

Charlie's Note: If you Telecommunicate, you know that one of the two top free networks for educators and students in the country is FrEdNet (Free Education), originated and operated by Fred Rogers and his foundation in California. Here is a great lesson plan for helping students write newspaper articles. It is part of the Newsday Project, one day per semester when students contribute their newspaper articles as in a newswire.

FrEdMail Newsday Project

Lesson Plan: News Article - Report of Information

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This lesson plan was based on a Telelesson originally written by Steve Pinney under a grant from the California State Department of Education.

You may use this lesson to help your students learn how to write their own news articles for Newsday.

SUMMARY

This is an adaptable lesson for student news report writing. A large group lesson is included to emphasize that important information is included in all good news articles. Student teams work together to identify information categories and use local newspapers to practice identifying types. Students learn critical thinking, summarizing, and writing skills.

AUDIENCE/TARGET POPULATION

This telelesson can be adapted and used with students in upper elementary and junior high. It could form the basis for lessons at the high school level.

SEQUENCE

1. Following the directions in the prewriting lesson, the students will examine the attributes of good news reporting (who, what, when, where, why and how).
2. Using the listed attributes from the prewriting lesson, each team of reporters will design questions to elicit an informational response.
3. Each team reporter will use the Prompted Writing Worksheet at the end of this file to help build the first draft of his or her report. This first draft will be printed and critiqued by the other members of the reporting team.
4. Comments by team members will be used to revise the draft and then the article may be printed again for team response.
5. Once revisions are completed the selected articles will be uploaded to the Newsday conference.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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1. The student will be able to work in a cooperative group to generate a news article about a school or local event.
 2. The student will be able to write a news article draft using the prompts in the NEWS.PF file.
 3. The student will be able to revise and edit the draft in response to peer review and feedback.
 4. The student will be able to send this news article via modem to the Newsday conference.

SUMMARY OF LESSON

Students will use the categories of good reporting (who, what, when, where, why and how) to write their own newspaper article. Teams of 3 or 4 students will write the articles for compilation.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. This project is a major writing assignment designed to provide classroom activities to support the writing genre known as Report of Information.
2. At the 7th grade level it will require about 10 to 12 days for completion.
3. This project can be done within one classroom, between two teachers at the same school, among a number of teachers at many school sites or an entire network of teachers across a large segment of a city or state.
4. This project is appropriate for grades 4 through 12.
5. A collection of news from state and national sources could be used by teachers for other assignments in social studies or math prior to this project.
6. Each team of students should have access to a student or teacher team leader or editor.
7. The prewriting exercise should take about 3 or 4 days and the composing and revision another 3 or 4 days. Collation and publication of the newspaper will require yet another 3 or 4 days.
8. Minimal equipment: one computer per class. More computers will enable the lesson to move more quickly and/or involve more students.
9. Any word processor that can produce ASCII text files (FrEdWriter is easiest) can be used for this project.
10. The finished product has two parts: an electronic downloadable version of a newspaper (merged text files) available to all who access FrEdMail and a desktop-published version of the same text files with graphics.
11. Evaluation of this project can also be a worthwhile classroom tool, as students can use these writings to evaluate writing style, appropriateness of topic and ability of author to make his or her point known. On-going evaluation of writings could be included in the publication of future newspapers.

PREWRITING ACTIVITY

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INTRODUCTION TO THE NEWS IN A LOCAL NEWSPAPER

Place your students into cooperative working groups of 3, 4 or 5. Give each team a copy of the local newspaper. Allow enough time for them to read the headlines from each of the newspaper's sections. As you read a few of the headlines, have them identify the ones they think they would like to read more about. Ask them why they chose these articles. List these articles by name on the board.

Assign the articles, one to each team and give them time to have one team member read the article aloud to the group. If they decide that they no longer like the article, have them choose another. When all groups have completed the oral reading, have one member share the information with the entire class by summarizing the important facts. As they do, write these facts on the board.

