



Lesson Title	Do journalists shape or report the news?		
Lesson Plan Number 6	Age Range/ Year Group	15-18 years	
Resources	Learning Outcomes		
1. Copies of newspapers containing lurid headlines and images and contrasting more serious paper (two contrasting newspaper per group of four). 2. Resource Sheet 1. Task 1 – Do the media create stereotypes and negative imagery? Task 2 – What are some examples of negativity within the media? 3. Resource Sheet 2. Task 3 – Which powers do the media have? Task 4 – Why are the media fascinated by bad news? 4. Resource Sheet 3. Task 5 – What makes newspapers sell? Task 6 - Who is responsible for the news that is received by the public?	By the end of this lesson students will be able to; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decide whether journalists shape or report the news. • Consider what kind of news sells. 		

LESSON INTRODUCTION

This lesson encourages students to question whether journalists shape or report news. Through doing so, students discuss the fact that ‘bad news sells’ and explore the impact of this upon intercultural understanding.

STARTER (10 mins)

- Ask students to briefly discuss (in pairs) some stereotypes that they have come across in the media.
- Encourage students to briefly share their ideas (and praise those that do so).
- Explain to students that an organisation called ‘Connecting Cultures’ unites young people from different cultures. This is achieved through these young people meeting each other and describing their own cultures as well as their perceptions of other cultures.
- Show students task one (explaining that the quotes are taken from young people involved in ‘Connecting Cultures’). Ask students to discuss the quotes in pairs.
- Show students task two. Ask them to discuss the stories in pairs.
- Ask students the following questions:
 - How do the young people quoted in task one feel about the media’s portrayal of people from different cultural groups?
 - Do you think that everyone in Peru supports ‘Shining Path’ views and actions?
 - Do you think that everyone in the Basque region supports ETA views and actions?
 - If someone in your country read about ‘Shining Path’ or ETA every day, how might this eventually affect their views on ‘normal’ Peruvian and Basque citizens?

MAIN ACTIVITY (20 mins)

- Ask students to read task three. Encourage them, as individuals, to choose the quote with which they most agree.
- Invite students to justify (orally) why they have chosen a particular quote.
- Suggested answers:
 - "I strongly agree with the third quote. It made me realise that it is our responsibility to stop buying the papers that focus on stereotypes all the time."
 - "I chose quote one because it reminded me of all the innocent peace-loving Muslims in my town. Because of the media, they are now suspected of being terrorists just because they have a beard and don't wear jeans every day."
- Show students task four. Ask them to discuss (A) and (B) in small groups.
- Put the following questions on the board (and ask students to answer them through group discussion):
 1. Why do you think that negative news is usually seen to be 'newsworthy' whereas positive news often gets left out?
 2. Can you think of an example from a recent news story that encourages the public to feel negatively about members of a minority group? Explain.
 3. Do you think that journalists report everything that happens, or do you think they just choose certain news stories? Explain.
 4. Why do you think that 'bad news sells'?
- Ask students to get into groups of four and give each group two contrasting newspapers (please note – the newspaper in question should have lots of lurid headlines and images).
- Invite students to respond to the questions in Task 5
- Emphasise to students the fact that they should read shocking negative headlines with care in the future; plenty of 'good news' stories are available to journalists every day but most of these get left out of newspapers for financial reasons.

SUMMARY (10 mins)

- Ask students to read Task Six.
- Ask them to choose the six stories that they want to keep (one of which should be a headline). They should work in groups of three or four for this task.
- Invite a spokesperson from each group to feed back to the class.
- Prompt questions for spokespersons might include:
 - Did you deliberately choose the kind of stories that the public is in the habit of hearing? If so, what kind of stories were they?
 - Did you deliberately leave out the kind of stories that the public is in the habit of hearing? If so, explain why.
 - Do you think that journalists and news broadcasters should focus upon negative news because 'bad news sells', or on positive stories which promote positivity about people from minority groups?
 - How important is profit to the media? Which kind of stories make the most money?



- What could the public do stop such a large amount of stories revolving around negative stereotypes and biased reporting?

An example of a good answer is:

“We tried to be realistic about what the public wanted to hear. In other words, we thought that people might be more interested in the story of a child being killed than the one about the lady picking up litter. This is because lots of people have seen litter-pickers but might never experience a local terrorist attack. We think that people would get frustrated with the media if they just kept telling the public about things that they had already seen for themselves. On the other hand, we deliberately included some ‘positive stories’, because we feel that it is the media’s responsibility to re-assure the public that there are a lot of nice people in this world! At the moment the media seem determined to prevent intercultural understanding.”

EXTENSION/FOLLOW UP IDEAS

Imagine that you are a member of the public who is campaigning about the fact that the media encourages stereotypes and presents biased stories.

Decide how your campaign is going to work (consider petitions, protests, local government, boycotting particular news publications etc).

Be ready to explain your campaign to the other students next lesson.

CHECK THE WEB

1. www.guardian.co.uk for a British newspaper that is often described as having ‘good quality journalism’.
2. www.dailymail.co.uk for a British newspaper that is often described as having ‘biased journalism’.
3. www.connectingcultures.co.uk to find out more about the ‘Connecting Cultures’ project.

NATIONAL CURRICULUM LINKS

KS4: 1.1.b, 1.2.b, 1.3.c, 2.1.a, 2.1.c, 2.2.b, 3g, 4a, 4b, 4c & 4i.



TASK ONE. Do the media create stereotypes and negative imagery?

Many young people believe that the media negatively affect the way in which we perceive other people.

Read the quotes below and discuss them with your partner.

“This journey has made me see the real faces and voices of Middle East people, and I can say right now that they’re quite different of the news about this region that we watch in our western media.”

Santiago Lozano Lopez, Spain.

