



JUST THINK

TEACHING CRITICAL THINKING WITH NEWSPAPERS

**Newspaper
Association
of America**



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Introduction

Developing critical thinking skills is an increasingly important part of the curriculum in elementary and secondary schools. Using newspapers in the classroom can provide an opportunity for students to practice these new skills as they examine daily coverage of national and local issues. The op-ed page is also a valuable forum for ideas and opinions which can spark lively discussion.

This curriculum guide is intended to offer suggestions for activities using newspaper content in the classroom. It originally was developed by the Newspaper Association of America Foundation, and it has been adapted by Newspapers Canada for use in Canada.

About the organizations:

Newspapers Canada

Newspapers Canada is a joint initiative of the Canadian Newspaper Association and the Canadian Community Newspapers Association. Together they create one strong industry voice for newspapers in Canada, representing over 830 daily, weekly, and community newspapers. Newspapers Canada increases the profile of the newspaper industry in Canada through a program of education and other member services, as well as initiatives in marketing and public affairs.

Newspaper Association of America® Foundation

The NAA Foundation strives to develop engaged and literate citizens in a diverse society. It invests in and supports programs designed to enhance student achievement through newspaper readership and appreciation of the First Amendment in the U.S. Bill of Rights. The NAA Foundation also endeavors to help news media companies increase their readership and audience by offering programs that encourage the cultivation of a more diverse work force in the press. NAA Foundation support is concentrated in four primary focus areas: Newspaper In Education, youth content, student journalism and diversity. For more information, visit www.naafoundation.org.

The Bloom Six

Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives has been a staple of education for many years. Today, the levels may have slightly different designations — synthesis might be called creative thinking, for example — but they reflect the continuum from simple recall to evaluative thinking. The taxonomy does not suggest that teachers must move students from the first through the sixth level in a prescribed sequence. What the levels can do is help you plan your questioning strategies and assignments. You can check yourself to see that you are guiding students to higher-level thinking. Bloom's levels are listed here, along with some outcome verbs that help define the behaviors expected at each level. The activities in this guide focus on the thinking levels of application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation.

6

... Evaluation ...

Make a judgment based on personal knowledge, experience, values and opinions

Appraise, compare and contrast, critique, interpret, justify

5

... Synthesis ...

Use prior knowledge to create a new and original whole

Adapt, compose, design, model, reconstruct

4

... Analysis ...

Break down information into its component parts, examine structures

Correlate, differentiate, discriminate, infer, prioritize

3

... Application ...

Use previously learned information to solve problems

Act, chart, construct, predict, produce, solve

2

... Comprehension ...

Understand the meaning of new information

Describe, discuss, give examples, paraphrase, summarize

1

... Knowledge ...

Recall previously learned material

Define, identify, label, list, name, state

Components

The Bloom Six - provides an overview of Benjamin Bloom's Taxonomy of Educational Objectives.

Lesson Plans — presented in two parts:

Open Their Minds, the teacher page, and Engage Your Brain, the student activity page.

Each has its own elements and organization.

Open Their Minds elements:

- Newspaper section/feature
- Thinking level
- Guiding the lesson
- Rubric
- Internet resource(s)

Engage Your Brain elements:

- Think about it
- Make a connection
- Student activities containing higher-level thinking activities (application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation) for 10 different newspaper sections/features.

Thinking level: Evaluation Background

Background

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees freedom of the press and other communication media (ie., television, radio, web news channels). Freedom of the press has been called the most vital freedom of all, because of its role in protecting a citizen's other rights. A free and responsible press is a safeguard against loss of liberty.

Newspapers are sometimes called "the public's watchdog." Newspaper reporters attend government events, from school board meetings to political press conferences.

Guiding the lesson

- Discuss the role of the press with the class.
- Have students look over international and national news stories in the newspaper. Select one or two stories and discuss with students.
- Ask students to talk about why citizens need to know about the stories.
- Go over the student activity page with students. Have students complete the activity individually.
- Have students share their completed assignments with the class

The student...	Excellent	Acceptable	Revisit
Identified an appropriate story/subject			
Identified effects on citizens			
Supported his/her position with details and logic			

Think about it

The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms guarantees freedom of the press and other communication media (ie., television, radio, web news channels). Freedom of the press has been called the most vital freedom of all, because of its role in protecting a citizen's other rights. A free and responsible press is a safeguard against loss of liberty.