NEWS ARTICLE SUB-CATEGORIES

After all groups have reported on their news articles, the facts will be compared to see if there are any common categories. All good news items have 6 major pieces of information:

Who What When Where Why How

Have each team appoint one recorder to write these categories on a piece of paper with 6 lines between each. Direct the teams to look at the categories written on the board and discuss which facts and statements on the board might best fit into each category. The recorder writes the statements under the correct category name as the group makes the decision.

Visit each team to restate the direction and check for understanding. Choose a few teams to share their categories and information and ask the whole class to respond. If time permits, have each team work together to categorize a second article to be shared with the whole class.

ALTERNATE/ADDITIONAL PRACTICE IDEA

Have each team cut out the headline of an article that they like. Have them paste the headline on the top of a lined piece of paper and pass the paper to the next team. Team #2 will use the categories on the board to list the important information from the newspaper for each category for that article.

WRITING ASSIGNMENT

After ample practice time has been given (an additional writing period or two), prepare the class for writing an actual news item on an event that has happened on your campus.

Copy and distribute the writing situation and writing directions.

WRITING SITUATION

An international group of students publishes a newspaper every semester on the FrEdMail Newsday Conference. Students from Canada, Australia, Argentina, Europe, and elsewhere are eagerly awaiting their copy of this exciting publication which may contain your article.

WRITING DIRECTIONS

Write a five-paragraph news report about an important event at your school. Include an eye-catching headline, a byline and a lead paragraph. Also include paragraphs with supportive details. Finally, provide a comment about what you believe to be the impact this event may have on your school, its students, or the community.

Use the prompts in the worksheet (below) to help write your first rough draft. When you have completed this file, print your news item and share your work in a read-around group. Use the suggestions your writing team has provided to help you edit your rough draft. When complete, save your file on your data disk with a good, descriptive name. Finally, print one copy of your final article.

EVALUATION RUBRIC

If writing meets all four points, the grade is an A, if three the grade is B, etc. Also, students may be graded on each step of the process. Less skilled writers could thus raise their grades.

1. The writer provides an eye-catching headline as well as byline with the author's name.
2. The writer opens with a lead paragraph including information stating who, what, when, where and why.
3. The writer includes supportive details in subsequent paragraphs.
4. The writer includes a paragraph on the possible impact this news may have on an individual, the school, or the community.

Sample NEWS ARTICLE

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Mt. Saint Helens - A Day to Remember!
By Seth Blumenthal
Tewinkle School, Newport Beach, CA

Mt. St. Helens, Washington State:

In 1981, Mt. St. Helens erupted with the force of 1000 hydrogen bombs. That eruption devastated a once-beautiful wilderness area. In seven years the area, including Spirit Lake, has made considerable progress in repairing itself.

The eruption occurred on Friday the 17th of June, 1988. It started at 5:00 in the morning, and lasted 15 minutes. That dreadful Friday morning, before the sun came up, the already battered mountain created three serious earthquakes, and then spouted millions of tons of molten lava three thousand feet into the sky. The geologists believe the

cause of this eruption was the weakening of a huge, unknown pressurized 'pool' of lava hundreds of feet under the mountain.

The mountain's eruption in 1981 came from a different source, but definitely carried away most of the earth that kept this lava in place underground. The pressure was too strong for the remaining rock to hold it down, and it burst. Great, powerful earthquakes in Washington, measuring around 6.4 on the Richter Scale, for about 3 to 4 minutes were the first sign of the eruption. After the quakes, an explosion of rock and debris that could be heard across the western states occurred. Then came the lava - millions of cubic feet of it shot into the sky at 100 miles per hour. Luckily the eruption happened on a Friday, so only 3 people were on the mountain. They were evacuated before the actual eruption.

"I was sleeping in my bed, when all of a sudden the house started to shake harder than I ever imagined possible," said one mountain resident. "Immediately I called and was rescued. The moment we took off, my house collapsed."

We talked with some people who saw the eruption, from about 200 miles away. "The ground shook a tiny bit for a second," said Vern Stacy, local resident. "I was outside, so I looked around, and there was this big 'flame' in the sky. It lit up the entire place a dark red. It took about a minute for the sound to get to me from the mountain, so I saw the 'flame' before I heard anything."

The eyewitness news reports on television and radio treated the occurrence like it was an everyday incident. They gave all the necessary information, but nothing else.

