

## Topic: The media and public opinion

<b>Lesson: Reporters' ethics</b>	<b>KS or Year Group: KS3</b>
<b>Resources:</b> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Sky video x 2</li> <li>2. Resource 1 - True or false (student version)</li> <li>3. Resource 2 – True or false (teacher version)</li> <li>4. Resource 3 - Diana crash picture questions</li> </ol>	<b>Outcomes:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students are aware of moral/ethical issues concerned with reporting.</li> <li>• Students have considered how stories are found and how they are reported.</li> </ul>

### National Curriculum

Key Concepts: 1.1b, 1.2a, 1.2b, 1.2c

Key Processes: 2.1a, 2.1c, 2.2a, 2.2b

Range and Content: 3d

Curriculum Opportunities: 4i

### Lesson

This lesson examines ethics in journalism by stimulating class discussion about what should be reported and what should not. How do we go about arbitrating between rights that often clash (the public's right to know, the reporter's right to report, the subject's right to privacy, etc)? What ethical limits should be set on journalism, if any? How far is it acceptable for reporters to go in the name of a good story?

### Starter

- Begin the lesson with **SKY video 1**, a news clip about several leading newspapers apologising for false stories against the McCanns after a court ruling.
- Ask students to discuss how this situation arose. Why did the McCanns decide to take legal action against the newspapers? Why did the newspapers agree to publish such a wholehearted retraction of their stories? Discuss how the newspapers were forced to admit they had printed stories which did not have enough evidence to support them. Why might the newspapers have done this? Introduce the concept that the newspapers often sensationalise stories to sell more copies. A good

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working definition of sensationalism would be making the story more thrilling or shocking than is supported by the proven facts.

- Teachers have the option of connecting this discussion to Princess Diana, either at this point or later in the lesson, by raising the various headlines about Princess Diana which were printed as fact but finally dismissed by the inquest. An example of such a headline might be the 'Diana was pregnant' stories which emerged in the weeks after her death. Ask students whether they think it is acceptable for the press to make assumptions such as these without hard evidence to back them up. They might consider how such assumptions entertain the public, profit the newspaper owners but potentially harm the individuals involved in the stories.

## Main activity

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Give out copies of **Resource 1 – True or false (student version)**. The students must decide whether they think the headlines are from actual news stories (true) or whether they are made up (false).

### Activity 1:

- Students read headlines and reach their own judgements – they should annotate their decisions onto their resource sheet.
- Students should then note down what they think the story behind the headline is.
- Teacher to ask a sample of students about their answers.
- Using **Resource 2 – True or false (teacher version)**, teacher to reveal actual answers and lead brief discussion on how misleading headlines can be and how false headlines can easily get printed.

### Activity 2:

- Watch **SKY video 2**, a news clip about the broadcasting of images from the car crash that killed Princess Diana. This video does not show images from the crash, but is rather a discussion of the morality of broadcasting them to public.
- Given each student a copy of **Resource 2 – Diana crash picture questions**. Ask them to quickly fill in the sheet.
- Ask the class to vote on the question: 'should Channel 4 have been allowed to broadcast the images of the car crash in which Princess Diana died?'. Ask a few selected students to elaborate on their vote, using the answers from their filled-in sheets.
- Many news reports contain graphic images of people in extreme distress or suffering violence. Should these be broadcast? Does the class think that the images of Princess Diana should be treated any differently?
- Introduce the concept of 'news value'. This is the idea that publishing or broadcasting certain extreme or graphic images is justifiable because they bring an important story to the public's attention. A good example might be the 1972 photo

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of a naked Vietnamese girl running down the road after a napalm attack by U.S. forces (this photo won the Pulitzer prize).

- Ask the class whether they think that the images of Princess Diana had 'news value', i.e. did they break an important story? did they bring any new evidence to light? or could they be considered sensationalistic?

## Plenary

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Recap on the false allegations contained in many stories about the McCann case, the subsequent apologies and the unprecedented retraction. Discuss how journalists can twist the stories reported and even create stories, which has worrying ethical consequences. Ask sample of students what they feel they've learnt from the lesson.

### Aim high

More able students should consider the question: do newspapers/TV report the news or make it?

### Assessment

At Level 7, students weigh up and assess the implications of situations where an individual's or group's rights and obligations are contested. Pupils explore their own opinion on a controversial issue.

Assessment of classwork - students can further develop their answers to the Diana questions by writing a 'think-piece' article or creating a radio monologue expressing their opinion about which is more important – the public's right to know or an individual's right to privacy?

## Check the web

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<http://news.sky.com/skynews/article/0,,91248-1300799,00.html>

Sky article about press complaints, including relatively current examples.

[http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/newsid\\_2180000/newsid\\_2183900/2183979.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/hi/newsid_2180000/newsid_2183900/2183979.stm)

Guide to media standards including Press Complaints Commission introduction.

<http://www.pcc.org.uk/index2.html>

The Press Complaints Commission website

<http://www.editorscode.org.uk/>

Voluntary code of practice for editors

### Summary of key learning

- Students realise that the media is not always honest and headlines can be deceptive.
- Students have greater awareness of ethical and moral issues surrounding reporting.

**Resource 1 – True or false (student version)**

Do you think these headlines are true or false?

**Big Brother disowns little brother,  
Dermot, and adopts sister.**

**'Boy Racer' head teacher sacked**

**Unruly pupils to serve in the military**

**Nottingham is UK burglary hotspot**

**US Army robots using Nintendo Wii**

**Drug delivery grandmother jailed**

**Terrorist caught after using  
Terminal 5 fingerprint check-in**

## Resource 2 – True or false (teacher version)

### **Big Brother disowns little brother, Dermot, and adopts sister.**

False. Dermot O'Leary has left *Big Brother's Little Brother* and a female replacement is being sought, but he wasn't disowned because he left of his own free will.

### **'Boy Racer' head teacher sacked**

True. A head teacher who had been involved in a high speed crash has been dismissed following the General Teaching Council decision that he brought the profession into disrepute.

### **Unruly pupils to serve in the military**

False. A discussion had been held in public forums suggesting this might be a good idea following the NUT declaring that they felt the army recruited young people in schools without the young people not getting all of the facts.

### **Nottingham is UK burglary hotspot**

True. Headline is based on crime figures.

### **US Army robots using Nintendo Wii**

True. Due to the Wii controllers being so easy to manipulate, the US are using them to control land mine clearing robots.

### **Drug delivery grandmother jailed**

True. A grandmother from Cornwall was jailed after being caught with 10kilos of cannabis.

### **Terrorist caught after using Terminal 5 fingerprint check-in**

False. Fingerprint check-in at Heathrow's Terminal 5 has been suspended following concerns that it breached the Data Protection Act.

### Resource 3 – Diana crash picture questions

1. What are Dickie Arbiter's main arguments against showing images of the crash?
2. Do you think publishing images of the crash is distasteful or offensive?  
Why/ Why not?
3. Do the public have a right to see these images?  
Why / Why not?
4. Do the public need to see pictures of these images?  
Why / Why not?
5. Is it good journalism to get photographs such as these?  
Why / Why not?