

Current Events

LEVEL: Low Intermediate to Advanced

TIME REQUIRED: 45 minutes to model the activity; 3 to 5 minutes for each student to present (presentations may take place throughout a course)

GOALS: To read and understand informational text; to gain knowledge of events in local, national, and international communities; to practice summarizing; to improve oral presentation skills

MATERIALS: Sample news article: “E-readers Help Thousands in Africa Learn to Read” or a different news article; 5Ws + H graphic organizer (Appendix); paper and pencils or pens

BACKGROUND: This activity is based on current events and news stories. You can use it as a regular feature in your classroom or English club. By reading articles in newspapers or magazines or online, students or club members become familiar with an informational writing style; they also learn vocabulary and develop reading-comprehension skills.

Using news in the classroom keeps students aware of events happening in local, national, and international communities, and it promotes critical thinking. Being aware of issues and events in the news can motivate students to have further discussions with classmates, family, or members of the community and to become active in their communities. The procedures below describe how to model a way for students to collect information from a current-events article and prepare a presentation. Although this model

is set in a classroom, you can use the same steps to establish a current-events project in an English club.

PREPARATION:

1. Consider how often you would like students to present current events. After students understand the assignment, they will select an article and prepare a presentation independently. How often you schedule current-events presentations depends on your class size and how often your class meets. Here are four options:
 - Create a calendar or list of dates and allow students to sign up for a day they would like to present, or assign dates to students.
 - Schedule presentations on a specific day of the week; each week, have one or two different students present.
 - Allow one student to present at the beginning of each class meeting so that a current event is presented every day during the course.
 - Select specific dates during the course that will be dedicated to current-events presentations.

You can also use these options to schedule presentations in English clubs.

2. Prepare the news article you will use to model this activity. You can choose one yourself or use the sample article,

E-readers Help Thousands in Africa Learn to Read

Deborah Block

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At the Kibera Girls Soccer Academy in Nairobi, 17-year-old Naima Hassan and her fellow high school students sit in class, using an e-reader instead of textbooks. The electronic device, known as the Worldreader, can be loaded with hundreds of books.

“I get to learn everything that I want,” Hassan said.

On a continent where millions of people can’t read, there’s a chronic shortage of textbooks in many schools, including the girls’ academy.

“The textbooks that we have cannot be used by everyone in the school, so with the e-readers we now can learn at a comfortable pace,” Hassan added.

Over the past five years, tens of thousands of free Worldreaders have been provided to students, teachers and libraries in 12 African countries, including Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Malawi and Zimbabwe. The digital collection comprises about 30,000 books in 40 languages.

The idea came from Worldreader Co-founder and President David Risher, a former marketing executive at Microsoft and Amazon.

“Now that the world is going digital,” he said, “this is a good time to try to solve the problem of illiteracy on a scale where people haven’t been able to solve it before.”

He said the Worldreader is increasing reading comprehension in the schools where it’s being used.

Access, portability

With so much information on the device, including books from African authors, teacher Claris Akinyi is pleased that the students can do their own research and learn more than they ever could before. Besides English, there are books in Swahili, Kenya’s national language.

Akinyi uses it to plan her classes.

“When I need to prepare a lesson using different books, I can easily access the materials,” she explained. “I can carry it home so as to prepare a lesson for different classes.”

She said the Worldreader is helping give disadvantaged students a better chance of getting into college after high school.

Hassan dreams of becoming a TV camerawoman.

“Using the e-reader, you can download a book about a camera,” she said, “and then you can learn everything about a camera.”

In areas without electricity, Risher said, the e-readers can be charged using a simple solar setup at a school or library.

Worldreader also has an app that anyone anywhere can access. By using a phone with a Web browser, thousands of books in several languages are available at read.worldreader.org.

www.voanews.com/content/e-readers-africa-students-read-access-technology-books/3179051.html

“E-readers Help Thousands in Africa Learn to Read.” The examples in the procedure refer to the sample article, but you can adapt them easily if you choose a different text. You can make copies of the article for students or project the article so that it is visible to your whole class. If students can access the article online, you can provide a link and ask them to read it before class.

3. Each student will use the 5Ws + H graphic organizer (Appendix); prepare copies or draw it on the board so that students can copy it into their notebooks.

PROCEDURES:

1. Ask students if they know what “current events” are. Depending on their knowledge, you can explain that current

events refer to news stories—important things that are happening now in local (in your town or region), national (in your country), or international (worldwide) communities. Ask students if they can give any examples of current events/news stories that they have seen or heard about.

