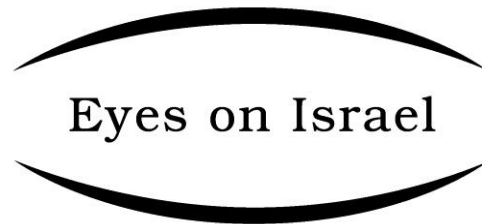


**A curriculum that teaches critical
analysis of news media coverage
of Israel and the Middle East.**



Module 4
What YOU Can Do

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What YOU Can Do

Module Introduction

If your students have used exercises from other modules in this curriculum, it should be clear that accuracy, balance and context are not always well-served in news media coverage of Israel and the rest of the Middle East.

As members of a society that values freedom of expression and enshrines press freedom as a constitutional right, students should be encouraged to help make American news media the best they can be. Israel, the strongest representative of liberal democracy in the Middle East, will also benefit greatly from improved reporting and informed coverage. Unlike other modules in the *Eyes on Israel* curriculum, this section is devoted to giving students opportunities to act on what they have learned about journalistic standards and ethics and to interact with news outlets that influence their lives.

The purpose of Module 4—What YOU Can Do—is to challenge students to make a difference in a constructive and positive fashion. For students who wish to ensure the information that appears in America’s newspapers, on radio and television, on the Internet and elsewhere is accurate and fair in its treatment of Israel, this module offers a series of specific steps.

The following topics are covered in this module:

Lesson 4.1: Monitoring the News Media

Objective: Students will learn how to take a comprehensive approach to monitoring news media.

Lesson 4.2: Communicating with the News Media

Objective: Students will practice communicating about Middle East coverage by writing letters to a media outlet of their choice.

Lesson 4.3: Writing for the News Media

Objective: Students will practice composing Op-Eds and informative articles for submission to a media outlet of their choice.

Objectives and a list of materials are included within each lesson. Actual materials needed—student handouts and teacher aids—appear in the appropriate section of each lesson.

Lesson 4.1: Monitoring the News Media

Objective

Students will learn how to take a comprehensive approach to monitoring news media.

For the Teacher

Students gained important background information about the Arab-Israeli conflict and an understanding of journalistic ethics from study of previous modules of *Eyes on Israel*. They can begin to apply what they know toward constructively engaging with members of the media. The first step is learning to evaluate coverage of the Middle East.

The goal of this lesson is to provide students with techniques to successfully monitor news reports. Students will evaluate a sample article according to a checklist and learn to use evaluation tools each time they read, see or hear the news.

Students will learn to understand the importance of closely following reporting accuracy and will become more discriminating news consumers.

Grades: 7-12

Estimated Time: 1 period

Materials

Student Handouts:

- **Monitoring the News Media Tips** (Student Handout 4.1A)
- **Monitoring the News Media Checklist** (Student Handout 4.1B)
- **Sample Article to Analyze** (Student Handout 4.1C)
- **National and Israeli News Media Resources** (Student Handout 4.1D)

Teacher Aids:

- **Monitoring the News Media PowerPoint** (Teacher Aid 4.1A)
- **Sample Article Analyzed** (Teacher Aid 4.1C)
- **Dictionary of Bias** (Teacher Aid 4.1E)
- **The Unseen Bias in Middle East Reporting** (Teacher Aid 4.1F)

Instructional Objective

Students will learn specific techniques to successfully monitor media, then practice their skills by evaluating a news article.

Lesson Instructions

Warm-up Activity

The topic of this lesson is monitoring the media in a deliberate and thorough manner. You may wish to first engage your students with why such an undertaking is important.

Distribute Student Handout 4.1A (Monitoring the News Media Tips), and if you have a computer and a projector, project the first slide from Teacher Aid 4.1A. Have students turn to the “Dry

Bones” cartoons on the first page. Ask: What is a political cartoon? The American Heritage Dictionary defines political cartoons as “drawings representing current public figures or issues symbolically and often satirically.” Satire is irony, sarcasm, or caustic wit used to attack or expose folly, vice or stupidity.

Remind the class that Hamas (the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement) is designated as a terrorist group by the United States, Israel and the European Union. Hamas’ goal is to establish an Islamic religiously-governed state in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza Strip, using violence against Israelis, Jews in general, and non-combatants as well as combatants. Shortly before the publication of the first cartoon in January 2006, Hamas won Palestinian legislative elections and became the major party in the government of the Palestinian Authority.

