**Lesson Plan: News Evaluation – Beyond the Checklist**

**Goal:**

To equip students with strategies to evaluate news articles

**Outcomes:**

Students will be able to …

* make an initial determination of an article’s accuracy and bias based on an evaluation of headline/content match (content), news type (purpose), evidence used (content), and writer’s attitude (tone).
* discover the importance of corroborating information.
* identify resources that can reveal more information about a news source’s perspective.
* recognize that many factors may be considered when evaluating a news sources.

**Threshold Concepts:**

* Authority is Constructed and Contextual
* Information Creation as a Process
* Information Has Value

**Note:** This lesson focuses on evaluating news article content and comparing that content. It tries to avoid the checklist of currency, authorship etc.

**Materials Needed:**

* News Evaluation handout, for each student, with questions for evaluation
  + The handout is meant to help students use various strategies to help them critically consume news. See Appendix A for more details.
* Multiple copies of each of the three articles, news source information can be redacted
* PPT/Keynote for introduction & post-discussion
* Whiteboard & markers to jot down students’ observation for Article A, B and C

**Other Preparation for the Jigsaw:**

* Determine which students will read X article for the large group discussion - Part I of the News Evaluation handout. There will be three groups since there are three articles. In Part II there are small groups with ideally one representative for each article. You may wish to prepare lists with which students who will be in the smaller groups OR we found that it worked to number off students from their original groups. For example, a class of 18 would start with 3 groups of 6 and then split into 6 groups of 3.

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| **Suggested Articles:**  We attempted to select articles around the same event, topic or theme that were similar in length. It was important for us to have mix of editorial(s) vs. news report(s). We were also trying to avoid items that may be severely on the fringe of one political spectrum or another. A potential resource for identifying articles is AllSides since the site organizes sources from the left, center and right. <http://www.allsides.com/>  We used the following set of articles; they are uploaded into CORA.  **Health Care Sign-Ups**  “HealthCare.gov signups fall short of last year, at 9.2M”  GOP see dwindling interest in failed law, supporters claim sabotage  *The Washington Times* (3 Feb. 2017)  Tom Howell, Jr.  <http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2017/feb/3/healthcaregov-signups-fall-short-last-year-92m/>  “HealthCare.gov suffers first enrollment decline as GOP works to kill the ACA”  *The Washington Post* (3 Feb. 2017)  Amy Goldstein  <https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/healthcaregov-suffers-first-enrollment-decline-ever-as-gop-works-to-kill-the-aca/2017/02/03/941e0e3a-ea2d-11e6-bf6f-301b6b443624_story.html?utm_term=.230856ecb514>  “Obamacare Signups Sag and It’s Trumps’ Fault?”  *The American Spectator* (6 Feb. 2017)  David Catron  <http://www.allsides.com/news/2017-02-06-1008/obamacare-signups-sag-and-it%E2%80%99s-trump%E2%80%99s-fault>  **Other Options:**  We also used other groups of articles to target our lesson more closely to specific class themes and context. Here are two other examples of article sets.  **2017 Oscars Mistake** (more generally about Hollywood and its personalities)  “‘La La Land’ producer Jordan Horowitz is the truth-teller we need right now”  *The Washington Post (*27 February 2017)  Stephanie Merry and Lindsey Bever  <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2017/02/27/la-la-land-producer-jordan-horowitz-is-the-truth-teller-we-need-right-now/?utm_term=.d9bd522ce8a3>  “At the Oscars: Revenge of the Hollywood Crybullies”  <http://www.nationalreview.com/article/445444/oscars-awards-fiasco-crybullies-revenge>  *National Review* (3 March 2017)  Armond White  “What it was like onstage during the Oscars’ best picture mistake”  *The Boston Globe* (27 Feb. 2017)  Cara Buckley and Brooks Barnes (*from The New York Times*)  \*NYT has a piece with the same journalists and same title but different content  <https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/movies/2017/02/27/what-was-like-onstage-during-oscars-best-picture-mistake/HVWijJkSQAHDUiptgacD5O/story.html>  **Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) & Bill H.R. 861**  “Congress and Trump Won't 'Terminate the EPA' - Instead, they’ll restrict the agency in far subtler ways.”  *The Atlantic* (16 Feb. 2017)  Robinson Meyer  <https://www.theatlantic.com/science/archive/2017/02/congress-wont-terminate-the-epa/516918/>  “Bill to Eliminate Environmental Protection Agency Introduced in Congress”  *The New American* (24 February 2017)  [Christian Gomez](https://www.thenewamerican.com/usnews/congress/itemlist/user/75-christiangomez)  <https://www.thenewamerican.com/usnews/congress/item/25468-bill-to-eliminate-environmental-protection-agency-introduced-in-congress>  “Florida congressman gets little traction on legislation to abolish EPA”  *Palm Beach Post* (14 February 2017)  Wayne Washington  <http://www.mypalmbeachpost.com/news/state--regional-govt--politics/florida-congressman-gets-little-traction-legislation-abolish-epa/eRqNfdiat9JEoo1E4O0xHM/> |

**Flipped Classroom Assignment:**

Students would read their assigned newspaper article before the class. One third of the class reads Article A, another third reads Article B etc.

