Updated, July, 2016

How can we make sure that students are informed about what's going on around the world? That they are armed with the tools to be able to distinguish between opinion and fact; between evidence-based statements and empty rhetoric; between sensationalism and solid journalism? Just like most other things in life, the best way to do all that is through practice.

In honor of National News Engagement Day, here are 50 ideas to help teachers bring current events into the classroom, grouped below by category:

Reading and Writing
Speaking and Listening
Games and Quizzes
Photographs, Illustrations, Videos and Infographics
Design and Creativity
Making Connections
Building Skills

Some ideas work best as regular routines, others as one-shot activities. Many might be easier to use together with the new K-12 New York Times school...
subscription, but all of them could be implemented using the free links to Times articles on The Learning Network — or with any other trusted news source.

In our comments section, we hope you'll share how you teach current events.

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**Reading and Writing**

**1. Read the Paper and Find What Interests You:** If we could recommend just one thing teenagers should do with the news, it's this. Just read and discover what you care about. Every summer we try to promote this with our Summer Reading Contest, and we hope teachers are continuing this student-centered approach now that school has started.

You might invite your students to pick one article each week and write about why they chose it, perhaps using student winners from our summer contest as models. Our Reading Log (PDF) might also help.

Then, set aside time for students to share their picks with a partner, or even with a wider audience through social media.

**2. Share Your Opinion:** Each school day we publish a new Student Opinion question about an article in The Times. Students can participate in our moderated discussions online, or you can borrow from hundreds of published questions for class discussions or personal writing from 2016, 2015, 2014 and beyond.

**3. Read About News-Making Teenagers:** Every month we publish a collection of all the recent Times articles and multimedia that feature teenagers. Students can use this list to identify someone they admire, learn how other teenagers are taking action or make connections to issues in their own school and community.

**4. Find ‘News You Can Use’:** Use The Times, or any other news source, to find things like movie or video game reviews, recipes, sports scores, health
information, and how-to’s on subjects from social media to personal finance that can help improve your life.

5. **Ask and Answer Questions:** Each day we choose an important or interesting Times story and pose the basic news questions — Who, What, Where, When, Why and How — in our News Q’s feature. Students can first answer the “right there” questions that test reading comprehension, then move on to the deeper critical thinking questions, then write their own “News Q’s” about articles they select.

6. **Write an Editorial:** Have your students pick an issue that matters to them, whether climate change, gender roles or police brutality, and then write an evidence-based persuasive essay like the editorials The New York Times publishes every day. They can practice all year, but save their best work to submit in our Student Editorial Contest in February. Each year we select 10 winners along with dozens of runners-up and honorable mentions from nearly 5,000 student editorials.

7. **Compare News Sources:** Different papers, magazines and websites treat the news differently. You might have students compare lead stories or, via the Newseum’s daily gallery, front pages. Or, you might just pick one article about a divisive topic (politics, war, social issues) and see how different news sources have handled the subject.

8. **Be a Journalist Yourself:** Perhaps the most powerful way to engage with current events is to document them yourself, as a student journalist. Write articles or opinion pieces for your school or community paper about how a national or global issue is playing out in your community. Contribute comments online or letters to the editor reacting to news stories you’ve read. Use social media to document what you witness when news happens near you. Take video of local events and interview participants. Or, suggest ways that you and others your age can take action on an issue you care about. The National News Engagement Day Pinterest board has ideas like this and many more.
Speaking and Listening

9. Hold a Debate: Want your students to be able to develop arguments and support a point of view on current issues? We offer numerous resources to help, including: ideas for different classroom debate formats; ways to use The Times’ Room for Debate feature in the classroom; and a graphic organizer for gathering evidence on both sides of an argument (PDF).

10. Interview Fellow Students: Ask students to generate a question related to an issue they’re reading about, and then conduct a one-question interview (PDF) with their classmates. The room will be buzzing with students asking and answering questions. For more detailed instructions on this activity, consult our teacher instructions.

11. Brainstorm Solutions to the World’s Problems: Why not put students in the role of policymakers? They can look closely at an issue covered in The Times and brainstorm possible solutions together, using our Problem-Solution handout (PDF) to take notes. Then they can work together to draft a policy proposal, perhaps one that suggests a local solution to the problem, and present it to the class or to the school board or city council.

12. Create a News-Inspired Theatrical Performance: Whether a simple monologue or a full Reader’s Theater event, our series, Drama Strategies to Use With Any Day’s Times, can help you use simple theater exercises to spur discussion and thinking about current events.