Ask the class any or all of the following:

- **According to the cartoonist, what was the media reporting?** [The news media was reporting that the Hamas victory shocked the public.]
- **What had the public been mistaken about?** [The public had been mistaken in thinking the Palestinian Arabs didn’t want to be led by Hamas.]
- **What do you think the media had been reporting previously?** [The news media essentially had been reporting misinformation to the public—that the Palestinian Arabs didn’t want to be led by Hamas.]
- **Why is the television set saying “Oops!”** [The TV is saying “Oops!” to indicate jokingly, “Gee, we (the news media) goofed.”]
- **Who is being satirized in this cartoon? Is it Hamas? The news media? People who rely on the news media?** [The subject of the cartoon’s satirical viewpoint is the news media, which had reported the facts about Palestinian politics incorrectly. The cartoonist may also be lampooning members of the public who believe what they read in newspapers (such as the one the man is holding) or hear on television or radio.]
- **What is this cartoon’s message?** [The news media sometimes get the story wrong.]

Have students analyze the three other “Dry Bones” cartoons.

Cartoon #2 presents the message that news media often report only parts of the story. In this instance, they reported only that Israel struck Gaza, while not mentioning the reason: Israel first had been attacked from the Strip. Many press outlets do not seem to consider it “newsworthy” that terrorists from the Gaza Strip frequently bombard Israel with rockets and mortars, terrorizing, injuring or killing Israelis in much of the southern part of the country.

Cartoon #3 mocks a recurring double standard in reporting on the Arab-Israeli conflict: Israeli building in the disputed West Bank is considered an “obstacle to peace,” yet Palestinian Arab building there is never an issue.

Cartoon #4 highlights the irony that anti-American, anti-Israeli bias run rampant in totalitarian regimes (centralized governments that do not tolerate differing opinions and exercise dictatorial control over virtually all aspects of life) because these governments oversee all news coverage.

Yet, in Western democracies, the same type of bias can appear in the absence of government control of the news media.

Sometimes news media report the wrong story. Sometimes they report only one side of a situation. Sometimes news outlets employ a double standard. The general message—and the impetus for this lesson—is that the news media cannot always be trusted to get the story right. Even a report that is correct as far as it goes may not go far enough and therefore be biased by omission. Hence, it is important to be an informed news consumer and evaluate closely the news you read, see and hear.

Step 1 Explain that the class will practice monitoring inaccurate or unbalanced reporting on Israel in a deliberate and thorough manner. Student Handout 4.1A provides several approaches to examining the news media for accuracy and bias. Or, project the slides from Teacher Aid 4.1A. Have student volunteers read aloud the material, while you explain the nuances of each item.

Call attention to the page labeled “What to Look At,” which addresses headlines, images and content. Provide background for the screen shot on this page. It is a March 22, 2011 *Associated Press* screen shot (no article is available). Address the following questions:

1. *What does this headline have to do with this image?* The headline, “Bus explodes in Jerusalem, people taken away on stretchers,” is ambiguous. It does not say who is responsible for the bus explosion nor who was targeted. Palestinian Arabs were responsible for the terrorist attack (an explosion from a bomb placed in a bag near a bus opposite Jerusalem’s central bus station) and their target was Israelis. One woman was killed and 39 others were injured.
2. *Is this image appropriate for this article?* The first photo provided (there appear to be several) has nothing to do with the headline. The image should have shown victims of the bus explosion. Instead, *Associated Press* chose an image of a Palestinian man killed “during an Israeli airstrike east of Gaza City” being carried to a morgue. No context is provided, nor is there any information linking the bus bombing to the airstrike. The photo should not have been that of a Palestinian Arab. This type of journalistic misrepresentation shows bias in favor of Palestinian Arabs, portraying them as victims rather than initiators of violence—displacing by imagery if not words the actual Israeli victims of Palestinian violence.
3. *Is the content of this article accurate, balanced and unbiased?* The screenshot only provides the following information: “Palestinians carry a man, killed during an Israeli airstrike east of Gaza City, to the morgue of Shifa Hospital in Gaza City.” This matches the photograph but not the headline. Some crucial context about the Israeli airstrike is missing: Israel was compelled to strike the Gaza Strip in response to ongoing rocket and mortar attacks from Gaza Strip on southern Israel.

Students need to be keenly aware of these and other kinds of journalistic misrepresentation.

Continue reviewing each page of the handout with the class. Have volunteers read aloud the rest of the material, while you explain what to look for in each item.