**Lesson Introduction:** (5 minutes)

Before arriving to class, you all read one newspaper article in preparation for some group questions and discussion. Our goal is to evaluate three news articles to identify features that will help us to determine the extent to which they are accurate and unbiased. \*You will notice that I did not give you the newspaper source for each article. Note: We gave some additional context about our current news environment and the importance of being able to evaluate this type of information.

**Instructions:**

Today each of you will receive a sheet with questions. As a group, you will answer the questions about your assigned news article. However, each of you will fill in your sheet since you will need to refer to your group’s answers in your second group. After your group discussion and questions are completed, I will split you into smaller groups. In the second group, you will be the expert about your news article. You will share information about your news article with your peers who have not read it. Once you are in your second group, I will give additional instructions.

**Activity:** (20 minutes)

Divide students into three large groups representing the three news articles. Even if they read the article earlier, this often involves going over the article again. Students discuss article X and answer the questions. Each member of each group answers Part I Questions but will benefit from the group discussion.

**Instructions:**

Great, all of you have answered your questions. I will now be breaking you into your groups of three. Show groupings on the board. (It may be easiest to have this divided ahead of time or we did find that numbering off students worked well.) In the next 15 minutes, your group will have two primary tasks. 1) Each of you will tell your peers about the news article you read. Refer to the questions you answered in your larger group. 2) Once all three of you have shared, discuss the group questions. Be prepared to share your thoughts with the class.

**Activity:** (15 minutes)

Students are divided into groups of three. They complete Part II on the handout. They do not have to write answers for their portion. However, they need to be prepared to discuss with the class.

**Debrief:** (10 - 15 minutes)

You may wish to have the titles of each article on a whiteboard with room to write underneath. Students’ observations about each article can be recorded during the class discussion. Here are possible debrief questions:

* Which news article(s) did you believe was most accurate and least biased? Could you make this determination by only looking at the article? How challenging was this?
* What influenced you the most in making this determination? (headline/content, type of news story, use of evidence, tone/language, other…)
* Was it easier to evaluate your initial article after you heard about two other articles on the same topic? (an opportunity to refer to corroboration)
* Was there any information missing that you think would have helped you in your evaluation? What else should we have considered?
* If you are unsure about whether a news article is accurate and/or unbiased, what other strategies might you take? (Remember – student have not been given the news source)

**Share Resources:** (10 - 15 minutes)

Reveal the news sources from which the articles are taken. Ask them …

* Do we know anything about these news sources? (e.g. *The Washington Post, The Washington Times, The American Spectator*).
* Where can we find out more about news sources?

“HealthCare.gov suffers first enrollment decline as GOP works to kill the ACA”

*The Washington Post* (3 Feb. 2017)

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/healthcaregov-suffers-first-enrollment-decline-ever-as-gop-works-to-kill-the-aca/2017/02/03/941e0e3a-ea2d-11e6-bf6f-301b6b443624_story.html?utm_term=.5a1c9a7f5e98>

“HealthCare.gov signups fall short of last year, at 9.2M”

*The Washington Times* (3 Feb. 2017)

<http://www.allsides.com/news/2017-02-04-1108/healthcaregov-signups-fall-short-last-year-92m>

“Obamacare Signups Sag and It’s Trumps’ Fault?”

*The American Spectator* (6 Feb. 2017)

<http://www.allsides.com/news/2017-02-06-1008/obamacare-signups-sag-and-it%E2%80%99s-trump%E2%80%99s-fault>

Transition into showing resources students can consult or strategies they can use to find out more *about* a source. We chose to do this through a PPT/Keynote presentation. For example, we look up the news sources of the articles they read in sites like MediaNewsBias and AllSides.

* MediaNewsBias
* AllSides
* Wikipedia
* “About” the Source
* Other sources

**Additional Questions:**

* Does this help you evaluate the individual news articles you read and discussed earlier?
* What are the limitations and/or benefits of this additional information?

**Closing:** (5 minutes)

Have students respond to the following T/F questions as a way to check for understanding and to lead into final comments.

True/False Questions

* A news article can be accurate and biased. TRUE
* A news source *only* publishes news articles that reflect its perspective. FALSE
* Analyzing the tone of an article may help you determine if the article is biased. TRUE

Big Ideas

Your news evaluation can be strengthened by considering the author’s goal (news types), examining the language, comparing content to other sources, comparing content to the headline and being aware of a news source’s purpose. News articles from left leaning or right learning sources may still be accurate and relatively unbiased.

**Appendix A**

The News Evaluation handout leads students through a set of questions to help them analyze news.

Strategies for Critically Consuming News

1. Compare the headline with the content.

* some sources are more concerned about clicks than accurate reporting (Part 1, Question 1)

1. Recognize the author’s goal.

* e.g. editorial vs. reporting (Part I, Question 2)

1. Consider the content focus & use of evidence.

* What is included or left out? (Part I, Question 3)

1. Look at the language.

* attitude toward the topic (Part I, Question 3)

1. Corroborate & investigate.

* compare to other articles (Part II, Questions 1-3)

1. Know your news sources.

* Be aware of purpose and partisan leanings. (Part I, Question 2; Debrief)

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