a time, and ask students to raise their hands if it is their first choice, and then their second choice. Put tally marks in each column.
 4. Ask students to examine the results of the informal class survey. Ask them "What news sources do we prefer as a class?" Circle the news sources that students most commonly use.
- (Do not erase the blackboard. Students will refer to it in following exercises.)

Transition from Warm Up to Activity #1

Tell students that this class session will focus on one individual freedom. Ask them "Which individual freedom do you think we will be talking about today?" Try to elicit **freedom of the press** from them. Define the term, if necessary. Relate student responses to the notion of freedom of the press.

Activity #1 (approximately 15-20 minutes)

Purpose:

- To provide students with opportunities to use English in a meaningful way
- To give students the chance to use key vocabulary and concepts associated with the theme of the lesson
- To hold students responsible for their own learning

Procedure:

1. Put students into groups of four. Have students in each group choose numbers from 1 to 4 and then give them their role assignments:
 - Chairperson (leads group discussion)
 - Recorder (writes down group's ideas)
 - Reporter (reports group deliberations to the rest of the class)
 - Responder (answers questions from the whole class after the group report)

While students are forming their groups, erase the "1st choice" and "2nd choice" headings and tally marks from the board. Replace them with new headings, as indicated below:

	<u>Reliable</u>	<u>Biased</u>	<u>Truthful</u>
Newspapers			
News			
Magazines			
Television			
Radio			
Internet			
Friends			
Family			

2. Also write the following questions on the blackboard:

A. Which news source is the most reliable? Least reliable? Why?

B. Which news source is the most biased? Least biased? Why?

C. Which news source is the most truthful? Least truthful? Why?

3. Ask students to work in their groups to answer these questions. Before they begin to work together, make sure they understand the three key terms: reliable, biased, and truthful. Remind students that they should be able to defend their responses to these questions. Give students a time limit (about 10 minutes).
4. Ask reporters to report on group deliberations. While reporters are speaking, record their answers with check marks (✓) on the blackboard. Encourage other class members to ask responders for clarification. Put these questions on the blackboard to encourage and model appropriate questioning: How did your group come to that conclusion? Why does your group feel that way? How can your group defend that answer?
5. Ask the class if any of the news sources that are listed **limit** or **restrict** their reports about local, national, and world news. Ask the class why news is sometimes limited or restricted. Write student responses on the blackboard. (Student answers might include national security, number of stories to report, time or space limitations, politics, privacy, protection of the innocent, protection of people's reputations, secrecy, fear, power.)

Activity #2 (approximately 20-25 minutes)

Purpose:

To provide students with opportunities to use English in a meaningful way

To reinforce key vocabulary and concepts associated with the theme of the lesson

To encourage students to take a stand in English about important issues

To give students an opportunity to defend their opinions in English

Procedures:

1. Ask students to remain in the same groups. Assign new roles to students, using these guidelines:

Recorder (writes down group's ideas)

Reporter (reports group deliberations to the rest of the class)

Responder (answers questions from the whole class after the group report)

Chairperson (leads group discussion)

2. Distribute one copy of the News Reports handout ([Appendix A](#)) to each group. Go over instructions, introduce new vocabulary, and if necessary, review key vocabulary.

3. Have students work in their groups to answer questions on the handout. Give students a time limit (about 10 minutes) to keep them on task.

4. Ask reporters to report on group deliberations. Encourage other class members to ask responders for clarification. Refer back to the questions on the blackboard to encourage/model questioning: How did your group come to that conclusion? Why does your group feel that way? How can your group defend that answer?

Cool Down Activity (approximately 5 minutes)

Purpose:

To provide some closure to the lesson

To give students an opportunity to discuss relevance of the lesson

Procedures:

1. Ask students to review what happened in class. ("What have we done in class today?")
2. Ask students "How is today's lesson related to freedom of the press?" (Help students understand the intricacies associated with freedom of the press. Freedom of the press does not simply give individuals the ability to report whatever they please, it also grants individuals the power to choose what to report, what not to report, and the extent, tone, and manner of reporting.)

Possible Extensions to Lesson

1. Ask students any of these questions to extend the lesson.
 - a. Who is responsible for reliable **journalism**: **journalists**, editors of newspapers, directors of radio stations, the government?
 - b. Should all citizens have equal **access** to information? Why? Why not?
 - c. What should the public know to be considered informed citizens?
 - d. Should newspapers and radio stations be able to report whatever they want? Why? Why not?
 - e. How has public access to information changed in the last decade in our country? Are these changes positive or negative? Why?
2. Ask students to list and present their arguments in favor of and against freedom of the press.
3. Ask students to imagine that they are the directors of the evening news for a popular local television station. Their job is to choose stories for the evening news, a 15-minute broadcast featuring local stories. Tell them that four of the 15 minutes are dedicated to commercials, giving the students a total of 11 minutes of news time. They can combine three different story lengths: 30-second spots, 60-second stories, and 2 ½ minute (150 second) features. Give students a list of at least 20 "headlines" to choose from (using many of the news categories listed in [Appendix A](#)). Have students plan the evening news by creating a program schedule with three columns: Column one: List the news items in order of presentation (1, 2, 3,

etc.); Column two: Identify the length (spot, story, feature) of each news item (for a total of 11 minutes);

Column three: State the reason(s) for choosing the news for this position and length. (This exercise has been adapted from Croddy, Degelman, & Hayes, 1998a, 1998b.)

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Appendix A

News Reports Handout

1. Consider the topics below and then answer these questions.

a. Which topics are most important for daily news **coverage**? Why? *Circle* the eight most important news topics. Be prepared to report your answers to other class members.

b. Should news sources (e.g., newspapers, magazines, radio, television) limit their reports about any of these topics? Why? *Underline* topics which might need to be restricted.

c. Should any topics be **banned**? Why? *Put a box* around topics that might need to be banned.

Science	Weather	Cultural events
Environment	<u>Natural disasters</u>	Social events
Crime	Sports	National <u>legislation</u>
Education	Business	National economy
Health	Wars and regional conflicts	National security
Famous people's private lives	News about the local community	New restaurants
Famous people's public lives	News about the country	Traffic
Government leaders	News about neighboring countries	Politics
Births and deaths	News about countries in other regions	
Glossary		

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