

Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #1

PRIMARY SOURCES

How do journalists and historians accurately describe important events? They rely on **primary sources**.

**A PRIMARY
SOURCE IS...**



- **A first-hand account from a key moment or event**
- **Created by someone who had a direct connection with the event**



Primary sources can take many forms...

such as an interview with people who experienced the event, a photograph, a letter, a film, a text message or cell phone video, a diary entry, or a recording of a speech that help capture a key moment as it happened.

Using multiple sources:

Just because something is a primary source doesn't mean it's necessarily accurate or true all by itself. After all, journalists might interview witnesses who might not have seen or heard everything at an event or incident.



Here is a classic example:

Many Titanic survivors said they were on "the last lifeboat." They were just on the last lifeboat that they could see. Journalists and historians seek multiple sources to try and confirm exactly what happened.

The following source was written by Thomas Morris Chester, a Black journalist during the Civil War. In this excerpt, Chester describes what he heard and saw during the surrender of Richmond, Virginia, which was the capital of the Confederacy.

The pious old Negroes, male and female, indulged in such expressions: "You've come at last"; "We've been looking for you these many days"; "Jesus has opened the way"; "God Bless"; "I've not seen that old flag for four years." "Have you come to stay?"; "Thank God", and similar expressions of exultation (joy). The soldiers, black and white, received these assurances, of loyalty as evidences of the [patriotism] of an oppressed people, which a military despotism (dictatorship) has not been able to crush."

"The Fall of Richmond - Hall of Congress - Richmond, April 4, 1865." *Thomas Morris Chester: Black Civil War Correspondent: His Dispatches from the Virginia Front*. R.J.M. Blackett. Louisiana State University Press, 1989.

Describe what is happening in the excerpt. What did you notice or wonder about?

What makes the source a primary source?

**PRO
TIP**

Check your sources! Primary sources often come with a caption. There, you can find bibliographic information like the name and year of publication.

PRIMARY SOURCES

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities

Use these tips and extensions to expand on the primary source mini-lesson. Keep in mind that the mini-lessons are designed to engage all learners, so that they feel confident and see the purpose of analyzing primary sources.

Source check activity: Journalistic standards (rules) dictate that a journalist must attribute or include their sources of information. No doubt you have to do the same when you write an essay for school. Sometimes information comes in the form of a caption below an image or a list of references at the end of the piece.

- **Ask students:** What piece of information is the most important to know and why? Title, author, publisher, place of publication, or year of publication? More challenging: What kinds of judgments can you make about a source if you know the elements of attribution?

Further investigation: Some students will gravitate more towards the process of analyzing primary sources and skill development, while others may want to take a deeper dive into the content. Additional content questions may include:

1. What additional questions do you have about the content?
2. What important information does Chester provide to readers in 1865 that might help them understand the event?
3. What important information does Chester provide that might help readers of today understand the Civil War?

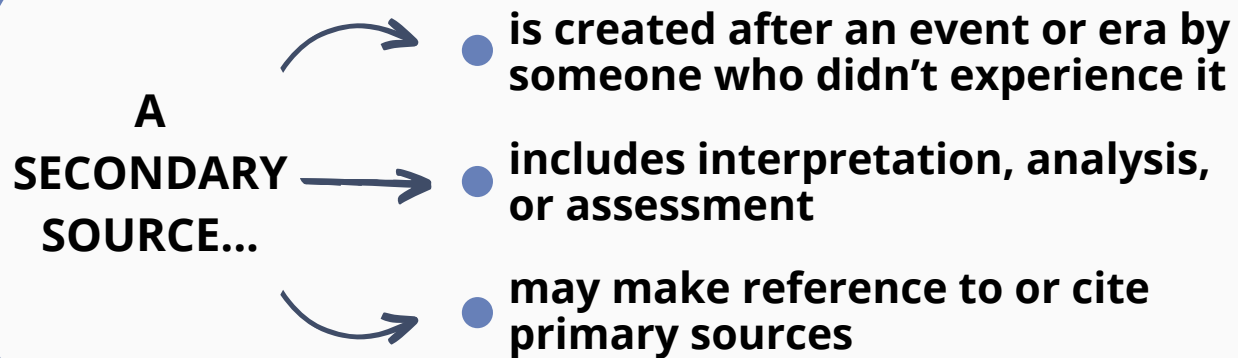
Extension activities:

1. Go to **bit.ly/jia-chester** to take notes on the full passage by Thomas Morris Chester with the Annotator tool activity on the Journalism in Action website!
2. More Practice: Go to the Introduction page of Journalism in Action's Civil War case study at **bit.ly/jia-cw**. Choose one of the primary sources and complete the See, Think, Wonder questions from the mini-lesson. Ask if they think the source is a primary source and to explain why or why not.
3. Who else would you want to hear from to learn more about the story?

Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #2

SECONDARY SOURCES

Secondary sources help interpret or explain firsthand accounts (a.k.a. primary sources)



Secondary sources can take many forms:

Some of the most common forms of secondary sources are textbooks, histories, articles in academic journals, and commentary in newspapers, which can help us understand how people reacted to historical events as they happened.

Sometimes sources can be both primary and secondary, depending on how they're used.

*Imagine you're a researcher trying to learn what actually happened at the Boston Tea Party. You find a pamphlet circulated at the time, written by a journalist who was not in Boston during the event. That would be a **secondary source**.*

*But imagine your research question was "How did journalists in the colonies react to the Boston Tea Party?" Now, that pamphlet could be considered a **primary source**, for the purposes of your question.*

Is Revere's engraving a primary or secondary source for a researcher trying to determine what happened at the Boston Massacre? Why?

SECONDARY SOURCES

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities

Use these tips and extensions to expand on the mini-lesson. Keep in mind that the mini-lessons are designed to engage all learners, so that they feel confident and see the purpose of analyzing primary sources.

Source check activity: Journalistic standards (rules) dictate that a journalist must attribute or include their sources of information. No doubt you have to do the same when you write an essay for school. Sometimes information comes in the form of a caption below an image or a list of references at the end of the piece.

- **Ask students:** What piece of information is the most important to know and why? Title, author, publisher, place of publication, or year of publication? More challenging: What kinds of judgments can you make about a source if you know the elements of attribution?

More practice: To get a better sense of primary vs. secondary sources, examine the following four 4 examples. Each includes a topic of interest and a particular source. For each, state whether it is a secondary source and why or why not.

