

Four great things to do with newspapers

ADAM JOHN SIMPSON

Although the way we consume news has gone through great changes in recent years, newspapers remain a great teaching resource to use in the classroom. Some of the best lessons I've ever taught have been based around newspaper articles. Their flexibility in terms of meeting objectives and outcomes are the key to why they are such a good resource for us as teachers. Here are four ways we can exploit newspapers, and a few carefully chosen links, too!

1. Use newspapers as a gateway for teaching reading and grammar

Newspapers are, by definition, full of writing that uses language to deliver information in a specific way. For this reason, they make for a fantastic real-world resource for analysing grammar, as well as the reading skills connected with discourse analysis.

Make a copy of your chosen article for each learner and get them to make note of any words in the article that they are unfamiliar with. You can use these as a way of teaching learners how to use the context of the article to guess what the word means. Another good task is to have learners pull out all the examples of a particular grammar item that they find in the text (e.g. all examples of the passive voice). Alternatively, ask the learners to read an article and then give them questions to answer, either about the choice of grammar in certain sentences or about the construction of the text.

2. Use newspapers as a vehicle to teach writing

Headlines serve as the basis from which we predict what the content of an article will be. Therefore, they make for great writing prompts.

With this in mind, give your learners only the headline and ask them to write an article based on this prompt. Alternatively, you might show them a photo associated with the article and get them to write their article based on this alone. Again, by contrasting newspapers to papers with different agendas or motivations, we can get learners to analyse the language used to create bias. If they have written a response to a headline, having them rewrite it inserting opinionated statements is a good way to focus on the purposes of writing and the intended audience. As a follow up, discuss with learners how this changes the article.

3. Use newspapers to teach cultural values and current events

Newspapers are a great way to learn about what is going on in your country and the wider world. What's more, they are equally good for seeing how that world discusses the main issues going on where you live.

Choose one article every morning to share with your class. You can use this as the springboard for a class discussion, or have them write a written response to the information presented. Depending on the age, multicultural make up, and general interests of your learners, you might wish to choose a controversial article and have the students debate it. This is where having articles from different sources/perspectives comes in handy, so consider the stance of the newspaper(s) you have chosen.

4. Use newspapers to teach about media and information

Recently, in Turkey, there was a famous instance of about a dozen newspapers all having identical headlines. The reasons for this aren't things I want to go into here, but it highlights the importance of how and why certain information is deemed important enough to be front page news.

Teaching learners about the different parts of a newspaper is a useful task. One thing we can do, just as effectively online as in printed media, is to determine which parts of a paper are the most 'important', and the process behind how headline stories are chosen. A great follow-up that promotes creative thought is to create your own classroom newspaper. This could become a regular thing, getting learners to publish it on a monthly basis, and sending it home to their parents (depending on their age of course!).

A few useful links...

You might want to sign up for *Newspapers in Education*, an Australian resource that can give you ideas on how to incorporate newspapers into your teaching.
<http://nie.thewest.com.au/>

Education World offers ten terrific classroom activities that use newspapers to teach all sorts of valuable skills, including reading and writing for meaning, map

reading, media literacy, sequencing, word meaning, and math.

http://www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson/lesson139.shtml

The *Media in Education* (MIE) program of the Democrat and Chronicle has created one hundred activities which can be used to encourage students to see more than just the words and photographs, and challenge their minds to further develop what they see and read.

<http://mie.democratandchronicle.com/content/100-ways-use-newspaper>

Another superb link for up-to-the minute news and ideas is [newseum.org](http://www.newseum.org). It also has a bank of the day's front pages for over 800 different news publications worldwide – from tabloid to broadsheet – and is searchable by city, country, or continent, which I have found invaluable.

I should also mention www.newslevels.com. For teaching news, Breaking News English (<http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/>) can also be a good start – seven graded levels with lots of printables and online activities.

Thanks to Hannah McHugh, Michael Bauer, and Sean Banville for suggesting some of these resources.

A word of caution...

Make sure to consider controversial or inappropriate stories before learners are exposed to them. Basically, this is down to your relationship with your class and having an idea of what they will find appropriate or unsettling, but also think about the rules and regulations of your place of work.

Editor's Note:

This article appeared originally as a post on Adam Simpson's blog *Teach them English* (<http://www.teachthemenglish.com/?s=four+great+things+to+do+with+newspaper/>) on October 7, 2013. Reprinted here with the kind permission of the author.

About the Author

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