

## A FREE PRESS: RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

### LESSON PLAN

*Liberty Nation GenZ believes in educating young Americans about the U.S. and its Constitution. This middle school lesson plan can be used in the classroom or the home and can be adapted to a range of student abilities.*

#### Objectives

- Students will identify the rights of the press in the United States.
- Students will identify the responsibilities of the press in the United States.
- Students will discuss their experiences and views regarding the news media.
- Students will analyze news samples.

#### Materials:

HANDOUT: [“News Media and You” sheet](#)

VIDEO: [A Free Press: Rights and Responsibilities](#)

HANDOUT: [Free press comprehension sheet](#)

ARTICLE: [A Free Press for a Free People](#)

HANDOUT: [Free press discussion sheets](#)

[Headline cut-out sheet](#) OR a selection of real headlines written on paper strips OR blank strips of paper for students to write their own headlines.

#### Other:

- pens
- markers
- scissors
- computers with internet access (optional)
- newspapers (optional)
- a hat or other container

### Suggested Procedure:

1. Ask students if they ever watch the news and their general impressions of the news media today.
2. Introduction activity: Give students the [“News Media and You” handout](#). Allow them a few minutes to fill in the sheet individually, or they may discuss in small groups. Come back together as a class to compare answers and write them on the board.
3. Divide the board into two segments: One half is for media rights and the other half is for media responsibilities. Ask the students what they consider to be the rights and responsibilities of the news media in America today. Write their answers on the board in the relevant section. Allow for discussion or debate this may bring up. Ask students if the media has power and how this may affect society.
4. Display the video [A Free Press: Rights and Responsibilities](#).
5. Students complete the [comprehension sheet](#) based on the video. Check answers – is there any disagreement? If so, allow discussion.
6. Students read the article [A Free Press for a Free People](#) either as a group or individually.
7. Students complete the [discussion sheets](#) – this can be done individually or in small groups to facilitate debate.
8. Teacher has strips of paper, each with a news headline or a short media passage written on it (use provided made-up [headline cut-out sheet](#) or gather real ones). Alternatively, students could write a number of headlines each to put in the hat.

Students are called to the front individually to pick out a headline at random and read it to the class. Students vote on whether the headline does or does not live up to the responsibilities of the press discussed previously in the class. Students suggest changes to “correct” any unapproved headlines.

9. Have students choose a news story each – they can either find one online, or the teacher can bring newspapers into class as a source. Students read their selected article and then write a 250-300-word analysis of it, looking at features such as:
  - bias
  - persuasive language
  - accuracy & completeness
  - independence

Go through the instructions as a class, brainstorming key points to include in the analysis, with students taking notes. Further research may be needed – this can either be done in class if students have access to a computer or completed for homework.

### **Extension 1**

*Case Study:* Choose from the articles [The Spanish-American War and the Media's Instigation](#) or [Yellow Journalism: A Legacy of Sensationalism](#). Students write a summary of the chosen text and analyze how the media did or did not fulfill its rights and responsibilities in each instance.

### **Extension 2**

*Creative Writing:* Students make up a news story, or they can choose a real story that is of interest to them. They write two versions of an article covering the story: One objective news report and one that demonstrates biased reporting. Students could then present their news stories to the class, with classmates voting on which is genuine and which does not live up to journalistic standards. Alternatively, this could be completed in pairs, with one student writing and presenting each version.

### **Extension 3**

*Analysis:* Students find two news stories from different outlets on the same topic. They write an analysis comparing and contrasting how each outlet approaches the subject.

## The News Media and You

Answer the questions about your own experience with the news.

What news outlets can you name?

How can people consume media?

What do you consider a reputable source?

Where do your friends and family get news?

What do you consider a bad source of news?

# A Free Press: Rights and Responsibilities **Liberty Nation GenZ**

**Test Your Knowledge:** Answer the questions based on the video "A Free Press: Rights and Responsibilities."

1. Where is the right to a free press enshrined?

- a) First Amendment
- b) Second Amendment
- c) Fifth Amendment

2. Why did the Founders value a free press?

- a) It would keep the government accountable to the people.
- b) They could get the latest gossip about the royal family.
- c) They didn't care about a free press.

3. The United States is a \_\_\_\_\_.

- a) Republic
- b) Constitutional monarchy
- c) Dictatorship

4. When should a news outlet report false or misleading stories?

- a) When there is a national crisis.
- b) When the journalist believes strongly in a certain ideology or political idea.
- c) Never.

5. What should a news outlet do when it makes a mistake or prints wrong information?

- a) Ignore it and move on.
- b) Print a correction in an inconspicuous place.
- c) Openly admit the mistake and print a prominent correction.

6. Which of these pieces of information could be safely omitted from a news story?

- a) When, where, and how an event occurred.
- b) A crime victim's name.
- c) Key details of the story's context.

7. A news outlet telling half a story is acceptable, unlike making one up from thin air.

True / False

8. Under British rule, the colonies were allowed a free press.

True / False

9. Every nation that exists today has written freedom of the press into law.

True / False

10. Outside influences or special interests can affect the impartiality of a news outlet.

True / False



# A Free Press For a Free People

*Discussion:* Answer the questions based on the article "[A Free Press for a Free People](#)" and your own ideas. What is your opinion on the news media today?

1. Fill in the table with the key rights and responsibilities of the press.

| Rights of the Press | Responsibilities of the Press |
|---------------------|-------------------------------|
|                     |                               |

2. Were the Founders right to enshrine a free press into the Bill of Rights? Does America still need this right? Why or why not?

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3. How has modern society impacted the right to a free press?

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# A Free Press For a Free People

4. What is the key mission of the press?

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5. How do you see the U.S. media today? Is it living up to its responsibilities? Explain your answer.

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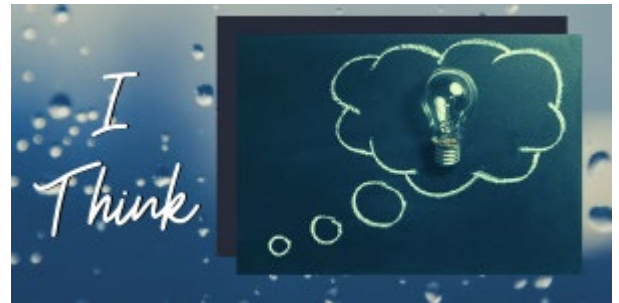
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6. Do you think unethical journalists could pose a danger to a free republic? Why or why not?

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7. What do you know about the rights of the press in other countries? How could media laws affect those societies?

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