1. You are studying the 2019 World Series between the Houston Astros and the Washington Nationals. Your source is a TV segment recorded after the series in which the journalists or sports broadcasters discuss who was the best player in the series.
2. You are studying the role of baseball in American society. Your source is a TV segment recorded after the 2019 World Series in which the broadcasters discuss who was the best player in the series.
3. You are studying the Civil Rights Act, passed in 1964. Your source is a documentary released in 1985 that interviews many of the politicians involved in passing the law.
4. You are studying the Civil Rights Act, passed in 1964. Your source is an opinion piece published in a newspaper in 1964 advocating for passage of the act.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities (cont.)

Further investigation: Some students will gravitate more towards the process of analyzing primary sources and skill development, while others may want to take a deeper dive into the content. Additional content questions may include:

1. What additional questions do students have about the content?
2. Where would they go to corroborate the scene depicted in the Revere litho?
3. Whose perspective is left out? Whose perspective is missing?
4. Why are some perspectives more likely to be preserved in history than others?
5. Have students brainstorm an essay topic for which they could use Revere's carving as a primary source.

Extension activities:

1. Go to **bit.ly/jia-revere** to take a closer look at Paul Revere's litho on the Journalism in Action website! Then, examine the Boston Gazette and Country Journal excerpt. Have your students answer the following questions:
 - a. What is the main idea of the excerpt?
 - b. Does the excerpt corroborate the message in Revere's litho (claim)? Explain with evidence to support your position (reasoning).
 - c. What additional information would you want to know to decide upon the validity of the Revere litho's message?
2. More Practice: Go to the Introduction page of Journalism in Action's American Revolution and Early Republic case study at **bit.ly/jia-arer**. Choose one of the sources, complete the See, Think, Wonder questions from the mini-lesson, and determine whether it is a secondary source.
3. Who else would you want to hear from to learn more about the moment in history captured by Revere? How would you find more sources?

Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #3

JOURNALISM

Journalists gather information about what's going on in the world and share it with their audiences.



Journalism can take many forms:

Journalism can include newspaper articles, magazines, photos, videos, or podcasts. Journalism can be about politics, sports, pop culture, and so much more. But what different forms of journalism have in common is a reliance on *sources* for info.

Who can be a journalist?

Anybody! But that doesn't mean that everyone who writes about current events is a reliable journalist. To be a reliable journalist, you have to adhere to some important values, like honesty, fairness, and verifying the facts you publish.



Journalists get their information from sources, such as eyewitnesses, documents — or even the experiences of the journalists themselves.

The following source was written by Nellie Bly, an investigative journalist who discovered rampant abuse when she went undercover as a patient at a mental health asylum in New York.

On the 22nd of September I was asked by THE WORLD if I could have myself committed to one of the Asylums for the Insane in New York with a view to writing a plain and unvarnished narrative of the patients therein and the methods of management, etc. ...

I was to chronicle faithfully the experiences I underwent, and when once within the walls of the asylum to find out and describe its inside workings, which are always, so effectually hidden by white-capped nurses, as well as by bolts and bars, from the knowledge of the public. "We do not ask you to go there for the purpose of making sensational revelations. Write up things as you find them, good or bad; give praise or blame as you think best, and the truth all the time." ... said the editor.

Source: "Behind Asylum Bars" by Nellie Bly. The New York World. Oct. 17, 1887. Permission has been granted for educational purposes only, courtesy of NYU Digital Library Services.

Describe what is happening in the excerpt. What did you notice or wonder about?

What sources of information does Bly rely on in this short excerpt?

JOURNALISM

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities

Use these tips and extensions to expand on the mini-lesson. Keep in mind that the mini-lessons are designed to engage all learners, so that they feel confident and see the purpose of analyzing primary sources.

Source check activity: Journalistic standards (rules) dictate that a journalist must attribute or include their sources of information. No doubt you have to do the same when you write an essay for school. Sometimes information comes in the form of a caption below an image or a list of references at the end of the piece.

- **Ask students:** What piece of information is the most important to know and why? Title, author, publisher, place of publication, or year of publication? *More challenging:* What kinds of judgments can you make about a source if you know the elements of attribution?

Tip 1: Remind students to check the caption below the source. Ask students: What piece of information about the source do you think is most important to know? Title, author, publisher, place of publication, or year? How does that information change how you see the story?

Tip 2: This is an example of *investigative journalism*. Students might be interested in talking about the pros and cons of taking an investigative approach to the news like Nellie Bly did. What are the advantages and disadvantages of making yourself the center of the story as a journalist?

Tip 3: Brainstorm together: What makes a good news story? What are some values, in addition to honesty, fairness, and verifying facts, that you think all journalists should stick to?

Extension activities:

1. Go to bit.ly/jia-bly to take notes on Nellie Bly's passage with the Annotator tool on the Journalism in Action website!
2. More Practice: Go to the Introduction page of Journalism in Action's Mental Health case study at bit.ly/jia-mh. Choose one of the primary sources and complete the See, Think, Wonder questions as well as questions 1-3 from the second page of the mini-lesson
3. Who else would you want to hear from to learn more about the moment in history captured by the source? How would you find more sources?

Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #4

EYEWITNESSES

An eyewitness is a person who observed what happened at the scene of an important event.

AN
EYEWITNESS
ACCOUNT...

- is a record of an event told by someone who observed it
- is often recorded in or based on a journalist's notes from speaking to an eyewitness
- can be a source of evidence



Eyewitness accounts aren't always accurate:

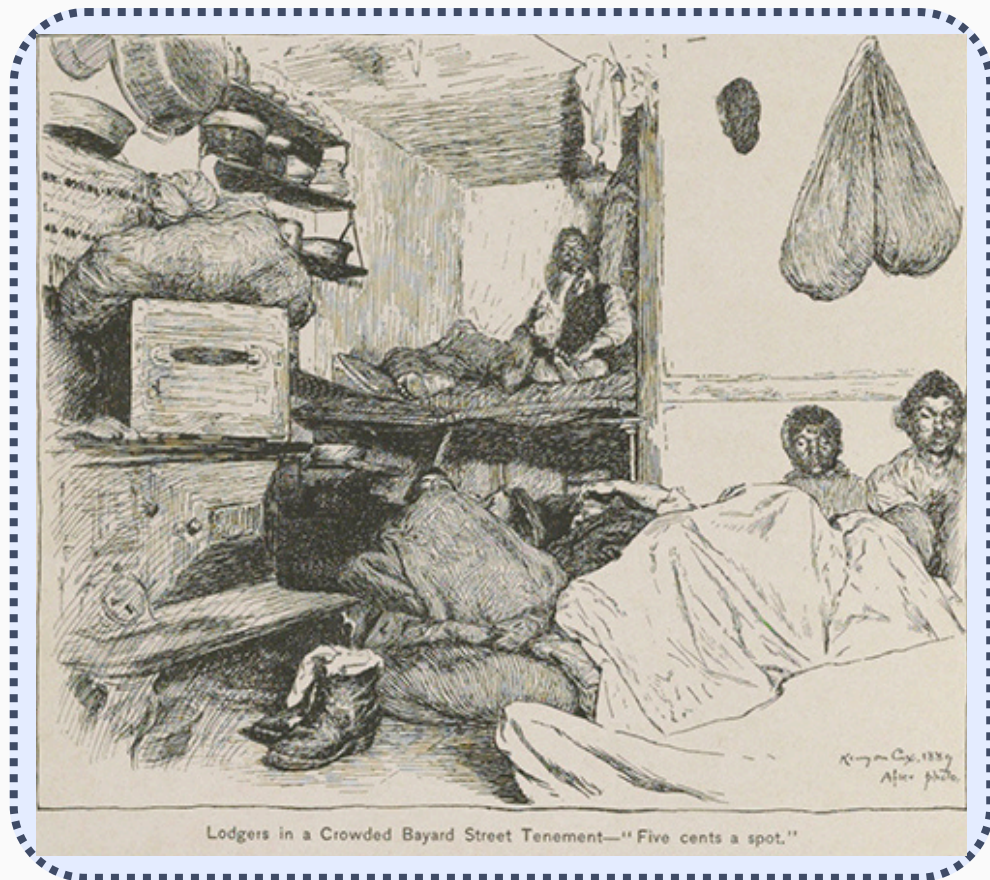
An eyewitness may have heard or seen only part of the story. Sometimes their memories fail them. Some eyewitnesses may have a particular *perspective or bias*. That's why it's important for reliable journalists to seek out multiple sources to confirm what happened.

Some eyewitnesses choose to remain anonymous:

They may fear that revealing information with their name might get them into trouble. Still, readers should be skeptical of stories that rely only on anonymous sources, especially without other evidence to help verify the story.



The following source was created by the 19th century photojournalist Jacob Riis. Riis used his camera to communicate the poor living conditions in New York's tenement housing.



Source: "How the Other Half Lives: Studies among the Tenements" by Jacob Riis. *Scribner's Magazine*, Dec. 1889. One of twenty wood engravings based on Riis's photographs. Library of Congress.

Describe what's happening in the photo. What do you notice or wonder about?

What makes this image an eyewitness account?

EYEWITNESSES

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities

Use these tips and extensions to expand on the mini-lesson. Keep in mind that the mini-lessons are designed to engage all learners, so that they feel confident and see the purpose of analyzing primary sources.

Source check activity: Remind students to check the caption below the source to help learn more about its origins and figure out whether a source is a primary source.

- **Ask students:** What piece of information about the source do you think is most important to know? Title, author, publisher, place of publication, or year? Explain.

Additional example: Take a look at the following scenario involving a car getting rear-ended. No one was hurt but it made the news because Trusty, a famous YouTube dog, was in the back seat. Who do you think makes the strongest eyewitness? Why?

Person A: "I witnessed a blue car rear-ending a red car as I left the supermarket."

Person B: "I was standing outside the supermarket and saw the blue car weaving in and out of traffic before rear-ending the red car."

Person C: "I was texting outside the supermarket but looked up as soon as I heard the crash. The red car stopped short. I'm a very good multitasker."

If you were reading this story in the news, and the journalist included quotes by Person C and not Person B, what conclusions might you draw? Now that you know that some eyewitnesses are more reliable than others, what additional questions would you ask?

EYEWITNESSES

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities (cont.)

Further investigation: Some students will gravitate more towards the process of analyzing primary sources and skill development, while others may want to take a deeper dive into the content.

1. What additional questions might students have about the content?
2. What important information does Riis present readers in the photo images that might help them understand the conditions in the tenement housing?
3. What important information does Riis present that might help readers of today understand the life of poor people?

Extension activities:

1. Go to **bit.ly/jia-riis** to take notes on Jacob Riis's image with the Annotator tool on the Journalism in Action website!
2. More Practice: Go to the Introduction page of Journalism in Action's Muckrakers case study at **bit.ly/jia-m**. Choose one of the primary sources and complete the See, Think, Wonder questions as well as questions 1-3 from the second page of the mini-lesson
3. Who else would you want to hear from to learn more about the story?
4. Do you know that wood engravings were made from Riis's photography and then printed in books and magazines? Learn more about wood engraving technology by doing some research in your school or town library.

Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #5

EVIDENCE

To tell a story as accurately as possible, journalists need **evidence**: sources that provide the who, what, where, when, why, and how about a particular event.

**EVIDENCE
CAN BE...**



- **eyewitness testimony**



- **primary sources, like
photographs, notes, and letters**



- **claims of experts based on their
observations and gathered data**



**Journalists use evidence to back up
their sources.**

Skeptical readers might not take a source's word as fact. To tell the most accurate and compelling version of the story, journalists look for additional evidence to *corroborate*, or support, what they learn from sources.

Is evidence the same as “proof”?

No!

Have you ever found yourself trying to piece together a story from a friends' night you missed? Journalists have to do the same thing. Sometimes a source is unreliable, or different sources contradict each other. Very rarely will a journalist know every important detail about a story with absolute accuracy.

The following source connecting extreme weather to climate change was written in a Montana newspaper more than 100 years ago!

The year 1911 will long be remembered for the violence of its weather. The spring opened mild and delightful, but in June a torrid wave of unparalleled severity swept over the country. The cities baked and gasped for breath while the burning sun and hot winds withered the corn and cost the farmers a million dollars a day.

...

With only one month out of twelve below normal, one may well ask if the climate is not changing and getting warmer. This important question is discussed by Francis Molena in the March Popular Mechanics Magazine. He says:

"Since burning coal produces carbon dioxide, it may be inquired whether the enormous use of that fuel in modern times may be an important factor in filling the atmosphere with this substance, and consequently indirectly raising the temperature of the earth."

"The Remarkable Weather of 1911" Fergus County Democrat, Lewistown, Montana. February 27, 1912. Library of Congress

What evidence does this excerpt provide about climate change?

What evidence is not included in the excerpt that would help establish that the climate was actually changing at this time?

EVIDENCE

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities

Use these tips and extensions to expand on the mini-lesson. Keep in mind that the mini-lessons are designed to engage all learners, so that they feel confident and see the purpose of analyzing primary sources.

Source check activity: Journalistic standards (rules) dictate that a journalist must attribute or include their sources of information. No doubt you have to do the same when you write an essay for school. Sometimes information comes in the form of a caption below an image or a list of references at the end of the piece.