Step 2 Distribute Monitoring the News Media Checklist (Student Handout 4.1B) and review each item. Then distribute Student Handout 4.1C, a July 7, 2012 article from *The New York Times*—“[Barefoot in a Tent, Neighbors Trading Vows of Mideast Peace](#)”. Have students read the article and analyze, filling out Student Handout 4.1B.

Ask volunteers to share their impressions of the article. Referring to Teacher Aid 4.1C, the CAMERA exposé “[New York Times: All the News That's Fit to Conceal](#),” point out the following: Although *The New York Times* article seemingly portrays Jews and Arabs successfully having a “meeting of the minds,” only one paragraph discusses Hebron’s history and it omits crucial information and context.

The paragraph states: “Hebron, home to about 150,000 Palestinians and 900 Jews, has been practically the opposite of peaceful since Israel began occupying the West Bank in 1967. Its Cave of the Patriarchs was the site of a massacre in 1994 when Baruch Goldstein, a doctor from the large neighboring settlement of Kiryat Arba, killed 29 Muslims praying at the mosque. It was the only city excluded from the Oslo accords, and it was the subject of its own pact in 1997 separating the two communities and restricting their movements. Clashes continue, sometimes daily.”

The message conveyed: Jewish settlers are violent interlopers in Hebron: It is only since Israel “began occupying” Hebron after 1967 that clashes and violence began. This is evidenced by the violent massacre in 1994 of peaceful Arabs by a Jewish settler. And this sort of violence continues today.

Information and context omitted from this article: Hebron is one of Judaism's four holy cities. With few interruptions, Jews inhabited Hebron since biblical times. A massacre by Arab rioters (in which 67 Jews were brutally slain and 60 more wounded) in 1929 put an end to the ancient Jewish community. (For more details, see CAMERA’s description of the [1929 Hebron Massacre](#).) After Jordan occupied Hebron in 1948 and for the next twenty years, Jews were barred from living there and from praying at the Cave of the Patriarchs (the burial site of the biblical patriarchs and matriarchs). In April 1968, after Israel gained control of the territory, a small group of Israelis attempted to re-establish the Jewish community of Hebron. Since then, Israeli settlers, soldiers and visitors who come to the Cave of the Patriarchs have often been subject to Arab violence. Jews have been murdered, synagogues destroyed and Torah scrolls burned.

None of this is mentioned in this *New York Times* article. The only act of violence mentioned is Israeli violence against Palestinian Arabs, leaving readers with the implicit message that the Palestinian Arabs in Hebron typically are victims of the violent Jews who live there. Students need to be vigilant against this type of bias (*The New York Times* is a major offender), especially when it is masked by a “feel-good” article and photograph. As critical news consumers, students will be able to spot this sort of bias.

Summing Up

While there are times American media outlets offer accurate and comprehensive reporting on Israel and the Middle East, there are often serious problems with coverage. These can take the form of errors of omission as well as of commission. Not all media reports offer context or nuance, while some seem to disregard basic journalistic ethics. Tell the class that American journalist Ellen Goodman once noted, “In journalism, there has always been a tension between getting it first and getting it right.” Ask students if they can explain in their own words what she meant.

Encourage students to monitor Middle East news throughout the school year and beyond.

Digging Deeper

Have students analyze an article (or series of articles) about the Arab-Israeli conflict from a media outlet of their choice. National and Israeli Media Sources (Student Handout 4.1D) list nationally known news media as well as Israeli news sources.

Encourage students to examine the same issue(s) as covered by Israeli news media outlets, which often provide a more comprehensive approach. Stress to students that a news report from Israel is not de facto more accurate or balanced than one from the United States; on a number of occasions, CAMERA has documented lack of rigor in reporting from Israeli news outlets, such as *Haaretz*. However Israeli news sources tend to present a more comprehensive account of events, partly because they are covering local, not foreign news events and therefore the news covered is of greater immediacy and often receives greater attention.

Distribute additional copies of Student Handout 4.1B (Monitoring the Media Checklist) to help students structure their analysis. Students can write their findings in a formal essay or present their analysis to the class.

Evaluation Material

Use Monitoring the Media Checklist (Student Handout 4.1B) as a benchmark for evaluating how thoroughly students did their analysis.

