

38 Teaching Tips

for Using the Newspaper in the Classroom

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Learning from the real world has magnetic appeal for students. That is one reason why newspapers are the perfect teaching tool. In addition, research shows that using a newspaper in the curriculum improves student skills, increases knowledge, and encourages a positive attitude toward learning. It also helps students become informed and involved citizens while developing a lifelong reading habit.

The following tips will help you get the most out of your newspaper use and make it easy to incorporate newspapers into your program.

1. **GETTING STARTED.** It's best to start each newspaper lesson with some free reading time. Allow students to explore the newspaper independently for about 10 minutes, if possible. Then you can spend a few minutes discussing the stories that your students read first. This is a terrific way to assess the students' interest in various sections of the newspaper.
2. **KNOW THE NEWS.** Consider introducing students to newspaper terms such as "headline," "byline," "masthead," "editorial," "column," etc. You can also review the sections of your newspaper and discuss the type of information that can be found in each one.
3. **TOO EASY.** Some of the lessons presented may strike you as too easy for your students. Even though a lesson may be simple, most students can benefit from completing the simplest tasks. The material in the newspaper itself is complex. Thus, students learn just from interacting with the material, even if the task is easy.
4. **VOCABULARY BUILDER.** The newspaper is a great tool for introducing students to some new vocabulary words. However, it can also be intimidating to some. Here is a quick game designed to introduce new vocabulary and to take away any negative feeling about encountering strange words. Play "Stump the Class." Ask students to search for words they do not know and that they think no one in class knows either. If they can find a "stumper," they get a point. Write the stumpers on the board and, as a follow-up assignment, have them define the words and use each in a sentence.
5. **KEEP A JOURNAL.** The newspaper provokes thought and sometimes controversy. Students will benefit from keeping a journal of thoughts as they interact with the newspaper. They can write in the journal at the end of any newspaper lesson or as homework. The journal can be kept private or turned in for your review. The idea is to have students react in writing to what they read.

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6. **FRONT PAGES.** Students may want to collect front pages that they feel have historic value. Each month, as a class, choose one that they think is the most important. Create a chronological display, showing a recap of the biggest news stories month by month. At the end of the year, ask students whether they still feel that each selection is historic.
7. **KNOW, WANT TO KNOW, LEARNED.** When you can, begin a newspaper lesson about a specific story by asking students what they know about the subject of the selected news story. Then, ask what they want to know about that topic. Finally, after the lesson is complete, ask what they learned from reading the story. In this way, you can facilitate the students' ability to draw from their prior knowledge when approaching the reading material.
8. **CONTACT SPORTS.** Some reluctant students who are hesitant about using the newspaper may find the sports section very compelling. Try doing some language arts or math lessons using only the material in that section for a change. Math lessons are especially easy to create thanks to all of the sports statistics available. Once students are completely comfortable with newspaper use, you can expand and use the other sections more liberally. One of the best advantages to newspaper use is that there is something for everyone!
9. **Springboard.** The newspaper makes a great springboard for discussing sensitive subjects. You can utilize the advice column to objectively introduce topics such as drug and alcohol abuse. Students often find it easier to discuss something if the discussion is in the context of someone else's problem, not their own.
10. **NO STRINGS ATTACHED.** Whenever possible, allow students some time to read the newspaper for no other reason than pure enjoyment. No tests, no follow-up – just a no-strings-attached time to read and develop a lifelong reading habit.
11. **USE THE INDEX.** Students can benefit greatly from understanding how to use the index of the newspaper. Ask some quick questions like, "Where would I find out what's on NBC at 10 tonight?" or "What section has the stock market listings?" Once students grasp the concept of how using an index to find information saves time, they will be able to use any index they encounter in a reference book.
12. **THE NATURE OF NEWS.** A good way to enhance any newspaper lesson would be to discuss the nature of the news with students. On the board, write: "When dog bites person, that is not news, but when person bites dog, that is news." Ask students to respond and tell what they think the statement means and what news really is. Are there stories in your newspaper that students do not consider news? Why do they think those stories are included?
13. **GLUE IT.** If you are going to assign students to glue items from the newspaper, use glue sticks. White glue or paste can make bumps in the paper and get really messy with newsprint. Glue sticks are perfect for this activity.

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14. **CLEAN HANDS.** If the ink from the newspaper rubs off, it may help to keep a canister of pre-moistened towelettes in your classroom. Baby wipes are perfect for this purpose. Or, if wipes are not available, assign one student to get a small container of water and paper towels. Place the towels in the water and by the time the lesson is completed, the towels should have absorbed the water and be just damp enough for cleanup.
15. **MULTI-DIMENSIONAL LEARNING.** The learning attached to any of the newspaper activities is likely to be multi-dimensional. That is, students may find ideas in news articles that are thought-provoking even though those ideas may not be included in the specific lesson. For this reason, you may want to consider doing the same learning activity more than once with different issues of the newspaper.
16. **CLIPPING FILE.** As you use the newspaper, suggest to students that they keep a personal clipping file of interesting stories. Then, when they are stuck for something to write about, either in a journal or for a writing assignment, they can just check their file and choose an idea. This file also provides a great record of the news from that year.
17. **STORAGE.** A classroom set of newspapers will fit nicely into a paper grocery bag. Bags can be marked with the issue date and kept for use. After use, the bag makes the perfect container for recycling the newspaper. Check with a local recycling plant to arrange for regular pickup of the papers. Art teachers may also want the used newspapers for projects.
18. **SHORT ATTENTION SPANS.** Students with difficulty focusing, or those with short attention spans, can benefit from using only one section of the newspaper at a time. You may even want to limit their attention to just one page. For students who have difficulty physically managing the pages, staple the upper left corner of each section.
19. **NEWSPAPER DELIVERY.** If your school receives several sets of newspapers on the same day, assign a student or students to pick up the newspaper from the drop point and deliver them to the appropriate classrooms. Your local newspaper may be willing to donate a newspaper carrier bag to make this an easier job.
20. **SENSITIVE MATERIAL.** Students at all grade levels can handle a wide range of topics with great maturity and responsibility. They realize that the topics in the newspaper are real life and their presence in the newspaper is to inform or educate. However, you may encounter a topic that you do not feel comfortable discussing. Feel free to explain to your students that, although it may be in the newspaper, you are not comfortable with the subject and that selection is not part of the plan for the class today.