2. Tell students, “We will have regular current-events presentations in our class. For your presentation, you will choose a news story that interests you. You will present information about the news event to the class.” At this time you might want to explain how you plan to schedule the activity in your course.
3. Tell students, “Today I will show you how to complete the current-events graphic organizer and presentation from start to finish. We will read a news article, write down important information, and then choose the information we want to share in a short presentation.”
4. Have students read the sample news article you have prepared. You can choose to have them read it independently, in pairs, or together as a whole class.
5. Tell students, “After reading the article, I need to write down the important information I will use to plan my presentation. For this, I will use my 5Ws + H graphic organizer. The 5Ws are *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, and *why*, and H stands for *how*.” Distribute copies of the graphic organizer to students or, if you have drawn it on the board, ask them to copy it into their notebooks.
6. Tell students, “I am going to begin with the first W, *who*. I will reread or skim my article to find the information I need for this question. Who are the people involved in the news story?” You can model rereading the article aloud to find the information, and students can follow along. Give students a chance to provide the information; if the article is projected on a screen, you can highlight or underline it in the text. If students have copies, they can also underline or highlight the information.
7. Write the information for *who* in the graphic organizer and have students do the same on their copy. If necessary, say, “In this article, I found several people involved with the use of e-readers. One person is Naima Hassan, a student who uses the e-reader. Another person is David Risher, the founder of Worldreader. The last is Naima’s teacher, Claris Akinyi. I am going to write down their names and their roles in the story to help me remember when I make my presentation.”
8. Follow the same process to look for information that tells *what* the news story is about. Give students time to go back through the article. If necessary, you can say, “I found that this article is about an e-reader, called Worldreader, with 30,000 books in 40 different languages. The article also mentions an app and a website people can use on their mobile phones. I am going to write these things under *what* on my graphic organizer.”
9. Have students refer to the article again to find information for the *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how* sections of the graphic organizer. Say, “For the next four sections of the graphic organizer, I want you to look back at the article and see what you can find about when, where, why, and how this news is happening. Underline or highlight the information in the article when you find it, and write it in the chart.” If necessary, work through each W and H with the class to be sure students understand the procedure.
10. Give students time to locate information from the article independently or in pairs. Circulate around the room to make sure students understand the task. As needed, ask guiding questions to help students find the information. When they have finished, ask student volunteers

to share the information they located. Record information from the article on the graphic organizer on the board.

If students need additional support, you can guide them through the *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how* portions of the activity by asking questions and soliciting responses:

Guiding Questions	Information from the Article
When is this news happening? When were the e-readers given to schools?	<i>E-readers have been given to schools in the past five years.</i>
Where does Hassan go to school? Where have the e-readers been used?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Kibera Girls Soccer Academy in Nairobi</i> • <i>12 African countries including Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Malawi, Zimbabwe</i>
Why are the e-readers being used in these countries and schools?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>textbook shortage</i> • <i>to solve illiteracy using digital tools</i>
How are the e-readers helpful to students and teachers? How do they use them?	<i>E-readers are giving students access to new information in many languages and allowing teachers to plan for different classes at home.</i>

11. Say, “Another part of the activity is presenting the news event you chose to the class. Now we will talk about what you should include in your presentation and how to use the information you have written in the graphic organizer.” Ask students what makes a good presentation. Ideas might include “speaking clearly and loudly,” “being prepared,” “making eye contact with the audience,” “not reading off of your paper,” and so on. You may want to list these ideas on the board for students to copy or on a poster to display in the

classroom, so students can refer to the list as they plan their presentations.

12. Inform students that for your presentation, you will start by providing the title of the article and a short introduction telling what it is about. Then, using the graphic organizer, you can make a list of key points to include in your presentation. Model your thinking by saying, “I want my presentation to be about three minutes long, and I am going to use my graphic organizer to help me plan what I will say. I need to include information about all 5Ws and *How*.” You can ask students for ideas about what they would include and, on the board, make a list such as this one:

- Worldreader is an organization co-founded by David Risher.
- Worldreader has given thousands of free e-readers to classrooms in 12 countries in Africa in the past 5 years.
- Countries include Ghana, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Malawi, Zimbabwe, and more.
- The e-readers give students and teachers access to about 30,000 books in 40 languages.
- A Worldreader app and website can be used for free on mobile devices.
- Teacher Claris Akinyi from Nairobi likes the e-readers because she can take one home to plan lessons and use different texts with her students.
- Student Naima Hassan said the e-readers have helped her learn about things that interest her and given her school access to more books.
- E-readers are helping to solve problems such as a shortage of textbooks and illiteracy in many African countries.

