

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 <u>contemporary</u> news reports are <u>biased</u>. 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 <u>exploit</u> 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 <u>dramatic</u> enough. Is America more interested in being entertained than in learning about what's happening in the world? Or have the news media <u>abandoned</u> their job of informing people about events and issues that really matter?

Unit 1.15 - 7 Information Focus Word Cha		Today's news: 1 or entertainment? ^{art}	int?	
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 I.I5 - 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.

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

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?



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Unit 1.15 Today's news: Information or entertainment? Debating the Issue

I. Get ready...

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

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

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.

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.

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

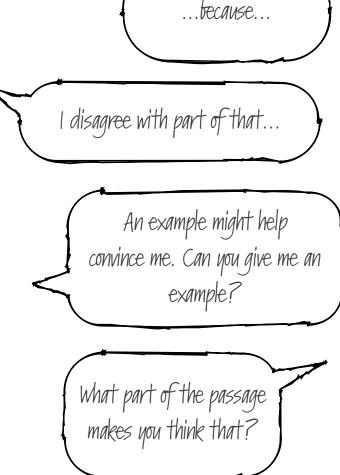
2. Get set... Be ready to provide evidence to back up your position

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

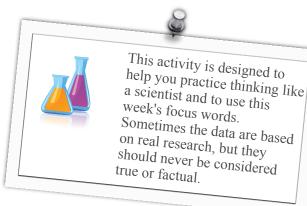


Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.





Unit I.15 - Today's news: Information or entertainment? Science Activity



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?

Writing Prompt	A tool to help you think about your own writing!
What types of stories should the news media cover?	Remember you can use focus words from any of the WG Units.
the news meala cover:	Check off what you accomplished:
Support your position with clear reasons and specific	Good Start
examples. Try to use relevant words from the Word Generation list in your response.	 Stated my own position Included 1 focus word
Focus Words	Pretty Good
abandon biased contemporary dramatic exploit	 Stated my own position clearly Included 1-2 arguments Included 1-2 focus words
	Exemplary
	 Stated my own position clearly Included 1-2 arguments Included 1 counterargument Used 2-5 focus words
