

TEACHING JOURNALISM ETHICS IN THE  
HIGH SCHOOL JOURNALISM CLASSROOM  
THROUGH THE USE OF TEXT SETS

by

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## Project Summary

It is common for an introductory journalism class to spend time learning how to locate sources, conduct interviews, and synthesize gathered information into a news story, but none of those tasks can be mastered without students gaining a fundamental understanding of press ethics. Ethical issues, like impartiality and the use of anonymous sources, arise every day for journalists of all types of media and years of experience, yet ethics instruction at the high school level is all too frequently relegated to advising students on a case-by-case basis as issues arise. Educating students about journalism ethics not only results in better journalists in the classroom, but also more mindful consumers of media out in the real world. My search for an effective intersection of ethics instruction and secondary journalism education led me to the research question, *How can text sets be used in a high school journalism classroom to teach journalism ethics?*

This project is a unit of curriculum aligned with the Minnesota ninth and tenth grade English standards. The unit contains 8 lessons, each of which is 45 minutes in length but can easily be adjusted longer depending on the instructor's intended use of the accompanying text set. This unit is designed to be integrated into an introductory journalism classroom that is simultaneously learning the basics of newswriting and reporting; for this reason, the lessons are intended to be taught once per week, for a total of 8 weeks.

The focus of the unit is journalism ethics. Using the National Scholastic Press Association's Model Code of Ethics for High School Students (Swikle, 2009) as an

anchor, the unit takes students on a journey through many of the ethical facets of being a high school journalist. The goal of this unit is to give students an understanding of how to evaluate the messages they encounter every day in the media and empower them to hold themselves and each other accountable for the choices they make that can potentially be helpful or hurtful to others.

To bring real world depth to journalism ethics, this unit is centered around a text set that includes 10 texts of various media, from news articles and videos to podcast episodes and a cartoon. This text set facilitates building background, synthesizing information, and discussing ethical dilemmas throughout the lesson sequence. The Text Set Summary that follows presents and summarizes each of the 10 texts that guide this unit.

Because this project focuses on using text sets to teach journalism ethics, the primary audience is high school journalism and publications teachers. High school English teachers may also choose to use this curriculum in a wider media literacy unit as its intended outcome of empowering students to evaluate the media messages they see every day is useful in these types of units. Finally, homeschooling parents and students may find benefit in using this curriculum because of its accompanying text set with resources that allow for deeper understanding of journalism ethics in the real world; the only caveat for homeschooled students is that many activities rely on partner and group discussions and activities, so these parts of the lesson plans may require modification.

Students with any level of journalism experience can benefit from this unit, however it is geared towards ninth- and tenth-graders who are at the beginning of their

student journalism endeavors. Before starting the unit, students should know how to read and understand news articles. The way this unit is presented, as a once-per-week ethics lesson sequence that spans 8 weeks, is conducive to students spending the other four days of the school week learning how to locate and interview sources and how to write news briefs, among other introductory topics. By bringing the conversation back to ethics as students gain practical reporting experience, the unit encourages periodic revisiting and reframing of applied ethics in journalism.

The research framework behind this capstone project and its resulting curriculum is Understanding by Design, created by Wiggins and McTighe (2011). This framework describes the process of designing curriculum backwards, starting with identifying the intended outcome of a unit, then deciding what evidence students will present to display mastery, and finally developing the lessons and activities that move students toward accomplishing these goals (Wiggins & McTighe, 2011). By following these steps in this particular order, an instructor is better able to develop focused, successful classroom content without leaning too heavily on a textbook to guide the way and without including any lessons that distract from the main objectives. The Unit Overview that follows serves as an at-a-glance guide to how this unit was designed, from intended outcome to lesson plan sequence.

My goal in this project was to design a curriculum that answers the question: *How can text sets be used in a high school journalism classroom to teach journalism ethics?* The following documents are the Text Set Summary, Unit Overview, Lesson Plan Calendar, Lesson Plans, and Resources for teaching this unit.

## PROJECT TABLE OF CONTENTS

Text Set Summary.....	5
Unit Overview.....	11
Lesson Plan Calendar.....	14
Lesson Plans.....	15
Unit Resources.....	36
References.....	37

## Text Set Summary

The 10 texts presented below are the overall guides for this unit. Of the 10 texts, 3 of them are specifically referenced in the lesson plans that follow, during Lesson #1 and Lesson #7 of the sequence. The other 7 texts are useful in grounding the lessons on media ethics in the real world and are optional to incorporate throughout the curriculum. An instructor may choose to require students to read, watch, listen to, or observe certain texts before or after their accompanying lessons. If the instructor has more than 45 minutes of time to meet with students, he or she may choose to incorporate discussions of or responses to these optional texts in the extra time, or maybe build them into journaling or lesson opener activities.

I chose to keep 7 texts optional because publications classes are so diverse and often hectic that an instructor may not find the time to incorporate all 10 texts into a unit that reconvenes once per week amid pressing writing deadlines and other class work. Additionally, 7 of these texts are optional because many lessons have activities that are centered around news and opinion articles that are fluid based on when and where this unit is taught, and since there are texts incorporated from outside of this main text set, I made some of these guiding texts optional for use during lessons.

Regardless of the level of explicit integration of these texts into class lessons, the instructor ought to make all 10 texts available for students throughout the unit, as the texts will deepen students' understanding of journalism ethics and aid them in the various projects and assessments they will complete.