- **Ask students:** What piece of information is the most important to know and why? Title, author, publisher, place of publication, or year of publication? More challenging: What kinds of judgments can you make about a source if you know the elements of attribution?

Further investigation: Some students will gravitate more towards the process of analyzing primary sources and skill development, while others may want to take a deeper dive into the content.

1. What additional questions do you have about the content?
2. What evidence does this article provide to researchers who are trying to understand the history of scientific understanding of climate change?
3. Have students find a contemporary article about climate change. What evidence is included in the article? How does it compare to the account in the Fergus Democrat?

Extension activities:

1. Go to **bit.ly/jia-fergus** to take notes on the full passage with the Annotator tool activity on the Journalism in Action website!
2. Have students go to **bit.ly/ferguscounty** to read the other entries on the page of the Fergus Democrat in which the climate article appears. What other concerns were presented to the readership on that day? What evidence is presented in those other clips?
3. More Practice: Go to the Introduction page of Journalism in Action's STEM case study at **bit.ly/jia-s**. Choose one of the primary sources and complete the See, Think, Wonder questions and questions 1-3 from the second page of this mini-lesson.
4. Who else would you want to hear from to learn more about how attitudes toward the environment were shaped in the 20th and 21st centuries?

Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #6

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

Sometimes, journalists have to go to great lengths to uncover the truth — especially when others might not want the truth revealed. This is called **investigative journalism**.

**INVESTIGATIVE
JOURNALISTS
MIGHT...**

- be persistent in their research over a long period of time
- persuade sources to share information
- obtain documents that uncover important evidence



Uncovering the truth isn't always easy:

It's normal for a journalist to work to collect evidence; they might record a speech or speak to eyewitnesses.

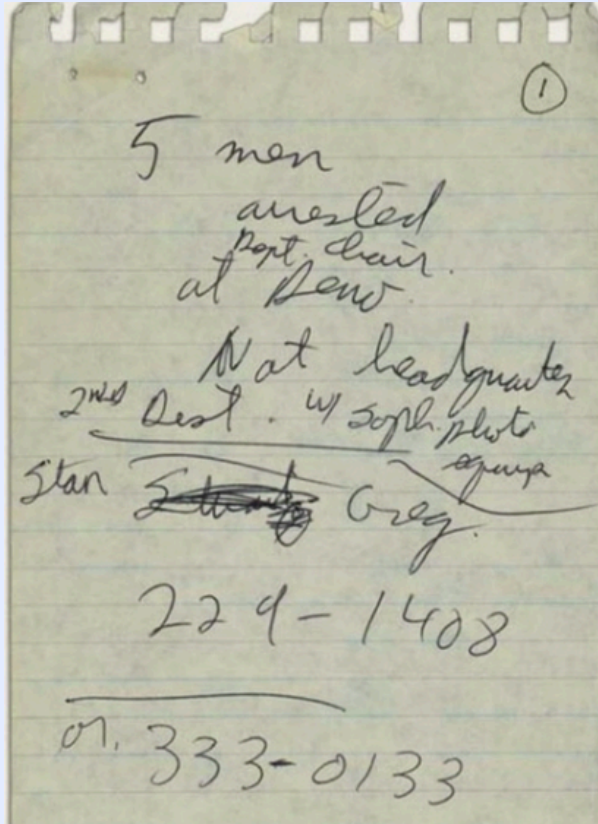
But sometimes, journalists have to dig deeper to find facts that aren't easily available. This type of journalism is essential to keep the public informed about things that have been covered up or overlooked.

The Watergate scandal

One of the most famous examples of investigative journalism began when two journalists investigated a break-in at the Watergate hotel in Washington, D.C. The hotel was the site of the Democratic National Headquarters, and campaign documents were stolen in the break-in.

Ultimately, their investigative reporting helped lead to President Nixon's resignation when it was determined that he knew about the break-in and used the power of the presidency to cover it up.

The following source is an image of Bob Woodward's notes from the Watergate burglars' first court hearing. There, he notes "leads" or information that he can follow up on to learn more.



Notes, with abbreviations spelled out:

"5 men arrested at Dem[ocratic] Nat[ional] headquarters. Dep[uty] chair. 2nd dist[ri]ct w/ soph[isticated] photo equip[ment]. Stan Greg 229-1408 or 333-0133."

Note that "Dept. Chair" and "Stan Greg" refers to Stanley Greigg, the deputy chair of the Democratic National Committee. It was Greigg who first heard about the break-in from the police and filed the complaint against the burglars in court.

Source: Woodward's notes from the arraignment of the Watergate burglars. June 17, 1972. Permission has been granted for educational purposes only courtesy of the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas–Austin.

Describe what is happening in the notes. What did you notice or wonder about?

What actions do you think Woodward and Bernstein took next based on these notes?

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities

Use these tips and extensions to expand on the mini-lesson. Keep in mind that the mini-lessons are designed to engage all learners, so that they feel confident and see the purpose of analyzing primary sources.

Source check activity: Remind students to check the caption below the source to help figure out whether a source is a primary source.

- **Ask students:** What piece of information about the source do you think is most important to know? Title, author, publisher, place of publication, or year? Explain.

Further investigation: Some students will gravitate more towards the process of analyzing primary sources and skill development, while others may want to take a deeper dive into the content.

1. What additional questions might students have about the content?
2. What evidence does this article provide to researchers who are trying to understand the history of investigative journalism or the Watergate scandal?
3. Have students find a contemporary example of investigative journalism. What evidence has been uncovered by the journalists, and how was it uncovered? What do the journalists still seem to be investigating?
4. Go to bit.ly/jia-wells to compare the Watergate investigation to another milestone of investigative journalism, Ida B. Wells' Red Report on lynching in the United States. How was Wells' approach different? What investigative methods did she use?

Extension activities:

1. Have students research the Watergate reporting of Woodward and Bernstein. What steps did the journalists take immediately after the court hearing described above?
2. More Practice: Go to the Introduction page of Journalism in Action's STEM case study at bit.ly/jia-s. Choose one of the primary sources and complete the See, Think, Wonder questions as well as questions 1-3 from the second page of the mini-lesson.
3. Who else would you want to hear from to learn more about how investigative journalism has changed from the Watergate era through to today?

Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #7

PHOTOJOURNALISM

Have you heard the expression “a picture is worth a thousand words”? **Photojournalism** can be a powerful way to convey information and emotional weight to audiences.

**PHOTO-
JOURNALISM...**



- **Uses photography in a news story to show what happened**

- **Can convey subtle details about photographic subjects, including clues about how people feel**



Photography also represents an important type of primary source...

since it can provide significant evidence about important events in the past. For example, during the Civil War, Mathew Brady took pictures to provide evidence of what had happened on battlefields, including the grim aftermath of war.