Further Reading and Viewing

You may wish to share the following articles with your students as they explore several of the issues raised in this lesson:

- Teacher Aid 4.1E (Dictionary of Bias) surveys a number of all-too common phrases used by reporters and editors that misreport the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- Teacher Aid 4.1F (The Unseen Bias in Middle East Reporting) suggests evaluating the terms journalists use in Middle East reporting.
- "First, Refute the Defamation," which discusses the important work of refuting slander, can be found at:
http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_print=1&x_context=7&x_issue=39&x_article=1483

- The following two articles, although several years old, provide excellent and still timely analyses about media bias against Israel.
 - “Responding to Bias—Fight or Flight?” asks whether the approach advocated in this lesson—monitoring the media with the goal of encouraging journalists to adhere to standard notions of accuracy and balance—is worth the effort. You can find it at: http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=22&x_article=938
 - “Dishonest Reporting: Media Bias against Israel” offers a well thought-out but impassioned review of the problem. It is available at <http://www.aish.com/jw/mo/48932327.html>
- The Arab-Israeli conflict is not only mischaracterized; it is also sometimes completely fabricated. Richard Landes coined the term “Pallywood,” which he describes in detail in his narration [Pallywood: Media Deceptions Regarding the Arab-Israeli War](#). His definition: “Pallywood is a bustling industry of al fresco cinema, staged news filmed in real time against the backdrop of a complex conflict we all think we know. It has directors, makeup men, sets, extras—often playing dead or injured, props—especially ambulances, plenty of cameramen and sometimes large audiences.”

Lesson 4.2: Communicating with the News Media

Objective

Students will practice communicating about Middle East coverage by writing letters to a media outlet of their choice.

For the Teacher

A strong and independent press, accountable to the public, is a hallmark of American civic discourse. News media influence policy and frame national debate, therefore, it is all the more necessary that they be subject to scrutiny, and if required, called on to improve.

One way to ensure journalistic accuracy is to communicate with news media. In a courteous and concise manner, provide them with relevant factual information when they are wrong, and compliment them when they are right. As the media's own guidelines make clear, interaction with the public is a key part of responsible journalism.

The primary goal of this lesson is to help students develop the habits and techniques necessary to interact successfully with the media. This will enable them to be more than passive recipients of news reporting and commentary. This does not mean creating an adversarial relationship with the press but rather building critical skills necessary to be both an educated news consumer and constructive critic of reporting and commentary from the Middle East. Another goal of this lesson is to assist students in feeling comfortable when interacting with editors, publishers, journalists and producers. Finally, the activities outlined in this lesson can help students become better writers and communicators, skills they will be able to take with them beyond this particular classroom setting. If your class is in a day-school setting, you may wish to share this lesson plan with a Language Arts teacher who may be able to work with you in helping strengthen students' expository writing skills.

Grades: 7-12

Estimated Time: 1 period

Materials

Student Handouts:

- **CAMERA's Top 10 Letter Writing Tips** (Student Handout 4.2A)
- **Sample Letters** (Student Handout 4.2B)
- **E-mail Letter Format** (Student Handout 4.2C)
- **Traditional Letter Format** (Student Handout 4.2D)
- **Sample CAMERA Alerts** (Student Handout 4.2E)
- **Social Media Tips and Links** (Student Handout 4.2F)
- **Peer Editing Help List** (Student Handout 4.2G)

Teacher Aid:

- **Peer Editing PowerPoint** (Teacher Aid 4.2G)

Instructional Objective

Students will practice communicating about Middle East coverage through letters to a media outlet of their choice.

Enabling Objectives

- a. Students will review a series of proven letter-writing tips and examine selected examples of published letters based on those tips.
- b. Relying either on the results of their own monitoring or information from CAMERA Alerts, students will compose sample letters of their own.

Lesson Instructions***Warm-up Activity***

While not all news media outlets or individual journalists are open to constructive criticism or recommendations, communicating with the media can help promote journalistic improvement. Even if a letter is not published, it can clarify the issue in question, and at the very least, let journalists know that the public notices and cares if they are inaccurate or biased in their reporting. That knowledge can stimulate improved future coverage.

Remind students that while journalists do not need a license or certification in order to practice their craft, they often endorse journalistic “codes of ethics” as guides to their work. By adhering to the values and principles laid out in these codes, journalists, editors and producers can be confident that they are working fairly and conscientiously.

Have students refer to the Society of Professional Journalists (SPJ) Code of Ethics (Student Handout 2.1A) to refresh their recollection of the code and to focus on the section “Be Accountable.” Journalists are accountable to their readers, listeners, viewers and each other. As stated in the SPJ code, journalists should:

- Clarify and explain news coverage and invite dialogue with the public over journalistic conduct.
- Encourage the public to voice grievances against the news media.
- Admit mistakes and correct them promptly.
- Expose unethical practices of journalists and the news media.
- Abide by the same high standards to which they hold others.

