

## OBSERVING NEWS MEDIA

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It is important that our students be able to recognize bias and instances where the news media may present a limited perspective of certain issues. This skill takes time to develop, but we can begin by asking students to carefully observe and reflect on different media sources.

This week's activity will provide students with a set of observation questions to collect information about a specific news source. Students will make observations outside of class once you've modeled how to use the questions in class. Students will keep a log of observations that will be used in next week's jigsaw activity, discussion, and presentation.

### OBSERVATION MODELING AND PRACTICE

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**Time:** 45 minutes to explain and model how to answer the news media observation questions. One week outside of class for students to observe their assigned media outlets.

**Note:** To conduct observations, students will need to have access to the news source which they are assigned. Alternatively, you can collect news clippings to use in class ahead of time and students can spend an additional class period examining the news you have collected. If you plan to use sources you have collected, it is suggested that you find sources—including newspapers, radio news clips, television clips, news magazines, social media posts, and any others—from the same 1-2 week time period. Another option is to provide students time at school to conduct observations.

**Goals:** To provide students with guiding questions to consider when consuming news. To help students begin to recognize common trends in how events, issues, and people are portrayed in different media outlets. To read, write, speak, and listen in English while participating in group discussions and making observations.

**Materials:**

- Student access to different news sources or media
- One sample news story or clip for demonstration purposes (If using a printed news story, you will need multiple copies or a way to display or share the story.)

- Media observation questions from the appendix (You will need to choose how you will share these with students, whether by displaying them, writing them on the board, or providing students a copy.)
- Chalk or whiteboard markers
- Pencils
- Device for keeping time

**Preparation:**

1. Select one news story from any type of media to use as a model for how to answer the news media observation questions. Ideally, all students should be able to see the story, whether it is projected, accessed on mobile phones, or photocopied. If using a television or radio clip, be sure you have a means of playing it clearly for all students.
2. Using the news media observation questions, examine the news story or clip you have chosen and write notes and your answers to each of the questions.

**Procedure:**

1. Revisit your list of popular news sources from the activity in Week 1. Your class should have created a list of 5-8 news sources they believe are most popular in your community.
2. Tell students that they will spend the next week (or next class period if you are using sources you've already gathered) conducting observations of one of the news sources on the list. Explain that today you will share a set of questions for students to think about as they conduct their observations, and that you will demonstrate using an example.
3. Display or share the news media observation questions. Discuss each one of the questions with your students and be sure they understand what is being asked. Brainstorm and discuss possible responses to each question with students.
4. Next, use the sample news story or clip you prepared prior to class to further explain how to use the observation questions.
  - a. If using a printed news story, it would be helpful if students had their own copies, but you could also read the story aloud. A news story from an online source that could easily be displayed or accessed by students individually would also be a good option. If using a news clip from television, the internet, or radio, all students should be able to watch or listen.

5. Using your sample news story and the media observation questions, guide students in reading/watching/listening the news story and answering the first two questions in their notebooks. Record answers on the board so students can see an example.
6. For questions 3-5, have students discuss their answers in small groups as you move around the room and listen. Clarify any concepts that students do not understand or answer any questions they have.
7. Bring the class back together and have groups share their responses to questions 3-5. If needed, guide students in finding the correct information and clarify any misunderstandings by referring directly to the news story. Record answers on the board.
8. Repeat steps 7 and 8 for questions 6-7. Allow time for students to discuss each question, and then have them share responses or ideas with the class. If necessary, discuss possible perspectives and opinions not addressed by your sample news story, or questions it might raise.
9. Clarify any questions students have about using the media observation questions on their own. Explain that students will be assigned one type of media (such as television, social media, newspapers, etc.) to observe for one week. Students should complete at least one observation on a news story from that type of media per day.
10. Provide students with a list of the media observation questions, or have them copy questions into their notebooks. Tell students that for each observation that they make, they should write down the date and answer all questions.
11. Using the list of popular news sources your class created (see step 1), assign students to observe each type of media (no more than 5-6 in each group). Each type of media should have the same number of student observers (or as equal as possible). Name the groups according to the type of media, such as “Newspaper” or “Television.” If you have a very large class, it is acceptable to assign the same type of media to more than one group.
12. Then assign each student in a media group a number 1-6. Each student will then have both a media type and a number, such as *Newspaper 2*, *Television 2*, etc. Create a list like the one below for each group because you will need this information for a future activity.

Newspaper	Television	Social Media
1. Student Name	1.	1.
2. Student Name	2.	2.
3. Student Name	3.	3.
4. Student Name	4.	4.
5. Student Name	5.	5.

6. Student Name	6.	6.
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13. If you plan to use news sources you have gathered prior to class, tell students that they will work in groups to examine news stories and answer the questions from the observation log during the next class period. In the following class, distribute the news sources you have collected to each group and allow students to discuss and answer the questions.

For next week's Teacher's Corner activity, students will participate in a jigsaw activity to share their media observations (whether done at home or in class). Students will analyze the information to look for commonalities in how news is reported across different media outlets.

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### APPENDIX: MEDIA OBSERVATION QUESTIONS

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1. What issues, events, or topics are discussed in the news story?
2. Is the story written by a recognizable journalist or produced by a known media outlet?
3. What facts or figures are presented?
4. Can you check the facts and figures? Where could you check the information for accuracy? If you cannot verify the information, why not?
5. If quotes or ideas from other people are included, is the source named?
6. Are there any people involved in the news story? Who? How does the news story portray the people involved? Do you think this is a fair and accurate representation?
7. Does the news story address multiple opinions or perspectives on the topic? What opinions are included? What might be missing?
8. Did this news story leave you with any unanswered questions about the topic, event, or issue? What are the questions? Was there anything that you believe was left out of the news story?