

Hot Off the Press

Purpose: Students will recognize the role of an independent press in a democratic society by exploring the methods modern news stories are investigated and written. Through a hands-on creation of a classroom newspaper, students will appreciate the power of the press and the importance of the First Amendment to an informed public.

Procedures:

1. Post headlines collected from local newspapers around the classroom. Headlines might include local human interest stories, weather-related news, sports stories, and national politics, etc.
2. Review rights protected by the First Amendment, focusing on student understanding of freedom of the press. Develop basic definitions for the press, published information, editorials, and other vocabulary that might be relatively new to students.
3. Conduct a classroom discussion, asking key questions, such as "What is news?" Is it what is taking place in our own neighborhood? Is it what is happening all around us? What is worthy to be news? What news do students share when they get home from school? What kinds of stories interest their classmates versus their parents? Does the First Amendment guarantee the right to publish any kind of story?
4. Ask students to read six quotations from famous American politicians and journalists, discussing why they believe that freedom of the press is important in our democracy. Cut apart the six quotation cards found on the "Hot Off the Press" handout. Divide the class into six groups, giving one quotation card to each group. Ask students to develop a statement in their own words, summarizing the main ideas from their assigned quotation. Allow time for each group to read their quote and summary aloud to the class. Conduct a discussion, focusing on the common ideas expressed in the quotations. For example, most quotations refer to the press as necessary for a public which is informed to make effective decisions, while others refer to the press as a guardian of public interest.
5. Explain to students that they will be exploring the rights and responsibilities of newspaper publishers and reporters by creating their own classroom newspaper. Divide the class into "beats"- focus of investigations and news reporting. Such beats might include: school sports, holiday activities, academic studies, lunchroom update, student hobbies, etc.
6. Give students the "Inverted Pyramid" diagram and News Lingo to begin explaining how information is organized in a news story. Select a news story from a local newspaper. Take colored markers to highlight the different elements of the news story. Does the lede (lead) summarize and present the main information? Is supporting information arranged from most to least important?

7. Offer outside time for beat reporters to gather information for their stories. Allow class time for reporters to begin writing their stories, should assistance by the instructor be required. When finished, post stories into a large classroom newspaper, posted on the walls of the classroom. Ask students to share problems they encountered while trying to dig up detailed information or quotes needed for their stories. Why is it important for people to have access to the news around them? Are these reasons why freedom of the press is an important liberty found in the First Amendment?

8. Option: After time is given for students to read each other's articles, ask students to independently write a letter to the editor, offering an opinionated commentary toward one of the news stories or news events. Discuss with students the difference in an objective news story, expected of American reporters, and editorials, which are opinion, submitted by the publisher or public.

9. Extension: if possible, invite a local news reporter to the classroom as a guest speaker following the exercise above. Allow time for students to ask questions regarding the reporter's opinion toward the First Amendment and newspapers' role in keeping the public informed about local and national events.

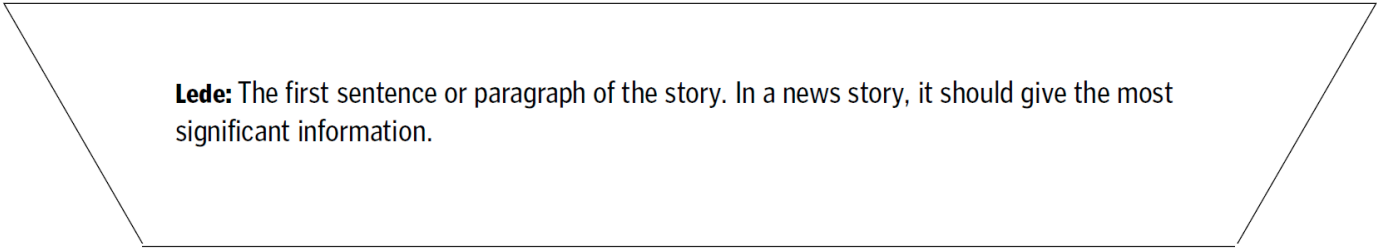
**Hot Off the Press:
Quotes About the Role of a Free Press in America**