Your newspaper reports on policies the government is putting in place as well as laws being considered or passed by Parliament.

Select a national issue that is of interest to you. Collect news stories about the positions taken by the prime minister and members of Parliament. Then think about the issue yourself. Answer these questions:

- What is the issue you've chosen? Write a headline that would be suitable for a story about it.
- Why is this issue important to our national leaders? Why do we need to be concerned about it?
- What are the opposing sides of this issue? What are the consequences to ordinary citizens of each side's position?

What is your position on the issue? Explain why you feel that way.

Make another connection

Read a newspaper editorial about the issue. What is the newspaper's position? What new information or insights did you gain by reading the editorial?

Student Activities

THINKING LEVEL	ACTIVITY
Application	Read a news story about a proposed new federal law or Supreme Court decision. Discuss the different ways the new law or court decision will affect individuals, groups and current laws.
Analysis	Read several news stories about a major national or international issue. Discuss the historical, economic and social elements that have created the situation that exists today.
Synthesis	Select a news story about an important problem facing the international community. Select people you read about in the newspaper to create a commission that could find a solution to the problem.
Evaluation	Select a news story about a national or international issue about which people take different sides. Discuss the consequences of each side's position. Take a stand on the issue and explain why you support that position.

Thinking levels: Analysis, synthesis Background

Background

Newspapers provide consistent coverage of local government meetings, such as city council or planning committee meetings. Newspapers fulfill the role as the keepers of the public record. The newspaper acts as a concerned citizen of the community.

Guiding the lesson

Discuss the role of the newspaper in covering community news. Explain that newspapers generally offer more comprehensive reporting of community events when compared with radio and television news.

Have students identify local news stories they would expect to see on a television news program and those they would not expect to see on television. Have them explain their choices.

Discuss the activity sheet with students. Explain the term, stakeholder — anyone who has an interest in a situation. There are direct and indirect stakeholders in many community situations. For example, a budget shortage might cause a city council to curtail the hours that the public library is open. The immediate stakeholders are the library employees and regular patrons. However, public school students are also affected. The public at large may be affected because the library serves as an important source of public activities. You may want to discuss a recent community issue that affected different groups.

Have students work individually.

Have students share their responses.

Rubric

The student...	Excellent	Acceptable	Revisit
Identified stakeholder positions in detail			
Generated an original solution			
Demonstrated logical thinking in his or her solution			

Engage Your Brain!

Local News

Think about it

When there is a situation that requires community action, the newspaper reports on the problem and all the different individuals and groups that have an interest in the problem. People who are affected by a situation are often called “stakeholders.”

Read news stories about a problem or concern in your community. Identify the different stakeholders who are proposing different solutions to the problem. Collect your information in the space below. Then develop a solution of your own.

Stakeholder

Solution:

Stakeholder

Solution:

Stakeholder

Solution:

What solution would you propose that is different from any of those proposed by the stakeholders?

Make a connection

Interview family members and friends. Ask their opinions about the problem. Ask them for their solutions. How are their solutions different from yours? Write a news story that reports on your findings.

Student Activities

THINKING LEVEL	ACTIVITY
Application	Read a news story about a citizens' group that is proposing some change in your community. Describe how the proposed change would affect the social, economic and political situation in your community.
Analysis	Read news stories about a community concern and identify elements that contribute to it. Determine where you might look for ideas that address that concern – like other communities that have a similar geography, social structure or history. What can you learn from those communities?
Synthesis	Select a news story about a concern facing your community. Identify different individuals or groups who have ideas for addressing the concern. Write three possible scenarios for the outcome of the situation.
Evaluation	Use newspaper stories to identify the three most important issues facing your community. Rank them from most important to least important. Explain how each issue impacts individual citizens, businesses and government institutions.

Open their Minds!

Feature Stories

Thinking level: Analysis

Background

While a hard news story is only concerned with the who, what, where, when, why and how of a timely event, feature stories concentrate instead on human interest, feelings, irony or humour.

Features are meant to inform readers as they entertain them, putting a human face on newsy or topical information.

