

American Genius: Competition

How can you know whom to trust for accurate news?

Overview

Students review the history of competition between two American journalists of the late 19th century, William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, as an introduction to competition in the news. Then they evaluate a range of current news media to determine their fitness for different purposes and write a persuasive essay on the problems of accuracy and bias in news sources.

For the complete activity with media resources, visit:

<http://education.nationalgeographic.org/activity/american-genius-competition/>

Program

AMERICAN
GENIUS

Directions

1. Activate students' prior knowledge.

Write the term news media on the board and invite volunteers to define it in their own words. Guide students to understand that in this context the term "media" refers to the ways in which news is communicated to the public. Determine students' level of understanding about news using the prompts below. Accept any answers and capture them on the board. Ask:

- *What is the purpose of news?*
- *What are some examples of news media? Where can a person find news? (TV, radio, newspapers, Internet, magazines)*
- *Can social networking sites like Twitter or Facebook be considered news sources? Why do you think so?*
- *Do you think one of these sources is better than the others? Explain.*
- *Do you think that competition between different news media benefits the public? In what way?*

2. Discuss news of the past.

Project the online articles Joseph Pulitzer (jump to the section labeled "St. Louis Post-Dispatch and read from there) and Yellow Journalism: William Randolph Hearst. Read the articles aloud as a class, asking for volunteers to read sections of each. Discuss some of the principles that William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer held dear, comparing and contrasting the two journalists' lives and rivalry. Share the following quotations commonly attributed to each man and have students discuss how each fits the personal code and driving force of the man who said it, based on the short biographies

you just read. Discuss how each of these newsmen would affect the public's perceptions of a story of the time.

- William Randolph Hearst may have said: "You furnish the pictures and I'll furnish the war."
- Joseph Pulitzer said: "Put it before them briefly so they will read it, clearly so they will appreciate it, picturesquely so they will remember it, and, above all, accurately so they will be guided by its light."

Ask: *Which person would you trust, based on the quote attributed to him, to provide you with trustworthy news? Why?*

3. Assign research tasks to small groups.

Divide the class into small groups, each with access to a computer and the Internet as well as the school library. Each group will select a news story of global importance, review the same news story across three separate news media types, and identify differences in reporting styles. Write the following types of news media on the board:

- traditional newspapers (printed versions from the library or online versions of newspapers like the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, etc.)
- news magazines like *Time* or *Newsweek*
- online news sources (not online versions of traditional newspapers, but rather online-only news sources like *The Huffington Post*)
- [blogs](#) and other social media like Twitter or Facebook

Preview the assignment by explaining that each group must first choose a current topic in the news that is important to the entire country or the world. They must have you approve the topic before moving on. Then they will research how that story has been reported in three different types of news media, selecting from the list on the board. Provide each group with a copy of the News Media Comparison worksheet. Explain that groups will report their findings to the class. Project the Group Collaboration Rubric and briefly discuss the criteria on which this group report will be evaluated. Point out that every member of the group must contribute in some way to the research and/or the brief presentation of their findings.

Ask groups to work together to complete the worksheet by first photocopying or printing and attaching an article from the two types of news media sources listed on the worksheet. Then ask groups to compare how each source treated the topic. The worksheet will also guide groups in fact-checking the information from several trustworthy media organizations or references. Observe the groups as they conduct their research to ensure that all group members participate in this preparation.

4. Have groups share their findings with the class.

Regroup as a whole class and give each group five minutes to share some of the things they learned during their research. Have group members tell the class which news sources showed bias, details about how they reported the story differently, and so on. Use the Group Collaboration Rubric to assess each group's presentations.