<p style="text-align: center;">“The Founding Fathers gave the free press the protection it must have so it could inform the people.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Supreme Court Justice, Hugo Black</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">“Let the people know the facts, and the country will be safe.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">President Abraham Lincoln</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">“A democracy ceases to be a democracy if its citizens do not participate. To participate, they must know what their government has done and plans to do. This is the meaning of freedom of press. It is not just important to democracy, it is democracy.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Walter Cronkite, journalist</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">“If you want a watchdog to warn you of intruders, you must put up with a certain amount of barking...A free press is the watchdog of a free society.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Alan Barth, journalist</p>
<p style="text-align: center;">“It is the purpose of the First Amendment to preserve a free marketplace of ideas in which truth will prevail.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Supreme Court Justice Byron White</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">“It is never pleasant to read things that are not agreeable, but I would say that it is invaluable to check on what is going on.”</p> <p style="text-align: center;">President John F. Kennedy</p>

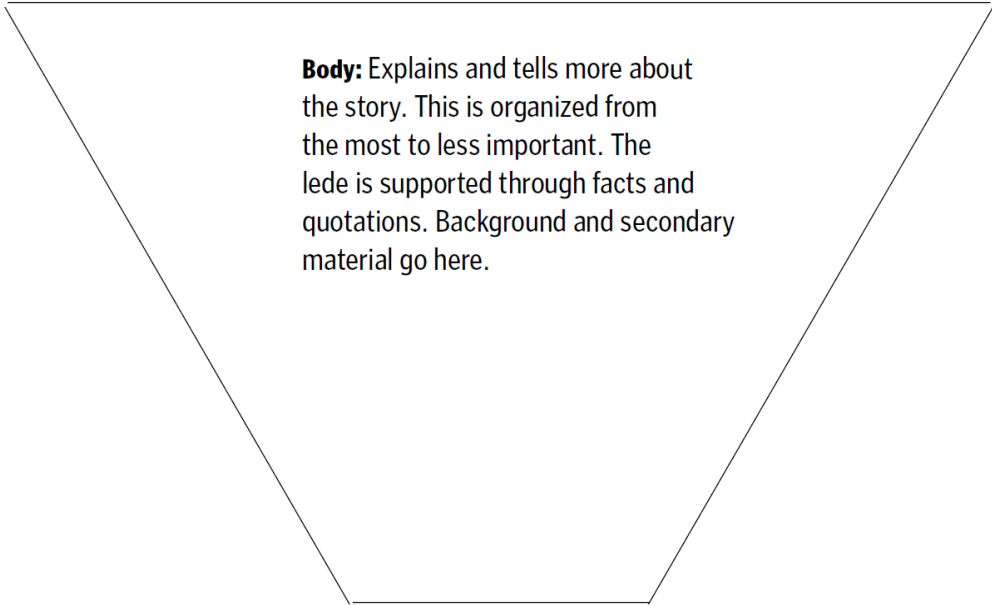
The Inverted Pyramid

News stories use an inverted pyramid structure: News is given from the most important information, to lesser in importance to the least important information. This allows the reader to learn the basic news without reading the whole article.

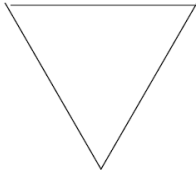
Headline: The story in a nutshell; the summary that appears above the article



Lede: The first sentence or paragraph of the story. In a news story, it should give the most significant information.



Body: Explains and tells more about the story. This is organized from the most to less important. The lede is supported through facts and quotations. Background and secondary material go here.



Cut-off test: Check to see if information at the end of a news story can be deleted, "cut off," without removing important information from the story.

News Lingo



Headline: This should give the story in a nutshell, letting a reader decide whether to read the article. Usually, the bigger the headline, the more important the story.

Byline: The name of the person who wrote the story.

Lead/Lede: This is the first sentence or paragraph of the story. In a news story, it should give the most important information.

Inverted pyramid: "Inverted" means "upside down," Most news stories are written in an inverted pyramid style. That means the most important information is at the top of the story and the least important is at the bottom. That's so that busy readers can get the main points of a story by reading just a few paragraphs.

The 5Ws and an H: If possible, a news story should answer the questions Who, What, When, Where, Why and How.

Quote: A quote is the exact words of someone who spoke to the reporter.

Source: A source is a person who gives information. Anyone, such as a policeman, a zookeeper, or tourist might all be "named sources." A named source tells the reporter that it is okay to print their names in the paper. Newspapers sometimes use an unnamed source. Why wouldn't someone let his/her name be used? Might they be afraid of losing their job because they talked about problems at their work, for example?