Photojournalistic ethics:

Photographers make editorial choices — like, who and what to include (and exclude) from their images, or how (if at all) to edit their photos. Like all journalists, photojournalists should strive to meet certain ethical standards, like honesty and accuracy.



The image below depicts American labor leader Dolores Huerta outside of the 1972 Farm Bureau National Convention.



Dolores Huerta, Farm Bureau National Convention, Los Angeles, 1972. Permission has been granted for educational purposes only courtesy of United Farm Workers Collection, Walter P. Reuther Library, Wayne State University.

Describe what is happening in the image. What did you notice or wonder about?

Look at the different subjects in the image. What emotions does the image convey for you?

PHOTOJOURNALISM

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities

Use these tips and extensions to expand on the mini-lesson. Keep in mind that the mini-lessons are designed to engage all learners, so that they feel confident and see the purpose of analyzing primary sources.

Source check activity: Journalistic standards (rules) dictate that a journalist must attribute or include their sources of information. No doubt you have to do the same when you write an essay for school. Sometimes information comes in the form of a caption below an image or a list of references at the end of the piece.

- **Ask students:** What piece of information is the most important to know and why? Title, author, publisher, place of publication, or year of publication? *More challenging:* What kinds of judgments can you make about a source if you know the elements of attribution?

Further investigation: Some students will gravitate more towards the process of analyzing primary sources and skill development, while others may want to take a deeper dive into content.

1. What are a few features in the photo that allow viewers to experience empathy? What else is presented in the photograph?
2. How many times is the UFW's symbol of the eagle presented in the photo? What do you think the eagle represents?

Extension activities:

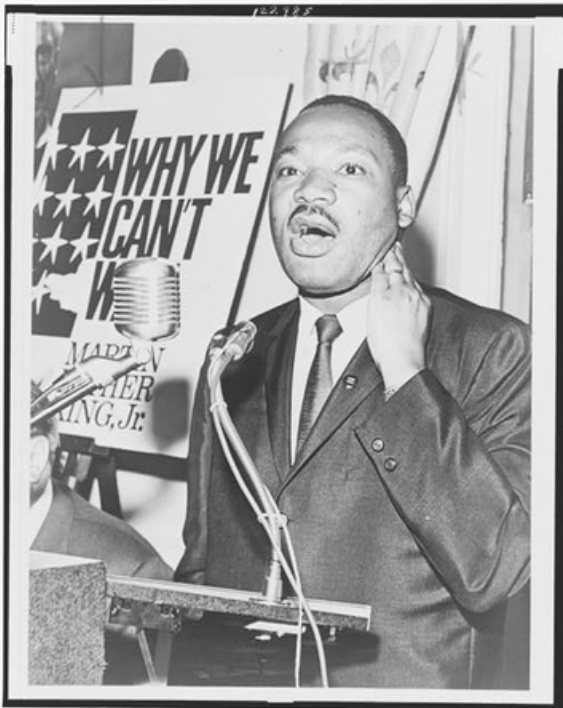
1. Go to bit.ly/jia-ufw to complete the full Annotator tool activity on UFW and the California Grape Strike on the Journalism in Action website!
2. Go to to.pbs.org/3fSqH45 to watch Tell Me More with Kelly Corrigan: Dolores Huerta and have students take notes as they watch. Then have students visit the Dolores Huerta Foundation website (doloreshuerta.org) to see the causes that Dolores Huerta is focusing on today.
3. Learn more about photojournalist Glen Percy and see more of his Civil Rights Movement photographs at bit.ly/jia-percy and read his obituary in the *Washington Post*.
4. Go to to.pbs.org/3T1krLZ to watch an interview with Professor Jonathan Rieder about his new book, *Gospel of Freedom: Martin Luther King, Jr.'s Letter from Birmingham Jail*. Have students read King's "Letter from Birmingham Jail" (individually or in small groups) and have them record the main idea of each passage or write questions for each section.

PHOTOJOURNALISM

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities (cont.)

More practice: Former *Washington Post* publisher Philip Graham is credited with saying, “the news is the first rough draft of history.” Photojournalists give us a glimpse of the people, events, emotions, and surroundings that allow the public to experience empathy and ask questions based on what is presented in the photograph. Take a look at this example:

The photograph of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was captured by Walter Albertin on June 8, 1964, at a press conference for King’s book *Why We Can’t Wait*. Ask your students: What actions do you think the public had upon examination of the photograph? What further observations could you make about the Civil Rights Movement? Responses might include:



- Some may be prompted to read *Why We Can't Wait* and Dr. King's other books.
- Others may become aware that King had written books. You could introduce them to Dr. King's iconic Letter from Birmingham Jail, which is featured in the book.
- Students might have questions about King's age at the time of the photograph and the publication of the book. Students might be surprised to learn that King was in his early 30s when this photograph was taken, and it might inspire them to take action knowing that someone could make such a powerful impact on the world at such a young age.
- The role that photojournalists play and the use of pictures as a primary source is often an underutilized driver of discussion and discovery.

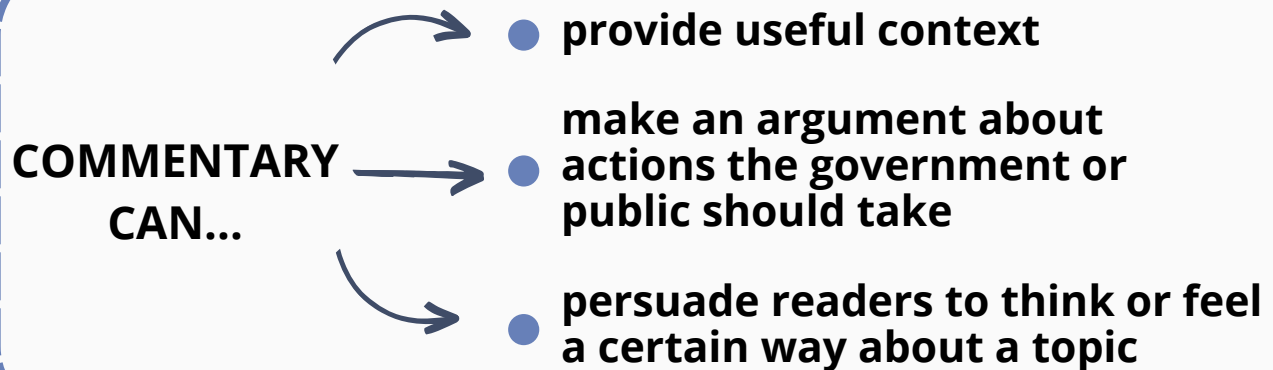
Use the following questions to compare and contrast the photos of Dr. King and Dolores Huerta:

1. What do students not see in the images of Dr. King and Dolores Huerta?
2. Who is not in the frame of the images of Dr. King and Dolores Huerta picture who might be nearby?
3. What additional questions do students have about the photographs?
4. What important information do the images of Dr. King and Dolores Huerta provide that might help students make connections with protest movements today?

Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #8

COMMENTARY

Sometimes, news organizations share opinions about the news via opinion pieces or editorial **commentary**



A commentary's main purpose is to interpret facts, rather than present them:

A commentary may offer support or criticism of proposed laws or endorse political candidates, although that practice that is becoming less common at traditional newspapers.

Commentaries can take many forms...

such as editorials (opinions written by the editors ahead of a given news story), op-eds (from "opposite-editorial," referring to the page opposite the editorial page, often written by someone not on the news staff), or editorial cartoons.



PRO TIP

Check the sources! Good arguments are always grounded in good sources. When you read an opinion piece, take a discerning look at the writer's sources of information.

The following words urging the U.S. to pull out of the Vietnam War were delivered by legendary news reporter Walter Cronkite in 1968. Famed for his objective reporting, it was notably out of character for Cronkite to express his personal opinion during a newscast.

It's about time we started thinking about Vietnam in terms of the Vietnamese and our responsibilities towards them. ...

The best that we can do is try to find some way out of a meaningless and destructive war and bring about peace in the country. For my own part, I see no alternative to abandoning the policies which have been disastrous up 'til now and to begin a policy based on political understanding and negotiations.

Source: Parting words from Walter Cronkite: His famous Vietnam commentary, originally aired on a special CBS News broadcast Feb. 27, 1968, via NPR.

Describe what is happening in the excerpt. What did you notice or wonder about?

What makes this an opinion piece? What information do you think informs Cronkite's opinion of the war?

COMMENTARY

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities

Use these tips and extensions to expand on the mini-lesson. Keep in mind that the mini-lessons are designed to engage all learners, so that they feel confident and see the purpose of analyzing primary sources.

Source check activity: Journalistic standards (rules) dictate that a journalist must attribute or include their sources of information. No doubt you have to do the same when you write an essay for school. Sometimes information comes in the form of a caption below an image or a list of references at the end of the piece.

- **Ask students:** What piece of information about the source of an op-ed is the most important to know and why? Title, author, publisher, place of publication, or year of publication? More challenging: How can these details help you understand the origin, reliability, or perspective of the media source?

Extension activities:

1. Go to **bit.ly/jia-cronkite** to complete the full activity on Walter Cronkite using the magnifier tool on the Journalism in Action Website
2. More Practice: Go to the Introduction page of Journalism in Action's Vietnam War case study at **bit.ly/jia-vw**. Choose one of the primary sources and complete the See, Think, Wonder questions.
3. Who else would you want to hear from to learn more about the story? Whose perspective or opinion was missing from the examples provided?

COMMENTARY

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities (cont.)

Further investigation: How do you think Walter Cronkite eventually got to the point where he delivered a full monologue about his thoughts on Vietnam? Cronkite, like most journalists during Vietnam, were supportive of the war and reported the news based on what information the government gave them. This practice continues today through press conferences led by White House and Pentagon officials. However, the journalists' duty is to sift through official reports and press releases to discover the full story.

Take a look at the following two videos and answer the following questions, which might help you answer the question about Cronkite above and why some journalists end up becoming opinion columnists after years of news reporting. Watch the first 2:40 minutes of the government-produced video "Why Vietnam?" at bit.ly/jia-whyvietnam. Then go to bit.ly/jia-atissue read an excerpt of the transcript from WNET's "At Issue; The Stakes in Vietnam," which brought together journalists and professors to share their opinions about the war.

1. Use the See, Think, Wonder questions from the mini-lesson.
2. What important information do the two pieces present that might help you understand why most of the public including journalists supported the war? What did you hear that might change people's opinions about the war?
3. Whose perspectives did you notice were absent from the pieces?

Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #9

POINT-OF-VIEW AND BIAS

We all have **points-of-view** and **biases**. A core principle of journalism is to understand bias and prevent it from interfering with fairness and accuracy.

POINT-OF-VIEW IS...



- How we view events based on our values, life experiences, and interests

BIAS IN JOURNALISM IS...



- Unfair or unbalanced reporting that favors one point-of-view
- Reporting that excludes key facts about events or individuals



Everybody has a point-of-view, but...

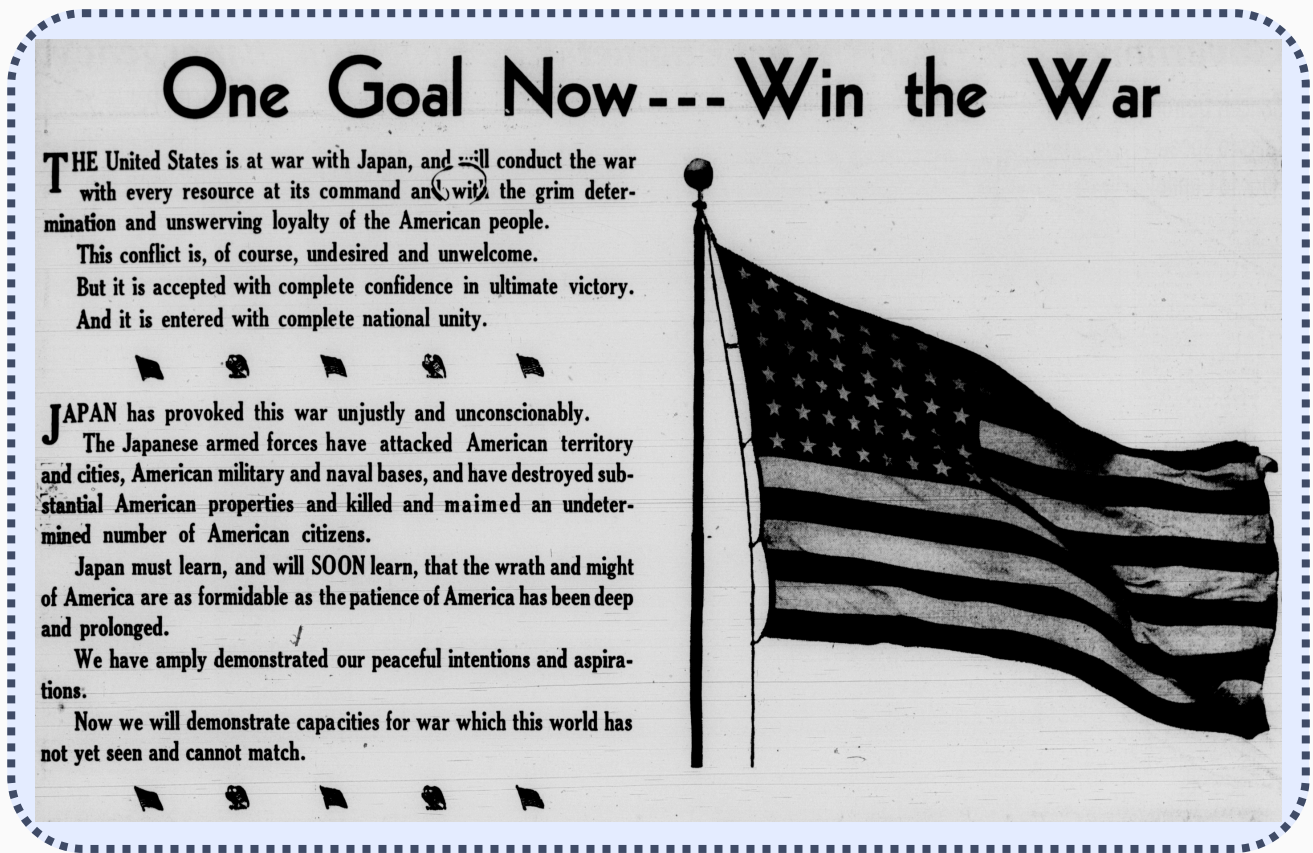
Responsible journalism requires that the journalist consider their own biases to ensure that they are being fair, accurate, and responsible to the story and their subjects.