<b>Model Code of Ethics for High School Students</b>
Randy G. Swikle, National Scholastic Press Association (NSPA)
Anchor text
<p>First published in 2009, the NSPA Model Code of Ethics for High School Students provides student journalists with a set of newsroom ethics that specifically apply to their place and purpose within the world of journalism so that they do not need to translate professional codes of ethics to fit their roles. This text guides the structure of the unit because of its specificity to high school journalism and the clear set of directives it lays out, not to mention the depth of information it provides students who peruse it. This text is part of the activity sequence for Lesson #1 – Introduction to Media Ethics and may be read ahead of the lesson or during class.</p>
<p>Swikle, R. G. (2009). <i>Model code of ethics for high school students</i> (1st ed.). National Scholastic Press Association.  <a href="http://studentpress.org/nsipa/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/04/wheel_modelcodeofethics.pdf">http://studentpress.org/nsipa/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/04/wheel_modelcodeofethics.pdf</a></p>
<b>SPJ Code of Ethics</b>
Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ)
Supplement to anchor text
<p>While students learning from this unit will put most of their focus on the NSPA Model Code of Ethics, it is important for them to understand the ethical expectations of professional journalists. By reviewing the SPJ Code of Ethics alongside the NSPA Model Code of Ethics, students can better understand the similarities and differences in roles of high school and career journalists and gain a deeper perspective on the field of press ethics. This text is part of the activity sequence for Lesson #1 – Introduction to Media Ethics and may be read ahead of the lesson or during class.</p>
<p>Society of Professional Journalists. (2014). Code of ethics.  <a href="https://www.spj.org/pdf/spj-code-of-ethics.pdf">https://www.spj.org/pdf/spj-code-of-ethics.pdf</a></p>
<b>Press Rights Minute #26 – Unnamed Sources</b>
Megan Fromm, Scholastic Press Rights
Podcast episode

This episode, just under a minute long, is a short and sweet way to present the issue of anonymous sources to students. The podcast defines unnamed sources and clearly states when a journalist might choose to use them, most importantly providing guidelines for what journalists ought to do when they can't. This text is best used in conjunction with either Lesson #2 – Be Responsible or Lesson #7 – Minimize Harm.

Fromm, M. (Producer). (n.d.). Press rights minute #26 – Unnamed sources [Audio podcast]. Retrieved from <https://soundcloud.com/scholastic-press-rights/press-rights-minute-26-unnamed-sources>

### **A Betrayal: The teenager told police all about his gang, MS-13. In return, he was slated for deportation and marked for death.**

Hannah Dreier, ProPublica, in partnership with New York Magazine

Feature article and video

Though lengthy, this feature package serves as a model for responsible journalism practices. Due to the sensitive nature of the story, immigration reporter Hannah Dreier worked with many parties, from gang experts to the subject's lawyer, to protect the subject's identity while presenting an in-depth view into his life. This text is best used in conjunction with Lesson #2 – Be Responsible and can be presented to students as a whole package or even just in video form, depending on the level of engagement the instructor is going for.

Dreier, H. (2018, April 2). A betrayal: The teenager told police all about his gang, MS-13. In return, he was slated for deportation and marked for death. *ProPublica, New York Magazine*.  
<https://features.propublica.org/ms-13/a-betrayal-ms13-gang-police-fbi-ice-deportation/>

### **Brainerd Student Speaks Out On Trump Comment in Yearbook**

Liz Collin, CBS Minnesota

Video and news story

Quoting a source can potentially leave people in a vulnerable place. This broadcast news package centers around a student who made an offhand remark about wanting President Trump beheaded and was quoted in the yearbook as saying it, even though she did not know she was being interviewed by a member of the yearbook staff. It provides a cautionary tale about being transparent as a journalist to protect the stakeholders in a news story from harm. This text is best used in conjunction with Lesson #3 – Be Fair and can be presented to students as a whole package or in video



form.
Collin, L. (2017, May 19). Brainerd student speaks out on Trump comment in yearbook. <i>CBS Minnesota</i> . <a href="https://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2017/05/19/brainerd-h-s-yearbook-threaten-trump/">https://minnesota.cbslocal.com/2017/05/19/brainerd-h-s-yearbook-threaten-trump/</a>

<b>Staging, Manipulation and Truth in Photography</b>
The New York Times Lens
Series of written opinions
Allegations of staging a photo cost a skilled photographer a major prize in a photography competition. This post on the Lens blog by <i>The New York Times</i> presents the issue of image manipulation in the world of photojournalism in light of the revocation of that prize. In this post, several photographers and editors share their ideas and experiences in regards to the issue, making for an interesting look into the ethics of photojournalism. This text is best used in conjunction with Lesson #4 – Be Honest.
Staging, manipulation and truth in photography. (2015, October 16). <i>The New York Times</i> . <a href="https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/10/16/staging-manipulation-ethics-photos/">https://lens.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/10/16/staging-manipulation-ethics-photos/</a>

<b><i>Shattered Glass</i></b>
Lions Gate Films
Feature film
This film portrays the story of Stephen Glass, a journalist with <i>The New Republic</i> who, in the late 1990s, was outed as having made up sources, quotes, and even entire stories for publication. Though it is adapted to a film-going audience and thus somewhat dramatized, it depicts an essentially true story of a journalist who thrived on dishonesty. This text is best used in conjunction with Lesson #4 – Be Honest, but as it tells the story of a journalist who appears in the Journalist Dishonesty Scandals Activity, it may be best used after the lesson.
Ray, B. (Director). (2003). <i>Shattered glass</i> [Film]. Lions Gate Films.

<b>Retraction</b>
Ira Glass, This American Life
Podcast episode

With this episode of *This American Life*, Ira Glass addresses the implications of having received false information from a source and, in turn, sharing that information with the world. Glass presents the importance of not only fact checking and verifying information before using it in a story, but also being transparent and admitting to having made a mistake. This text is best used in conjunction with either Lesson #5 – Be Accurate or Lesson #8 – Be Accountable.

