



## LEARNING LYNX | Criminal Justice Mythbusters

Students will understand the 5 W's of the criminal justice system, identify ways that the media can shape its audience's perception of what is true and apply their understanding of media bias to their own views on crime.

When you open the newspaper, what types of stories are you most interested in reading? If you answered crime stories, you are not alone.

This lesson is focused on exploring the criminal justice system and considering the role that newspapers and other media plays in shaping our perceptions of crime. Criminal justice refers to all of the organizations and procedures that are involved in maintaining order in our community, state, and country by reducing crime and enforcing consequences for offenders. You develop your understanding of criminal justice from a young age by learning that there are laws that you must follow and consequences for breaking those laws.

In addition to your experiences learning and choosing to obey laws, you also see examples of criminal justice in the media that shape your understanding of the system. Through television, newspapers, and other media sources, you have seen the criminal justice system unfold and you have begun to form some ideas – or biases – about crime and punishment. Throughout this lesson you will learn some strategies that the media uses to capture your attention, and you will find that sometimes the media can mislead you or cause you to think something that may not be accurate. By the end of the lesson, you will have a chance to play the role of investigator and consider what misperceptions you may hold about crime.

**Getting On Board:** Think about what you know about criminal justice and what you want to know. Complete the first two columns of this KWL chart below:

What I Know (K)	What I Want to Know (W)	What I Learned (L)



### NEWSPAPER LINKS

Skim through today's newspaper to help you think about what you already know (K) about criminal justice and what you want to know (W) to help you complete the lists above. Use photographs, captions, headings, and charts as you brainstorm.



## THE 5 WS AND 1 H OF CRIMINAL JUSTICE

### WHAT

Criminal Justice is the system that seeks to maintain an orderly society, discouraging crime and penalizes individuals who are ruled guilty of a crime. There are three parts to our criminal justice system. Law enforcement (at the local, state, and federal level) is responsible for ensuring that everyone follows the law. The court system determines whether an individual is guilty or innocent of a charge by giving the accused person - the defendant - a fair trial. Corrections is the system responsible for carrying out a sentence and may involve prisons or parole.

There are many professionals that work within our criminal justice system. Their role can be best understood by the division in which they work. Law enforcement professionals include police officers at the state or local level, as well as law enforcement agents from federal agencies such as the Secret Service, FBI or Department of Homeland Security. The courts include professionals working as magistrates, prosecutors, defense attorneys, probation officers and judges. Corrections may involve the following: prison guards, correctional officers, and case managers.

### WHO

### WHEN

Criminal justice systems have existed since ancient civilization. How do you think that the three components of criminal justice (law enforcement, courts, and corrections or sentencing) have changed over time?

Because there are local laws, state laws, and federal laws, we have criminal justice systems in place at each of these levels. For example, in law enforcement you may have a county sheriff, a state trooper, and a federal agent that are all working to enforce the laws at their level.

### WHERE

### WHY

Understanding Criminal Justice allows us to view society through a different lens, exercise problem-solving skills, develop our critical thinking skills and act as responsible law-abiding citizens.

If you are interested in pursuing a career in Criminal Justice, check out Career Links to find out what it takes and what you can do to begin preparing now.

### HOW



## A PICTURE IS WORTH A THOUSAND WORDS



When a journalist or reporter writes a story for the newspaper, they describe the 5 W's: Who, What, When, Where, Why and How so that the reader can understand what happened. Because journalists choose the information that they share, they play an important role in shaping how a reader interprets a story. However, before readers even have a chance to read the story, they are forming opinions and impressions in their mind – sometimes without realizing it.

Take a look at the photograph below. Describe the scene as you see it. Include: **WHO, WHAT, WHEN, WHERE, WHY, AND HOW.**

**WHAT**

---

**WHO**

---

**WHEN**

---

**WHERE**

---

**WHY**

---

**HOW**

Now, covering your own answers, ask a classmate to tell you their 5 W's and How of the scene. Were your descriptions the exact same? Most likely they were not. Everyone has a different way to view the same photograph. Let's take a deeper look into how our ability to interpret photographs can change our perception of a news story.



