

Join the national conversation!



Focus Words

abandon | biased | contemporary | dramatic | exploit



Weekly Passage

What is the role of news media? Which stories should they cover? The news is reported every day by TV, radio, newspapers, and web sites. Some programs report on celebrity life, on everyday topics like shopping, or on strange events that do not affect many people. But is that news?

Some people think the public is missing out on important information. They believe we should be hearing more about what is happening with the war in Iraq and government spending of our tax dollars. They don't think the news should tell us about movie stars having babies and athletes getting arrested. Some people think that many contemporary news reports are biased. They say that today's reporters often present only one of many views on complex issues such as immigration or the conflict in the Middle East. Even the words and pictures that reporters use to describe an event can

affect people's feelings about it. Critics also say that today's news is sensationalized or made more exciting than it really is. They think that stories are chosen for shock value and told in ways that appeal to people's emotions and exploit their curiosity. These kinds of stories are designed to make people want to know more.

Some news sources say that they are giving the public what it wants. They fear that people will not watch their programs or read their papers if the stories are not dramatic enough. Is America more interested in being entertained than in learning about what's happening in the world? Or have the news media abandoned their job of informing people about events and issues that really matter?

Unit 1.15 - Today's news: Information or entertainment? Focus Word Chart

| Word | Meaning | Forms | Examples of Use | Notes |
|--------------|-----------------------------|-------|-----------------|-------|
| abandon | (v.) – to give up | | | |
| biased | (adj.) – slanted; one-sided | | | |
| contemporary | (adj.) – modern; current | | | |
| dramatic | (adj.) – exciting | | | |
| exploit | (v.) – to take advantage of | | | |

Unit 1.15 - Today's news: Information or entertainment?

Problem of the Week



Historically, a good journalist's job has been to tell the truth. Journalists tell us when companies **exploit** their workers. They tell us when police officers are **biased** against minorities or teens or when they are heroes to a community. They cover stories that are **dramatic** but also important, like tsunamis, the war in Afghanistan, plane crashes and presidential elections. They help us know what our world is really like.

Some **contemporary** news outlets are **abandoning** these responsibilities. They focus on stories that are gossipy or fun. Most people, they say, would rather read about Charlie Sheen than health care reform. Is this true?

In March of 2011, an earthquake struck Japan. It was followed by a devastating tsunami. The country's nuclear plants began to melt down, releasing deadly radiation into the environment. Were Americans tuned in to the disaster?

Options 1 and 2: Read each headline. Decide whether each article is "information," "entertainment," or "both." Put an x in the appropriate box. Can the class agree on each article? What fraction of the most-viewed articles fall into each category?

Top 15 most-viewed stories from cnn.com on March 17, 2011.

| | Information | Entertainment | Both |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1 Japanese settle in shelters, foreigners want out | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2 Japan struggles to cool reactors, spent fuel at damaged plant | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3 Yale killing suspect admits murder, gets 44 years | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4 U.S. hints at Libya airstrikes as Gadhafi pounds rebels | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5 Estranged son of anti-gay Westboro pastor says father does 'evil' | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6 Rob Pattinson and Kristen Stewart's movie date (with fans) | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7 Amid disaster, Japan's societal mores remain strong | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8 Sandra Bullock sends \$1 million for Japan relief | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9 Doctors feared mass suicide after deadly 'sweat lodge,' survivor says | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10 The moments that make us fat | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11 'Radiation has always been part of my story' | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12 Radiation: when to worry | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 13 LeAnn Rimes defends her slim figure | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14 Congress wants to cut tsunami warning centers? Really? | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 15 Tiger Woods: being a single dad is 'tough' | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Math Discussion Question: What do the 15 most-viewed articles tell us about **contemporary** internet news viewers? Should we be embarrassed that while Japan was in crisis, Americans were reading about LeAnn Rimes's weight loss? Or is it natural for people to want to **abandon** real-world concerns and read about something "light" once in a while? What do you think about stories number 3 and 9: are they important, or are they just **dramatic** tales that **exploit** people's curiosity? Why do you think so many people were interested in story number 5, about the **biased** Westboro pastor who pickets American soldiers' funerals?

