

Television news: Key Stage 4 lesson plans

Lesson 1: Investigate the news: its principles and impartiality.

Lesson 2: Comparing the way British news treats stories from Britain and abroad and producing a 60 second news bulletin.

Television news and Citizenship objectives	1	2
1a: The legal and human rights and responsibilities underpinning society and how they relate to citizens	●	●
1g: The importance of a free press, and the media's role in society, in providing information and affecting opinion	●	●
2a: Research a topical political, spiritual, moral, problem or event by analysing information from different sources	●	●
2b: Express, justify and defend orally and in writing a personal opinion about such issues, problems or events	●	●
2c: Contribute to group and exploratory class discussions	●	●
3a: Use their imagination to consider other people's experiences and be able to think about, express, explain and critically evaluate views that are not their own	●	●
3b: Negotiate, decide and take part responsibly in school activities	●	●
3c: Reflect on the process of participating	●	●

Media literacy objectives		
See a range of FVT that both consolidates and extends existing viewing experiences	●	●
Investigate a topic using FVT text.	●	●

A central principle of public service broadcasting is impartiality. But how impartial is the news really? The Chair and Director General of the BBC are selected by the British government. Does this in anyway affect how the BBC reports on the British government's activities? Many people feel that the BBC is not free from political interference. In the past the BBC have been accused of taking the Government's side in both the Israel/Palestine question and the coverage of the Iraq War. The Hutton affair in 2004 reflected the tensions that can arise from a commitment to impartiality towards the government in power. Some people also believe that powerful media corporations, such as Murdoch's, influence the news and make it less impartial.

When news events occur between people with particular points of view or in conflict, it can be difficult for reporters to maintain impartiality. In the past, early TV news announcers were not shown on screen, to ensure impartiality. The audience merely heard their voices. Producers were afraid that if the people could see the news announcer that a smile or a raised eyebrow could affect impartiality. Some people believe that even a newsreader's intonation can undermine impartiality influencing the way audiences respond to particular events. Traditionally, newsreaders and reporters have been expected to report news without showing emotion, even in the most extreme circumstances. However, some people suggest that relaxing the rule of impartiality would make the news more interesting for audiences. After all, newspapers can be affiliated to a certain political way of thinking and are not subject to the rules of impartiality. This would make an interesting topic for classroom discussion.

Lesson 1: Investigate the news: its principles and impartiality.

Resources

General

TV and Video Player

Development

News feature – try to get something contentious that will spark discussion about bias and impartiality e.g. Michael Jackson trial

Starter

- In pairs, pupils consider and make notes on the following questions:
 - What is the news?
 - What principles should the news abide by?
- Collect ideas and discuss as a class. (Hopefully they will come up with the idea of the news being impartial)
- Inform them that Reith (the first Director General of the BBC) insisted that the news should be impartial.

Modelling

- Look at a news feature.
- Analyse it and discuss whether it seems impartial.
- Discuss how it might be written to present a different point of view.

Development

- Either: Ask the class to make a list of five or six current news issues (local ones could work well). Or: provide a list of news items.
- In pairs, pupils choose one of the stories and write two news reports for television news, one designed to be impartial and the other to show a bias for or against.
- Present one or two and students peer assess.

Plenary

- Pose the question: Is it possible for the television news to be impartial?
- Allow pairs/groups 5 minutes to discuss it, then discuss as a class.

Homework

Ask pupils to watch the news and make a note of all news items that are not set in Britain. They should also note where these stories come in the running order and the visuals that are used to illustrate them.

Extension tasks

Students could produce a news report for Newsround on a horrific event, such as 9/11 or the tsunami, so that it is suitable for children. They should watch Newsround as part of preparing for producing this story and discuss what the producers consider to be appropriate for child audiences

Lesson 2: Comparing the way British news programmes treats stories from Britain and abroad and producing a 60 second news bulletin.

Resources

General

TV and Video Player

Video recording of a BBC3 60 second news report

Development

Worksheet 4: 'News stories' (PDF)

Starter

- In pairs, pupils discuss findings from homework research.
- Pairs join to form groups of four and discuss the same to identify five main points to feedback to class.
- Class feedback.
- Consolidations of points on board. (Usually foreign news is given less value than British news.)
- Discuss the moral issues behind their findings.

Modelling

Watch the BBC3 60-second news report.

Development

- Give pupils, in pairs or groups of four, a list of 12 news stories. See Worksheet 4: 'News stories'.
- Ask them to produce two running orders for a prime-time TV news programme – one as they think it would be in reality, ie foreign news being given less prominence than British, and an alternative schedule, featuring the stories they think are morally the most important.
- Out of twelve stories, they can include six for each running order.
- They should then produce a 60-second news bulletin in the style used by BBC3 for both schedules.

Plenary

- Ask pupils to present their bulletins. (You could film them with a DV camera if you have the equipment.)
- Discuss why the two schedules, and the different schedules from different pairs or groups, are so different (or so similar, depending how they turned out).
- Discuss: Why do television producers minimise the importance of foreign news? How do you feel about this?

Homework

Pupils should use a newspaper to research an item of foreign news that has been given very little coverage in TV news broadcasts and write notes on how to turn it into the main TV news story of the day. You should suggest one or two stories they could research.

Extension tasks

Use this homework as a basis for filming pupils presenting news features for a news programme. You could specify a particular news programme as the model, or have each group model their presentation on a different programme.