Glass, I. (Producer). (2012, March 16). Retraction [Audio podcast]. *This American Life*. Retrieved from <https://www.thisamericanlife.org/460/retraction>

**“Try this—I just bought a hundred shares.”**

C. Covert Darbyshire, New Yorker

Cartoon



*“Try this—I just bought a hundred shares.”*

A doctor who owns stock in pharmaceuticals and who prescribes those medications to

patients is likely engaging in a conflict of interest, as suggested by this editorial cartoon. This text is best used in conjunction with Lesson #6 – Be Independent as a tool for asking students about journalists who benefit from including certain information in their stories, and other conflicts of interest that may arise in the newsroom.

Darbyshire, C. C. (2006, July 10). Try this —I just bought a hundred shares [Cartoon]. *New Yorker*.

<https://condenaststore.com/featured/try-this-i-just-bought-a-hundred-shares-c-covert-darbyshire.html>

### **Train Wreck: The New York Post’s Subway Cover**

David Carr, The New York Times Media Decoder

Blog post

When *The New York Post* received a photo of a man being run over by a subway train and decided to publish it on its cover many people, from media commentators to readers, had opinions about the ethics of the publication having profited off the photo of a gruesome death. In this blog post, David Carr weighs the situation and shares thought-provoking insight into when and how such sensitive information ought to be shared. This text is part of the activity sequence for Lesson #7 – Minimize Harm and ought to be read ahead of the lesson, either in class or as homework.

Carr, D. (2012, December 5). Train wreck: The New York Post’s subway cover. *The New York Times*.

<https://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/12/05/train-wreck-the-new-york-posts-subway-cover/>

## Unit Overview: Backwards Design Template – Journalism Ethics Curriculum

Adapted from Wiggins & McTighe 2011

<b>Title of Integrated Unit:</b>	Journalism Ethics through Text Sets	<b>Grade Level:</b>	9-10
<b>Curriculum Area:</b>	Journalism, Publications	<b>Time Frame:</b>	8 weeks (1 lesson per week)
<b>Created by:</b>	Megan Erickson		

Stage 1 Desired Results		
CONTENT STANDARDS	<i>Transfer</i>	
	<p><i>Students will be able to independently use their learning to...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Evaluate the messages they encounter every day in the media.</li> <li>–Hold themselves and each other accountable for the choices they make that can potentially be helpful or hurtful to others.</li> </ul>	
9.9.7.7 Understand, analyze, evaluate, and use different types of print, digital, and multimodal media.	<i>Meaning</i>	
	<p>9.9.1.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</p>	<p><b>UNDERSTANDINGS</b></p> <p><i>Students will understand...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Being an effective journalist means facing ethical questions on a daily basis.</li> <li>–Ethical understanding plays a critical role in the overall media landscape.</li> <li>–Making unethical choices leads to a wide range of consequences, not only for the journalist but for all involved parties.</li> <li>–Each publication draws on its own code of ethics, likely related</li> </ul>

<p>9.7.7.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.</p> <p>9.9.2.2 Integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) evaluating the credibility and accuracy of each source.</p>	<p>to the Society of Professional Journalists' Code of Ethics.</p>	
<b>Acquisition</b>		
	<p><i>Students will know...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–How to identify morally ambiguous situations inside and outside of a newsroom.</li> <li>–How to make decisions they and their peers can stand by.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Students will be skilled at...</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>–Expressing their observations and ethical understandings in writing and orally.</li> <li>–Using critical reading strategies to interpret journalistic texts.</li> <li>–Collaborating with other students on presenting ethical topics.</li> </ul>
<b>Stage 2 - Evidence</b>		
<b>Evaluative Criteria</b>	<b>Assessment Evidence</b>	
<p>Knowledge of ethics Detail Clarity of writing Depth of thought</p>	<p>PERFORMANCE TASK(S):</p> <p>Ethics skits Tracing the Story activity Identifying the Stakeholders activity</p>	

Preparedness Clarity of ideas Collaboration with others	<b>OTHER EVIDENCE:</b>  Pre-assessment survey Exit tickets Small- and large-group discussion participation Other in-class activities and worksheets Culminating activity: Class Code of Ethics
<b>Stage 3 – Learning Plan</b>	
<i>Summary of Key Learning Events and Instruction</i>	
<p>The 8 lessons of this unit follow the lead of the mentor text, the National Scholastic Press Association Model Code of Ethics for High School Journalists. Lesson 1 introduces two widely-used press codes of ethics, and from Lesson 2 through Lesson 8, students explore the following sub-topics of journalism ethics:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Lesson 2: Be Responsible – How can I make responsible journalism a priority?</li> <li>● Lesson 3: Be Fair – How can a journalist fairly represent those whose stories are being told?</li> <li>● Lesson 4: Be Honest – What are the consequences of dishonesty in journalism?</li> <li>● Lesson 5: Be Accurate – How does a journalist make sure every fact cited in a news story is true?</li> <li>● Lesson 6: Be Independent – How can journalists ensure their own personal ideas do not obscure the information they report on?</li> <li>● Lesson 7: Minimize Harm – In the wake of breaking news, how can journalists share information without a negative impact on others?</li> <li>● Lesson 8: Be Accountable – What happens when journalists make mistakes?</li> </ul> <p>Throughout this unit, students perform skits centered around each of these sub-topics of journalism ethics. In addition to participating in several class activities, they have writing assignments, like the Identifying the Stakeholders activity, and a group presentation, the Tracing the Story activity. The unit ends with the class agreeing on its own set of three ethical guidelines together.</p>	

### **Lesson Plan Calendar**

This unit is meant to be integrated into a wider “foundations” unit of a beginning journalism class. This allows students to practice journalism while revisiting their ethics training, ideally allowing them to put the lessons they learn about ethics to practical use in their reporting, editing, and writing.