Feature stories are written more informally than news stories. They may be personal profiles. They may focus on an individual's special hobbies or collections. They may provide "how-to" advice. Some feature stories relate to what is happening in the news. These features often provide additional information or a personal point of view on a current topic.

Guiding the lesson

- Select several feature stories in the newspaper to share with students. Have students suggest ways in which the stories are different from the hard news stories on the front pages of the newspaper.
- Discuss how the stories contribute to the public's knowledge.
- Discuss the activity page with the students.
- Have students complete the activity individually or in pairs.
- Have students share their responses.

Rubric

The student...	Excellent	Acceptable	Revisit
Identified an appropriate feature story			
Identified several relevant characteristics			
Identified non-feature stories			

Engage Your Brain!

Feature Stories

Think about it

While a hard news story is only concerned with the who, what, where, when, why and how of a timely event, feature stories concentrate instead on human interest, feelings, irony or humour. Features are meant to inform readers as they entertain them, putting a human face on newsy or topical information. A feature story may address a timely topic, but it is not late-breaking news.

Read several feature stories in your newspaper. Select one to analyze. Complete the graphic organizer below to define the feature story.

Characteristics of this feature story (topic, format, writing style):

Examples of other feature stories in this edition of the newspaper:

Examples of items in this edition of the newspaper that are not feature stories:

Make a connection

View a television news program. Make a list of the segments that would be similar to a feature story in a newspaper. How are they alike? How are they different?

Student Activities

THINKING LEVEL	ACTIVITY
Application	Read a feature story about an individual who has achieved a major accomplishment. What lessons could you learn from this individual?
Analysis	Read a feature story and identify the way it addresses these elements: (1) is timely, (2) has human interest, and (3) has a special interest for at least one group of newspaper readers.
Synthesis	Select a feature story about an unusual individual. Write a letter to that individual commenting on his/her achievements and asking questions you have that were not answered in the story.
Evaluation	Select a news story about an individual or community group that supports a particular cause. Write a letter to the editor expressing your opinion about the actions of that individual or group.

Thinking levels: Analysis, evaluation

Background

The editorial and commentary pages of the newspaper provide readers with a variety of opinion pieces. The editorial is a unique part of that page because it represents the official position of the newspaper on a given topic. The editorial may be written by the editor, publisher, an editorial writer or a member of the editorial team.

Newspaper editors have an advantage when it comes to discussing an issue because they have access to a great deal of information on the topic. Editors feel it is their duty to address topics of concern to readers as long as their writing is clearly identified as opinion.

Students often have an incomplete understanding of an editorial. Most don't see past the word opinion. When students write editorials, they are free with their opinions; however, they must also do the research necessary to support their opinions with facts, statistics and historical perspective.

Guiding the lesson

- Share a newspaper editorial with students. Point out the way the writer uses specific information, objective data or historical/sociological perspective to support his/her position.
- Give students an editorial topic. Have them brainstorm the kinds of data they would need to support a position. Have them relate their own knowledge of the topic.
- Introduce the activity page to students.
- Have students complete the activity page individually.
- Have students share their responses with the class.

Rubric

The student...	Excellent	Acceptable	Revisit
Identified the elements of the editorial			
Identified specific supporting details			
Provided persuasive points			
Used specific information in reacting to the arguments in the editorial			

Engage Your Brain!

Editorials

Think about it

The editorial page of the newspaper provides readers with differing opinions about news events. Editorials present the views of the newspaper. Opinion columns present the views of individuals who comment regularly on news topics. Letters to the editor present the views of the newspaper's readers.

Read a newspaper editorial on a topic that interests you. Identify the standard editorial elements in the editorial you read and record them on the table below. Then explain your reaction to the editorial.

Element

Identifying the issues and the newspaper's position

Presenting opposing points of view

Refuting opposing points

Presenting details supporting the newspaper's position

Urging readers to make a decision

Example from editorial

What do you consider to be the most persuasive points made in the editorial? Did the editorial change your mind or strengthen your original position? Why or why not?

Make a connection

View a news analysis/commentary show from a network news show or a cable news channel. Identify the points the commentators make. Compare their comments to the editorial in your newspaper. Which arguments were the same? What new points or details did they add?