This news, with the memory of the 1981 eruption, could keep tourists away from the St. Helens area for some time.

WRITING PROMPTS

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Prompts for NEWS ARTICLE (Report of Information)

These prompts will help you write a news article. Read through these instructions. Each time you see an instruction beginning with ">>>" write the information on your paper or in your word processing file.

HEADLINE

Every news article has a headline to attract the attention of the reader. The headline must state the topic of the news in a strong, short phrase or statement.

Examples: Awards Assembly for 8th Grade Fire Burns Library!

Trojans Topple Sea Kings in Tennis

>>> Write a strong headline phrase for your news article.

BYLINE

Since this is YOUR news article you need to let the reader know WHO wrote it. The line with your name on it is called the "By" line because it tells BY whom the article is written.

>>> Write the word "By" followed by your first and last name

>>> On the next line, write your School, City, and State

LEAD PARAGRAPH

This paragraph will help you to write your LEAD paragraph. A lead paragraph offers the reader information in a few short sentences which answer the questions:

Who?

What?

Where?

When?

Why?

The next few directions will help you to draft your opening sentences.

>>> Write the name or names of the person or thing this news is about.

>>> Write a phrase or sentence which describes the place where this news occurred.

>>> Write the day, date, and time of day this news occurred

>>> Explain in a short sentence what happened

Almost all news has a reason for happening. Why something happened the way it did is important to the reader.

>>> Tell why this news item occurred

Now look back at the elements of your lead paragraph and think about how you could write a few, short sentences which includes everything you wrote down.

>>> Write one or more short, complete sentences which include all of the information that you wrote.

After you finish writing, re-read your sentences to yourself to make sure that they sound right.

You have now told your audience WHO did the news, WHEN it occurred, WHY it happened and WHAT happened. You also told the reader WHERE it took place. You have completed the LEAD paragraph.

SUPPORTIVE PARAGRAPHS

This part will help you write the supportive paragraphs for this news article. Supportive paragraphs tell the reader HOW the news occurred.

>>> Write a sentence which explains what was the first thing to happen?

>>> Tell what happened next.

>>> Continue telling what happened.

Eyewitness accounts to this news may be very interesting to your reader.

>>> Write some of the comments from people who actually saw this news happen. Tell what THEY saw happen. (Be sure to use quotation marks)

What others think of this news is also important.

>>> Tell what the eyewitness thought about this news.

As a reporter, you may also state what effect this news may have on others.

>>> What might this news event do to the people in the neighborhood?

RE-READ AND EDIT

You should now have the "meat" for a news article with several paragraphs. Re-read what you have written. Are all of your sentences complete? Do they say what you want them to say? Re-write your sentences where you need to and put them into paragraphs.

Indent your paragraphs, and double space between them.

Capital letters go at the beginning of each sentence and at the beginning of names and places.

Check for correct spelling.

Does your headline accurately describe your news story? If not, make up a new headline.

Save this article on your disk with a good, descriptive name.

Print out two copies of this article. Keep one, and give the other to your team leader.

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FrEdMail Newsday Project

Lesson Plan: Interview/Feature Article

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This lesson plan was based on a Telelesson originally written by Evelyn C. McNeilly under a grant from the California State Department

of Education.

You may use this lesson to help your students learn how to write their own interview articles for Newsday.

NOTE: You must adapt this lesson to fit the theme of this Newsday.

SUMMARY

This lesson provides a model for developing feature articles from interviews for an electronic newsletter. Students learn how to lead into direct quotes from interviews and how to reflect on a subject through inductive reasoning. While this lesson adopts the theme "Hard Times" (taken from the book of that name by Studs Terkel) you can adapt the lesson to fit the theme of this Newsday.

AUDIENCE/TARGET POPULATION

High school students can accomplish this lesson in a week. It can be adapted for grades 5 - 8 by allowing more time for each step of the lesson.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Students will cooperate to generate pertinent interview questions.
2. Students will conduct interviews, retaining information and direct quotes.
3. Students will write feature article from interview notes.
4. Students will select articles for electronic newsletter and upload them.

