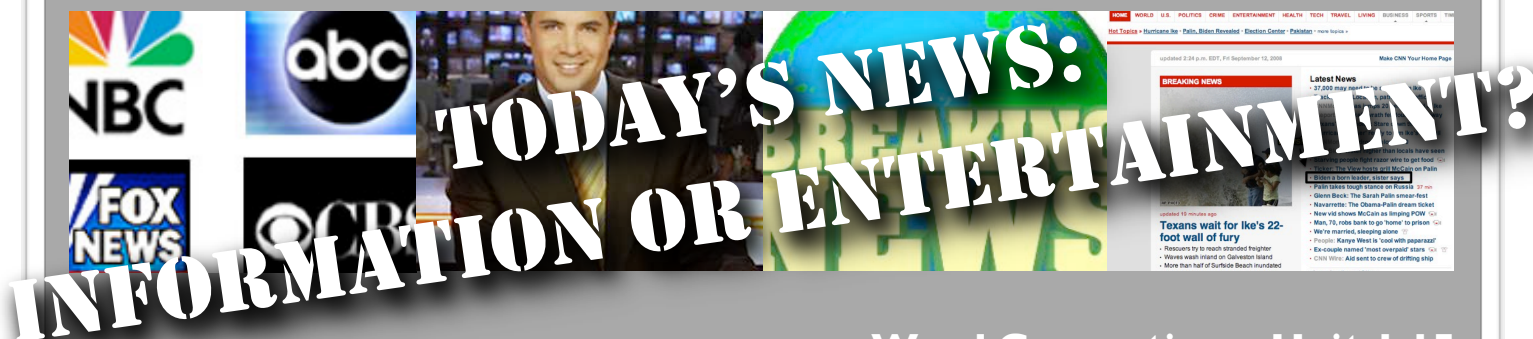


Join the national conversation!



Word Generation - Unit 1.15

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?

TEACHER

Discussion questions:

- ▶ What types of topics do contemporary news reports cover?
- ▶ Why do some people think these news reports are biased?
- ▶ Why do some critics also think that contemporary news reports exploit people's curiosity?
- ▶ Why do news sources say their stories have to be dramatic?
- ▶ Are people in this country more interested in being entertained than in being informed about the world?

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

Focus Word Chart (teacher version)

Word	Meaning	Forms			Related Words
		Inflectional	Basic Word Classes	Prefixes/ Suffixes	
abandon	(v.) – to give up	abandon (n.) abandons abandoned abandoning		abandonment	
biased	(adj.) – slanted; one-sided	biases (v.) biasing	bias (n.)	unbiased	
contemporary	(adj.) – modern; current			contemporize	tempo temporize temporary temporal
dramatic	(adj.) – exciting		drama	dramatize dramatist dramaturgy	melodrama
exploit	(v.) – to take advantage of	exploit (n.) exploits exploited exploiting		exploitation	explicit plait apply display multiply

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"/>

Answer: Answers will vary. Here is one possible answer set: "Information" articles are numbers 1, 2, 4, 7, 11, 12, and 14. "Entertainment" articles are numbers 6, 10, 13, and 15. Articles that are "Both" are 3, 5, 8, and 9. Given these answers, 7/15 of the articles are "Information," 4/15 are "Entertainment," and 4/15 are "Both."

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



I. Get ready...

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

Be a strong participant by using phrases like these.

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:

TEACHER

» If students do not regularly watch the news, they may have trouble initially connecting to this issue. Help them to see its relevance to their lives by asking what dramatic news events have caught their attention in the past. What made those events interesting or important to watch? What happens when the news is not so dramatic? Do contemporary audiences need drama and excitement in order to pay attention? Should news stations focus on stories they know will be interesting to a lot of people, or should they show stories they think are important for people to know about even if they are less exciting?

» Some students may need help defining their position on the weekly topic. Here are some examples:

...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.

TEACHER

Source:

Massing, M. (2009, October 7). The most misreported country. Columbia Journalism Review. Retrieved on October 12, 2009 from

http://www.cjr.org/behind_the_news/the_most_misreported_country.php?page=all

More About Massing's Article

Students may be confused about Michael Massing's point. They might legitimately wonder, "Isn't the gang violence he mentions worth covering, grisly or not?"

Massing's point is that news stories about drug gangs tend to focus on the sensational aspects of gang life, like torture, extravagant parties, and dramatic shootouts, and fail to explore the issues behind the violence. Focusing on the latest bloodbath at the expense of exploring more complicated, systemic problems, he says, will not expose helpful truths or help to change things. Massing says that the American media should investigate issues like corruption in the Mexican government, the Mexican income gap, and the connections between gangs and the Americans that buy their drugs. These stories, he thinks, will help people understand what's really going on in Mexico.

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?

Not supported

What evidence supports your conclusion?

Answer: Six out of 18 is less than half, so it is incorrect to say that most news stories talk about drugs and/or violence. Students may point out that 6/18 is still a substantial proportion, and this is true.

How would you make this a better experiment?

Encourage students to consider sample size, number of trials, control of variables, whether the procedure is a true measure of the question, whether the experiment can be repeated by other scientists, data collection and recording systems, and other potential explanations for the outcome. Students should understand that these simple experiments represent the beginning of an exploration, not the end. If time permits, have students suggest how the experiment could be strengthened, emphasizing the use of the target words in the discussion.



Writing Prompt

What types of stories should the news media cover?

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

Focus Words

abandon | biased | contemporary | dramatic | exploit

A tool to help you think about your own writing!

Remember you can use focus words from any of the WG Units.

Check off what you accomplished:

Good Start

- ☐ Stated my own position
- ☐ Included 1 focus word

Pretty Good

- ☐ 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

TEACHER

Ask students to write a response in which they argue a position on the weekly topic.

Put the writing prompt on the overhead projector (or the board) so that everyone can see it. Remind students to refer to the word lists in their Word Generation notebooks as needed.

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.