Ask students to share their thoughts about this section of the code of ethics. They will likely suggest that accountability must be important if the ethics code devotes an entire section to it. Elicit that journalists need to do more than report the news; they should encourage public feedback. And they are required to admit and correct mistakes.

Ask the class to find the portion of the code that discusses journalistic ethics regarding letters to the editor and opinion pieces. [“Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting. Analysis and commentary should be labeled and not misrepresent fact or context” is under the heading “Seek Truth and Report It.”] Emphasize that it is not only the public’s responsibility to ensure all news reporting is factual and balanced, but it is equally important to communicate with the media

when an editorial, opinion piece or letter misinforms the public. While all people are entitled to their own opinions, the public needs to be informed when those opinions are propped up with misleading “facts,” or when omissions lead to significant distortions. Remind students about the late Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s observation: “Everyone’s entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts.”

Step 1 Over the years CAMERA and others have found that certain approaches to communicating with the media have had greater success in effecting change than other ones. A well-written letter to the editor may not only be published, enlightening others to a problem in reporting, but may help members of the media redouble their efforts in approaching their jobs more rigorously.

Distribute Student Handout 4.2A (CAMERA’s Top 10 Letter Writing Tips) and ask for volunteers to read each item aloud.

Review these tips by passing out Student Handout 4.2B (Sample Letters).

Ask students to critique the first letter by referring to the letter writing tips. For example, you might ask:

- **Was the letter concise?**
[Yes. The letter used 174 words, well below the 250-300 mark. It was brief and to-the-point.]
- **Did the author state the point of his letter within the first two sentences?**
[Yes. He made it clear he doubted the validity of the statement that the Yitzhar settlement is “one of the most militant in the West Bank.”]
- **Did the letter provide title, author and date of the article?** [No. The editor may have had to search for the reference and would have found it more convenient if that information was provided.]
- **Did the writer stick to his topic?**
[Yes. He used the unsubstantiated accusation against Yitzhar to make his point that the Associated Press (the news source for the article) violated the high standards people have the right to expect from their news sources. In stating that the reporter was prejudicial and employing a double standard when it came to Israelis versus Palestinian Arabs, the writer alluded to the following ethics code violations: (1) “Distinguish between advocacy and news reporting” and (2) “Test the accuracy of information from all sources and exercise care to avoid inadvertent error. Deliberate distortion is never permissible.”

The writer made the same point that the *Eyes on Israel* curriculum has been making: “Readers should be able to trust that the information provided by their newspapers is acquired through the highest standards and from the most professional news outlets.”

Have students turn to the second letter in the handout. You might ask:

- **Was the letter concise?**
[Yes. The letter used 185 words to argue his points.]

- **Did the letter writer make clear from the outset what the problem was?**
[Yes. He immediately stated that the assumption of a two-state solution presuming peace between Israel and the Palestinian Arabs is problematic if one side does not desire it.]
- **What proof did the letter writer bring to support his thesis?**
[The writer gave the example of the Palestinian Authority sending a delegation to the Gaza Strip in May 2012 to unite Fatah and Hamas to support his thesis. He cited their meeting as proof that Israel cannot make peace with those (Fatah) whose partners (Hamas) openly state their purpose to destroy Israel.]

Have the class turn to Example # 3 in the handout. Explain how a letter can be improved through judicious editing.

Ask students what they think could be improved in the “Before” version of the letter before reviewing the “After” version. The “After” version enhances the impact of the writer’s points in the following ways:

- The second letter is 139 words, satisfying Letter Writing Tip #4 (“Be Concise”) without losing important content. Although the first letter is 268 words and within the 250-300 word count, it includes unnecessary or repetitive information. Suggest students do a word count before submitting their letters.
- By eliminating the first two paragraphs and unnecessary information throughout the letter, the second letter accomplishes Letter Writing Tip #2 (“Be Pithy”)
- The second letter is structured better and its sentences follow a more logical pattern. For instance, the sentence referring to the second *intifada* was moved up to the middle paragraph to explain why there are long lines at Israeli security checkpoints .
- By deleting the hostile last paragraph and emotional language throughout the letter, the second letter accomplishes Letter Writing Tip #6 (“Be Polite”).

