

Truth, Trends, & Traffic

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Time Frame 90–110 Minutes

Essential Question(s)

- How is news represented online?
- How do news sites engage audiences?

Summary

In this activity, students will increase their media literacy skills through exploring student-created news websites and analyzing the differences between hard and soft news reporting. Additionally, students will learn how to identify clickbait-style headlines and demonstrate their understanding by recreating headlines in a clickbait-style.

Learning Goals

Materials

- Writing utensils
- Paper
- Student device with internet access
- Headphones (optional; one per student)

30 minutes

Engage

Teacher's Note: Amplify Classroom Activity Preparation

Before beginning the learning activity, go to the Amplify Classroom: Truth, Trends, and Traffic. Sign up to create an account or log in. Select the "Assign" dropdown button, and then select "Create single session code." Adjust the settings as desired, then select "Create Invite Code." Prepare this session invitation code for distribution to students during the learning experience.

Provide students with your session code. Then, have them go to student.amplify.com/join and enter the session code.

Teacher's Note: Sign-in Options

If students sign in with their Google or other account, then their progress is saved, and they can resume the activity or view their work later. If students continue without signing in, they can complete the activity, but they must do so in one sitting. It is strongly recommended that students sign in; otherwise, they risk losing their work.

Introduce the lesson using **screens 1–2**, which display the lesson's essential questions and learning objectives. Review each of these with students to the extent you feel necessary.

Group students into five groups or groups of 3–4, depending on your class size. Introduce the I Notice, I Wonder strategy, then guide students to **screen 3**. Have them take out a piece of paper and a writing utensil. Assign each group one website to explore. Let students know that these sites were created by students from other schools across the country.

As students investigate, encourage them to look beyond the suggestions from the screen (looking for sports news, advice columns, entertainment reviews, etc.) and to generate a list of as many things as they may notice about the content on the websites. Have students write their notices and wonders on their paper.

Direct students' attention to **screen 4** to record two of their notices and one wonder.

After the students have made their observations, have a volunteer from a group share one of their group's notices. Then ask the class if any other group noticed the same item on the website they investigated. Repeat this process until you feel content with the responses or as time allows.

As time allows, have volunteers share what they wondered and facilitate a brief discussion.

10 minutes

Explore

Teacher's Note: Guiding the Activity

During this activity, students are sorting cards into two categories: *Category 1* and *Category 2*. The cards contain hard news and soft news headlines, but students do not yet know that these are the two categories. Do not reveal this information during this activity, as this information will be revealed later.

Direct the students' attention to **screen 5** and introduce students to the Card Sort strategy. Here, groups are asked to sort cards containing headlines into two categories. Let students know that you are interested in how they think the cards could be related or grouped into categories, and that there are no wrong answers for this activity.

After approximately five minutes, ask for volunteers to describe their group's two categories and their reasoning for how they sorted their cards.

20 minutes

Explain

Direct students' attention to **screen 6**. Instruct them to use their headphones and watch the *Hard News vs. Soft News: News Types Explained* video or play the video for the class.

Embedded video
https://youtube.com/watch?v=-7lVkYt4jjw

After the video, give students a chance to ask any clarifying questions about hard news and soft news. This is the time to ensure that students understand the difference between the two.

Teacher's Note: Hard News vs. Soft News

Hard news stories are identifiable by the content. With a hard news story, the reporter is reporting on an event that is actively happening like a press conference or a natural disaster. These stories are universally newsworthy and have importance. They are meant to inform.

Soft news stories are dictated by the reporter or the news organization. Examples of these stories are profile pieces or society trends. These stories are less newsworthy and serve more to entertain the audience.

Both are important for connecting to an audience; both are considered to be credible news types, but their objective—whether to inform or entertain—is their clearest difference.

After watching the video, have students navigate to **screen 7**. Here, students are again asked to sort the same cards as before, but this time, they have been given the names of the two categories: *Hard News* and *Soft News*. Have students work in their same groups to complete this Card Sort activity.

When the students have completed the card sort activity, direct their attention to **screen 8**. Explain to the class that they are to now return to the website they investigated earlier to identify an example of a hard news story and an example of a soft news story. Instruct students to type the headlines of these stories into the textbox on their screen.

After five minutes, ask for volunteers to share an example and to explain why those stories meet the criteria for hard or soft news.

15 minutes

Extend

Ask the class what they know about *clickbait*. Where do they typically see clickbait headlines and titles? Facilitate a brief discussion about what students know, and make note of any misunderstandings to potentially address after the following video.

Direct students' attention to **screen 9**. Instruct them to use their headphones and watch the *What is Clickbait?* video or play the video for the class.

Embedded video

https://youtube.com/watch?v=rrpFObGbV9Y

After watching the video, give students time to ask questions. Address any misunderstandings, especially any you noticed in the earlier discussion that were not covered in the video.

Have students navigate to **screen 10** and get out a piece of paper. Direct students to select one of the headlines from the Card Sort activity conducted during the Explain phase and indicate their selection on the screen. Then on their paper, have students rewrite their selected headline as a clickbait-style headline.

15 minutes

Evaluate

Have students remain on screen 10 to use as a reference for the following activity.

Introduce the Commit and Toss strategy to the class. Direct students to crumple the paper with their headline and gently toss it across the room.

Have students pick up someone else's paper, read it, and try to match it to one of the original headlines. Guide students to use the list on screen 10 for reference.

Ask for a volunteer to share the clickbait headline they have and which original headline they think it matches. Then ask the class if anyone else thinks their headline matches the same original one. Give those students time to share the clickbait headlines and facilitate a brief discussion about multiple correct ways to write a clickbait headline. Repeat this until everyone has had a chance to share or until the class demonstrates their understanding of clickbait headlines.

Research Rationale

Research rationale for this resource is provided in the literature review, The Role of After-School Media Clubs in Closing Participation Gaps and Expanding Social Networks.

Resources

- Brimmer's Student News Site. (n.d.). https://bmgator.org
- Coppell Student Media. (n.d.). https://coppellstudentmedia.com/
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Card sort. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/147
- K20 Center. (n.d.). Commit and toss. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/119
- K20 Center. (n.d.). I notice, I wonder. Strategies. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/strategy/180
- K20 Center. (n.d.). *The role of after-school media clubs in closing participation gaps and expanding social networks*. Literature Review. https://learn.k20center.ou.edu/literature-review/4757
- K20 Center. (2025, July 30). *Hard news vs. soft news: News types explained* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-7lVkYt4jjw
- K20 Center. (2025, July 30). *What is clickbait—and how can students learn to recognize it?* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrpFObGbV9Y
- *National Scholastic Press Association*. (n.d.). *About NSPA*. https://studentpress.org/nspa/
- The Mirror. (n.d.). https://vnhsmirror.com
- U-High Midway. (n.d.). https://uhighmidway.com
- Your Source for CHS News. (n.d.). https://hilite.org