The lessons in this unit were created to be taught weekly; as there are 8 total lessons, this unit will span the length of 8 weeks. If desired, the instructor may teach these lessons at a more frequent interval in order to cover the topics more quickly, however the texts accompanying them will likely have greater impact if students have more time to spend with them, so this unit is not recommended to be taught daily, for 8 consecutive class meetings.

### Lesson Plans

<b>Lesson</b>	1
<b>Time Frame</b>	45 minutes
<b>Title of Lesson and Guiding Question</b>	Introduction to Media Ethics – How does a journalist act ethically?
<b>Objective</b>	Students will be able to compare and contrast two different widely-used codes of ethics.
<b>Materials Needed (See Unit Resources)</b>	Laptops/computer access The Student Journalists' News Attitude Survey Online or paper copies of both the NSPA and SPJ Codes of Ethics (one per student) Online or paper copies of Ethics Skit Rubric (one per student)

This lesson introduces the idea of journalism ethics to students, setting them up for the unit to come. It starts with an invitation for students to share their thoughts on media ethics surrounding them, and it then calls for them to read, compare, and contrast both the SPJ Code of Ethics (widely used as a basis for professional newsroom codes of ethics) and the NSPA Model Code of Ethics (written as a guide for high school journalists to learn ethics). The lesson ends with students planning skits depicting journalism ethics which they will perform during a later lesson of this unit.

<b>Introduction: Survey and Responses (10 minutes)</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Email or post a link to The Student Journalists' News Attitude Survey (see Unit Resources) for everybody in the class to complete. (Google Forms is recommended because it quickly calibrates graphs depicting responses.)</li> <li>2. Introduce this as a set of extreme choices to get students thinking before they start to get into the subtleties of media ethics.</li> <li>3. After giving students 5 minutes to respond, bring up the results of the survey.</li> <li>4. Turn-and-talk discussion questions: Did anything surprise you about these results? Do you have any takeaways?</li> </ol>

<b>Comparing Codes of Ethics Activity (15 minutes)</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Distribute copies of the SPJ Code of Ethics (see text in Unit Resources). Instruct students to read this alone or with a partner. (5 minutes)</li> </ol>



2. Distribute copies of the NSPA Code of Ethics (see text in Unit Resources). Have each student or pairing find at least three differences between these codes of ethics. (5 minutes)
3. Share-out: Differences and similarities between the texts; Does one seem more effective or useful than the other? Tell students that, for the next 7 weeks, they will be exploring a different subsection of the NSPA Code of Ethics.

### **Ethics Skit Introduction and Collaboration (15 minutes)**

1. Form 7 groups of students. Assign each group to a different subsection of the NSPA Code of Ethics. (See text in Unit Resources.)
2. Introduce ethics skits and guidelines:
  - a. Skit is 5-7 minutes long.
  - b. Skit must portray at least 4 sub-points of your ethical topic (mark these in your script).
  - c. One group member provides a copy of the script to the teacher on the day that particular group performs.
  - d. Skit can be filmed and presented as a video if desired; same requirements apply.
3. Distribute copies of the rubric. (See Resources.)
4. Give each group time in class for collaboration and planning.

### **Wrap Up: Exit Card Response (5 minutes)**

Reflect on the following prompt: What is one ethical guideline that stands out to you as important, and why?

### **Resources and References**

Harrower, T. (2012). *Inside reporting: A practical guide to the craft of journalism* (3rd ed.). McGraw-Hill Higher Education.

Swikle, R. G. (2009). *Model code of ethics for high school students* (1st ed.). National Scholastic Press Association.

[http://studentpress.org/nsipa/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/04/wheel\\_modelcodeofethics.pdf](http://studentpress.org/nsipa/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2016/04/wheel_modelcodeofethics.pdf)

Society of Professional Journalists. (2014). Code of ethics.

<https://www.spj.org/pdf/spj-code-of-ethics.pdf>

<b>Lesson</b>	2
<b>Time Frame</b>	45 minutes
<b>Title of Lesson and Guiding Question</b>	Be Responsible – How can I make responsible journalism a priority?
<b>Objective</b>	Students will be able to determine appropriate responses to ethical dilemmas and begin following a particular news event to analyze the way it has been handled.
<b>Materials Needed (See Unit Resources)</b>	Press Ethics Scenarios slideshow A copy of the Tracing the Story Grid for each pair of students Writing utensils

This lesson focuses on the theme of responsibility in journalism. This theme is attached to many of the other ethical themes students will be exploring in the coming weeks, so this lesson functions as an opportunity for students to test and discuss their nascent knowledge of ethics in a high school newsroom. Later, they will start the Tracing the Story project, which is one of the major assessments of this unit. Lesson 2 ends by bringing the focus back to responsibility, asking students to whom journalists are responsible.

#### **Introduction: “Be Responsible” Ethics Skit (10 minutes)**

1. Collect a script from a group member.
2. After the skit, have performers describe the ethical subpoints they included to the rest of the class.

#### **Press Ethics Scenarios Activity (15 minutes)**

1. Form small groups of no more than 3 students per group.
2. Start the slideshow and instruct students to discuss the scenarios one by one and discuss appropriate responses within their groups (see Unit Resources).
3. After giving students a few minutes to discuss each scenario and response, display and discuss the correct answer as a small and large group. Consider asking students to raise their hands to vote whether they agree with the response from the slideshow or discuss whether they have a more appropriate response.