Step 2 Review the proper formatting of a letter with students before they begin writing.

CAMERA’s experience has been that most editors (and producers) have become accustomed to hearing from the public via e-mail (which arrives immediately, as opposed to “snail mail”) and even provide simple and easy ways to submit a letter via their Web sites. Briefly review the proper formatting of an e-mail letter to the editor by distributing and reviewing Student Handout 4.2C (E-mail Letter Format). If you have Internet access in your classroom, review the following procedure:

- Enter the URL of the media outlet of your choice or consult a search engine such as Google. Alternatively, use CAMERA’s “Contact the Media” Web site, which can be found at www.camera.org or directly through CAMERA’s link: http://www.camera.org/index.asp?x_context=23. This will open a page with an alphabetized list of media outlets with links to their respective contact information.
- Click on the “Contact Us,” “Feedback,” “Letters to the Editor” or “Newsroom” link. The link may take you (often through Windows Live Mail) directly to a blank e-mail form

already addressed to the appropriate contact person at the news outlet. It is suggested to compose your letter in word processing software (such as Microsoft Word), review it carefully and then copy it to the blank e-mail form. However, any special formatting you used (boldface, underlines, etc.) most likely will be lost.

- The home page of many news outlets lists the e-mail addresses of reporters and columnists. As pointed out in Student Handout 4.2A (CAMERA's Top 10 Letter Writing Tips) Letter Writing Tip # 8 ("Be Impactful"), send a copy of your letter not just to the editor, but also to the reporter, foreign editor, publisher and so forth.

If you wish to review the conventional layout of a business letter, distribute Student Handout 4.2D. There are those who contend that a traditional mailed letter is more likely to get an editor's attention than an e-mail, in part because the high volume of e-mailed letters dilutes the significance of each individual e-mail.

Step 3 Student Handout 4.2E (Sample CAMERA Alerts) contains sample e-mail notifications that CAMERA sends to people interested in following Middle East news and reporting. Review the format of an Alert. It provides:

1. A brief summary and analysis of an article or broadcast, indicating its main problems.
2. Specific contact information for the news media outlet and talking points to use in a letter.
3. A detailed analysis of the article or broadcast (when the item is long) and a copy of the report or a link to it.

CAMERA sends Alerts to its team of letter-writers at least once a week, providing them with all the information necessary to engage in useful dialogue with the media. You and your class can sign up for free e-mail Alerts and can also regularly log in to CAMERA's main Web site (www.camera.org) or its blog "Snapshots" (<http://blog.camera.org/>) for the most up-to-date information and analysis of the Middle East.

Depending on how much class time is available, either ask students to write a letter in class or assign it as homework. Use an Alert provided in Student Handout 4.2E, an Alert you received from CAMERA or a topic from CAMERA's Web site. Remind students to refer to Student Handout 4.2A (CAMERA's Top 10 Letter Writing Tips) as well as Student Handout 4.2C (E-mail Letter Format) or Student Handout 4.2D (Business Letter Format).

Note that the Alerts ask those on Twitter to tweet their responses. Twitter is an excellent social media tool, as is Facebook and YouTube. Your responses via social media can have a strong impact on news media. To learn more about social media and how to use it, refer to Student Handout 4.2F (Social Media Tips and Links).

Step 4 Review students' letters yourself or work cooperatively with their Language Arts teacher. Alternatively, since working together often elicits greater enthusiasm for the revision process, you may choose to try peer editing. Have students work in pairs to use Student Handout 4.2G

(Peer Editing Help List). It may be helpful to review the Peer-Editing PowerPoint (Teacher Aid 4.2G) produced by the International Reading Association and the National Council of English.

Step 5 Ask students to post their edited letters on their Facebook and other social media pages as outlined in Student Handout 4.2F (Social Media Tips and Links). If your school has a media lab, work with the teacher to have the students record and post videos of their letters. Alternatively, this can be done at home or with smartphones.

As an ongoing project, you can ask the students to post or tweet a link to one interesting article, blogpost or video every day for a week. What responses did they get from friends and family? How did this experience influence their views of social media's usefulness?

Summing up

Encourage students to communicate with the news media frequently. Remind them that while freedom of speech is protected by the First Amendment, there is no constitutional guarantee that what gets “spoken”—either on the air or in the press—will be accurate or balanced. Also stress that the quality of a democracy’s news media depends in part on what citizens tolerate. If unfair and inaccurate reports are consistently noticed and protested by active citizens, editors will take note, and there will be fewer shoddy reports in the future.