Student Activities

THINKING LEVEL	ACTIVITY
Application	Identify a problem discussed in an editorial. What existing law or ethical principle would you use to address the problem? What recommendations would you make?
Analysis	Read an editorial. Discuss how the editorial employs these elements: (1) statement of the problem, (2) opposing arguments, (3) refuting opposing arguments, (4) recommendations for solution, (5) call to action.
Synthesis	Collect opinion columns and letters to the editor about a particular topic. List the points made in the columns and letters. Add your own points and write your own editorial.
Evaluation	Select an editorial or a letter to the editor with which you disagree. Write a rebuttal to the editorial responding to the writer's ideas point by point.

Thinking level: Evaluation

Background

Entertainment reviews provide an important service to readers. Professional reviewers do more than give thumbs up or down on a particular event or film. The reviewer will describe how the creative work did or did not meet expectations.

Good movie reviewers, for example, discuss a movie in terms of how well it exemplifies its genre (science fiction, action-adventure, comedy, drama, etc.). A reviewer may also discuss an actor's performance with references to other works in which that actor appeared. Good reviewers know movie history and movie-making techniques (lighting, sound, camera angles, etc.).

A review can be informative, but it need not be prescriptive. If a student's favourite actor is appearing in a film, he/she will probably attend that movie regardless of the reaction of the critic.

Guiding the lesson

- Ask students to name a movie they have seen recently and that they would recommend to their friends. Often several students will respond with the same movie.
- Ask them to identify what it was that caused them to like the movie. List their ideas on the board. You may have to push them to get past descriptions (It was awesome!) and to find the elements that attracted them.
- Discuss with students the role of the movie reviewer. Emphasize the professional skills of the reviewer and point out why reviews are more than just opinions.
- Introduce the activity page to students.
- Have students complete the activity individually.
- Have students share their responses.

Rubric

The student...	Excellent	Acceptable	Revisit
Identified the elements of the review			
Identified appropriate points made by reviewer			
Identified his/her personal interests, qualities, etc. that related to the review			

Engage Your Brain!

Entertainment News

Think about it

Your newspaper provides information about the arts, usually in the entertainment section. A popular feature in the entertainment section is the movie review. Your newspaper may include reviews of current movies from a staff writer or from national reviewers.

Read three movie reviews in your newspaper. Choose the movie you would most like to see based only on the reviews and your personal opinions.

Movie title: _____

Identify the different elements that influenced your movie selection:

List points made by the reviewer that caused you to choose that movie:

List your personal interests, values or experiences that caused you to choose that movie:

Make a connection

View the movie. In what ways was the review accurate? Did your personal interests and experiences turn out to be good predictors of whether or not you would like the movie? How?

Student Activities

THINKING LEVEL	ACTIVITY
Application	Look at the television section of the newspaper. Develop a viewing schedule that would give you information about one of the three branches of government. Use at least two different newspapers.
Analysis	Look at the movie ads in the newspaper. Based on the ads and ratings, select an appropriate movie for each of these age groups: 7 and under, 8–13, 14–17, and adult.
Synthesis	Look at the movie ads in the newspapers. Combine elements from two movie titles to create a new title. Write a story to go with the new title.
Evaluation	Read the weekly entertainment section of your newspaper. Look at the fine arts and performing arts events taking place in your area. What type of entertainment do you think is underrepresented? What recommendations would you make to a local arts council to improve the cultural climate in your community?

Thinking level: Analysis

Background

Science plays an increasingly important role in our lives. Science stories today involve more than news of the latest invention or medical advance. Every science issue has implications on many levels: personal, social, economic, political, religious and ethical.

There are multiple sides to every science story. Technological advances, for example, may increase communication but may also raise questions of privacy rights. Stem cell research may hold the answers to many devastating medical conditions, but it raises religious questions as well.

Science stories are found throughout the newspaper.

Guiding the lesson

- Ask students to identify a recent science breakthrough or advance they've heard or read about.
- Have them discuss the benefits of the advance. Then ask them to think about any negative consequences of that breakthrough. Discuss the fact that every new scientific advance has consequences people may not have considered.
- Introduce the activity page to students.
- Have students complete the assignment individually.
- Have students share their responses with the class.