### Tracing the Story Project Introduction (15 minutes)

1. Introduction: In a media landscape such as this, when multiple news sources tell the story in a myriad of ways that are available at the click of a button, how do journalists (and non-journalists) construct a story?
2. Have students choose a partner, and hand each pairing a copy of the Tracing the Story grid (see Unit Resources).
3. Assign each pairing of students to a relatively recent news story that is currently making headlines. Instruct them to follow that particular story and its evolution throughout the next 4 weeks.
  - a. Remind students that they cannot do this all at once, otherwise they will miss the big picture that may come out in three weeks.
  - b. Students are required to have reviewed 12 total sources for their assigned news event by the start of the class meeting for Lesson 6. They are expected to have their Tracing the Story grid completed to turn in on the presentation day.
4. Students will present their answers to the following questions in a short 2-3 minute visual presentation (Google Slides, Prezi, etc.):
  - a. How does breaking news differ from the evolving story?
  - b. How does the information provided change, depending on the source?
  - c. Who is providing information, outside the reporting community?
  - d. What does this mean for reporters and how they tell the news?
  - e. What does this mean for readers and how they interact with stories?
5. Give students time to collaborate with their partners and start to compile sources during class.

### Wrap Up: Exit Card Response (5 minutes)

Reflect on the following prompt: To whom does the journalist ultimately have the most responsibility: sources, employer, public, other journalists, or somebody else? Why?

### Resources and References

NewseumED. (n.d.) *What would you do? Media ethics scenarios*. NewseumED Lesson Plans.

<https://newseumed.org/tools/lesson-plan/what-would-you-do-media-ethics-scenarios>

<b>Lesson</b>	3
<b>Time Frame</b>	45 minutes
<b>Title of Lesson and Guiding Question</b>	Be Fair – How can a journalist fairly represent those whose stories are being told?
<b>Objective</b>	Students will be able to draw connections between fairness to stakeholders and ethical journalistic practices.
<b>Materials Needed (See Unit Resources)</b>	Printouts of or access to a news article of your choosing, or of the below cited article Writing utensils and paper, or computers for word processing access

Part of a journalist’s job is to report events people need to know about, but a reporter must do it fairly and accurately — a tall order in situations with many people and perspectives. Today’s lesson focuses on those perspectives and teaches students how to identify and consider the many people whose lives may be impacted by a news event and the way a journalist may report on it. The lesson gives students an opportunity to put themselves in the shoes of someone involved in a news story and write and share the potential reaction that person would have to the way the story was covered.

#### **Introduction: “Be Fair” Ethics Skit (10 minutes)**

1. Collect a script from a group member.
2. After the skit, have performers describe the ethical subpoints they included to the rest of the class.

#### **Identifying the Stakeholders Activity (30 minutes)**

1. Revisit the SPJ Code of Ethics as a class, and discuss what divides reporters from stakeholders, commentators, and anybody with an individual opinion.
2. Choose a news article for the whole class (either a current, local article or the example article below) and have students, working by themselves, identify the stakeholders (any person who has a perspective that is essential for balancing a news story).
3. As a whole group, list all stakeholders for the story.
  - Example: Stakeholders from the *Pioneer Press*, “[Woman hit by car, three men shot just after MN State Fair closes Monday](#),” published September 2, 2019:

- *Pedestrian*
  - *One of the three men who were shot*
  - *Driver*
  - *Gunmen*
  - *Roseville or St. Paul Police / Spokesman*
  - *Police at the Minnesota State Fair / Minnesota State Fair Police Chief*
  - *Paramedics*
  - *Witnesses*
  - *One of the people who were in a fight outside the Fair's main entrance or Regions*
  - *MN Governor / State government / St. Paul Mayor / City government*
  - *State Fair general manager*
  - *Visitors to the State Fair (and who weren't necessarily during these events)*
  - *Workers at booths in the State Fair*
  - *Minnesota NRA*
  - *Minnesota gun control advocates*
  - *Residents of neighborhood*
  - *Regions Hospital workers (guards / doctors / staff)*
  - *Families of victims*
4. Once students have an understanding of the vast number of stakeholders involved in a news story, have them individually write a half-page account of or reaction to the news event from the perspective of one stakeholder from the story. Advise students to consider how personal values come into play and how bias may influence perspective.
  5. Instruct students to respond to the following questions on the lower half of the page:
    - a. How are non-journalism sources used by journalists to tell the story?
    - b. How can you determine whose perspective adds the most to a story?
  6. With any remaining time in the class, have students share their writing in groups of two or three.

### **Wrap Up: Exit Card Response (5 minutes)**

Reflect on the following prompt: What did the Identifying the Stakeholders activity teach you about fairness as a journalist?

### **Resources and References**

Gottfried, M. H. (2019, September 2). Woman hit by car, three men shot just after MN State Fair closes Monday. *Pioneer Press*.

<https://www.twincities.com/2019/09/02/st-paul-police-investigate-crash-shooting-near-state-fair/>

<b>Lesson</b>	4
<b>Time Frame</b>	45 minutes
<b>Title of Lesson and Guiding Question</b>	Be Honest – What are the consequences of dishonesty in journalism?
<b>Objective</b>	Students will be able to argue on behalf of, or against, dishonest journalists' work.
<b>Materials Needed (See Unit Resources)</b>	Representation cards for Journalist Dishonesty Scandals activity (cut each name and role apart) A bag or hat from which students will pick the slips Optional: Computers and web access for each student

In the past century, Americans have faced several high-profile scandals in which journalists employed dishonesty to further their careers. During this lesson, students will explore the backgrounds and implications of these scandals and act as lawyers and jury members for eight different journalists. They have the opportunity to vote on the consequences for dishonest journalists and see how their peers' opinions on the matters stacked up to their own.

#### **Introduction: "Be Honest" Ethics Skit (10 minutes)**

1. Collect a script from a group member.
2. After the skit, have performers describe the ethical subpoints they included to the rest of the class.

