

# TODAY'S FRONT PAGES

The activities in this lesson plan are created for use in conjunction with the Newseum's daily online "Today's Front Pages" exhibit and "The Front Page" [poster](#).

**Grade levels:** 6-12

**Activity summary:** "Today's Front Pages," updated daily at [newseum.org](http://newseum.org), features the front pages of 800-plus newspapers from all 50 states and countries around the world. Newspapers are listed alphabetically, first by state for the United States, and then by country for the international papers. The Newseum web site also features archived front pages that chronicle events of historical and journalistic significance.

## Objectives

Students should gain an understanding of the following:

- How newspapers serve as primary source documents for historically significant events
- 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
- How a newspaper's layout and style are deliberate
- How a newspaper's mission is to be fair, accurate and clear

Students will:

- Prepare for the exhibit by gaining prerequisite knowledge and skills
- View the exhibit
- Reflect on the exhibit by responding to analytic questions and tasks
- Extend the exhibit through activities that expand on and enrich the exhibit's content
- Apply what they've learned to their own experiences as they shape their world view

## Preparing for the Activity

### *Key Concepts*

1.) Familiarize students with the elements that comprise the front page of a newspaper. The Newseum has an excellent resource for this purpose: the annotated "Front Page" [poster](#), which can be downloaded along with this lesson plan. The poster utilizes a sample front page from The Washington Post to illustrate how a front page is formatted. Have students analyze the sample front page by answering the following questions:

- How do you, the reader, know what is the most important story on the front page? What are the techniques the newspaper utilizes to draw your attention to the content?
- The **jump line** tells the reader on what page a front-page story continues. Why do front-page stories often continue on another page?

- Some newspapers feature an index on the front page; others feature the index inside the paper. Why might a newspaper want the index on the front page? Why might a newspaper not want it on the front page?
- Why do you think many newspapers don't feature advertisements on the front page? Consider the role perceptions play when advertisements do appear on the front page.
- The **overline** or **teaser** prompts readers to look at articles inside the newspaper. The **key** or **refer** serves the same purpose. What other features on the front page seek to draw the reader's attention to significant stories?

2.) Distribute hard copies of today's local newspaper. Ask students what is the first thing on the front page that grabs their attention. Various students will give different responses, but a focus on headlines and photographs will likely emerge. Give each student a copy of Handout 1-1 (attached) to complete individually or with a partner. (Each student or pair will also need 15 adhesive notes.) Use the completed handouts to discuss their analyses.

3.) Visit the Newseum's online exhibit "Today's Front Pages" to see various newspapers from the same day or week. Download several front pages from the same day of the week, choosing the greatest variance in style and purpose as possible. Establish stations around the room at which students can examine each paper and, using a journal or teacher-created guide, note its features, style, the kind of news it covers, and the intended audience.

Reconvene to discuss students' observations. Ask the students which papers give the best daily news coverage and why.

4.) Distribute copies of a newspaper. (They don't have to be from the same day or week.) Ask students to choose a story from the newspaper. Have them create a table and record quotes from people affected by the actions reported in the story that give different views on the story's topic. Ask the students if the story is balanced.

## Enrichment

1.) Invite a journalist from your local newspaper to talk to your class about how editorial decisions are made at the newspaper. In particular, the journalist should address how planning the front page differs from planning the rest of the paper's layout; how the elements that comprise the front page differ from similar elements inside the paper; how the front-page photos are chosen; and how front-page stories are determined.

2.) Clip front-page stories from the past week's newspapers and remove the headlines. Discuss the qualities of effective headlines and how front-page headlines differ or are similar in purpose and style from headlines throughout the paper. Then, instruct students to read the articles and create their own headlines. Let students compare the actual headlines to their own. Use the students' headlines to extend the discussion about writing effective front-page headlines. Point out that headlines about events that have already happened are usually written in the present tense, and ask students why they think this is the case.