Rubric

The student...	Excellent	Acceptable	Revisit
Identified an appropriate advance			
Recognized positive consequences			
Recognized negative consequences			
Supported his/her opinion in a logical manner			

Engage Your Brain!

Science/Technology News

Think about it

Your newspaper provides information about the latest breakthroughs and advances in all fields of science. That's because science plays an important role in our lives from medicine, to the environment, to space exploration, to computers and technology.

Read and think about a news story on a scientific breakthrough/advance or a story about a new technology. Consider the impact of this development and your opinion about its value.

What is the headline? _____

What is the breakthrough/advance? _____

Why do scientists consider it important? _____

Who will be happy about this development? _____

Who will be unhappy about this development? _____

In your opinion, is this news cause for happiness or concern? Why? Give examples. _____

Make a connection

Collect stories about this breakthrough/advance from online sources. What issues are raised in the online sources? Are those issues the same as the ones that are raised in your newspaper? What is different in the coverage?

Student Activities

THINKING LEVEL	ACTIVITY
Application	Read a story about a scientific/technological advance. Write a story explaining how the advance will benefit individuals and/or businesses.
Analysis	Collect several stories about scientific advances or breakthroughs. In which area is the progress being made - biology, chemistry, physics or technology? Which advances represent contributions from more than one branch of science?
Synthesis	Locate a news story about a problem in your community. List different ways science could contribute to a solution. Write your own solution to the problem using these scientific ideas.
Evaluation	Select a news story about a medical breakthrough or advance. Evaluate the benefits of the new medicine, product or procedure in terms of cost, ease of use, and side effects.

Thinking level: Evaluation

Background

Business news is of interest to many readers. Decisions made by large corporations can affect many sectors of the community and can often have a domino effect. For example, an increase in coffee prices may negatively affect the number of customers at a local coffee shop which decreases the shop's profit margin which can result in staff layoffs. Many newspapers contain a daily business section; others run a special weekly business section. Business articles cover traditional stories, such as which corporations and market sectors are doing well and why. In addition, there are often stories related to corporate greed, ethics and legal issues.

Guiding the lesson

- Ask students to name an individual business or business sector that they think is very successful.
- How do they know the business is doing well? Who would be affected if the business failed? Encourage students to go beyond corporate employees losing their jobs. What would the effects be in their communities or their lives?
- Introduce the activity page to students.
- Have students complete the activity page in pairs or small groups.
- Have students share their responses with the class.

Rubric

The student...	Excellent	Acceptable	Revisit
Identified a business change			
Described reasons for the change			
Supported his/her position with logical arguments			

Think about it

Your newspaper keeps you informed about events and changes in the world of business. Events that affect national companies can influence the country's economy. Decisions made by local businesses can affect the financial health of your community.

Read a news story about a change in a business product or service. Think about the causes and effects of the change. What is your reaction to the change?

What is the headline?

What product or service is being changed?

Why did the company make the decision to change the product/service?

Why wasn't this change made before?

Do you believe this is a change for the better or the worse? Why?

How might this change affect you/your community?

Make a connection

Visit the web site of the company involved in the news story. Read what the company says about the change. Does the site discuss potential negative effects of the change or does it present only a positive picture? Where would you go to get a different point of view?

Collect business opinion columns that address this news. How do the commentators evaluate the decision made by the company?

Open their Minds!

Display Advertisements

Thinking level: Synthesis

Background

Advertising makes up the majority of the newspaper. Just as television commercials offset the cost of creating and distributing programming, newspaper ads provide income to keep the newspaper running. Most newspapers contain about 60%-65% advertising and 35%-40% news.

Newspaper ads tend to be direct and informational as well as graphically interesting. Most newspaper ads promote businesses and services.

Guiding the lesson

- Have students pull out the local or lifestyle section of your newspaper. Tell them that on the count of three, you want them to open the section to any page they choose or click on a section heading on the website. Ask them to note the first thing they look at on the page or screen. Generally it will be a large picture or an ad.
- Ask students who first looked at ads to explain what caused them to notice the ad. Usually it will be bold or unusual type, a graphic image, or a lot of white space in the ad. An online ad may have some animation. Explain that ads have to be eye-catching to get the reader's attention. Have them look at another ad on the same page. Have them identify the special qualities of that ad.
- Introduce the activity page to students.
- Have students complete the assignment in pairs or small groups.
- Have students share their ads with the class.

