



Making Students NewsWise

NewsWise is a news literacy initiative that aims to equip students with necessary skills and habits to assess information online, determine what sources are accurate and credible, and build awareness of journalism's role in democracy. Resources are designed to engage students around themes of news production, journalism standards, social media personalization, and the spread of misinformation online. It also includes two video series with techniques for evaluating sources and claims.

NewsWise is a project of CIVIX, developed in partnership with the Canadian Journalism Foundation, with support from Google. Resources are available in English and French at www.newswise.ca.

ACTIVITY 1 – WHAT IS NEWS?

We rely on news to make sense of the issues and events that affect the world around us. News media are said to have agenda-setting power because the process of story selection shapes public discussion and debate. Informed citizenship relies on consuming news from a variety of sources, as well as analyzing and thinking critically about information.

1. Start with a brief conversation about the news. What are all the ways that people consume news? (e.g., newspapers, online media, news broadcasts on TV, radio programs)
2. Each day brings many different events, issues and developments. Using Think-Pair-Share, discuss what makes something newsworthy.
 - *What qualities does an issue or event have to have in order to make it news?*
 - *What are some recent examples of news? Do you know why they made the news?*

3. Review the fact that not all news organizations cover the same events, issues and developments. Using either option below, compare the front pages of local, provincial and national newspapers.

Option 1: Bring in several newspapers and post them around the classroom or down the hallway. Have students participate in a “Gallery Walk.” Using sticky notes or chart paper, ask students to write down the reasons why they think articles were chosen for the front page.

Option 2: Using Newseum.org compare the front pages of newspapers in Ontario and/or Canada.

Questions for analysis and discussion:

- *Which stories are featured on each front page? How do they compare?*
- *For reports on the same news event, how do the headlines and/or images compare to each other?*
- *What additional thoughts do you have about how news is chosen?*

4. Introduce the following factors that are often used to determine an issue's newsworthiness. Have students jot down the news values and the meaning of each in their own words.

- **Current:** The issue or event is recent.
- **Important:** The issue or event is likely to affect its audience.
- **Unique:** The issue or event is unusual.
- **Close:** The issue or event takes place geographically close to its intended audience.
- **Competing views:** There are opposing perspectives at play.
- **Famous:** The issue or event involves prominent or famous people.

5. Ask students to find two articles and analyze them using the news values.

- *Which values are present?*
- *Do you think the story of newsworthy? Why or why not?*

ACTIVITY 2 – WHY JOURNALISM?

Professional journalism involves research, assessment and verification where the central goal is to produce an accurate and fair representation of the facts. Journalists play a key role in a healthy democracy. They hold government and other sources of power to account, help inform citizens, foster debate about important issues and give people a voice.

1. Give students time to work in pairs or small groups to activate any background knowledge they have about the term “journalism” using a Frayer model (Worksheet 1). Students can also use images to communicate their thinking.
2. Have students share their thinking with another pair or group. Through a class discussion, highlight common themes that emerge.
3. Journalism consists of the gathering, evaluating, creating, presenting of and/or commenting on news and information. Watch the NewsWise video “What Is Journalism and Why Does it Matter?” (newswise.ca/videos) and review the role of journalism in a democratic society.

“Watchdog” role: To monitor government activity, fact-check statements, question the decisions of our government officials

ACTIVITY 3 – OPINION VS FACT

When it comes to assessing information of any kind, one of the most fundamental distinctions there is to make is between what is fact, and what is opinion. When we form our own opinions, we want to make sure they based on the best possible understanding of the information available.

1. Initiate a class discussion about a debatable topic and invite students to share their views (e.g., cats are better than dogs, uniforms should be mandatory at school, smartphones should be banned from schools).
2. Review key terms:
 - A fact is statement that can be proven or checked.
 - An opinion is a statement based on individual perspectives or beliefs. It cannot be proven or checked.
3. Ask students to determine which of the eight fictional statements provided are fact-based or opinion-based and why (Worksheet 2).
4. Similar to other types of media, journalism can take different forms and have different purposes. It is helpful to analyze the purpose so that we can assess credibility and potential bias.
 - **Fact-based news coverage:** Focuses on reporting on events, issues or developments and is intended to inform. While it may include analysis or assessment, it is based on facts and not opinion.