13. Hold a Mock Campaign and Election: Looking to teach an upcoming election? Let students take the role of campaign strategists and candidates. Our Election Unit can be adapted for any election to get students researching candidates, studying issues, trying out campaign strategies and holding their own mock election. Or, choose another approach from our 10 ways to teach about Election Day or our list of resources for the 2016 presidential election.

14. Organize a Teach-In, Gallery Walk or Social Action on a
**Topic:** Our country and world face complex issues — war, drug abuse, climate change, poverty — to name a few. Students working in groups can follow a topic in The Times, and then organize a classroom or whole school “teach-in” to inform their peers about topics in the news and decide how to take action. Alternatively, they can create a classroom gallery of photographs, maps, infographics, articles, editorial cartoons, essays, videos and whatever else they can find to immerse others in the topic. Ask yourself and your classmates, what can people our age do to effect change around this issue?

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**Games and Quizzes**

**15. See How You Do Compared to Others on Our Weekly News Quiz:** Have students test how well they’ve been keeping up with the week’s news with our 10-question current events quiz. The answers provide an explanation along with links to relevant Times articles so students can learn more. Then, in December, students can take our annual year-end news quiz, like this one from 2015.

**16. Play Fantasy Geopolitics:** Have students draft teams of countries, similar to how they might draft players in a fantasy sports league, and then accumulate points based on how often those countries appear in The New York Times. Classrooms can track point scores and trade countries using the resources on the Fantasy Geopolitics site, a game created by Eric Nelson, a social studies teacher in Minnesota.

**17. Battle Others in Bingo:** Encourage students to get to know the newspaper — digital or print — by playing one of our many versions of bingo: Page One Bingo, Science, Health and Technology Bingo, World History Bingo or Geography Bingo (PDF).

**18. Do a Scavenger Hunt:** Send your students searching for answers to our New York Times Scavenger Hunt (PDF) as a way to become more familiar with how a newspaper covers the day’s news.
19. Mix and Match Headlines, Stories and Photos: Cut up articles, headlines and photos into three separate piles and mix them up, then challenge students in groups to see who can correctly match them in the shortest amount of time. When they’re done, they can fill out our related handout (PDF). Our teacher instructions provide more details.


Photographs, Illustrations, Videos and Infographics

21. Analyze Photographs to Build Visual Literacy Skills: On Mondays we ask students to look closely at an image using the three-question facilitation method created by our partners at Visual Thinking Strategies: What’s going on in this picture? What do you see that makes you say that? What more can you find? Students can participate in the activity by commenting in our weekly “What’s Going On In This Picture?” moderated conversation.

Alternatively, you might prefer to select your own news photos. Slideshows, such as the regular “Pictures of the Day” feature, are always a great place to find compelling images related to current events.

22. Interpret Editorial Cartoons and “Op-Art”: Patrick Chappatte publishes editorial cartoons on topics ranging from ISIS to the Ukraine. You can use the Visual Thinking Strategies facilitation method to ask open-ended questions, letting students make meaning out of the cartoons. Or, have students analyze some of the “Op-Art” on the Opinion pages of The Times. How do these images make an argument? Students can also try their hand at drawing their own editorial cartoons, and then enter them into our annual editorial cartoon contest.
23. Decipher an Infographic: Take an infographic or chart in The Times and have students explain what it shows using sentences. Our handout “A Graph Is Worth a Thousand Words, or At Least 50” (PDF) can serve as a guide.

24. Create an Infographic: Or, do the opposite, and have students take the data provided in a Times article to create their own graph or chart (PDF). The Reader Ideas “From Article to Infographic: Translating Information About ‘Sneakerheads’” and “Telling Stories With Data” suggest ways to approach this task.

25. Illustrate the News: Students can draw an illustration that captures some aspect of an article. Using our handout “The One-Pager” (PDF), students accompany their illustration with a quote from the article as well as a question for the journalist or someone mentioned in the article.

26. Write a Postcard: Or, maybe having students create a mock postcard to or from a subject in a Times article would work better for your class.

27. Say What’s Unsaid: Another option is assigning students to add speech and thought bubbles (PDF) to a Times photograph to communicate something they learned by reading an article.

28. Create Storyboards: Students can break a story into various scenes that they illustrate (PDF), like a storyboard, and then write a caption or choose a quote from the article that captures the essence of each frame. Our teacher instructions can help with this activity, as can a recent lesson plan on using storyboards to inspire close reading.

Creative Writing and Design

29. Write a Rap or Song: Each December, we ask students to compose a rap about important and memorable events from the past year. Get inspired by the winners from our 2015 contest, and start polishing your rhymes for this year.
30. **Make a Timeline:** Students can design their own timelines, using photographs, captions and selected quotes, to understand and keep track of complex current events topics. Times models can help since the paper regularly publishes timelines on all kinds of topics, whether Mariano Rivera’s career, the evolution of Facebook or the Ferguson protests.