3.) Collect a variety of newspapers for students to peruse. These can include the school paper, the community paper, specialized newspapers, or regional and national papers. After reviewing the parts of a front page on the Newseum's "The Front Page" poster, ask each student to choose one newspaper's front page and, using Handout 1-2 (attached), compare elements with the sample

front page on the poster.

4.) Arrange to visit your local news organization and attend a budget meeting. Who on the newspaper staff attends this meeting? What decisions are made? How are the decisions made?

### **Viewing and Responding to the Exhibit** **Suggested activities for students**

#### *Today's Front Pages*

1.) Follow one paper's front page for one week or longer. Keep a journal that chronicles the front-page content and your impressions of it. In particular, note story headlines, story subjects and photographs. At the end of the week, review your notes to answer the following questions:

What do the stories that were featured most prominently have in common? In other words, what makes for a good front-page story?

What attributes do the photographs chosen for the front page have in common? In what ways are they different?

2.) Choose five to 10 front pages from different U.S. cities to review. Begin with the newspaper from the city closest to your school. What is the paper's lead story? Do other U.S. newspapers cover the same story? Do they give the story the same placement or emphasis? How do the various papers' perspectives on the story compare? How does reading numerous versions of the same story shape your own perspective on the story? Many newspapers will use the same story from The Associated Press or another wire service. Why would a newspaper want its own reporter covering a story that they could get from a wire service?

Note to teachers: A variation on this activity is to have each student read the same front-page story as covered by different newspapers. (This assumes a story of national significance.) As they read, students should write down the facts of the story in one column and the story's sources in another. Then, create a three-column chart on the board or overhead. The third column will serve to note the newspaper from which the fact comes. If the fact is included in all story versions, write "all" in the third column.

Use the completed chart to demonstrate the differences in perspective or approach a newspaper can take on a story.

3.) Compare today's headlines in major U.S. newspapers with headlines in international cities. (Peruse papers in foreign cities that are familiar and unfamiliar to you.) What international events and news are receiving front-page coverage? How do the types of front-page stories in a particular international city or country compare with the types of stories that typically receive front-page coverage in the United States?

4.) View at least three front pages written in languages that are foreign to you. Despite the language barrier, what elements provide clues that give you insight about the story content? How important is a photograph?

5.) Compare the front-page layout in one or more international newspapers with typical front-page

layouts in U.S. newspapers. What features of these international front pages would you not expect to see in U.S. newspapers? Why not? Explain the similarities and differences you see, including why you think those similarities and differences exist.

6.) Follow coverage of a front-page story in your local paper for a week or longer. (Keep in mind, the story might “move” from the front-page to another page in the newspaper.) Clip the articles in case you need to refer to them later. How did the story change or evolve? What elements, if any, were constant?

### *Today's Front Pages Archive*

The archive section of “Today’s Front Pages” includes front pages that chronicle events of historical and journalistic significance. Review the list of events the Newseum has identified as historically significant on the archive page.

1.) Do you agree that these events are historically significant? Why or why not? Which events, if any, might have more journalistic significance than historical significance? Explain your reasoning.

2.) Choose one story from the archive and write about how its historical significance changed or might change over time.

3.) How does a news story evolve into a historically significant event? Is there a specific point or time when a news story becomes historically significant? What determines whether or not a news story becomes historically significant? Cite specific examples.

4.) Review the archived front pages for several historically significant events. Take note of changes in technology and the purchase price of the newspaper. How does the layout and content of the front page change over time? Why does it change?

5.) Choose a set of front pages for one historically significant event to review and compare, then answer the following questions:

- In your opinion, which headlines communicate the importance or essence of the event? Why?
- In your opinion, which images best communicate the importance or essence of the event? Why?
- How did different U.S. newspapers approach the event on their front pages?
- How does international newspaper coverage of the event compare to U.S. newspaper coverage? What factors might explain the differences and similarities?
- How do front-page images of the event in international papers compare to images in U.S. papers?