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In this photo, Milo the Lynx (who) is helping CU Denver students move (what) by unpacking boxes (how) into their residence hall (where) before class starts in August (when) so that they are prepared for their first semester (why). This story is a feel-good story, also known as a human-interest story, exposing something positive that is happening in the community. These news stories are pleasant to read, but sometimes readers overlook these stories in the newspaper in favor of something more thrilling or exciting.

Consider another interpretation of this same photo. Milo the Lynx (who) is stealing textbooks from CU Denver students (what) by sneaking in as they are unpacking their cars (how)

on the day before class starts (when) right in front of their residence hall (where) so that he can get ahead on his class reading (why). This story is not true, however it is believable because the description could describe the photograph. Readers are very often drawn to read stories that are exciting or dramatic – especially stories that feature a crime.

A journalist wants his or her story to be read, but they cannot fabricate, or make up, a completely untrue story. But they can choose photographs and write headlines that are ambiguous, or unclear, so that the reader is forced to make an assumption about a story before even reading it. Compare the following headlines:

### MILO LENDS A HELPING HAND



### MILO'S SURPRISING BEHAVIOR



The first headline, “Milo Lends a Helping Hand” accurately portrays the story in which Milo is helping his fellow students. The second headline, “Milo’s Surprising Behavior” causes readers to wonder what Milo did that was so surprising and whether the behavior was positive or negative. Take a moment to consider the consequences of choosing an ambiguous headline.



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### MILO LENDS A HELPING HAND



### MILO'S SURPRISING BEHAVIOR



Imagine that the same story appeared in two different newspapers. Newspaper A displayed the heading “Milo Lends a Helping Hand” and Newspaper B reads “Milo’s Surprising Behavior”. Which headline would interest more readers? Why?

Many newspaper readers will skim a newspaper for headlines but not read the entire story. If a reader encountered the headline “Milo’s Surprising Behavior” but chose not to read the story, what impression (positive or negative) of Milo would that reader have? Why?

Which newspaper would sell more copies? Why?

Should journalists be allowed to write misleading headlines, that is, headlines that cause a reader to think something different than what the story is telling? Why or why not?



***NEWSPAPER LINKS***

Use your newspaper to find a crime story that includes a photograph. Read the heading and photograph caption and make an inference about the 5 W's and How of the story.