Evaluation material

Evaluate students’ achievement of this lesson’s objectives by reviewing their letters.

If students have done peer-editing, do not forget to evaluate their work.

Lesson 4.3: Writing for the News Media

Objective

Students will practice composing Op-Eds and other articles for submission to a media outlet of their choice.

For the teacher

It is a common perception that young people today do not rely on newspapers and that they derive much of their information about the world from the Internet and television. While this may be largely true, “legacy” or mainstream news media’s ability to shape public opinion on a subject remains significant. Serious public debate still takes place on the Op-Ed pages and blogs of many traditional newspapers and magazines and those of some influential online publications. These in turn, affect content in the news media.

The goal of this lesson is to help students become advocates for, and educators about, Israel through the medium of opinion pages. Regardless of whether students in a middle- or high-school can get their writing published in a mainstream newspaper, there are other venues for their work. School newspapers are often eager to publish viewpoints from members of the student body, including opinion that will generate discussion or even controversy. Community newspapers also often are interested in well-argued opinion pieces, especially if there is a local angle to the articles. Some newspapers dedicate a weekly section to pieces by students or even publish separate “teen editions.”

While publication of an opinion piece would be rewarding for students, the process of researching a topic and developing a cogent argument to support an opinion is itself worthwhile. The need to encourage student involvement in setting the record straight is equally important. As in the previous lesson, this can be an opportunity to work with Language Arts teachers who may be willing to assist in developing students’ expository writing skills.

Grades: 10-12

Estimated Time: 2 periods

Materials

Student Handouts:

- **Tips for Writing an Op-Ed** (Student Handout 4.3B)
- **Selected Sources for Information** (Student Handout 4.3C)
- **Writing an Op-Ed Checklist** (Student Handout 4.3D)
- **“Is Israel ‘a Rogue State’? You’d Better Hope So”** (Student Handout 4.3E)

Teacher Aids:

- **Op-Ed Leads** (Teacher Aid 4.3A)
- **Tips for Writing an Op-Ed PowerPoint** (Teacher Aid 4.3B)

(NOTE: This lesson is designated as appropriate for grades 10-12, though you may decide that it is suitable for younger students.)

Instructional Objective

Students will practice composing Op-Eds and informative articles for submission to a media outlet of their choice.

Enabling Objectives

- a. Students will review a series of proven Op-Ed writing tips.
- b. Relying on their research, information provided by CAMERA or both, students will compose Op-Eds as homework.
- c. Students will edit their articles and submit their work for publication.

Lesson instructions***Warm-up Activity***

This lesson focuses on developing skills needed to write a clear and engaging opinion piece about Israel. Engage students' interest in one of these two ways:

1. Choose a topic that is light ("Baseball is the best sport") or serious. ("Global warming is a danger to the planet"). It all depends on what will engage students' attention and how much time you have to devote to this activity.

Give students five minutes to write an opening statement of no more than four sentences, choosing a side of the argument. Suggest that writing "I think X" is not a very strong way to make their point. Urge them to be creative and persuasive.

Once they have finished, ask students to sign their piece but tell them you won't reveal their names. Collect the opening statements and read them aloud. Ask the students to rate the submissions on a scale of 1-5 and explain their rationales. This should elicit discussion about style, emotional pull, pithiness and humor. Announce the winner's name and give the student an appropriate prize.

(NOTE: Since all students' Op-Ed introductions will be read, this activity works best for a small class.)

2. Read aloud several introductory paragraphs of actual published Op-Eds and elicit students' reactions. Ask them to rate which opinion piece they would be most interested to continue reading, and why. Ask students if they want to hear more even if they don't agree with the opening remarks. This too should elicit a lively discussion.

Teacher Aid 4.3A is a compilation of Op-Ed leads to use for this activity or you can choose your own. One source for opinion pieces that touch on a variety of subjects (and which come from all ends of the political spectrum) can be found at www.realclearpolitics.com.

Explain that the goal of this lesson is to help students become stronger advocates for Israel by informing others about the realities of the Middle East through writing articulate and accurate opinion pieces. Point out that one of the key elements for writing such pieces is developing a strong "hook," such as the ones they constructed or heard above, to engage readers.

Stress to students that the ability to present a cogent argument is something that they will need throughout their lives. However, some students may shy away from being confrontational or

argumentative. Tell them that occasionally confrontation over ideas is not only unavoidable but also necessary. That is why, for instance, we hold elections. The important point is to be capable of making a strong case so the other (wrong) side cannot win just because of your silence.