#### **Journalist Dishonesty Scandals Activity (30 minutes)**

- 1. Before Class** – Put representation cards (see Unit Resources) in a bag or hat.
2. Prosecution/Defense Activity
  - a. Have each student pick a slip of paper from the hat and gather with the other two students with the same journalist's name.
    - i. One student is prosecutor (arguing why the journalist deserves to get fired)
    - ii. One student is defense (arguing why the journalist deserves a second chance in the industry)

- iii. One student is the colleague's reaction (acting as a narratorial perspective on the matter, talking about the background of the scandal).
  - b. Instruct students to do research and take notes on the scandal in regard to the positions they were assigned. Remind them to **NOT** reveal the outcome of the scandal (firing, court case, etc.) until after everybody votes at the end.
  - c. All students, starting with the colleague with background information, make their case, and after each student has presented, the rest of the students in the audience vote (either on paper, aloud, or via Google Form) on whether or not this journalist should be fired from his/her job.
3. Colleague reveals outcomes in the end after students have voted on every case.

### **Wrap Up: Exit Card Response (5 minutes)**

Reflect on the following prompt: In your opinion, do dishonest journalists receive the consequences they deserve for their misconduct? Why?

### **Resources and References**

N/a



<b>Lesson</b>	5
<b>Time Frame</b>	45 minutes
<b>Title of Lesson and Guiding Question</b>	Be Accurate – How does a journalist make sure every fact cited in a news story is true?
<b>Objective</b>	Students will be able to verify that the information in a news story is accurate.
<b>Materials Needed (See Unit Resources)</b>	Fact Checking Groups A and B Characters worksheet ( <i>print at least 1 copy of each, depending on how many students are in the class, and cut character names apart</i> ) Fact Checking Groups A and B stories ( <i>divide the number of students in the class by 2, and print that many copies of each story</i> ) Writing utensils Computer and web access for each student

It is important for all journalists to be able to identify and verify facts from their reporting. This lesson teaches students how subtle a misprinted fact looks in a news story and how to check whether facts are true or not. The class is divided into two groups, each with its own story to fact check against a set of students from the opposite group representing the characters who can verify these facts. Students have ample opportunity to move around the classroom and interact with their peers while completing the activity, which is one of the central summative assessments of the unit.

#### **Introduction: “Be Accurate” Ethics Skit (10 minutes)**

1. Collect a script from a group member.
2. After the skit, have performers describe the ethical subpoints they included to the rest of the class.

#### **Fact Checking Activity (20 minutes)**

1. Divide the class into two groups: Group A and Group B
2. Assign all Group A members a character from the Group B story. Assign all Group B members a character from the Group A story (see Unit Resources for all characters and stories).

3. Give each Group A member a copy of the Group A story, and give each Group B member a copy of the Group B story.
4. Direct students to fact-check their own story using information they gather from “characters” in the other group (and vice-versa). For example, someone who is part of Group B and has the Group B story will only fact-check their information with Group A members from the class.
  - a. Errors come from the following categories:
    - i. Spelling
    - ii. Proper nouns
    - iii. Facts
  - b. Students must fact-check all underlined facts and correct those that are not accurate, or mark them correct if no changes need to be made.
  - c. When they have checked all of the facts in their story, students are to hand their fact-checked story to the teacher.

**DIRECTIONS TO GIVE STUDENTS OR PUT ON THE BOARD:**

1. Write your name at the top of your article.
2. Quickly read through your article so that you have an idea of what is happening.
3. Notice whether you are in Group A or Group B (this depends on whether you have the bear attack article or the rock stacking article).
4. Connect with peers who have the OPPOSITE group from you in order to verify the accuracy of all underlined facts.
  - a. Pay close attention to spelling, proper nouns, numbers, and factual accuracy.
  - b. Exact wording and AP Style are NOT factors in this activity.
  - c. Mark whether facts are correct so that you know you have already verified these facts.
5. When you find an error, cross out the incorrect information and write the corrected fact above.
6. You will need to verify every underlined fact in your packet.
7. Hand your packet to me when you have checked every fact.

**Tracing the Story Work Time (10 minutes)**

1. When students have finished the fact checking activity, they may meet with their Tracing the Story partner to touch base on their projects and work on the presentation.
2. Projects and presentations are due on the next Journalism Ethics meeting (likely

a week from today).

### **Wrap Up: Exit Card Response (5 minutes)**

Reflect on the following prompt: What is easy about verifying the accuracy of information in a news story? What is difficult?

### **Resources and References**

Associated Press. (2019, September 4). Black bear kills Minnesota woman in Canada in rare attack. *US News & World Report*.

<https://www.usnews.com/news/best-states/minnesota/articles/2019-09-04/woman-killed-by-black-bear-on-island-north-of-minnesota>

Kraker, D. (2019, September 13). Along North Shore, piles of rocks create mountains of controversy. *Minnesota Public Radio News*.

