



Using the Newspaper in your Classroom

Learning from the real world has magnetic appeal for students. That's one reason why the newspaper is the perfect teaching tool. In addition, using a newspaper in the classroom improves student vocabulary skills, increases knowledge and encourages a positive attitude toward learning.

Teachers, get your questions answered! The following 26 tips will help you get the most out of your newspaper use and make it easy to regularly incorporate newspapers into your classroom.

How do I introduce my students to the newspaper?

1. Teach students important newspaper terms such as “headline,” “byline,” “masthead,” “column,” etc. Then, review the different sections of the newspaper and discuss the type of information that can be found in each one.
2. Allow students to explore the newspaper independently. Before each newspaper lesson, have students explore the newspaper individually for about 10 minutes. Then, spend a few minutes discussing the stories they chose to read. This is a great way to assess your students' interests.
3. Review certain abbreviations. If you plan on using the classified section of the newspaper, be sure to conduct a lesson about the numerous abbreviations and discuss what they all mean. Have students write out some of the classified ads in words to demonstrate they understand.

How do I get my students interested in the newspaper?

1. Conduct language arts or math lessons using only the material found in the sports section. Students who are hesitant about using the newspaper may find the sports section very compelling. Math lessons are especially easy to create using the sports statistics available. Once students are completely comfortable with the newspaper, you can use the other sections more liberally.
2. Allow students free time to read the newspaper. No tests, no follow-up — just a no-strings-attached time to enjoy and develop a lifelong reading habit.
3. Let students make some choices about which newspaper activities they complete. By doing so, they may be more receptive to certain assignments. You also may want to offer some opportunities for extra-credit work using the newspaper.
4. Use only one section of the paper at a time if some of your students have difficulty focusing. You may even want to limit their attention to just one page.

What are some newspaper activities I can incorporate into my everyday lessons and curriculum?

Language Arts/English:

1. Introduce students to new vocabulary words. Play a game called “Stump the Class.” Ask students to search for words in the newspaper that they do not know and they think no one in the class knows. If no one in the class knows the meaning, the student gets a point. Then, as a follow-up assignment, have students define the words and use each in a sentence.
2. Have students keep a journal as they interact with the newspaper. The newspaper provokes thought and sometimes controversy. Have students reflect in writing at the end of any newspaper lesson.
3. Teach students how to use the newspaper’s index. Ask questions like, “Where would I find letters to the editor?” Or, “What section has local movie listings?” Once students understand how using an index to find information saves time, they will be able to use any index they encounter in a reference book.
4. Have students do additional research on a specific article that appeals to them. Help them develop research skills by using different types of sources, such as the Internet or reference books in the library.

Current Events/Social Studies:

1. Have students collect front pages that they feel have historic value. Each month, have the class choose one they think is the most important. Then, create a chronological display, showing a recap of the biggest news month by month. At the end of the year, ask students whether they still feel each selection is historic.
2. Teach students about the First Amendment, which guarantees freedom of the press. By learning this, students will better understand the function and responsibility of the newspaper. Ask students to find a story in the newspaper that would not have appeared without freedom of the press. Then, as a class, discuss what students think that freedom means and why it is valuable to all citizens.
3. Explain to students the function of the newspaper. Write this quote from Thomas Jefferson on the board: “Were it left to me to decide whether we should have government without newspapers or newspapers without a government, I should not hesitate a moment to prefer the latter. But I should mean that every man should receive those papers and be capable of reading them.” Have your students find examples in the newspaper that support Jefferson’s statement.

Critical Thinking:

1. Discuss the nature of the news with students. On the board write, “Dog bites person.” Then, write, “Person bites dog.” Ask students to determine which statement is more newsworthy. Then, explain to students why “Dog bites person” is news, but “Person bites dog” is not. Finally, have them find examples in the newspaper that they don’t consider news. Ask them why they think those stories are included.

2. Have students keep a personal clippings file of interesting newspaper stories. For a writing assignment, have students check their files and reflect on topics they find interesting.
3. Allow students to take the newspaper 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 discuss topics that spark their interest at home.

Geography:

1. Use the maps found in the newspaper to develop a geography lesson. You may want to assign a student to clip each different map found in the newspaper and hang it on a bulletin board. Don't forget to include the map's legend.
2. Hang a large map of the United States in your classroom. Ask students to read through the newspaper and find news items or pictures about different states. Place the items they find about each state on your map. See how many states your students can find in two weeks.
3. Use the newspaper to teach vocabulary words related to geography, such as delta, monsoon, panhandle, harbor and terrain. Then, as a class, discuss how the words are used in each story.

Math:

1. Have students locate recipes in the newspaper. Recipes are helpful for practicing fractions. Ask students to double, halve and triple the recipe.
2. Use the entertainment or lifestyles section of the newspaper to teach a simple math lesson. Have students choose an activity in the paper that they would enjoy doing and a restaurant where they would want to eat. Then, have them determine the cost of their entertainment for one person, two people and their family.
3. Use the sports section to create math activities. Have students use the sports statistics available to form word problems. Then, let students try to solve each other's equations.

How should I handle sensitive topics that might appear in the newspaper?

1. Explain to students that part of learning is understanding that there is always more to know. New knowledge is discovered daily. If you don't feel qualified to discuss every subject that might come up during newspaper use, don't worry.
2. Use the advice column to objectively introduce topics such as drug and alcohol abuse. The newspaper makes a great springboard for discussing sensitive subjects. Students often find it easier to discuss something if the discussion is in the context of someone else's problem, not their own.
3. Realize that the topics in the newspaper are real life, and their presence in the newspaper is to inform or educate. Students at all grade levels can handle a wide range of topics with great maturity and responsibility.