The problem with bias

Bias is a problem when journalists include only partial information about an event or leave out viewpoints of certain individuals. Bias in journalism can give readers an incomplete or distorted sense of what is happening in the world — it can lead to misinformation. Even worse, intentional manipulation of the facts is called *disinformation*.



The following source from an editorial (opinion piece) written shortly after the US declared war on Japan during World War II.



Detroit Evening Times. Detroit, Mich., Dec. 8, 1941. Library of Congress

How would you describe the point-of-view of this editorial? What details offer clues about the point-of-view?

Do you think this editorial shows bias? Why or why not?

BIAS

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities

Use these tips and extensions to expand on the primary source mini-lesson. Keep in mind that the mini-lessons are designed to engage all learners, so that they feel confident and see the purpose of analyzing primary sources.

Tip 1: Help students understand that there were (and still are) different perspectives on historical individuals and events.

Tip 2: Ask students to consider what facts are included and left out of historical accounts. Encourage students to examine language and look up the definitions of words to determine a source's bias.

Tip 3: Remind students that they should examine their own work for evidence of bias. After all, we all have biases!

Discussing bias: Students should know that bias can be unintentional, or it can purposefully distort the news.

1. "Implicit biases" are deep-seated biases that people are unaware of holding. Bias does not have to be conscious or intentional to potentially distort the way a journalist reports the news.
2. Bias may lead journalists unintentionally to share misinformation, or incorrect facts. Bias that results in intentional manipulation or distortion of facts is referred to as disinformation. Students can learn more [here](#).

Source check activity: Journalistic standards, or guidelines, dictate that a journalist must attribute or include their sources of information

- **Ask students:** Do you think journalists should be required to share a list of references at the end of their stories, similar to what you are required to do when writing essays? How might this help determine bias?

Extension activities:

1. More Practice: Go to the Introduction page of Journalism in Action's World War II case study at bit.ly/jia-wwii. Choose one of the primary sources and complete the See, Think, Wonder questions. Ask students: What words and images does the journalist use to describe their point-of-view? What bias does the journalist show, if any?
2. Choose a journalistic primary or secondary source (reporting or editorial) from any case study on the Journalism in Action site. Ask students:
 - a. What words and images does the author use to describe the subject that suggest a point-of-view?
 - b. What is the author's point-of-view?
 - c. Do you think the author or journalist shows unfair bias? Explain.

Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #10

WHOSE VOICES ARE MISSING?

Whenever we consume news media, a key question to ask is
whose voices are missing?

To figure out whose voices are missing from a news story, ask yourself:

Who is quoted in the article or featured in the picture?
Who is omitted, deliberately or not?

Why would a journalist or news editor choose to include certain individuals in a story and choose to leave other individuals out?



Who made the story?

Keep in mind the *points-of-view* that journalists or their editors may bring to a news story. Ask yourself if the story is *biased* in a certain direction. This will help you think critically about whose voices are included and whose voices are not included.

For example:

You've just come across a newspaper article about Native American mascots in sports. Take a look at the individuals featured or quoted in the story. Are they team managers or owners? Fans? Native American leaders or activists? What do the voices highlighted in the story tell you about the potential goals of that story?

The following source, “Indians Who Refuse to be Civilized,” comes from the *St. Paul Globe* in 1903. It conveys regret over Native people in Minnesota who didn’t want their children put in government schools.

The civilization of the Chippewa Indians who live in the northern woods of Minnesota is one of the greatest problems which confronts the interior department at Washington today. [...]

The schools founded by the government in their midst are not attended, the parents preferring to bring their children up in true Indian style. [...]

But aside from the pagan [non-Christian] Chippewas of the northern woods, the 10,000 Indians in Minnesota are rapidly becoming civilized, and many of the Indian children are receiving education almost as broad as is afforded to their palefaced brothers and sisters.

"Indians Who Refuse to be Civilized" *St. Paul Globe*, St. Paul, Minn. Dec. 20, 1903.
Library of Congress

Whose perspective is included in the news clip? Whose is left out?

What do you think you might learn if the journalist had spoken to the Native people being described here?

WHOSE VOICES ARE MISSING?

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities

Use these tips and extensions to expand on the mini-lesson. Keep in mind that the mini-lessons are designed to engage all learners, so that they feel confident and see the purpose of analyzing primary sources.

Source check activity: Remind students to check the caption below the source to help learn more about its origins and figure out whether a source is a primary source.

- **Ask students:** What piece of information about the source do you think is most important to know? Title, author, publisher, place of publication, or year? Explain.

Further investigation: Some students will gravitate more towards the process of analyzing primary sources and skill development, while others may want to take a deeper dive into the content. Additional content questions may include:

1. What additional questions do you have about the content?
2. What's the context behind the schools for native children set up by the U.S. government? Research what the government's goals were in creating the schools and what living conditions native children faced inside them.
3. What does the author of this article mean by the word "civilized?" Do they mean something they're not explicitly saying?