<https://www.mprnews.org/story/2019/09/13/along-north-shore-piles-of-rocks-create-mountains-of-controversy>

<b>Lesson</b>	6
<b>Time Frame</b>	45 minutes
<b>Title of Lesson and Guiding Question</b>	Be Independent – How can journalists ensure their own personal ideas do not obscure the information they report on?
<b>Objective</b>	Students will be able to discern bias from objective reporting and rewrite statements to eliminate bias.
<b>Materials Needed (See Unit Resources)</b>	<p>Paper copies of 4 opinion editorials (enough for each student to have one copy of one story) — choose your own or choose from this list:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Editorial Board. (2019, September 18). Opinion: The White House should compromise with California on fuel efficiency standards. <i>The Washington Post</i>. <a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-white-house-should-compromise-with-california-on-fuel-efficiency-standards/2019/09/18/c5a9924e-da44-11e9-bfb1-849887369476_story.html">https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-white-house-should-compromise-with-california-on-fuel-efficiency-standards/2019/09/18/c5a9924e-da44-11e9-bfb1-849887369476_story.html</a></li> <li>• Hoskin, C., Jr. (2019, September 17). Opinion: The 184-year-old promise to the Cherokee Congress must keep. <i>The New York Times</i>. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/17/opinion/choke-house-of-representatives.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/17/opinion/choke-house-of-representatives.html</a></li> <li>• Smarsh, S. (2019, September 17). Opinion: Something special is happening in rural America. <i>The New York Times</i>. <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/17/opinion/rural-america.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/17/opinion/rural-america.html</a></li> <li>• The Times Editorial Board. (2019, September 15). Editorial: Surviving climate change means an end to burning fossil fuels. Prepare yourself for sacrifices. <i>Los Angeles Times</i>. <a href="https://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-climate-change-global-warming-part-3-story.html">https://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-climate-change-global-warming-part-3-story.html</a></li> </ul> <p>A copy of the Editorializing vs. Objectivity worksheet for each student in the class Writing utensils</p>

An introductory journalism class that uses this unit will likely start the semester with news reporting, working with hard facts and concrete information before eventually branching off into other areas of journalism that may allow for more opinion. This lesson teaches students the difference between news and editorial opinion by giving them the mental task of rewriting five opinions found in major newspapers' opinion editorials section so that they become factual statements. This exercise is meant to help remind them of what news is and is not, especially when it becomes tempting and easy to slip personal ideas into one's writing.

#### **Introduction: "Be Independent" Ethics Skit (10 minutes)**

1. Collect a script from a group member.
2. After the skit, have performers describe the ethical subpoints they included to the rest of the class.

#### **Tracing the Story Presentations (15 minutes)**

1. Divide the class into groups of three pairings each.
2. Give each pairing 5 minutes to present their findings from Tracing the Story in the small group setting.
3. Ensure all pairings have sent a link to their presentation and handed their completed story grid document to the teacher.

#### **Editorializing vs. Objectivity Activity (15 minutes)**

1. Hand a copy of the Editorializing vs. Objectivity worksheet (see Unit Resources) to each student.
2. Direct students to choose an opinion story to work with from the list supplied by the teacher — or if they would like to use op-eds from outside of this list, they may also choose to do so
  - a. Students need to find five quotes from the chosen article that contain editorial bias (a.k.a. opinion).
  - b. With each quote, they will complete the table on the worksheet, eventually rewriting each of those five quotes to be objective (entirely fact-based).
3. Walk students through the example provided on the worksheet so that they know where the quote came from and how it can be written to eliminate bias.

- a. Source of example: Martin, C. E. (2019, September 18). Opinion: A new wave of caregivers: Men. *The New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/18/opinion/male-care-giver.html>
4. Hand worksheet to teacher after 15 minutes of work time.

### Wrap Up: Exit Card Response (5 minutes)

Reflect on the following prompt: Does editorial bias ever have a place in the newsroom? What kind of place and why?

### Resources and References

Editorial Board. (2019, September 18). Opinion: The White House should compromise with California on fuel efficiency standards. *The Washington Post*.  
[https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-white-house-should-compromise-with-california-on-fuel-efficiency-standards/2019/09/18/c5a9924e-da44-11e9-bfb1-849887369476\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-white-house-should-compromise-with-california-on-fuel-efficiency-standards/2019/09/18/c5a9924e-da44-11e9-bfb1-849887369476_story.html)

Hoskin, C., Jr. (2019, September 17). Opinion: The 184-year-old promise to the Cherokee Congress must keep. *The New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/17/opinion/cherokee-house-of-representatives.html>

Martin, C. E. (2019, September 18). Opinion: A new wave of caregivers: Men. *The New York Times*. <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/18/opinion/male-care-giver.html>

Smarsh, S. (2019, September 17). Opinion: Something special is happening in rural America. *The New York Times*.  
<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/17/opinion/rural-america.html>

Times Editorial Board, The. (2019, September 15). Editorial: Surviving climate change means an end to burning fossil fuels. Prepare yourself for sacrifices. *Los Angeles Times*.  
<https://www.latimes.com/opinion/editorials/la-ed-climate-change-global-warming-part-3-story.html>

<b>Lesson</b>	7
<b>Time Frame</b>	45 minutes
<b>Title of Lesson and Guiding Question</b>	Minimize Harm – In the wake of breaking news, how can journalists share information without a negative impact on others?
<b>Objective</b>	Students will be able to understand the broad implications of simple decisions made on deadline.
<b>Materials Needed (See Unit Resources)</b>	When Tragedy Hits: one copy of the role cards, cut apart When Tragedy Hits: Google Slides presentation SmartBoard or other projecting device Computer access or copies of <i>The New York Times</i> Media Decoder article, <a href="#">Train Wreck: The New York Post’s Subway Cover</a>

Journalists work under the pressure of deadlines and situations when timeliness is everything. This lesson explores the impact of media coverage and information dissemination during major news events. It adapts a NewseumED lesson plan about the media’s role in sharing information from the Virginia Tech shooting in 2007 and enlists students to role-play various involved parties in the aftermath of the tragedy. The lesson ends with some thoughtful discussion about publishing sensitive or graphic photos.

#### **Introduction: “Minimize Harm” Ethics Skit (10 minutes)**

1. Collect a script from a group member.
2. After the skit, have performers describe the ethical subpoints they included to the rest of the class.