(transparency) and make them take responsibility for their actions (accountability).

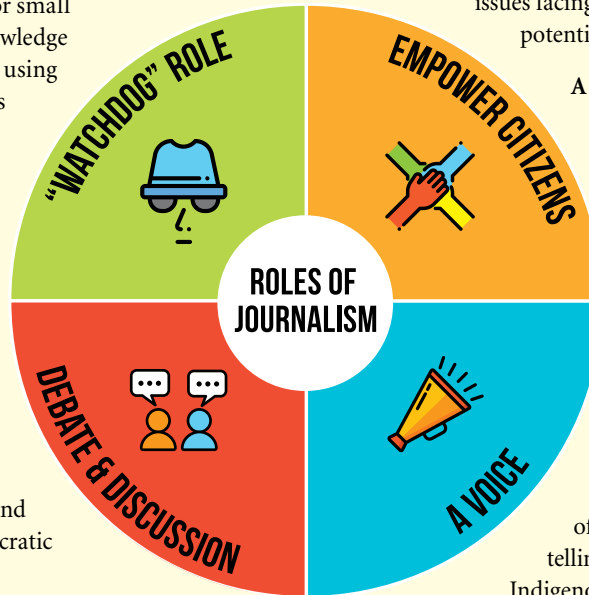
Empower citizens: To give people the information they need to make the best possible decisions about their lives, society and governments.

Debate and discussion: To foster conversation about important issues facing society by sharing different perspectives and potential solutions.

A voice: To give people a voice and help them be heard, particularly those who lack power in society. This reporting is often connected with influencing change in the community or government actions/responses.

4. Create a class definition for the term “journalism.” Students can also add to their Frayer model worksheet to include additional characteristics and examples.

5. As a class, watch the NewsWise video “Uncovering the Truth of Grassy Narrows” (newswise.ca/videos) – a short documentary of the work of two investigative journalists telling the story of mercury poisoning in the Indigenous community of Grassy Narrows. Debrief as a class: *What was the purpose of the news stories published? What was the impact?*