Explain to students that they can conclude the presentation by saying why they found the article interesting or telling about something new they learned from it.

13. Model giving an actual presentation to the class. Tell students, “When you present your current event, you may want to have cards or a small piece of paper with your important points written down. You should also practice your presentation so that you are not just reading the words off of your paper.” Then present the key information from the sample article as you expect students to do with their own news stories.
14. Give students about 10 minutes to take turns presenting on the sample article to one or two classmates in small groups, so that every student has a chance to practice. Those watching the presentations can provide feedback. You can move around the classroom to provide comments as well.
15. Brainstorm ideas about where to find articles. Sources can include local or national newspapers, news websites, or mobile apps. Additional sources, especially for students learning English, can be found in the Resources box on page 51.
16. When students understand the requirements of the assignment, you can schedule the presentations (see Preparation, Step 1). Review the schedule with students so they know their presentation date. You might want to confirm upcoming presentations each week as a reminder.

EXTENSIONS

1. Ask students to write a personal reflection about the news story they chose. The student can write about his or her opinion on an issue in the article, a possible solution to a problem, or the effect the news event has on his or her life. The

questions in Variation 3 can provide additional ideas for students’ reflections. These reflections could lead to a class discussion about how the news affects the class, school, community, or country.

2. Create a news timeline display in the classroom. Depending on how often current events are presented, you can divide the timeline into days, weeks, or months for the length of your course. After each presentation, have the student add information to the timeline about the news event he or she presented. Options include displaying students’ graphic organizers along the timeline, posting photos from the news article, or writing a one- or two-sentence description giving the date and what occurred. The timeline can be used for students to reflect on news over time or even to track developments of a single news story.
3. Facilitate discussion as a follow-up to students’ presentations. Discussions can be with the whole class or in small groups and can be teacher-led or student-led. (See Variation 3 for sample discussion questions.) After the discussion, small groups of students can create skits based on the news story to reenact it or to show the effects or consequences of the news event. If students are opinionated about the news story, they can hold a debate.

VARIATIONS

1. For students of lower English proficiency, articles with simplified sentence structure and grammar are available online at www.newslevels.com. Lower-proficiency students can also complete sentence frames like these to use as a presentation script:
 - The news story I found is called _____ (title of article).
 - The people in the story are _____ (who).

- The story tells about _____ (what).
- This story happened _____ (when).
- The story happened in/at _____ (where).
- This story happened because _____ (why).
- The story changed people's lives by _____ (how).

2. Students can create a visual representation of their news article. Ask students to create a poster that contains a single image and phrase that students feel summarizes the main idea of the article. The students can display their posters when they present their current events. Or you can display several of the posters at the same time in a gallery walk and allow the class to circulate freely, view each poster, and discuss the news event with the student presenting the poster. You can keep the posters on display to create a collection of news events over the duration of the course.

3. For an English club, the facilitator and members can decide how to implement a current-events activity depending on how often the club meets and how many members there are. Club members can use the graphic organizer and present

their current events following the procedures in Steps 11 through 13. To increase participation and opportunities to practice English, the presenter can pose discussion questions to the club following the presentation of the news article. This can be done as a whole-group discussion or in smaller groups if many people are at the club meeting. Presenters can develop their own questions based on their news story. Sample questions include the following:

- Why is this news event significant?
- What effect will this news event have on local, national, and international communities?
- Does this news event affect your life directly? If so, how?
- What is your opinion about this issue/news event? Why?
- What is the best way to solve the problem or deal with the issue in this news story?

This activity was written by **Amy Hanna**, who has taught ESL to students in primary school, university, and adult education classrooms, trained teachers in TESL methods, and developed materials for English-language programs in the United States and abroad.

Resources

There are many places where students and English club members can find news articles to read and summarize. Local, national, and international English-language newspapers or magazines are a great resource, and many have websites that can be accessed on mobile devices. Websites with news articles written specifically for students learning English include the following:

- *Time* for Kids: www.timeforkids.com
- Smithsonian Tween Tribune (leveled articles): <http://tweentribune.com/>
- Voice of America: www.voanews.com
- News in Levels: www.newsinlevels.com
- *The New York Times* The Learning Network blog (articles and lesson ideas for current events): <http://bit.ly/LearningNetworkBlog>

APPENDIX: 5Ws + H Graphic Organizer

5Ws + H

Title of News Article: _____

Article Date: _____ Source: _____

Who?	
What?	
When?	
Where?	
Why?	
How?	