

Integrated Media Literacy Project

Practicing Journalism (Intermediate Grades)

Project Description

In order to facilitate learning about journalism and reporting, students can use website/blog creator Weebly (<http://education.weebly.com>) to post research and assignments, embed videos, and practice journalistic techniques. Students can post videos from news sources on YouTube, and add their own information about topics as diverse as helmet safety or rainforest conservation. Through this, students develop familiarity and skill with web 2.0 tools, online research, copyright regulations and proper citation techniques.

Before the Project

- Research and Learning: Classes should review curricular information before starting the project, deciding if students will work as independent journalists or work as part of a news team. Teachers should also allow students enough time to collect preliminary information about their chosen news issue or topic, and be prepared to assist students in finding online information sources that would be relevant to their research area. Teachers and students should also consider whether they would like to write their article using formal reporting, in Opinion Editorial (Op Ed) format, or as a news magazine story-style of writing, among others. Students should be given examples of these different writing approaches, and should discuss the strengths and weaknesses of each approach.
- Technical and Media Setup:
 - Teachers should start by creating a Weebly account (and class logins for each student or team) before introducing the site to students. Weebly allows you to set up a class account and have students login at <http://students.weebly.com>; this enables easy access to websites for supervision, marking and review.
 - Teachers should also review Weebly's functions in advance, to become generally familiar with their capabilities and limitations. For example, using these accounts ensures security, but free student accounts limit users to 5 pages within their created websites.

First Online Session

- Teachers can start the session by asking students to engage in a WebQuest to determine what important journalistic practices and principles are important to follow in their work. Students can work independently, then share their results in a class discussion, creating a list that can be referenced in future sessions. Teachers may also choose to develop a Student Journalists Code of Ethics and Practices (or Code of Conduct) with the class, and could use the following sites for reference, among many others:
 - Journalism.org: <http://www.journalism.org/resources/principles>

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- Wikipedia.org: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Journalism_ethics_and_standards
- PBS: <http://www.pbs.org/idealab/2010/02/what-are-the-universal-principles-that-guide-journalism032.html> and <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/about-us/journalistic-guidelines/>
- At the completion of this discussion (and/or creation of a Student Journalists Code) teachers can continue their session by outlining their project parameters (e.g. providing background information to a topic, providing two or more opinions about the topic, publishing information about the providers of these opinions, etc.).
- Teachers can continue by demonstrating the features of Weebly to help students in their planning:
 - Together with teachers, students can sign in at <http://students.weebly.com> to begin creating their website. Ensure that students are provided with their designated username and password and remind them to store it in a place they won't forget.
 - Students can add components to the website through dragging and dropping the respective elements they want to include. They can rearrange the order or delete the element at any time.
 - Each student website is limited to 5 pages but students can add sub-pages by dragging each individual page bar a little to the right in the "Pages" tab.
 - Remind students the importance of having a visually appealing website and encourage them to consider their site's aesthetics after all information is entered.
- Work time: Allow for enough time for the students to polish their work and encourage them to peer-edit. One session will not be enough for the completion of a website.

Second Online Session

- Teachers should review their Student Journalists Code or school online responsibility practices before starting this session.
- Discuss the importance of responsible Internet use, and researching while citing references and respecting copyright regulations and laws.
 - Show students websites where copyright free images are readily available, such as Wikimedia Commons (http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Main_Page), Creative Commons (<http://search.creativecommons.org/>), Flickr (www.flickr.com) (Search through Creative Commons to ensure they are licensed under CC), Pics4Learning (www.pics4learning.com), Picdrome (<http://www.picdrome.com/>), and the Library of Congress (<http://www.loc.gov/index.html>)
 - Engage students in beginning to add references to their Weebly website. Images and information being used in the project should be referenced with their website addresses and titles.

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- Students should then log into Weebly with their assigned username and password. Teachers can use the rest of class to provide students with research and website development time. Several sessions (or the use of homework time) will likely be required for the completion of the website.

Third Online Session

- Students should log into Weebly and continue working on their websites.
- Internet research techniques can be elaborated on, such as how to effectively use Google (<http://mashable.com/2011/11/24/google-search-infographic/>)
- Students should be encouraged to ask: “Is the site I am looking at trustworthy?” (<http://acoachma.tripod.com/>)
- The students can take the information they learn from researching and practice putting it on their website in their own words. Proper citation techniques can also be demonstrated.
- The teacher can give questions that the students need to answer to help them find material, in our case (regarding rainforest conservation), questions like “Which organizations are involved in helping save rainforests?”, “Why is the rainforest useful?”, and “How can you help conservation efforts?” were very helpful.
- For follow up with the students, the teacher can put students into small groups for a group discussion on the following questions:
 - Do digital media and web tools make researching/remembering/presenting information easier or harder? How do you know if an information source is reliable or not? What steps can you take to ensure that the research acquired is real?
 - What do you like and dislike about research using the Internet? Why?
 - Did you consider copyright or providing references when you did research before this project? What about after? What steps will you take to make sure you do so next time?

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