“I’ve learnt the extent to which the media and stereotyping actually influences our minds, we really don’t know enough about other cultures to even begin prejudicing/judging.”

Anne-Marie Piper, Oman/Australia/UK.

TASK TWO. What are some examples of negativity within the media?

Based on the idea that ‘bad news sells’, the media usually focus upon stories that are sad, frightening, or downright shocking. In other words, newspapers and televised news broadcasts are full of biased stories. These stories make readers and viewers feel frightened – even though they focus upon rare occurrences or minority groups!

Have a look at the stories below.

(A). Innocent workers kidnapped in Peru!

In 2003, innocent gas pipeline workers were abducted by a group of sixty heavily-armed kidnappers from the ‘Shining Path’ organisation. The attackers were thought to be seeking a ransom.

The anti-government hostage-takers undertook the attack in the Ayacucho region of Peru (about 400 miles southeast of Lima).

Peruvian ‘Shining Path’ rebels first became well-known for their dislike of their government in 1980. Shining Path members committed brutalities against people who were considered to support the government. They were thus labelled as terrorists by many Peruvian citizens.

(B). Bomb attack in Spain’s capital city!

In December 2007, a bomb attack at Madrid airport killed two people and left 26 injured. It also destroyed a five-storey car park.

Responsibility for the attack was claimed by ETA (a Basque Separatist group).

As a result of the attack, the Spanish government stated that it was not willing to negotiate with ETA.

Although ETA had not killed anybody since 2003, police in the Basque Country found in their possession explosives that could be use for car bombs. Car bombs have previously been used by ETA as part of their campaign for independence in the Basque region.



TASK THREE. Which powers do the media have?

Many people do not realise what a huge influence institutions such as television, the radio, the internet and newspapers have over people.

Decide which of the quotes below most interests you.

“The media’s the most powerful entity on earth. They have the power to make the innocent guilty and to make the guilty innocent, and that’s power. Because they control the minds of the masses.”

Malcolm X.

“The news media are, for the most part, the bringers of bad news... and it’s not entirely the media’s fault, bad news gets higher ratings and sells more papers than good news.”

Peter McWilliams.

“The media’s power is frail. Without the people’s support, it can be shut off with the ease of turning a light switch.”

Corazon Aquino.

“The current state of the news media is partially to blame for the public’s general lack of information vital for responsible citizenship in a democracy. The news media has become an aspect of show business, offering merely infotainment.”

Teresa Stover.

“Our aim is to help...understand the world a little better and enjoying doing it – what we call ‘education in the broadest sense of the word’.

Pearson, international media company.

TASK FOUR. Why are the media fascinated by bad news?

It is very important to question why so many news stories focus upon issues such as terrorism, betrayal, suffering and misunderstanding. It is also essential to recognise that many news stories only talk about very small minority groups and as such promote stereotypes.

Discuss the information below in small groups

An American newspaper that was packed full of positive and inspirational stories was created because its owners felt that people were tired of reading bad news. It was called ‘Good News’. The fortnightly publication ignored bad news and instead printed good news.

The newspaper did not last very long however. After only 16 months in operation, it was forced to close down because readers just didn’t seem interested in good news stories.

The newspaper refused to print the fact that it was shutting down (because this was bad news!). As such, it simply disappeared from the shelves.

The last issue contained the headline “No war declared in 16 weeks!”.

TASK FIVE. What makes newspapers sell?

Which headlines have the more impact?

Why do you think that your newspaper contains lots of shocking images and headlines?

If a newspaper wanted to make more money, what kind of stories would it focus upon?

Which paper do you think has higher circulation? Why?

Do newspaper buyers have a responsibility for the content of newspapers?

What has surprised you the most about what you have just discussed?

Pause for thought?

Bombarding readers/viewers with frightening information keeps them 'hooked'.

Alarming headlines catch people's attention very quickly.

Death is a concept understood by every culture in the world.

Negative imagery stirs up strong emotions.

Education about foreign cultures is usually very limited. As such, citizens are quick to believe that other cultures are threatening.

Worry about a 'loss of traditional values' is very common in the 21st century.

Stereotyping leads the public to mistrust minority groups. People thus want to find out more about them.

So many people do not question whether what they are reading is biased.

Everyone likes to believe that he/she is a good person. When comparing ourselves with terrorists (etc) most of us feel better about our own personalities.

Lots of people believe that the world is an evil place and that they must find out about evil organisations in order to protect themselves from them.

Losing track of the low frequency of 'bad news' in everyday life is easily done. In other words, people believe that bad news is more common than it really is.

Scapegoating individuals or groups appeals to people who want someone to blame for the world's problems.



TASK SIX. Who is responsible for the news that is received by the public?

There are millions of daily events that do not make the headlines! People who work at news desks have to decide which stories to include, which to leave out, and which to prioritise.

Imagine that you are in charge of a television news station. Ten journalists approach you with a story that they hope will be televised tonight. You can only choose six stories. Which six will you choose? Which one will be your headline story?

1. A thirty-year-old woman is planning to spend her weekend picking up litter in a local supermarket car park.
2. A young child loses her legs when her classroom collapses during a terrorist attack.
3. A couple who have been happily married for thirty years write a book about respect within relationships.
4. A doctor is tortured in Afghanistan after expressing concern about Al-Qaeda.
5. A lady viciously attacks an elderly gentleman whilst shouting biblical quotes at him.
6. A lady who has failed her driving test four times passes with very few faults.
7. A man decides to donate 1% of his wage to charity every month.
8. A Muslim British-born Maths teacher has been researching homemade bombs on a school computer.
9. Twenty human rights campaigners are taken hostage by attackers who support human rights violations.
10. A twelve-year-old is given a special pen that helps him to improve his spelling.