31. **Create a Twitter Feed:** Or, students can create a fake Twitter feed documenting a news story, paying attention to time stamps and author tone, such as we suggested in this lesson about the 70th anniversary of Pearl Harbor.

32. **Explore a Particular Community:** Find reporting on a community of which you’re a member — whether an ethnic, religious, professional, school or artistic group, or any other — and analyze how it has been reported on. Then use these ideas for finding ways you can help express what, in your experience, makes this group unique. What do you think people need to know about this community and how can you communicate that?

33. **Write a Found Poem:** Every year we invite students to take any Times article or articles published since 1851 and mix and combine the words and phrases in them into a new piece. Take a look at the work of our winners for inspiration, but the exercise can be done with anything from a science essay to an obituary to an archival article reporting on a famous event from history.

34. **Make a News Broadcast:** Students can turn an article they read in The Times into an evening news broadcast, with an anchor, on-the-ground reporter and interview subjects.

35. **Create an Audio Podcast:** Listen to some Times models, then get students to create a podcast (PDF) of a news story instead.

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**Making Connections**

36. **Connect the Past to Today:** Help students tie what they’re studying in history class to what’s going on in the world today. We regularly do this in both our Text to Text feature as well as our social-studies-focused lesson plans.
You might also consider following @nytarchives on Twitter and our own “Throwback Thursday” posts to see echoes of the past in today’s headlines — or, visit Times Machine on your own to view by date or through search terms 129 years of Times journalism as it originally appeared.

37. **Pair the News With Literature and Poetry:** Encourage students to look for connections between literary themes and current events. Our Poetry Pairings and Text to Text lesson plans can provide inspiration, as can our Classic Literature posts.

38. **Think Like a Historian:** What events make the history books? How and from whose point of view are they told? Have students research a current events topic, and then write a paper arguing whether this topic will make “history” and how it will be remembered.

39. **Connect The Times to Your Own Life:** Have students make connections between the articles they read in The New York Times and their own life, other texts and the world around them using our Connecting The New York Times to Your World (PDF) handout.

40. **Consider Censorship Through Any Day’s Front Page:** What if we didn’t have freedom of the press? Ask students to take the front page of any New York Times and put an X over the stories that might be censored if our government controlled the press. You might use our Censoring the Press (PDF) handout to help.

41. **Take Informed Action:** When students become more informed about the world, they can get inspired to become civically active and engaged in their communities. Have students brainstorm issues that matter to them, either at the local, national or global level, and then design a plan of action for how they can begin to make the change they hope to see in the world.

**Building Skills**

42. **Determine Reliability of Sources:** How do we distinguish good
journalism from propaganda or just shoddy reporting? Students can use simple mnemonics, like those developed at the Center for News Literacy, to evaluate the reliability of an article and the sources it relies on. For example, apply the acronym “IMVAIN” (PDF) to an article to surface whether sources (and the information they provide) are Independent, Multiple, Verifiable, Authoritative, Informed and Named. This and many other strategies can be found in our lesson on “fake news vs. real news.

43. Distinguish Fact From Opinion: Even within The Times, students can get confused when navigating between news and opinion. What’s the difference? Use our Skills Practice lesson on distinguishing between the two to help students learn the basics, then go on to our lesson “News and ‘News Analysis’,” to help students learn how to navigate between news reporting and Opinion pieces within news outlets.

44. Start With What Students Already Know: Students are often aware of current events on their own, even before topics come up in school. When delving into a subject, start by asking students what they’ve heard or seen, and what questions they already have. Use our K/W/L Chart (PDF) or a concept map to chart what students say and think. And this post, about reading strategies for informational text, has much more.

45. Identify Cause and Effect: Much of journalism involves tracking the ripple effects of big news events or societal trends. Our handout (PDF) can help students get started, as can this Facing History “iceberg” strategy that helps learners think about what’s “under the surface.” Another resource? This Skills Practice lesson.

46. Compare and Contrast: Venn diagrams and T-charts (PDF) are often useful for comparing two topics or issues in the news, and our Text-to-Text handout can help students compare two or more texts, such as an article and a historical document.

47. Read Closely: By using a double-entry journal (PDF), students can
become better readers of informational text by noting comments, questions and observations alongside lines or details they select from a text.

48. **Support Opinions With Facts:** Whether students are writing their own persuasive arguments, or reading those written by other people, they need to understand how authors support opinions with facts. Students can practice by reading Times Opinion pieces and identifying how authors construct arguments using opinions supported by facts (PDF). Then they can develop their own evidence-based counterpoints.

