

## Newspapers in Your Life: What's News Where?

**Rationale/Main Concept:** How do newspapers decide if stories are publication-worthy? Why are some stories news in one community but not in others? In this activity, students use the Newseum's "Today's Front Pages" exhibit to explore the relationship between news and geography and compare/contrast what's front-page news in their community and in locations around the globe.

**Exhibit Summary:** "Today's Front Pages," updated daily [here](#), features the front pages of more than 800 newspapers from all 50 states, the District of Columbia and countries around the world. Newspapers can be sorted by state, country or region. The Newseum's website also features [archived front pages](#) from events of historical and journalistic significance.

**Objectives** – Students will understand:

- How the newsworthiness of a story is determined by impact, time, location and reader interest.
- How newspapers determine story placement based on perceived newsworthiness, editorial considerations and readership.
- How readership, location and competition from other news stories influence how a story is presented in the newspaper.

**Time:** 30 to 40 minutes

**Materials:**

- Digital or print copies of today's local newspaper (one per student pair).
- Digital or print copies of today's front pages from papers throughout the nation and around the world (these should be as varied as possible and set up in stations around the room).
- Handout 2-1: "Front Page Choices" (one per student, included in this packet).
- Handout 2-2: "Front Page Comparisons" (one per student, included in this packet).

**Procedure:**

- Tell students that they are going to explore the role of newspapers in a community and how newspapers choose stories. Ask students: What purpose do newspapers serve? How do newspaper editors decide if a story is news or not? Write their answers on a board for students to reference later. Summarize their findings:
  - A newspaper's purpose is to cover a community, reflect the readership and provide information that the residents of a community want to know, need to know and should know.
  - Possible guidelines for deciding whether or not to cover a story:
    - **Human interest:** Appeals to your emotions.
    - **Timeliness:** Is the event of immediate concern?
    - **Proximity:** How close is the event to you?
    - **Impact:** On your community, on many people.
    - **Celebrity:** How prominent is the person involved?
    - **Magnitude:** Storms, economic impact on the dollar.

- Distribute or display copies of today's paper. Ask students to find a partner, look closely at the front or home page and answer the questions in Handout 2-1.
- As a group, discuss students' observations. Review the priorities listed at the beginning of this lesson. What can you tell about the newspaper's priorities? What issues or topics are important to its readers?
- Tell students that they are now going to explore further how geography affects story coverage. Give students 10 minutes to look at the front pages you chose and take notes on Handout 2-2.
- Ask the students which papers give the best daily news coverage and why. Discuss what they can tell about the interests or concerns of each community, state or country. What differences do they see? Are any of their results surprising?
- Conclude by referring again to the list of guidelines written at the beginning of class. Ask: Do you want to add or erase anything? Are some guidelines more important than others?

## Extension Activities

1. Invite the managing editor of your local newspaper to visit your class. You can contact your local paper's Newspaper In Education program for assistance finding a news expert to visit your class. Prepare for the visit by:

- Reading the newspaper daily for one week and charting the international, national, regional and local stories.
- Noting how national stories have been localized.
- Brainstorming and selecting the best interview questions to ask.

2. Divide the class into two to four groups to produce class newspapers. Each group should select its managing editor, photography editor and arts/graphics editor. Other students should be given beats to cover: news, style/entertainment, sports, academics and clubs/organizations, or op-ed. Give students a day to brainstorm stories and sources and then reconvene to determine a production timeline and start the production process.

**For elementary school students:** Create your own front page! Bring in multiple copies of today's newspaper; if possible, include papers from different communities. Ask students to work in pairs or small groups to find the eight articles they think are most newsworthy. They should cut and paste these on poster paper to make a new front page. Have students reconvene to share their papers and explain their choices.

## Newspapers in Your Life: The First Rough Draft of History

**Rationale/Main Concept:** With the right to a free press comes the media’s responsibility to do their job well. What guides journalists when they cover the news? How can they gauge if their headlines reflect pivotal moments in our society? In this activity, students will use the Newseum’s “Today’s Front Pages” archive to find examples of news coverage of events that are now written up in history books. They will then compare and contrast front-page news coverage of a major event in their lifetime to the way history books present those stories. After gaining a hands-on understanding of how news becomes history, students predict what changes in information and coverage might occur over time for a current news event.

**Objectives** – Students will understand:

- Why news coverage of an event can differ from historical accounts.
- How news becomes history.

**Time:** 10-minute class discussion and a 45-minute worksheet

**Materials:**

- Access to the Newseum’s [“Today’s Front Pages”](#) archive.
- Handout 2-3: “From the Headlines to the History Books” (one per student, included in this packet).