Today's news: Information or entertainment? Debating the Issue



1. Get ready...

Pick one of these positions (or create your own).

A News stations are too biased. They should present many different opinions about contemporary issues in order to keep people interested.

B News stations have abandoned their responsibility to inform people about the world. They should focus less on celebrity life and more on important world events.

C News stations should cover dramatic stories people want to hear about, like when movie stars have babies or athletes get arrested. Their job is to give people what they want.

D Contemporary news reports are not biased or sensationalized; they do a good job of showing people what they need to know about the world.

E _____

2. Get set...

Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position during your class discussion or debate. Jot down a few quick notes:

GO!

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

...because...

I disagree with part of that...

An example might help convince me. Can you give me an example?

What part of the passage makes you think that?

Unit 1.15 - Today's news: Information or entertainment? Science Activity



This activity is designed to help you practice thinking like a scientist and to use this week's focus words. Sometimes the data are based on real research, but they should never be considered true or factual.

Michael Massing is a reporter. He sees **bias** in the American media's stories about Mexico. He says that **contemporary** reporters focus on violent Mexican drug gangs. They ignore important stories about poverty and corruption. Instead, they **exploit** sad events like shootings and murders. They want to tell stories that are **dramatic** rather than stories that are important.

Is Michael Massing right? Does news coverage of Mexico focus on drugs and drug violence and **abandon** other topics? Professor Seemy wants to know.

Question:

Do most news stories about Mexico focus on drugs or drug violence?

Hypothesis:

Over one month, more than half of the news stories about Mexico will talk about drugs and/or drug violence.

Materials:

- ▶ A national newspaper

Procedure:

1. Select a national newspaper.
2. For one month, count all news stories about Mexico.
3. For each story, decide: Does this story focus on drugs and/or drug violence?
4. Count the number of drug and violence stories and compare to the total number of stories.

Data:

| Date | Title of Article | Drugs/ Violence? |
|--------------|---|-----------------------------|
| Sep 2, 2009 | Baja Battens Down as Hurricane Approaches | No |
| Sep 3, 2009 | Hurricane in Baja Weakens | No |
| Sep 3, 2009 | Leader Urges Cooperation Against Ills Mexico Faces | Yes |
| Sep 4, 2009 | 17 Killed in Mexican Rehab Center | Yes |
| Sep 4, 2009 | Tahéima Wellness Resort | No |
| Sep 7, 2009 | Mexican Candidate and Family are Killed in Apparent Drug Hit | Yes |
| Sep 8, 2009 | Seeking the World's Biggest Meatball? Try Mexico. | No |
| Sep 8, 2009 | Mexican Police Make Arrest in Killing of Candidate and His Family | Yes |
| Sep 10, 2009 | Mexican Police Thwart Plane's Hijacker | No |
| Sep 13, 2009 | Mexico Now Enduring Worst Drought in Years | No |
| Sep 14, 2009 | Eyes Turn to Mexico as Drought Drags On | No |
| Sep 17, 2009 | Lenient Sentences Given for Plundering of Artifacts | No |
| Sep 19, 2009 | Ending the 'War on Drugs' | Yes |
| Sep 24, 2009 | Survey Shows Pull of the U.S. Is Still Strong Inside Mexico | No |
| Sep 24, 2009 | Two Arrested in Attempt to Crash Border | No |
| Sep 25, 2009 | Mexican is Confirmed as Attorney General | No |
| Sep 29, 2009 | 2 Canadians Shot to Death in Mexican Resort Town | Yes |
| Sep 30, 2009 | In Mexico City, a Political Deal Redone | No |

Conclusion:

Is the hypothesis supported or not by the data?

What evidence supports your conclusion?

How would you make this a better experiment?



Support your position with clear reasons and specific examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.

abandon | biased | contemporary | dramatic | exploit

| | Exemplary |
|---|--------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Stated my own position clearly | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Included 1-2 arguments | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Included 1 counterargument | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Used 2-5 focus words | <input type="checkbox"/> |

☐ Used 2-5 focus words

This image shows a single sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.