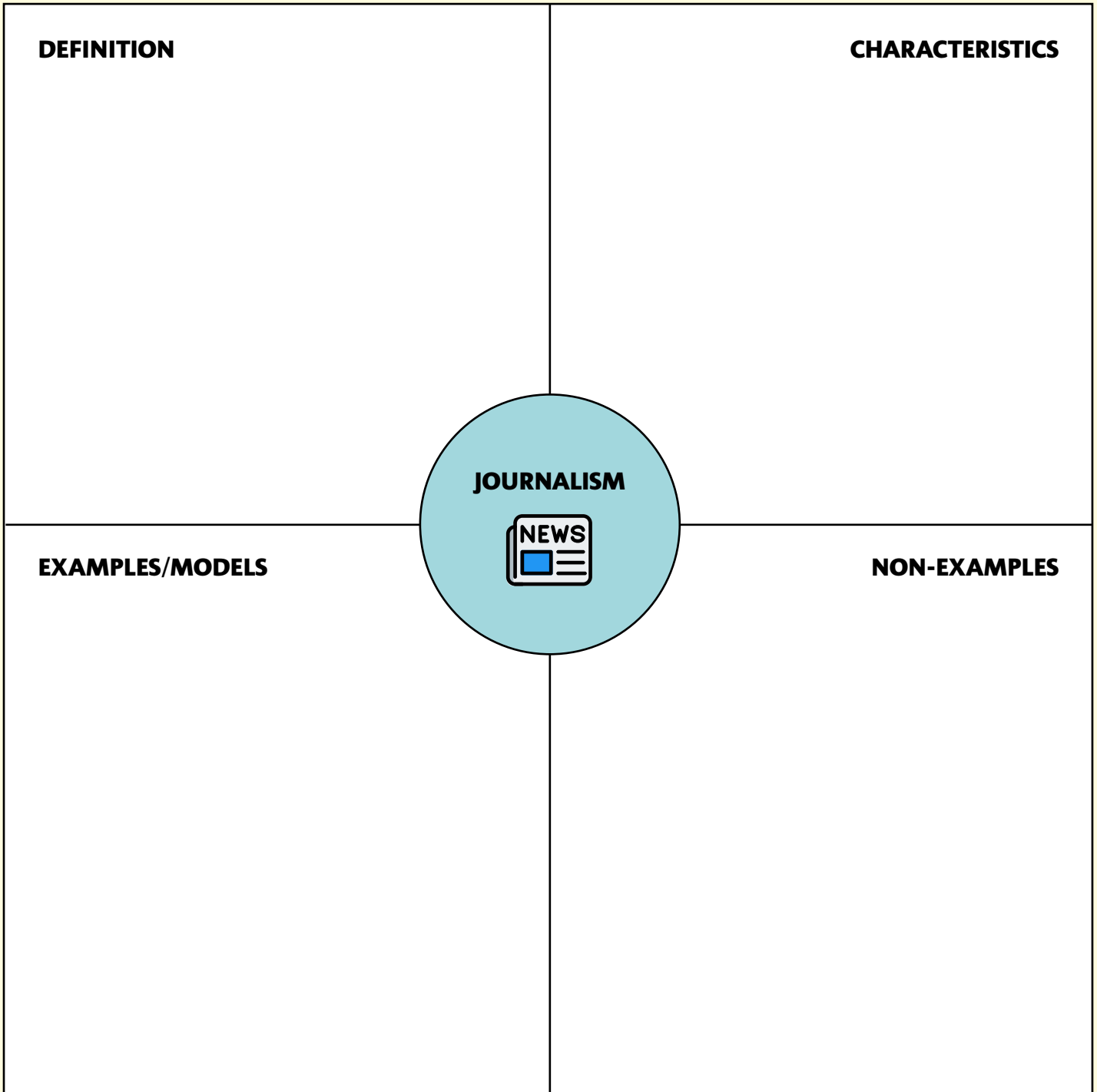


- **Opinion journalism:** An opinion piece provides a viewpoint about an event, issue or development. The purposes can vary, sometimes it is meant to critique, praise, interpret or persuade. It may not be impartial or balanced, and is usually impacted by preconceived notions or opinions. Examples include editorials, columns and commentary.

5. Examine a print or digital newspaper as a class to discern fact-based news coverage from opinion journalism. What signals are there to mark opinion journalism as different from fact-based news coverage? (e.g., labels, photos of columnists, different sections of the newspaper.)

6. Provide or ask students to find one article that is opinion-based and one article that is fact-based on the same subject, and to compare them by underlining all the facts in each piece.

- How many facts did you underline in the news piece vs the opinion piece?
- How were the facts in the opinion piece used? Did you find them persuasive, in thinking about the author’s argument?
- For the opinion piece, if you were going to check the facts presented to you, how might you go about doing that?



CLASS DEFINITION:

WORKSHEET 2: FACT VS OPINION



Read the eight statements below and determine if they are opinion or fact.

| STATEMENT | FACT OR OPINION? | WHY? |
|---|------------------|------|
| 1. Only 5 out of 10 citizens voted in the last provincial election. | | |
| 2. Providing free childcare for families will help more women work and improve gender equality. | | |
| 3. According to the research, teenagers spend five hours a day using social media. | | |
| 4. The politician is not considered trustworthy after making false statements. | | |
| 5. New funding was announced from the provincial government to help schoolyard greening projects. | | |
| 6. It is not fair for wealthy people to have to pay more in taxes if everyone gets the same services. | | |
| 7. After graduating from a university program, the average Ontario student has to pay back \$25,000 in student loans. | | |
| 8. Social media is bad for our mental health. | | |