**Procedure:**

- Tell students they’re going to explore why news has been called the “first rough draft of history” and the differences between that rough-draft stage and the information that appears in our history books.
- Begin the discussion by finding events in the archived front pages that you can now read about in history books or other reliable sources of historical information (for example: the 2008 U.S. presidential election or the 2011 uprising in Cairo, Egypt).
- Ask the students how they think our understanding of those events may have changed from when the original news coverage appeared. For example:
  - We may know more background information.
  - Some initial details in the news story might be wrong because of the rush to get the news out before deadlines.
  - We now know what happened in the weeks or months after the big event.
- Tell your students they’re going to study one specific event in recent history and compare the front-page coverage of that event to the information that we now have about that event. Students should pick one of the following major news stories, for which front pages have been archived on the Newseum [website](#):

- Columbia space shuttle explosion, 2003
  - Terrorist bombings in Madrid, 2004
  - Tsunami in Asia, 2004
  - Terrorist bombings in London, 2005
  - Hurricane Katrina, 2005
  - Discovery lifts off, 2007
  - Beijing Olympics, 2008
- Distribute the “From the Headlines to the History Books” handout. Ask your students to look up the front pages for their chosen event on the Newseum [website](#), research more recent accounts in history books or other reliable sources for historical information and then complete the worksheet.
  - When students have completed the assignment, lead a class discussion about what they found:
    - Were there major changes in our understanding of what happened between the news coverage and information that emerged later?
    - Were there bigger changes for some events than for others?
  - Ask the students to share the current news stories for which they made their predictions and how they think our understanding of these events will change over time.

### Extension Activities

1. Give students Handout 2-4, the Newseum’s [“Stories of the Century” poll](#) sponsored by *USA Weekend* and tell them that they are going to rank the important historical events of the 20th century. Ask students to cut and paste the events from most important to least important, 1 being the most important event and 100 the least important. Students may need to research events with which they are unfamiliar to complete this activity. Students should compare their lists and discuss:

- Which rankings do you roughly agree on? Why? Which do you disagree on? Why?
- How did you decide which events were most important historically? Least important?
- Do you think the events at the top of your lists were newsworthy at the time? What about the events at the bottom of your list? How do you know?
- How would your list be different if you were ranking the most important news stories of the 20th century? Why?

2. As a class, research and create a list of 20 important events from 2000 to today. Use newspaper articles and headlines, history books and history websites for guidance. (Newspapers have archives of their articles and your local NIE coordinator may be able to arrange free access for your class.) Create a paper or digital poll for your classmates, teachers and families to rank the events from a historian’s perspective. Discuss:

- What was the process of choosing events like? How did you decide which events made the cut?
- In this exercise, you choose and ranked events for the history books. How might your process be similar to that of a news editor preparing for the next publication? How might your criteria be different?

**For elementary school students:** Ask students individually to come up with a list of 10 events they think were really important during their lives. Have them share and debate their ideas with the class, then vote for a group list. How did they decide which events were most important? Next, make a time capsule with objects that represent each event. At the end of the school year, open it up. Would students choose the same events? Why or why not?

**Handout 2-1: Front-Page Choices**

**Name:**

**Date:**

A newspaper's purpose is to cover a community, reflect the readership and provide information that the residents of a community want to know, need to know and should know.

Newspaper name:

Newspaper date:

How many stories appear on the front page?

How many stories are about an event or action that took place outside the United States?

How many stories are about a national event or action?

How many stories are about a state event or action?

How many stories are about a local event or action?

Choose three stories. How does each story relate to the local community or community interests?

Story 1

Title:

How it relates to the community:

Story 2

Title:

How it relates to the community:

Story 3

Title:

How it relates to the community:

Are there any stories you wouldn't have included? Explain your reasoning.

**Handout 2-2: Front-Page Comparisons**

**Name:**

**Date:**

<i>State:</i>	<i>Foreign country:</i>
<i>Newspaper:</i>	<i>Newspaper:</i>
<i>Lead story:</i>	<i>Lead story:</i>
<i>How many stories are on the front page?</i>	<i>How many stories are on the front page?</i>
<i>How many of those stories are local?</i>	<i>How many of those stories are local?</i>
<i>National?</i>	<i>National?</i>
<i>International?</i>	<i>International?</i>
<i>How many photos or graphics are on the front page?</i>	<i>How many photos or graphics are on the front page?</i>
<i>Based on the stories, photos and graphics, which issues are most important to readers?</i>  1.  2.  3.	<i>Based on the stories, photos and graphics, which issues are important to readers?</i>  1.  2.  3.



## Handout 2-3: From the Headlines to the History Books

Name:

Date:

**Instructions:** *Washington Post* publisher Philip Graham famously described news as the “first rough draft of history.” Your task will be to evaluate how this description plays out in real life by comparing breaking news coverage of a major event to the coverage that emerged over time, years after the initial event.

To complete this worksheet, choose one of the following events for which the Newseum has archived front pages on its [website](#):

- Columbia space shuttle explosion, 2003
- Terrorist bombings in Madrid, 2004
- Tsunami in Asia, 2004
- Terrorist bombings in London, 2005
- Hurricane Katrina, 2005
- Discovery lifts off, 2007
- Beijing Olympics, 2008

For your chosen event, first explore the front pages online and then find more recent articles, books or online sources about these events. Use all of the sources you gathered to answer the questions below.