DESCRIPTION OF LESSON

This lesson, while geared toward high school students, can be modified for younger students by allowing more time for each step. The students will write feature articles on "hard times" for the electronic newsletter from interviews with adults about specific times in their lives that were difficult. (Note: you may adapt the topic to meet your own themes.) Each student will use direct quotes and add depth to his feature article with reflective statements on his experience conducting the interview and on hard times in general.

These objectives fit higher order thinking skills within language arts curriculum--inductive reasoning. In addition, students will develop social skills in the interview process, writing skills (how to lead into a quote), technical skills in word processing, punctuation, and in transferring files electronically.

Since everyone has experienced his own definition of hard times by age forty--economic, personal, professional--and wants to tell his story, it will be easy for students to interview adults and collect a wealth of data. It won't be quite so easy to shape the data into readable form. To lead into the lessons, students should read or hear selections from Stud Terkel's Hard Times, then cooperate with peers to develop pertinent, specific questions for the interviews, construct the articles, and print drafts for revision and editing before sending

to Newsday.

The lesson itself leads directly into _My Neighbor Rosicky_ by Willa Cather suitable for high school students

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The time allowed for this lesson should be at least one week, two days in class to read models and create pertinent interview questions, outside class time to conduct interviews, and three days at computers to write, revise and electronically upload. Younger students will need more time.

Students will need models to read and the writing prompts at the end of this file.

Since writing is idiosyncratic, the teacher could use an LCD screen or overhead transparencies to project one or more student's drafts from computer to large screen. The teacher could then demonstrate how to lead into direct quotes, how to paragraph for reader ease, what to delete to highlight inherent drama. If such a projector is unavailable, the teacher could pair the strongest writers with the weakest for peer tutoring.

Students will be given a writing prompt and a four point rubric for evaluation (grade). In read-around groups, students will choose the paper(s) they want to publish in the electronic newsletter. Students will deliver articles they wrote to people they interviewed.

PRE-WRITING

Obtain and read models of interviews from Stud Terkel's _Hard Times_. Then have students use the writing prompts at the end of this file to create interview questions and plan their own interview. Students then conduct interviews and take notes.

WRITING SITUATION

You have read feature articles from interviews with various people about hard times in their lives. You have planned and conducted your own interview, and you have your notes from the interview.

DIRECTIONS FOR WRITING

Write approximately three-hundred words in an article about the hard time of the person you interviewed. Make sure you include a specific incident discussed by the person you interviewed. Be sure your direct quotes are properly paragraphed. Share your own reflections... your feelings, opinions, discoveries about hard times... in the process of creating this article.

Save this article on your disk with a good, descriptive name.

Print out two copies of this article. Keep one, and give the other to your teacher or team leader.

EVALUATION RUBRIC

If the writing meets all four points, the grade is an A, if three, the grade is B, etc. Also, students may be graded on each step of the process. Less skilled writers could thus raise their grades.

1. The writer opens with a hook (line of high reader interest)
2. The writer includes a specific incident in the interviewee's period of hard times.
3. The writer includes properly punctuated and paragraphed direct quotes.
4. The writer includes a thoughtful reflection on hard times in general.

PEER RESPONDING

Using the evaluation rubric, evaluate your classmates' papers. Write down any questions the article raises in your mind. s. Make specific recommendations for clarifying or improving phrases and sentences. If you can think of some interesting words the author could use write those

REVISING

Analyze your classmates' critique of your article and revise as you see fit. If you don't understand a comment, be sure to ask the reviewer.

PUBLISHING

Read one another's interviews and then as a group select which articles to upload to Newsday. Send a copy of your own interview to the person you interviewed.

Sample INTERVIEW

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Hard Times in Vietnam
by Tuan Pham

(from writing directions that did not include reflection)

Yesterday I interviewed my sister about one of her especially hard times in her life.

She answered quickly, "I will probably never forget the day when the communists declared they would change the monetary system. We were in our country and you were a little boy of three years old.

"Can you imagine it? One day I woke up and there was an announcement on the radio and on the TV and in the newspaper that nobody was allowed to go anywhere until noon. Everybody must stay

home!