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21. **TIME ALLOTMENT.** Most of these activities are designed for a single 45-minute class period. However, the time needed will depend greatly on the newspaper you are using and the ability level of your students. When gauging time, try the activity yourself to see how difficult it is to do with your newspaper. That way you can allow more or less time as needed. It may save time in some cases to select news stories or articles to use ahead of time.
22. **MAP SKILLS.** It is fascinating to note the different maps found in the newspaper. You may want to assign a student to clip each different map and hang it on a bulletin board. This display provides some wonderful material for geography lessons. Be sure to include each map's legend.
23. **TALK ABOUT IT.** Encourage discussion among your students. Allow them opportunity to voice their opinions about the stories you are reading. If students react to something they have read, they can note their reactions in the margin of the newspaper. That way they can check their notes when they write about what they read or participate in follow-up assignments.
24. **NEWSPAPERS SHOULD GO HOME.** If possible, allow students to take the newspapers home and assign homework that involves discussing the material with parents. Even if no newspaper homework is assigned, it's a good idea to encourage students to share the newspapers with their families.
25. **FREEDOM OF CHOICE.** Students may be even more receptive to the assignments if you allow them to make some choices about which activities they complete. You may want to offer some opportunities for extra-credit work using the newspaper. It may help to give students a choice of two or three newspaper assignments, with the final choice being theirs.
26. **SMALL GROUP LEARNING.** Some activities may work best in small groups. Encourage students to work together for optimal results. This is a great way for students of different ability levels to use the same material and to help each other succeed. Newspaper content is often controversial and complex, lending itself beautifully to group discussion.
27. **READ MORE ABOUT IT.** Encourage students to do additional research in the library, in other sources, and even on the Internet. Caution them about the reliability of Internet sources. It may be best to compare those sources to the print material.
28. **READ ALOUD.** Read aloud to students. Children of any age can benefit from a good news article read aloud with emphasis. Share with your students what you find interesting. Chances are that if you find something fascinating, they will too. Encourage them to share with you what they like. Allow students to read aloud to the class when possible.

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29. **RANDOM GROUPING.** Here is a way to divide your students randomly into small, cooperative learning groups. Cut apart several comic strips until you have one panel for each student. Distribute the panels and allow students to get up and find the other people who have panels of the same strip. When they have found each other, they can read the panels and put them back in sequential order. Now they're ready for any small-group activity.
30. **WHO WROTE THIS?** Some of the articles in your newspaper may come from a wire service to which the newspaper subscribes. These services are identified under the byline. Staff reporters may write the other stories. Have students check the stories on the front page to find out whether they are written locally or by a wire service. Discuss the reason why some newspapers might use wire services to get news from around the world.
31. **FREEDOM OF THE PRESS.** The First Amendment guarantees freedom of the press, among other freedoms. Students will better understand the function and responsibility of the newspaper, and they will get more out of their newspaper use, if they understand this freedom. Can your students find a story in today's newspaper that they think would not have appeared without freedom of the press? What do they think that freedom means, and why is it valuable to all citizens?
32. **ABBREVIATIONS.** Much of the classified section is written in abbreviations. Before you conduct any lesson utilizing that section, it's important to review the abbreviations and discuss what they mean. It may help to have students write some of the classified ads out in words to demonstrate that they understand.
33. **ATTRACTIVE DISPLAY.** If you are displaying student work that includes clippings from the newspaper, keep some construction paper on hand. Notebook paper and newsprint do not look particularly exciting, but the work is worth displaying and the background of construction paper will help. Students of all ages enjoy having their work shown.
34. **FREQUENCY OF USE.** Like any good teaching resource, newspapers are flexible. Vary the days and ways in which you use it. Some weeks you may want to interact with newspapers daily, while other weeks may call for once- or twice-a-week use. Your use will also depend on whether you are teaching newspaper unit or whether the newspaper is simply a teaching tool.

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35. **SHARING.** It is best if each student has his/her own newspaper. If that is not possible, allow two students to share. More than two students per newspaper becomes unwieldy.
36. **LEARN EVERY DAY.** Perhaps you don't feel qualified to discuss every subject that might come up during newspaper use. Don't worry. Explain to students that part of learning is the understanding that there is always more to know. New knowledge is discovered daily.
37. **ACCEPT ALL OPINIONS.** Occasionally, in the course of classroom newspaper discussion, you or other students may disagree with what's being said. It's important to create a classroom atmosphere where all opinions are valid. Students should be encouraged to respect and, in fact, celebrate differences.
38. **THE FUNCTION OF NEWSPAPERS.** Thomas Jefferson said, "Were it left to me to decide whether we should have government without newspapers or newspapers without government, I should not hesitate for a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them." What do your students think he meant? Can they find examples in today's newspaper that support Jefferson's statement? What is the function of newspapers? Discuss with your class.

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