Rubric

The student...	Excellent	Acceptable	Revisit
Used compelling visuals			
Provided useful information			
Included positive points about the product.			
Used language to encourage the reader to act			

Engage Your Brain!

Display Advertisements

Think about it

Ads for stores and other businesses serve an important purpose in your newspaper. The ads let you know where you can go for goods and services in your community. The ads also offset the cost of the newspaper.

Find and read a news or feature story about someone with an unusual talent, or someone who has accomplished something significant. Create an ad promoting that individual. Be sure to use these elements in your ad:

- Get the reader's attention (with art, font type, white space)
- Give information about the product (the individual)
- Emphasize the good points of the product
- Include language that urges the reader to "purchase" (acknowledge and celebrate) the person you've chosen

Make a connection

Listen to a radio commercial. How does the commercial address the elements you included in your ad? Create a radio ad for the individual you chose.

Student Activities

THINKING LEVEL	ACTIVITY
Application	Locate an ad for an existing service. Suggest ways to expand the service and provide new uses for it.
Analysis	Examine a large display ad for a product in the newspaper. Determine how the ad: (1) attracts attention, (2) provides information, (3) develops interest, and (4) encourages the reader to make the purchase.
Synthesis	Select three related products and/or services advertised in the newspaper. Create a new ad that puts the products/services together in a package deal.
Evaluation	Read a national or local news story about a current problem. Create a display ad that outlines a new service designed to address and offer solutions to the problem.

Thinking level: Synthesis

Background

Many readers assume the comics pages are for children. Although that may have been true at one time, most modern comic strips target adults. Read the comic strips in your newspaper. You'll find strips that deal with interpersonal relationships, teenagers and school, sociological issues and political concerns. It requires a certain level of sophistication to appreciate the humour in many comic strips today.

Guiding the lesson

- Have students look at the comics pages of your newspaper and identify the strip they like best.
- Have students discuss their choices. Ask students to identify the problems they see reflected in the comic strips. Make a list of the problems. Discuss why the problems might be considered humorous.
- Introduce the activity page to students. (Note: In the One-Stop Advice Centre, students may select columnists as well as newsmakers to help solve problems.)
- Have students work in pairs or small groups to complete the assignment.
- Have students share responses with the class.

Rubric

The student...	Excellent	Acceptable	Revisit
Identified a variety of problems			
Identified appropriate people to address those problems			

Engage Your Brain!

Comics

Think about it

Your newspaper includes comic strips to entertain you. Years ago, comic strips were based on jokes. Today, comic strips often find their humour in real-life situations. Comic strips revolve around our family life, workplace, friends and schools.

Read the comic pages of your newspaper. Identify the kinds of problems people are experiencing in the strips. Then identify people in the news – newsmakers or columnists - who could help with those problems.

Use the graphic organizer below to create a one-stop, full-service comics solution centre.

One-Stop Advice Centre

Type of problem:	Type of problem:	Type of problem:
Newsmaker/ Columnist:	Newsmaker/ Columnist:	Newsmaker/ Columnist:
Type of problem:	Type of problem:	Type of problem:
Newsmaker/ Columnist:	Newsmaker/ Columnist:	Newsmaker/ Columnist:

Make a connection

Read newspaper advice columns to find solutions to problems illustrated in comic strips.

Ask friends to tell you about the television comedy programs they like. What kinds of problems show up in those programs? How are they similar to the problems you see in the comics pages?

Student Activities

THINKING LEVEL	ACTIVITY
Application	Find a personal problem illustrated in a comic strip. Write a letter advising the character on how to solve the problem. Base the solution on your personal experience.
Analysis	Examine the comics page of the newspaper. Classify the strips according to these categories: jokes, relationships, family/home, workplace, school, politics and other. Which type of strip do you like the best? Why?
Synthesis	Select a comic strip that reflects something in your life. Use the strip as a model to create your own comic strip about your family, friends or school.
Evaluation	Examine comic strips about school or family life. Select the one you think is most realistic. Explain how that strip portrays real life.