

## From the Front Page to the History Books: Understanding News as the First Draft of History

**Introduction and Objective:** News is often referred to as the first draft of history. In this activity, students will analyze the similarities and differences between news coverage and historical accounts of the major events to understand the role/importance of journalists' first reports of breaking news and how the initial information available about a news event evolves over time to become part of the historical record.

**Grade Level:** Middle-High    **Time:** 45-60 minutes plus discussion

### Warm-Up Discussion Prompts:

- News is often referred to as the first draft of history. What do you think this means?
- Where do reporters get the information they use to report? Where do historians get the information they use to chronicle/analyze/explain the events of the past?

### Activity Procedure:

- Hand out copies of the activity sheet below, and tell students they are going to explore a primary source to determine if they think news should be considered the first draft of history and why. Students may work individually or in small groups.
- Give students access to the Internet and direct them to the archived 9/11 Front Pages on the Newseum website (<http://bit.ly/1fGfaGO>). The plan was written with the USA TODAY front page (<http://bit.ly/1JTQAhw>) in mind, but you can have students choose any domestic front page with at least one story on it. (You can [download](#) a copy of the USA TODAY page, if you wish.)
- Give students 15-20 minutes to look at the front page and fill in the left column of the chart with the key facts about the tragic event that they can find on their front page and the questions that are not answered.
- Give students access to the library/Internet and allow them 15-20 minutes to find information to fill in the right column of the chart with key facts about 9/11 from a historical source and any answers they can find for the questions they posed in the left column. Steer students toward encyclopedia-like sources that offer a concise summary of the event.
- Ask students to follow step 3 on the activity sheet, underlining facts that are the same and circling those that do not match up, then underlining the questions for which they found answers and circling those for which they did not.
- Give students 15-20 minutes to respond to the three questions at the bottom of the activity sheet, analyzing their chart findings.
- Use the post-activity discussion prompts to begin a class discussion about news versus history and what they discovered during the activity.

### Post-Activity Discussion Prompts

- Which facts did you find were the same in both sources? Which were only found in one or the other? Why do you think this was the case?
- Which of the questions you wrote after reading the news source are still unanswered? Why do you think that is?
- What is the role of a reporter? What is the role of a historian? Compare and contrast.
- How much time must pass before news becomes history?

## Extension Activity

- Choose a contemporary news story. You may want to choose from the headlines you find by looking through the Newseum's online Today's Front Pages exhibit ([newseum.org/todaysfrontpages](http://newseum.org/todaysfrontpages)). Fill in the left side of the chart using a source about this story. Then imagine you're living 50 years in the future and can read a historical account of this same event. Create a list of key facts that you think would appear in that account. Then underline the questions you think you'd be able to find answers to 50 years from now, and circle the ones you think you would not. Write a paragraph explaining the decisions you made filling in the right side of the chart.
- The First Amendment protects freedom of the press. Why is a free press important in our society? Research freedom of the press and write a short essay about the role of the press and how our understanding of history might be different if there were no freedom of press.