49. **Summarize an Article:** Having students pull out the basic information of a news story — the five W’s and an H (PDF) can help them better understand a current events topic. Here is a lesson plan with a summary quiz and many ideas for practice.

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**And Finally...**

50. **Learn From Our Mistakes:** There are several places in the newspaper where you can see corrections and analysis of where The Times has made a misstep. For a weekly critique of grammar, usage and style in The Times, see the After Deadline series. For a list of each day’s corrections, go to the bottom of the Today’s Paper section and click “corrections.” And for a full discussion of issues readers and the public raise around Times coverage, visit the Public Editor column. What can you learn from the mistakes The Times makes, and from how they are addressed publicly?

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Let us know in the comment section below how you teach current events in your class, or which ideas from the above list inspired you.

Comments are no longer being accepted.
Inherent Bias: A Lesson to Improve Ethics and Fairness in Journalism

Objective:
Upon completing this three-phase ethics writing exercise, students will 1) have a better understanding of how personal bias influences the reporting process; 2) see the value that information from a variety of sources bring to news reporting; and 3) identify ways to prevent inherent bias from influencing original reporting routines.

Rationale:
Most current news practitioners would argue that truth and fairness—bound to them by ethical demands—are central to the daily workings of their vocation, but the reality is there are gaping holes in the academic record when it comes to scholarly examinations of the journalistic principles that guide individuals in the profession. This lesson comes at a time when, once more, journalism ethics are questioned by society at large, and distrust in the press abounds at all levels.

Inherent Bias. One continuing struggle for practicing journalists is recognizing and avoiding inherent bias with each story reported. This can be a challenge when reporters are constantly making subjective decisions from selecting which sources to interview and determining which quotes to use as well as which order of priority to place each comment in any given story.

Time & Resources Needed:
This activity requires external work and can either be completed as in-class or out-of-class assignments. While it can be completed over several days, we recommend several weeks to give students more time to reflect. For all three phases, the writing portion of the assignment is limited to one hour, plus 15 minutes for students to complete a self-evaluation survey on Qualtrics or a similar survey program. It should be noted that the second phase requires students to come to class having already conducted an original interview with an expert source.

Activity:
This activity works best in conjunction with a series of lectures, readings and discussions about ethical models followed by an application to journalistic activities.

Phase one: Students are instructed to write about a specific, controversial topic based only upon their existing knowledge. An example would be “clean public water.” No outside sources are used. After students complete the story, they are asked to reflect by ranking themselves on a 7-point Likert scale MES-R1 (Revision of the Multidimensional Ethics Scale, Hyman, 1996). Together it captures ethics (Hyman, 1996) and assists in reflection.

Phase two: Students are divided into different reporting groups (i.e., government, community groups, and consumers) and asked to gather information from one to three sources that represent a single side of the controversial issue. For example: Group A would interview sources from the Public Water Authority/government officials, Group B would interview sources with an advocacy group, and Group C would focus interviews on water consumers. Students complete their second story and reflect using the same MES-R1 scale.

Phase three: Students from each group gather as a whole and exchange their original interview notes that focused on one perspective/side of the controversial issue. Students discuss the various sides and their positions, clarifying any questions in the source notes. Then, each student writes up a third news story, this time incorporating source comments from all the available perspectives. Students complete their third story and reflect using the same MES-R1 scale.

Debrief:
Qualitative Self-Reflection. At the end of each exercise, students wrote a self-reflection essay on their actions and expanded on how they believe their actions changed in the light of new information. Additionally, they were given their survey data (MES-R1) back for 1-3 to see how their inherent bias and ethical stances changed over time. Additionally, it should be noted that modifications can be made at each phase to include qualitative reflections.

Appraisal:
After this first time using this exercise in class, students reported finding the assignments both challenging and enjoyable. One student explained how not using sources in the first phase of the exercise really prohibited his/her writing, “I can’t be sure that I’m being fair and balanced, or that I’m writing for the greater good, or if I’m breaking a promise to the reader (actually I can be sure on that one, I totally would have broken the promise of an accurate story) without even knowing for sure that what I wrote about was even completely true.” Other students found that it was nice to reflect on fairness in the media after the writing phases, “I did a pretty good job of not giving my personal opinion on the matter and I didn’t slant the article any which way so as to harm any of the parties involved.” Overall, students appeared to gain a greater appreciation for the value of multiple sources and the importance of using facts to describe a situation, rather than speculation. Ethical awareness was increased.

REFERENCES

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