#### **When Tragedy Hits Activity (25 minutes)**

1. Divide class into 6 groups, and once students are in their groups, each group chooses a spokesperson who will answer questions on behalf of the group.
  - a. Give each group a role card (see Unit Resources) and instruct students to read and think about their character.
2. Start Google Slides presentation: When Tragedy Hits (see Unit Resources)
  - a. Each group discusses the following questions based on their role card:

- i. What are the motivations, needs and interests of the person we are representing and others who are like that person?
- ii. What are some ethical issues that might arise for the person we are representing? (Consider privacy, fairness, sensationalism, news judgment, etc.)
- b. Whole-group share out.
- c. Instruct students:
  - i. You are role-playing the media, officials, and public during the coverage of a mass shooting at a large university in Virginia.
  - ii. When there is a situation like this, every party is clamoring for more information, but how much information *should* be shared during every step of the way? When is it helpful, and when can the information harm those involved?
  - iii. As you play your role, understand that everybody wants to know what happened, and not only do they have the right to know — they often need to know what’s going on.
- d. Follow the slides on the presentation: Read each update, and let the groups discuss their responses for 30 seconds. After 30 seconds, have the spokesperson for each group briefly share the group’s consensus, and move on to the next slide, through the entire presentation.

### Sensitive and Graphic Photos Discussion (5 minutes)

1. Students stay in the same groups they were in for the When Tragedy Hits activity to discuss the following questions based off *The New York Times* Media Decoder article, [Train Wreck: The New York Post’s Subway Cover](#):
  - a. Why did *The New York Post* decide to publish the photo on its cover?
  - b. What should the publication have done with the photo? Publish it or not publish it? Where should the photo be published? Why?

### Wrap Up: Exit Card Response (5 minutes)

Reflect on the following prompt: In your opinion, when is it okay for a publication to print a photo depicting graphic or sensitive material?

### Resources and References

Carr, D. (2012, December 5). Train wreck: The New York Post’s subway cover. *The New York Times*.



<https://mediadecoder.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/12/05/train-wreck-the-new-york-posts-s-subway-cover/>

NewseumED. (n.d.) *When tragedy hits – Role-playing a breaking news story*.  
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<https://newseumed.org/tools/lesson-plan/when-tragedy-hits-role-playing-breaking-news-story>

<b>Lesson</b>	8
<b>Time Frame</b>	45 minutes
<b>Title of Lesson and Guiding Question</b>	Be Accountable – What happens when journalists make mistakes?
<b>Objective</b>	Students will be able to create their own classroom code of ethics based on what they know about overall press ethics.
<b>Materials Needed (See Unit Resources)</b>	A copy of the Media Mistakes worksheet for each student Computer and web access for each student Writing utensils

For the eighth and final lesson of the journalism ethics integrated unit, students explore accountability in journalism and seek real-world examples of journalists and publications retracting errors (because even top editors are human and can make mistakes too). This lesson allows students to make connections between national news media and their own school newspapers, as they will learn what their own policy is for correcting wrong information. The unit ends with the whole class collaborating on a set of three ethical principles that they feel can guide them in their own journalism careers.

#### **Introduction: “Be Accountable” Ethics Skit (10 minutes)**

1. Collect a script from a group member.
2. After the skit, have performers describe the ethical subpoints they included to the rest of the class.

#### **We Regret the Error Exploration (20 minutes)**

1. Whole-group discussion:
  - a. Do you think journalists ever make mistakes? Discuss why this might happen.
  - b. Have any of you noticed what happens when journalists make mistakes?
2. Pass out Media Mistakes worksheets (see Unit Resources) to each student.
  - a. Let them work individually or in pairs.
  - b. Tell students to look for three examples of media corrections and then answer the questions for each example on the worksheet.
  - c. Challenge: Find an example from your own school newspaper.

3. Discuss how the corrections were presented: Were they easy to locate?
4. For those who found an example from the school newspaper: What does the correction look like and/or include?
  - a. Show students where to find the corrections policy for your own newspaper.
  - b. Give everyone a visual of a recently published piece for the school newspaper that corrects an error.

### **Classroom Code of Ethics Activity (10 minutes)**

1. Individually, have students summarize journalism ethics into 3 guidelines to being an ethical journalist, without using the word (or variations of the word) *ethical*.
  - a. Decide the three things journalists must know above all else about ethics.
  - b. Make your guidelines specific enough to actually matter for a journalist to know, but general enough to apply to most situations you can think of.
2. Have each student find a partner and synthesize their guidelines into 3 total guidelines.
3. Get together with another partner group to merge guidelines into 3 total guidelines that combine the best of both pairings' ideas.
4. Continue merging groups until the entire class collaborates on 3 total guidelines for being an ethical journalist.
5. Have one student write these guidelines on the board or on a poster for the class to read through in unison.

### **Wrap Up: Exit Card Response (5 minutes)**

Reflect on the following prompt: In your opinion, what is the most important thing to remember about ethics in journalism?

### **Resources and References**

Bowen, J. (2013, September 1). Accountability in journalism: What does it mean for student journalists? *JEA Scholastic Press Rights Committee*.  
<https://jeasprc.org/accountability-in-journalism-what-does-it-mean-for-student-journalists/>

NewseumED. (n.d.) *When the news media make mistakes*. NewseumED Lesson Plans.  
<https://newseumed.org/tools/lesson-plan/when-news-media-make-mistakes>

### Unit Resources

(All Unit Resources can be found in the PDF link above.)

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[https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-white-house-should-compromise-with-california-on-fuel-efficiency-standards/2019/09/18/c5a9924e-da44-11e9-bfb1-849887369476\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/the-white-house-should-compromise-with-california-on-fuel-efficiency-standards/2019/09/18/c5a9924e-da44-11e9-bfb1-849887369476_story.html)
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