Headline: \_\_\_\_\_

**WHAT**

\_\_\_\_\_

**WHO**

\_\_\_\_\_

**WHEN**

\_\_\_\_\_

**WHERE**

\_\_\_\_\_

**WHY**

\_\_\_\_\_

**HOW**

\_\_\_\_\_

**LEARNING LYNX I** Criminal Justice  
Mythbusters



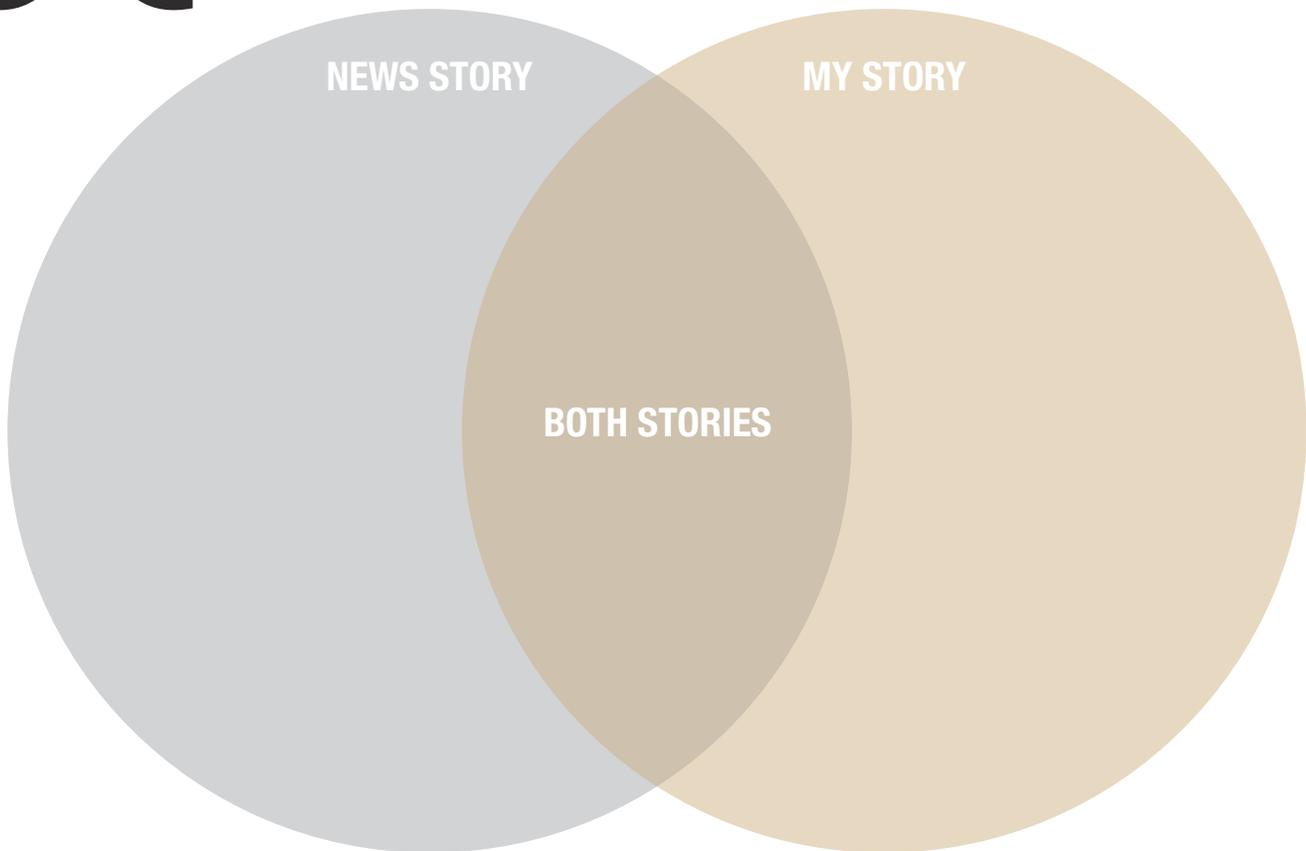
Without reading the article, use the information you have inferred to create your own news story:



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Now read the original story. Consider how the two stories are similar and how are they different. Use the Venn-Diagram to help you organize your thoughts.



As you compare and contrast your story from the actual news story, think about the impact of a photograph and heading on a reader's understanding of a newspaper article. Did the heading and photograph of the story that you read present an accurate depiction of the story? If not, what part of the heading or photograph provided information that caused you to think something that was not accurate?



## MYTHBUSTERS

Often, media sources contain accurate and reliable information that we can use to become informed citizens, But we must always think like investigators, constantly questioning what you read. When you do, you may be surprised by what you find.



### ***NEWSPAPER LINKS***

A myth is a fact that people believe to be true when in fact it is not. Take a look at the most common crime myths below. Search your newspaper for stories, photographs, and headlines or think about examples that you have seen in movies or on television that lead people to believe the myth. Then, read the true fact about the issue and try to find examples that oppose the myth and expose the real truth. Take notes on what you find in the chart below. Can you debunk all the myths below?

MYTH	EXAMPLE OF MYTH	FACT	EXAMPLE OF FACT
Violent crime is on the rise in CO		Violent Crimes in CO decreased by 3.4% in 2013	
Most crimes are solved by fingerprints and DNA		<1% of all crimes are solved by DNA or fingerprints.	



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### MILO'S EXTRA CREDIT

#### KWL

Return to your KWL chart and fill in what you learned “L” about Criminal justice and the media. Share your learning with a teacher, classmate, or family member.

#### Media Bias:

Practice your critical thinking skills through this game that will challenge you to think about bias and prejudice:

<http://bit.ly/1bOvX5g>

#### Mythbusters:

Perform an Internet search for “Crime Myths.” Select three myths to debunk by finding evidence in the newspaper or online that negates – or proves wrong – these common beliefs. How will you know if your sources are dependable?



### FIFTEEN SECOND SURVEY

Help us create a resource you can use with just 4 questions:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/s/68GNXSW>

#### COLORADO ACADEMIC STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1 Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.7 Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.6 Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author's point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts).



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