### **Extending the Exhibit** **Suggested activities for students**

#### *Follow-up Activities*

1.) In addition to the headlines and photographs, a significant feature on the front page is the **nameplate** (also called the flag). In it, a newspaper typically features the name of the city, coupled with a word like Tribune, Courier, Register, Post or Times.

Find as many different names for newspapers as you can. Then, locate definitions or explanations of each word. Why is the term appropriate for a newspaper? Do some of the terms appear to be more or less appropriate than others? How so? Why are they used?

Research the origins of your school or community newspaper's name. This might involve contacting the editor or owner, reviewing archived copies of the paper (perhaps the name changed at some point), contacting sources who previously worked at the paper, or doing research at your local library.

2.) Use your library's archives to locate the first edition of your local newspaper or another newspaper of your choice. (This could be a hard copy, but many libraries retain an archive of newspapers on microfilm, microfiche or in a computer file.) How has the front-page layout changed? If possible, locate editions of the paper from every 20 or 25 years since its first edition. What changes appear to be subtle and what changes dramatic? What do you think prompted the changes?

3.) Choose a front page from "Today's Front Pages" to compare with the home page of the newspaper's online version. (In most cases, a link to the newspaper's online counterpart appears on the web page featuring the front page.) The content and layout differences will be obvious, but focus on why the differences exist. How do the differences between online and print media influence content and layout? What can the online version accomplish or offer that the print version cannot, and vice versa? Which medium do you prefer, and why?

### **Applying What You've Learned**

1.) Consider the U.S. and international front pages you viewed in the exhibit. Which front pages are the most visually appealing? The easiest to read? What other features of those front pages impressed you the most?

Using this list, choose one of the following options:

- Design a front-page layout of your own newspaper or newsletter.
- Redesign the front page of an existing school, community regional or national newspaper.

Whichever option you choose, be sure you are able to explain the rationale for your design choices. There are three rules for designing a front page: put big headlines at the top, don't "bump heads" (put two headlines side by side) and keep it simple.

2.) Look at the "History Through the Headlines" poster that shows what stories journalists and historians consider the biggest of the 20th century. Create your own "History Through the Headlines" compilation or exhibit for the stories of the 21st century. Start by identifying the top 10 most newsworthy stories from 2000 to the present. You might review archived newspapers or news magazines, poll friends and family members, or ask local journalists. Your final product should include rationales for choosing each story and evidence of each story on the front page of at least one regional or national newspaper and one local paper.

# TODAY'S FRONT PAGES

Handout 1-1

Preparing for the exhibit – Foundational

Newspaper name:

1.) Using the adhesive notes provided by your teacher, locate the following features on the front page of the newspaper:

Headline	Issue number	Nameplate/Masthead	Photo credit
Subhead	Edition	The lead story	Photo caption
Byline	Price	Jump line	Agate line/credit line
Dateline			

2.) Respond to the following questions:

FEATURE	ANALYSIS
Headlines	How important is the headline to an article? Why?  How does the purpose of front-page headlines differ from the purpose of headlines elsewhere in the paper?  Why do you think there is sometimes more than one headline for an article?
Images	How important are the images on the front page?  How does the purpose of front-page images differ from the purpose of images elsewhere in the paper?  How do you think front-page photographs are chosen?
Agate line/credit line	Sometimes, instead of or in addition to the byline, you will see an agate line that reads AP (Associated Press) or Reuters. What do you think this means?
Edition	Newspapers in larger cities often distribute several editions of the same day's paper. Why might they need or want to do this?

What other questions or insights do you have about the features, content or layout of the front page?

## TODAY'S FRONT PAGES

Handout 1-2

*Preparing for the Exhibit – Continuing*

Element in <i>The Washington Post</i>	Is this represented on your paper's front page?	If yes, how?	If no, why might your paper not include this?
<p>What elements do you see on the front page of your paper that are not represented on <i>The Washington Post</i> front page?</p>			
<p>Consider the similarities and differences between the layout of your paper and <i>The Washington Post</i>. Why do you think these similarities and differences exist?</p>			