5. Have a whole-class discussion to wrap up the activity.

Revisit the questions students discussed during Step 1 of this activity to determine if their understanding has changed. Ask:

- *What is the purpose of news?*
- *Is "news" what journalists think is important, or what the audience finds interesting?*
- *Do you consider any of the news media we've explored "better" than the others? Explain.* (Answers should indicate that students have considered several aspects of good reporting, such as that their choice provides more thorough, detailed, and/or accurate reports, contains illustrations, graphs or charts, and so on.)
- *How did competition between William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer affect the way news was reported to the public?*
- *Do you think that competition between different news media helps the public? In what way?*

TipTeacher Tip

Most newspapers today are written at an 11th grade reading level. Support younger students and struggling readers with reading passages by having team members who are strong readers read the passages aloud and discuss the meaning of difficult words or sentences.

Tip

Check the rules and regulations of your school before allowing students to explore sites like Twitter, Facebook, or some blogs. You may need to alter the types of news media that students review.

Modification

Create mixed-ability groups to ensure that students with special learning needs or English language learners have strong support for the collaborations and presentations of the groups.

Modification

To save time, identify and prepare the examples of a news story you select for younger students. Cut out the story in newspapers or magazines and copy/paste online examples into a document.

Informal Assessment

Use a rubric to evaluate the group work, assessing both students' collaboration and their presentation of findings to the class.

Extending the Learning

- (For younger students) Assign or read together as a class the online news essay "[California's Velcro Crop under Challenge](#)." Ask students what they think about this news story from 1993, based on what they've learned about news media. Does it back up its statements with facts? Does it seem to be reliable and unbiased? Continue the discussion until someone in the class realizes that the whole story is a fake. Discuss the idea some people have that if you read it in the paper (or other news media), it must be true. Ask if the addition of the bar graph gives the story even more weight. Ask: *Can you think of anyone you know who might believe this story? What would you tell them to convince them otherwise?*
- (For older students) Discuss news satire. Have students gather a variety of satire stories that were created to mock the news of the day, select one, and write an essay that explains why it is satire and what makes it funny. Sources might include *The Onion*, *The Daily Curreant*, and others. Create a satire piece related to a current news story. Note that some satire pieces may be inappropriate for school use; approve all stories before allowing students to use one for this assignment.

Objectives

Subjects & Disciplines

Language Arts

- Journalism
- Reading
- Writing (composition)

Social Studies

- Technology and civilization
- United States history

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- evaluate a variety of news sources on their bias, reliability, and authority in reporting a news story
- explain the difference between traditional journalism and entertainment news
- develop an opinion about whether competition is necessary for innovation or progress to occur

Teaching Approach

- Learning-for-use

Teaching Methods

- Brainstorming
- Cooperative learning
- Discussions
- Information organization
- Reading
- Research

- Writing

Skills Summary

This activity targets the following skills:

- 21st Century Student Outcomes
 - Information, Media, and Technology Skills
 - Information Literacy
 - Media Literacy
 - Learning and Innovation Skills
 - Communication and Collaboration
 - Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Critical Thinking Skills
 - Analyzing
 - Evaluating
 - Understanding

National Standards, Principles, and Practices

IRA/NCTE Standards for the English Language Arts

- **Standard 7:**

Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., print and nonprint texts, artifacts, people) to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

- **Standard 8:**

Students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

National Council for Social Studies Curriculum Standards

- **Theme 2:**

Time, Continuity, and Change

- **Theme 8:**

Science, Technology, and Society

National Standards for History

- **U.S. History Era 10 (5-12) Standard 2:**

Economic, social, and cultural developments in contemporary United States

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy

• **Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12:**

Key Ideas and Details, RI.6.1

• **Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12:**

Key Ideas and Details, RI.11-12.1

• **Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12:**

Key Ideas and Details, RI.8.1

• **Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12:**

Key Ideas and Details, RI.7.1

• **Reading Standards for Informational Text 6-12:**

Key Ideas and Details, RI.9-10.1

• **Speaking and Listening Standards 6-12:**

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, SL.8.4

• **Speaking and Listening Standards 6-12:**

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, SL.8.5

• **Speaking and Listening Standards 6-12:**

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, SL.9-10.4

• **Speaking and Listening Standards 6-12:**

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, SL.9-10.5

• **Speaking and Listening Standards 6-12:**

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, SL.11-12.4

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• **Speaking and Listening Standards 6-12:**