1. Name of story/event:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Does the front-page coverage of this event feel complete? What questions do you still have?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Are there any facts the newspapers got wrong or perspectives they missed?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
4. List three pieces of information about this event that did not emerge until after the front-page coverage.

5. What facts/pieces of information are treated as the most important in the front-page article? What facts/pieces of information are treated as the most important in historical coverage of the event? Explain why you think the information treated as the most important stayed the same or why it changed.
  
6. From a journalist's perspective, how would you rate the information in the original coverage of your event? Does it answer all of the "reporter's questions"? (Who? What? Where? When? Why? How?) Is it accurate, fair and clear? Does it grab your attention?
  
7. From a historical perspective, how would you rate the information in the front-page article?
  
8. Choose a major news story from today's newspaper that you think will someday make it into the history books.
  - a. Name of story:
  - b. How do you think coverage of this event will change over time? What new information are we going to find out? What will prove to be the most important aspect of the story?

## Handout 2-4: Stories of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

Quantum mechanics proposed	1900	GI Bill of Rights strengthened	1945
Freud interprets dreams	1900	ENIAC accelerates computing	1946
Radio signal spans Atlantic	1901	Robinson integrates baseball	1947
Wrights fly first airplane	1903	Marshall Plan unveiled	1947
Einstein conceives relativity	1905	Scientists invent transistor	1948
Quake, fire devastate S.F.	1906	Israel achieves statehood	1948
Plastic revolutionizes products	1909	Airlift saves West Berlin	1948
U.S. radio broadcasts begin	1909	NATO established	1949
Standard Oil trust busted	1911	Mao starts communist China	1949
“Unsinkable” Titanic sinks	1912	U.S. defends South Korea	1950
Ford creates assembly line	1913	New polio vaccine works	1953
World War I begins	1914	DNA’s structure discovered	1953
Panama Canal opens	1914	Court ends “separate but equal”	1954
U.S. enters World War I	1917	Alabama bus boycott begins	1955
Communists take over Russia	1917	Interstate highways approved	1956
World War I ends	1918	Soviets launch first satellite	1957
Flu epidemic kills 20 million	1918	China’s famine to kill 20 million	1958
U.S. women win the right to vote	1920	First computer chip patented	1959
Gandhi starts nonviolent reform	1920	Birth control pill OK’d by FDA	1960
U.S. rejects League of Nations	1920	Gagarin first man in space	1961
Scopes: evolution vs. creation	1925	Shepard first American in space	1961
Lindbergh flies Atlantic alone	1927	Berlin Wall goes up	1961
Babe Ruth hits 60 home runs	1927	“Silent Spring” warns of eco- danger	1962
Antibiotic penicillin discovered	1928	Glenn first American in orbit	1962
Soviet famine to kill 25 million	1928	World crisis over Cuba missiles	1962
U.S. stock market crashes	1929	JFK assassinated in Dallas	1963
FDR defeats President Hoover	1932	King delivers ‘Dream’ speech	1963
FDR’s New Deal begins	1933	Friedan sparks women’s rights	1963
Hitler named chancellor	1933	Congress OKs Civil Rights Act	1964
Hitler launches “Kristallnacht”	1938	Beatles tour USA	1964
Official U.S. debut of TV	1939	U.S. warns of smoking hazards	1964
Germany invades Poland	1939	Gulf of Tonkin Resolution OK’d	1964
First jet plane takes off	1939	U.S. escalates Vietnam War	1965
Churchill leads Great Britain	1940	Congress passes voting act	1965
Japan bombs Pearl Harbor	1941	M.L. King Jr. assassinated	1968
U.S.-licensed TV begins	1941	Robert F. Kennedy slain	1968
Secret project to make A-bomb	1942	Riots at Democratic convention	1968
Allies invade France on D-Day	1944	Men first walk on the moon	1969
Nazi Holocaust exposed	1945	Roe vs. Wade legalizes abortion	1973
U.S. celebrates V-E Day	1945	U.S. troops leave Vietnam	1973
World’s nations form U.N.	1945	Watergate engulfs Nixon	1973
U.S. tests atomic bomb	1945		

---

President Nixon resigns	1974
Gates, Allen start Microsoft	1975
North Vietnam takes Saigon	1975
Apple II first mass-market PC	1977
First “test-tube baby” born	1978
Deadly AIDS disease identified	1981
Gorbachev begins “glasnost”	1985
Shuttle Challenger explodes	1986
Chernobyl nuke plant explodes	1986
Berlin Wall falls	1989
World Wide Web invented	1989
Soviet Union dissolves	1991
Apartheid ends in South Africa	1993
Scientists clone sheep	1997
Pathfinder sends Mars photos	1997
President Clinton’s trial	1998