Extension activities:

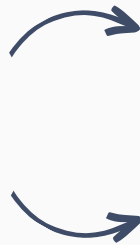
1. More Practice: Go to the Introduction page of Journalism in Action's American Indian case study. Choose one of the primary sources and complete the See, Think, Wonder questions.
2. Research the history of the land on which your school sits. Google "land acknowledge map" for your city/state.
3. Who else, specifically, would you want to hear from to learn more about the story?

Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #11

MEDIA OWNERSHIP AND EDITORS

Journalists don't necessarily get the final say on how their stories get published. In this lesson: the role of **media ownership** and **editors** in deciding how news is covered.

**NEWS STORIES
CAN BE
INFLUENCED
BY...**



- **The financial interests and point-of-view of the people who own the news organization**
- **Editors who decide what is newsworthy**



How editors affect the news:

Editors review articles and usually have the last word on what gets published or broadcast. They might choose an article's headline, proofread the language, or suggest additions and deletions in the story's content.

Notable news owners:

William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer

In the 1890s, William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer owned the biggest newspapers in the country. The push to make money influenced both publishers and led to the rise of yellow journalism (the use of sensational headlines and scandal-mongering to sell papers).

The following cartoon is about William Randolph Hearst, owner and publisher of the largest newspaper chain in the U.S. in the late 1800s.



Image description:

An author in a top hat looks on as two children read newspapers that say "DAILY SCANDAL MONGER" "MORNING CYCLONE OF CRIME: How to Poison a Whole City."

In the background are shops that say "Don't fail to buy the Sunday Slop Bucket" and "All the sensation papers: "Daily Rot," "Daily Scooper," "Morning Scavenger"

Under the cartoon's title, it says "Dime novel writer — And they used to say that my books were bad for young peoples' morals!"

"The 'new journalism' beats him." 1897. Puck. Artist S.D. Ehrhart. New York, 1897. Library of Congress

What do you see, think, and wonder about in this cartoon?

What point do you think the cartoonist was trying to make about the state of journalism in America at the time? What parts of the cartoon do this best?

MEDIA OWNERSHIP AND EDITORS

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities

Use these tips and extensions to expand on students' understanding of the media ownership mini-lesson. The Mini-Lessons are meant to engage *all learners* so they feel confident and have fun working with primary sources.

Make modern-day connections: As you know, modern-day connections make history more meaningful to students. In regards to media ownership, you may want to discuss media owners today, including Amazon's founder and chairman Jeff Bezos, who owns The Washington Post.

The family of Australian-born Rupert Murdoch owns many huge global media outlets, including Fox News and The Wall Street Journal. Conduct some research on these individuals and ask your students how owners' motivations and perspectives might affect how media companies report on and analyze stories.

Further investigation: Some students will gravitate more towards the process of analyzing primary sources, while others may want to take a deeper dive into the content. To learn more about William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer and yellow journalism, check out the [Library of Congress's resources](#).

Extension activities:

1. The editors of *The Recorder* (who also owned the paper) added their commentary on the front page following the 1848 women's rights convention in nearby Seneca Falls, New York. Read their post and answer the questions below.

The following is from the Declaration of Sentiments made at the Woman's Rights Convention, held at Seneca Falls, on the 19th and 20th [of last month]. The "Declaration" adapts the language of that of "Independence" to the grievous bondage of woman in the nineteenth century. We need not say we think the movement excessively silly: nevertheless many of our readers will have the curiosity to run through this formidable document.

"Woman's Rights" *The Recorder*, Syracuse, NY. August 3, 1848.

- What does the article tell us about how the editors viewed the movement for women's rights? Look for clues including punctuation and the words they use.
- How do the editors think their readers see the movement for women's rights?

2. Examine the [Woman's Journal and Suffrage News](#) and its owners in the suffrage case study, a newspaper dedicated to issues affecting women, and complete the See, Think, Wonder questions.

Media Literacy Mini-Lesson #12

AUDIENCE

Journalists always consider who their **audience** is — that is, who is reading, watching, or hearing their stories.

**THE
AUDIENCE
IS...**



- The set of people who will read, listen to, or watch a piece of news
- The people a journalist has in mind when producing a story



Audiences can affect journalistic choices:

Although journalists are committed to uncovering the truth, most publications are business, so they need to maintain audience interest to stay in business. Journalists or their editors will always decide which stories to cover and how to cover them with their audience in mind.

Describing an audience

Some of the biggest factors that differentiate news audiences are demographics like age, gender, race, income, education level, and geographic location. Audiences could also be differentiated based on their beliefs, like political or religious affiliations.



The following interview aired on the PBS WNED news program "Woman" which focused on women's issues. In it, the host interviews Marcia Ann Gillespie, the editor-in-chief of Essence, a magazine about Black women's issues. The interview was broadcast on public television in Buffalo, New York.

To watch, go to bit.ly/jia-gillespie



Woman, "New Image for Black Women" Edited version of interview with Marcia Ann Gillespie of Essence magazine. Jan 16, 1976. Permission has been granted for educational purposes only, courtesy of WNED via American Archive of Public Broadcasting (WGBH and Library of Congress).

Who is the target audience for the show "Woman"?

**What is Marcia Ann Gillespie's message to the show's audience?
How does she direct her message to that audience?**

AUDIENCE

Teacher Tips and Extension Activities

Use these tips and extensions to expand on the mini-lesson. Keep in mind that the Media Literacy Mini-Lessons are designed to engage *all learners* so that they feel confident and see the purpose of analyzing sources.

Source check activity: Journalistic standards (rules) dictate that a journalist must attribute or include their sources of information. No doubt you have to do the same when you write an essay for school. Sometimes information comes in the form of a caption below an image or a list of references at the end of the piece.

- **Ask students:** What piece of information is the most important to know and why? Title, author, publisher, place of publication, or year of publication? *More challenging:* What kinds of judgments can you make about a source if you know the elements of attribution?

Extension activities:

1. Practice: Go to the Introduction page of Journalism in Action's Gender Equality case study at bit.ly/jia-ge. Choose one of the primary sources and complete the See, Think, Wonder question from the mini-lesson.
2. Who else would you want to hear from to learn more about the moment in history captured by the source? How would you find more sources?
3. In the following activity, conduct a one-minute internet search of each of the following five news publications. What guess would you make about the audience of that publication?
 - a. The *Detroit Jewish News* (www.thejewishnews.com/)
 - b. *Seventeen Magazine* (www.seventeen.com/)
 - c. Bloomberg Businessweek (www.bloomberg.com/businessweek)
 - d. The Root (www.theroot.com/)
 - e. The *Chronicle of Higher Education* (www.chronicle.com/)