"The reason was the monetary system being used was declared no more valuable. The news scared me to death. Just imagine all your savings lost in one day. Then we were asked to come to a place where everybody was given some small amount of money.

"I was in despair. I wondered how long our family was going to survive. In fact, everybody was in the same situation, but nobody dared to say a word. No freedom, you know."

My sister stopped a while, then said softly, "That is why we are here now...."

INTERVIEW PROMPTS

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Prompts for INTERVIEW

These prompts are divided into two parts. The first part will help you think of questions and plan an interview which you will conduct.

After you conduct an interview you will use the second part to help you write a three hundred word feature article from your notes.

Your interview and article will focus on describing the hard times of the person you interviewed. Your article must include a specific incident that the person related to you. It must contain direct quotes from your interviewee. And it must contain your own reflections on what you learned about hard times in general.

Read through these instructions. Each time you see an instruction beginning with ">>>" write the information on your paper or in your word processing file.

PART I: PLANNING THE INTERVIEW

>>> Write the names of three or four persons whom you think might be interesting to interview and who might have some tales to tell about "hard times."

>>> Circle the name of the person who is probably the most available and likely to give you a "good" interview.

>>> Write two or three sentences which you can use as you describe this interview project to the person you select, and explain why you chose him or her.

>>> Write a question which will get the person to describe a hard time they experienced in their life.

>>> Write a question which will get them to describe what they did... how they responded or reacted to the situation(s) described.

- >>> Write a question which will elicit a description of their feelings then, and their feelings now, about those hard times.
- >>> Write a question which will get them to describe the effects of the situations(s) on their lives, and to speculate how their lives may have been different.
- >>> Write any other questions you can think of.
- >>> Write down when you will plan to conduct this interview.
- >>> Share your questions with at least three other students. If you wish, you may revise your own questions based on the ideas you obtain from your classmates.

PART II: DRAFTING YOUR ARTICLE

You may find the prompts below helpful as you create your first draft. You may prefer to use a different order than suggested below. Or, you may prefer to develop your article on your own. If you use the guide below, have your interview notes in front of you as you respond to the prompts.

As you respond to each prompt below, do NOT try and "polish" the article as you go along. This is a time to capture ideas and thoughts. You will reorganize and polish your draft at the end.

- >>> Quickly write -- off the top of your head, and for the next 3-5 minutes -- about your interview.
- >>> Go back over your "quickwrite" and re-write the most interesting part, deleting what "doesn't fit."
- >>> Does your introduction lead into a direct quote? If so, write the lead sentence plus quote. If not, write a sentence that leads the reader into your best quote and then write the quote.
- >>> Write two or three specific details relating to your opening.
- >>> Write a sentence which introduces the person you interviewed. Include name, approximate age, and a brief description.
- >>> Describe the place, if appropriate, and time described by the person you interviewed -- year and season. Use direct quotes where appropriate. Lead into your direct quotes with scene-setting phrases.
- >>> Describe the tone used by the person he or she described the hard times? Was it hushed? Proud? Ashamed? Matter of fact? Explanatory? Preachy?
- >>> Describe any emotional reactions displayed during the interview.
- >>> If the person's tone revealed his attitude toward life, how did it? Use direct quotes where appropriate.

>>> Re-read what you have written so far. Go back to the beginning and write three possible lead sentences to your article. Later you will choose the best one

>>> Quickwrite (off the top of your head, 3-5 minutes) about hard times in general.

>>> Write about a hard time you experienced.

>>> Discuss what may be good about hard times

>>> Conclude your article with a brief paragraph in which you reflect about what you learned writing this article and what you think about hard times in life.

>>> Go back and revise your article. Move sentences and paragraphs around to improve the flow and clarity of your article. Select the best lead-in sentence.

>>> Count the number of words, and cut or add accordingly.

>>> Create a headline and byline at the top of the article.

Indent your paragraphs, and double space between them.

Proofread for capital letters at the beginning of each sentence and at the beginning of names and places. Check for correct spelling.

Save this article on your disk with a good, descriptive name.

Print out two copies of this article. Keep one, and give the other to your teacher or team leader.