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classroom activity

Activity: What's in the news?

Activity summary

Students examine and compare the lead stories from selected global news sites, choosing three stories they think are the most important for an imaginary home page of their own global news site. They also consider the reasons why they have selected these stories. In conjunction with this activity, or as an extension, conventional and alternative news values can be explored to see how these relate to the leading stories selected.

Aims of the activity

- To become aware of the wide range of world news sources available through the internet
- To encourage students to look beyond the conventional sources of news and to use less familiar sources which may provide greater insight and depth on global issues
- To think critically about why certain news is selected and reported while other news is not
- To begin to understand the 'conventional' news values which are generally used by the media to select stories and consider how news might be different if 'alternative' news values were used

For details of how Global News activities meet the requirements of the national curriculum, in particular the citizenship curriculum, see:

http://www.globalnews.org.uk/teacher_curric.htm

Resources

Access to computers/internet – at least one computer for every 2-4 students; a copy of the What's in the news? worksheets (see below)

Activity details

Raising an issue

Ask students to consider the most important current news stories. Ensure the discussion moves to international news and ask them to identify the current leading international news stories. List these on pieces of paper and carry out the vote with your feet activity (see:

http://www.globalnews.org.uk/teacher_activity%20consensus.htm) to identify which one students consider to be the most important current international news story.

Questioning/Discussion

Discuss with students which sources they use for international news. Ask them what they think makes an important international news story. Are there important things going on in the world that do not make the news? What might these be? Are these

less important than those that are reported? Why/why not? This issue will be explored again later.

Researching/Group work

Students should next be asked to work in pairs or small groups. Each group will need a copy of the: What's in the news worksheets (see below). The group work is completed in two sections.

Section 1 using worksheet 1

Students may prefer to design their own spreadsheet on the computer based on the worksheet.

To complete worksheet 1 students need to look at links to a range of global news sites and find out the leading news stories on each site. They should select three leading stories that particularly interest them from each site they visit and write these down on the worksheet.

Once groups have completed this task, lead a brief whole class discussion to explore whether there are similarities and differences between the groups on their selections of news stories. Ask them why they have selected the stories they have. Do the stories chosen reflect at all the news stories raised at the beginning of the session?

Use the quote from the Indian journalist given in worksheet 1 to examine whether any of the issues he raises were included in any of the leading stories or in stories the students have selected. Ask students to think about why these issues seem rarely to get reported.

Section 2 using worksheet 2

Students are now told that they will take on the role of editor to select just three stories from all the stories they chose earlier. Which top three stories for that day would they choose to go on the home page of their own on-line global news service? They will then need to revisit the stories and decide on an appropriate title/headline for each one. They also need to write a brief summary, no more than 30 words, and the reasons why they have selected that story for their home page. Reasons might include because it was the most reported story, it has shock value, people ought to know about it, it is informative and educational, it is the kind of story that will grab people's attention etc.

Disseminating

Each group should present their choice of three lead stories together with the reasons why they have selected them. Is there consensus on the leading stories? Do some stories feature for all groups? Which stories are only selected by one group?

The leading issue voted on by students at the beginning of the session could now be revisited. Did any of the news services lead with this issue? Have any of the students changed their minds about the leading issue in light of what they have read and the selections they have made? A further round of vote with your feet could now be carried out where the original leading issue and the lead stories selected by groups of students are put to the vote.

Extension

This activity can lead into discussions about selectivity and could provide an opening to discuss influences on press and media such as ownership, agendas, audience, commercial constraints/interests and news values. The lead stories selected by the students could be examined in terms of conventional and alternative news values.

Which of the conventional values seem to relate to the selection of stories? Which alternative values seem to apply or do not seem to apply to the stories?

Conventional News values	Alternative News values *
<p>1. Timely – taking place at a time when the issue is at the forefront such as coinciding with an international summit, e.g. report on the impact of AIDS in Africa when a conference on AIDS is being held in Africa; reports on the environment at the time of the Earth summit etc.</p> <p>2. Important – the story should be seen as 'significant' and involve a lot of people. This is why news of the developing world is so often dominated by large scale disasters such as famine or floods etc.</p> <p>3. Near – the closer to home or the greater the connection to home the more likely the story is to be reported, e.g. if British tourists are suddenly caught up in a civil war or disaster it is likely to be reported whereas it might otherwise not have been.</p> <p>4. Controversial – an element of controversy or conflict of any kind helps sell stories.</p> <p>5. Bizarre – unusual, quirky or amusing stories often make the news.</p>	<p>1. Avoid catastrophic images in favour of considering root problems and the internal and external issues and difficulties which give rise to problems – political, structural and natural.</p> <p>2. Preserve human dignity by providing sufficient background information on people's social, cultural, economic and environmental contexts; highlight what people are doing to take responsibility for themselves.</p> <p>3. Provide accounts by the people concerned rather than interpretations by a third party.</p> <p>4. Provide more frequent and more positive images of women – not just as helpless, dependent victims.</p> <p>5. Avoid all forms of generalisation, stereotyping and discrimination – racial, sexual, cultural, religious etc.</p> <p>* based on a code of conduct drawn up by a group of European Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs)</p>

Positive action

Having learned about some of the leading global news stories/issues students may be encouraged to find out more. They may be more inclined to seek out alternative sources of news to those that they are familiar with. Ultimately they may be more inclined to take positive action to address an issue in the news. Ask students to consider the ideas on the students in action page on the Global News website: http://www.globalnews.org.uk/student_action.htm

Expectations:

By the end of this activity students will:

- be aware of a wider range of world news sources available through the internet
- be encouraged to look beyond the conventional sources of news and to use less familiar sources that provide greater insight and depth on global issues
- be aware that different news services select different lead stories according to various criteria which may include ownership, agendas, audience, commercial constraints/interests etc
- understand that most press and media operate according to 'conventional' news values and be aware that the use of 'alternative' news values may lead to very different lead stories and issues being covered in very different ways



...global**news**.org.uk worksheet...

Activity: What's in the news? Sheet 1

This sheet may be completed individually or in groups

Look at the leading news stories from three or more on-line news services. Complete the table below listing some of the leading stories on each site.

News service	Leading news stories
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.
	1. 2. 3.

Consider the following quote from an Indian journalist:

‘It is ultimately a professional challenge to report what really happened [in the world on any particular day]. Here’s some more news from yesterday: Nearly 14,000 people became infected with HIV; some 1,400 women died in childbirth (thousands more became disabled); more than 5,000 people died of tuberculosis and a similar number of children from diarrhoeal diseases; and 800 million people remained chronically undernourished. Let’s try and get the faces [and hear the voices] behind the figures.

Dipankar De Sarkar, Panos Institute.

Do any of the lead stories report on these issues or the people affected?



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Activity: What's in the news? Sheet 2

This sheet may be completed individually or in groups

Now take on the role of editor for your own on-line news service.

Having looked at the range of leading global news stories from some on-line news services, decide on the top three stories that you would have on the front page of your own on-line global news service.

For each story decide on an appropriate title, write a brief summary, no more than 30 words, and the reasons why you have selected that story.

Leading story title	Summary of story in 30 words or less	I/we have chosen this story because...
Second story title	Summary of story in 30 words or less	I/we have chosen this story because...
Third story title	Summary of story in 30 words or less	I/we have chosen this story because...