

Evaluating Broadcast News

http://www.highschooljournalism.org/Teachers/Lesson_Plans/Printable.cfm?lessonplanid=241

Ronni Kent Times Union Albany, N.Y.

Title: Evaluating News Broadcasts

Target Population:

This lesson can be used for elementary, middle school, high school or college level students, depending on level of inquiry. It is designed to allow students to explore and evaluate broadcast news values.

Generative Topic:

- Evaluate news coverage using a variety of television news shows.

Generative Object:

- Students will be assigned various newscasts to watch; they will keep a journal of the teacher-chosen broadcasts. Broadcasts chosen to include local, regional, and national i.e. Fox Network, NBC, CNN, etc.
- Student-boarded slugs/summaries of the lead stories from their homework assignments

Understanding goals:

• **Essential Questions**

- What is the major difference between the broadcasts?
- What story led first on each broadcast?
- What story (ies) had the most coverage?
- What news broadcast was "best" and why?

• **Critical engagement questions:**

- Why do you think "your" story was first?
- Why do you think the story receiving the most coverage was chosen?
- Compare and contrast two different news broadcasts. How might you arrange the stories differently shown on the broadcast you watched?
- Why do you think all stations did not carry the same lead story?

Performance of Understanding, Rationale, and Timeline:

This lesson is designed to provide a study in what constitutes news and how it is presented to the public for consumption. Students will be able to discuss the differences between news programs and will be able to identify news content as it relates to the mission and target audience of that news outlet. They will identify and evaluate traditional news values/balance. (this lesson can also be used in combination with a similar activity using newspapers,

with a discussion of the differences between print and broadcast news values/target audiences).

Activity 1

- Students will be assigned (in pairs) a teacher-designated news broadcast to watch for homework.
- Students will be responsible for watching 40 minutes of a news broadcast and for keeping a journal of how much air time was given to each story. In addition, students will keep a log of the stories in order and write a short summary of each for later class discussion. For younger students, 15 minutes of a local news broadcast can be used, along with the summaries. For ESE students, 10 minutes of a local news broadcast can be used with students writing two sentences of what they learned by watching the news.

Activity 2

- Using the same pair of students, a different teacher-designated news broadcast will be watched for homework. Students who watched a local channel will watch the national news and vice versa.
- Students will keep a journal as they did in activity 1, but will now compare and contrast the two news broadcasts in essay format. Younger students can be given a Venn diagram to complete.

Activity 3

- Each student will write their lead story of the previous night's news broadcast on the board. The teacher will lead a discussion evaluating why certain stories dominated and others did not.
- Students will evaluate why they felt their stories were chosen.
- Students will also discuss style and delivery in news broadcasting (*teacher may wish to bring in and show clips of various types of newscast styles-network news, CNN, Fox, MTV, for example, to facilitate this discussion*)

Activity 4

- Students will work in groups to create their own news story using school issues as the backdrop/criteria.
- Each group will have two minutes to present their news story. Younger students can work with a partner and create a newsworthy human-interest story (animals, the environment, a local attraction, etc.). For ESE students, the weather or ' sports coverage can be used. Students in a sign language class can present their news story in the target language.

Activity 5

- Each group will choose an editor from within the group.
- Editors from each group will choose how their news broadcast will be handled, including order, length, and genre, and decide how and what

- should be presented for a complete news show.
- A videotape of their final product, a full news broadcast, will be made. The video can be played back during another class period where students can begin to evaluate style and delivery per ELA speaking standards as well.

Assessment:

Students will watch a CNN broadcast in class (for younger students and ESE students, a local news broadcast will be used). Referring back to their two previous journals, they will evaluate the similarities and differences among the three and write an essay that will evaluate one common news story and how it was presented to the public. The essay should include an evaluation of the style and delivery of each news broadcast.

With modifications, all of the activities in this lesson can be used with students in Journalism, Communications, Social Studies, English, ESL, Sign Language, ESE/LD or other classes and for students as young as 3rd or 4th grade up through college level.

Resources Recommended:

- Klaidman, Steven & Beauchamp, Tom, "The Virtuous Journalist," Oxford University Press, July 1988.
- Patterson, Tom, "Out of Order," Vintage Books, 1994, p 28-52; p 134-175
- Patterson, Tom, "Doing Well and Doing Good: How Soft News and Critical Journalism are Shrinking the News Audience and Weakening Democracy — And What News Outlets Can Do About It," Cambridge, the Joan Shorenstein Center on Press, Politics and Public Policy, December 2000.
- Strunk, William, "The Elements of Style," 4th Edition, Allyn & Bacon, January 2000
- Volpe, John Della, "Reconnecting Students with Democracy," The Boston Globe, June 5, 2000, p A-13