Reassure students that instead of focusing exclusively on politics or the Arab-Israeli conflict, there are supplemental ways to stand up for the Jewish state. For instance, they can write feature articles highlighting Israel's many advances in science and technology or its humanitarian missions and cultural achievements. By focusing on positive accomplishments, students can help spread the word that there is more to Israel than the "doom and gloom" that they read, see and hear on the news.

Step 1 Show the class an Op-Ed page from a newspaper. Explain that although many people think the phrase "Op-Ed" is an abbreviation for "opinion editorial," it is actually short for "opposite the editorial," referring to its page position in the newspaper.

Distribute Student Handout 4.3B (Tips for Writing an Op-Ed) or project the slides in Teacher Aid 4.3B (Tips for Writing an Op-Ed PowerPoint). Ask for a volunteer to read aloud the categories. When you get to the third category ("The Structure;" also slide 3), ask students to circle or highlight it. This item will be especially important for students to keep in mind when they are writing their Op-Eds. Review the material in each category. Stop when you get to the category "Now Edit!" (slide 9). You will return to this later.

Show students examples of published Op-Eds that either uphold or violate the standards laid out in Student Handout 4.3B.

Step 2 Students will now select a topic. For topics dealing directly with the Arab-Israeli conflict, students can access CAMERA's Web site (www.camera.org) to help choose a theme and to supply critical facts needed to bolster an argument. Student Handout 4.3C provides additional sources for valuable information about Israel.

The class should bear in mind that many but not all the tips for writing an Op-Ed are applicable to writing a feature piece.

As indicated in Tips for Writing an Op-Ed (Student Handout 4.3B), one suggestion is to make a local connection to the topic of the piece. Ask students to consider friends and family who live in Israel.

Step 3 After you have approved students' topics, have them write a first draft for homework. Writing an Op-Ed about a topic in which one is not an expert is not a quick process and you should not expect students to complete this in one session. Distribute Student Handout 4.3D ("Writing an Op-Ed Checklist") to give students ways to measure their progress.

When reviewing their first drafts, students should refer to Tips for Writing an Op-Ed (Student Handout 4.3B) to see if they have successfully integrated the suggestions listed. Review the "Now Edit!" item on the handout as well.

Once students have completed their individual reviews, either review their work yourself, work with their Language Arts teacher or have students engage in peer editing, using the Peer Editing Help List (Student Handout 4.2G) from the previous lesson.

Step 4 Once editing has been completed, students should rewrite their work, incorporating the suggested changes. If students have done peer-editing, look over those suggestions to be sure they actually improved the piece and are clearly understood by the student.

Review “Getting Published,” the last category of Tips for Writing an Op-Ed (Student Handout 4.3B). Brainstorm with your students how they would prefer to submit their work. If the pieces are well-written, have students submit them to a newspaper or magazine. They may consider researching local papers to find those with “teen voices” or “teen” versions.

The school newspaper may be the most likely venue for publication. If your school does not have its own newspaper, consider creating a publication for student submissions. Seeing their name in print will go a long way in encouraging students to write and to advocate on behalf of Israel.

Summing up

A good way to sum up this lesson is to provide an effective example of how one student made a powerful impact. Distribute copies of Gabriel Latner’s speech, “Is Israel ‘a rogue state’? You’d better hope so” (Student Handout 4.3E). Provide the following background information to students:

In November 2011, the debating society at Cambridge University argued the motion: “Israel is a rogue state.” Gabriel Latner, a law student at Cambridge, technically argued in favor of the proposition, though in essence used “rogue” to represent a pro-Israel stance.

Latner made a huge impact in this debate. *The Irish Independent* called his speech “the most brilliantly audacious [defense] of Israel since Moses parted the Red Sea.” UN Watch, impressed with his remarkable speech, hired Latner as an intern in 2011.

Tell students that they, too, have the opportunity to have an impact. By writing well-informed and compelling opinion pieces, students can help inform and perhaps even persuade readers. Since the Op-Ed pages of newspapers frequently are filled with voices from all sides of the political and social spectrum, students should be congratulated for helping shape public attitudes.

Evaluation material

Review students’ opinion pieces to evaluate how well they grasped the material. If students had engaged in peer-editing, evaluate whether or not they followed the guidelines from Student Handout 4.2G (Peer Editing Help List) from the previous lesson.