

NEWSEUM PRE-VISIT ACTIVITIES

The Medium Shapes the Message

Rationale/Main Concept: How does where a story appears affect what information it includes? How does the news in one town compare to the news in another? In this activity, your class will look at four types of news media from a single day. The handout “The Medium Shapes the Message” will then guide your class through a discussion to analyze these sources, helping students gain an understanding of how today’s diverse media environment shapes the information we receive.

Time: 45 to 60 minutes

Materials:

- Four types of news media from the same day:
- A local newspaper (four copies).
- A front page from another state (available for the current day at <http://www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages>). Print out four copies of the chosen front page.
- An international online news site (for example, news.bbc.co.uk, english.aljazeera.net or www.xinhuanet.com/english). Print out four copies of the chosen home page.
- An online blog (for example, huffingtonpost.com or drudgereport.com or dailykos.com or politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com or andrewsullivan.theatlantic.com or michellemalkin.com). Print out four copies of the chosen blog home page.
- Copies of the handout “The Medium Shapes the Message,” one per student, included in this packet.

Procedure:

- Break your class into four groups. Give each group a copy of the local newspaper and a printout of each of the other three types of media.
- Hand out the “What News Is Where?” worksheet. Tell students to work together to analyze the media you’ve given them and fill out the sheets.

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- After students have completed their worksheets, lead a class discussion about their findings. You might use these questions as a start:
 - Which news media that you looked at seems to cover the most stories? Why do you think this is?
 - Which of the media covers the fewest stories on a daily basis? Why?
 - Which of the media has the most national coverage? The most international coverage?
 - In the case of stories that appear in more than one place, how does the coverage differ from one source to the next? Why is it different?
 - Why do these front pages and home pages feature different stories?
 - How is the blog's news coverage different from the other media?
 - Do any of these sources appear to be multimedia? Which ones? What different media are they using?
 - Which of the media have a good layout (way of organizing) the news? Which have a bad layout?
 - Which of the media appears to have the best sports coverage? The best entertainment coverage? The best business coverage?
 - Ask the students to name some of the stories that they found covered in multiple sources. Did some sources allot more time/space to the story than others? Why do you think this is?
- To conclude your discussion, ask your students which type of media they would pick if they could only use one type of media for a month. Why do they like that source? What do they think future media will look like? Will they resemble something they looked at today, or go in a totally new direction?

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Name _____ Date _____

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Instructions: Why does the news look different depending on where you find it? How does the type of news media shape the story being covered? Use this worksheet and the news media examples in front of you to start looking for answers to these questions:

Source that appears to cover the most stories:

Source that appears to cover the fewest stories:

Source that appears to cover the broadest range of topics:

Source that appears to have the narrowest range of topics:

Story that appears in more than one source:

Story that appears in only one source:

Source that uses the most pictures:

Source that appears to have the most multimedia offerings:

Source with the most local stories:

Source with the most national stories:

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Source with the most international stories:

Source with the best layout, in your opinion:

Source with the worst layout, in your opinion:

Source with the most interesting headlines, in your opinion:

Source with the least interesting headlines, in your opinion:

Source that seems the most up-to-date:

Source that seems the most out-of-date:

Story that you were surprised to learn about:

Story you'd already heard about somewhere else:

If you had to pick only one of these news sources to follow for the next month, which one would you pick? Why? What do you like about it?