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, SL.7.4

• **Speaking and Listening Standards 6-12:**

Presentation of Knowledge and Ideas, SL.7.5

• **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.9-10.3

• **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.7.1

• **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.6.3

• **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.6.1

• **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.11-12.1

• **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.11-12.3

• **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.7.3

• **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.8.1

• **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.8.3

• **Writing Standards 6-12:**

Text Types and Purposes, W.9-10.1

Preparation

What You'll Need

Materials You Provide

- Pencils
- Pens
- Examples of a current news story reported in a variety of news media

Required Technology

- Internet Access: Required
- Tech Setup: 1 computer per small group, Audio recording device, DVD player, Monitor/screen, Projector

Physical Space

- Classroom
- Computer lab

Setup

Each group will need access to its associated news source and an easy way to review it. Print media groups can gather around a table; others may need access to the TV/DVD combo, audio player, or computers.

Grouping

- Large-group instruction
- Small-group work

Other Notes

Before beginning this activity, gather the following resources:

1. Bookmark these two links to online articles for Step 2:
 - Yellow Journalism: William Randolph Hearst ([Found at the Public Broadcasting System website](#))
 - Joseph Pulitzer ([Found at the Missouri State Historical Society website](#))
2. For the vocabulary task in Step 3, locate the same news event from two different sources, one that is reliable, and one that is not.

Resources Provided: Websites

- [Joseph Pulitzer](#)
- [Yellow Journalism: William Randolph Hearst](#)

Resources Provided: Handouts & Worksheets

- [News Media Comparison](#)
- [Group Collaboration Rubric](#)

Background & Vocabulary

Background Information

There has been a lot of research about whether competition benefits innovation or actually causes it harm. Some have said that competition discourages innovation by quickly driving prices down. Others say that competition keeps innovators on their toes; knowing that someone else might design an improvement on your innovation and steal your profits will encourage you to keep looking for your own improvements.

The bitter rivalry between William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer, both owners and publishers of national newspapers in the 1890s, is an example of both sides of this question. Their competition drove news media innovation to the creation of what is still known as “yellow journalism.” In an effort to one-up each other, these men built enormous circulations for their newspapers with sensationalist news as well as drawings and cartoons. And Hearst tried to drive Pulitzer out of business, initiating a price cutting war that culminated in the Newsboy Strike of 1899.

Ironically, although both of these men were equal participants in the competition, and both allowed their rivalry to cross moral lines, their lasting legacies are vastly different. William Randolph Hearst is still known for the sensational news stories that helped to start the Spanish-American War, while Joseph Pulitzer is now famous for his awards of outstanding journalistic achievement with the Pulitzer Prize. Ultimately, the competition between these two men began the tradition of tabloid-style news that is still popular with some readers today.

Prior Knowledge

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Recommended Prior Activities

- None

Vocabulary

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
authority	<i>noun</i>	person or organization responsible for making decisions.

Term	Part of Speech	Definition
bias	<i>noun</i>	writing that shows strong feeling for or against something or someone or that favors one side too much. It presents just one point of view or one side of an argument.
blog	<i>noun</i>	(web log) website that contains online personal reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer.
competition	<i>noun</i>	contest between organisms for resources, recognition, or group or social status.
journalism	<i>noun</i>	collection and editing of news for presentation through the media.
news media	<i>plural noun</i>	methods of mass communication focused on delivering information to the public.
reliability	<i>noun</i>	being trusted to do or provide what is needed.
satire	<i>noun</i>	work of art that makes fun of ideas and social convention through use of irony, sarcasm, and ridicule.

For Further Exploration

Websites

- [National Geographic Education: Geography in the News](#)

Partner



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