Association for the Teaching of the Social Sciences

Teacher Support Materials

Booklet \*

'A' level

Who creates the News?

Written by Janis Griffiths

For the ATSS

ATSS Ltd.

PO Box 6079

Leicester LE2 4WB

www.atss.org.uk

**Note to Teachers**

This pack has been produced by Janis Griffiths. She is an examiner for GCSE Sociology

and an active member of the Executive of ATSS. She is Head of Sociology at Bryn Hafren Comprehensive School.

The ATSS is an organization designed to support the teaching of Social Sciences in schools

and colleges. Among its members are many serving teachers and lecturers in schools and

FE. If you would like further information then please contact the ATSS at ATSS Ltd. PO Box

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Visit the Website that is run by Tony Lawson at

www.atss.org.uk

Among the services, which the ATSS offers to teachers and lecturers, is the Annual

Conference that is held at a different venue each year. The journal, ***Social Science***

***Teacher*** offers a forum for academic articles and teaching ideas. In addition, there are a

variety of teaching resources and marketing materials to support the teaching of social sciences.

**This Booklet**

This booklet is designed to support teachers who are delivering courses on culture or media

for the OCR. It consists of notes and exercises for a teaching module designed to cover the main issues surrounding the topic of news and news values.

The emphasis is on active learning exercises so that development ideas and activities are

included in the materials.

If you feel that you would like to contribute work to this series, please contact the Resources

Editor c/o ATSS.

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**Introduction**

This booklet is based on teaching notes drawn from a variety of sources. It will focus on

summarising the debate surrounding the question of how the news is selected and created by newspapers.

The objectives of the teaching sessions described in this booklet are:

• To encourage students to view the debate as still being active and relevant

• To promote a critical awareness of the extent to which the news is a social and political

creation.

• To develop knowledge and understanding, interpretation and application, and evaluation

skills in context to student-centred learning.

Teachers may find that many Media Studies 'A' level texts are useful to support them in this

debate. Their use for sociology is limited by the Media Studies emphasis on the content of

and the creation of media texts. One of the best of the new Media Studies textbooks is:

Nicholas J and Price J (1998) ***Advanced Studies in Media*** Nelson

**Recommended texts and further research ideas include:**

Trowler P (1996) ***Sociology in Action: Investigating Mass Media*** Collins Educational

Bell A, Joyce M and Rivers D (1999) ***Advanced Level Media*** Hodder and Stoughton

Best S, Griffiths J and Hope T (2000) ***Active Sociology*** Longmans (Chapter 5)

Burton G (1999) ***Media and Popular Culture*** Hodder and Stoughton (Chapter 7)

Lawson T, Jones M and Moores R (2000) ***Advanced Sociology through Diagrams***

Oxford Revision Guides (page 52 and 53)

The Sociology Central Website run by Chris Livesey has a variety of notes and teaching

modules on this theme. You are advised to download to a disc for some of these files.

Look at Daniel Chandler's Website at Aberystwyth University for excellent notes.

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**Editorial Decision Making - Role Play**

Before this lesson, all students should have looked at a variety of newspapers and news programmes on TV. They should have listened to news bulletins on the radio.

**Roles:**

You are the editorial board of a newspaper or television company.

Overnight, the following events have occurred and stories have been sent to you.









**Activity:**







a minor member of the Royal Family has died in unusual circumstances

the government has decided to cut benefits to poor families

a foreign war has broken out and this could lead to serious political problems in

UK

there is a famine in Africa

there is a corruption scandal about to break involving a member of the cabinet

a sex scandal involving film stars and pop stars is developing

student grants and loans are to end

Which story will you feature as a headline? Choose the order of importance of

the other stories.

What factors did you consider to be most important in your decision making

process?

Did your political or social perspectives have an impact on your choice of story?

**Development**

Each person in the group should now take on a different role and comment on the content of the news bulletin or report. Here is a choice of roles; you may want to choose your own.

 the owner of the media corporation who needs to make money

 a Conservative politician

 a person surviving on benefit

 one of your parents

 a teacher

 a person with business interests in military hardware

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**Marxism and the Control of the News**

The media are assumed to have effects on audiences. The case is not proven in either

psychology or sociology. Marxist dominated thinking takes two particular lines of thought:

 ***brain-washing theory (control of ideology and values)***

This is related to early **Marxist** analyses of the media such as **Gramsci** (the bourgeois

hegemony) and **Althusser** (Ideological State Apparatus) and can sometimes be related to

the **Frankfurt School** of media analysis. It has also been taken up by feminists such as **Sue Sharpe**, ***Just Like a Girl***.

The media operate under certain social assumptions and do not challenge the values and norms of society. People who are exposed to the media become conformist because their

'world view' is not challenged. They may even be given some false assumptions. **Orwell** in

his essay ***Boys Comics*** made this point well before 1953.

This type of thinking has become part of **Lukes** analyses of power and you should look this

up in the texts. See **Haralambos and Holborn**, ***Sociology: Themes and Perspectives***

(1995: 502-3). The section does not refer to the media specifically, but you should be able

to see how it has influenced analyses of the media.

 ***cultural-drug theory***

This too, is related to Marxism. Marxism considered that the role of certain institutions in

society were to offer people a means out of their misery and to effectively stop them

thinking about more important issues, hence the famous quotation in **Marx and Engels,**

***Communist Manifesto*** which states that 'Religion is the opiate of the people'.

The idea was taken up, most notably by the novelist **Aldous Huxley** in ***Brave New World*** during the 1930s. In this story, the lower classes are actually drugged to keep them happy

and in their place. It has been developed further as cultural effects theory and is particularly

associated with the work of Jon Pilger, the journalist and Greg Philo of the Glasgow Media

Unit

It is believed by many that the media act as a cultural drug. People are harmlessly busy

worrying about what clothes the film stars wear and whether the Royal Family is in decline

to even notice major issues of politics and power which are being played out in government.

This argument is particularly pertinent to media which are deliberately pitched at the lower

classes and the less educated, such as TV game shows and the Tabloid press.

The argument is that people develop a fatalistic approach to life and do not attempt to

control events. Happiness lies in winning a lottery rather than overturning the root causes of misery and deprivation on our society.

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Pluralism and the Media Investigated

The pluralist argument is that the media reflects what the public requires. Although it may

be biased, it is reflecting and reinforcing commonly held attitudes and beliefs. (See Taylor

et. al. ***Sociology in Focus*** p 540)

You should investigate this tenet of political theory and hold your own view as to the extent

of the truth of it. Try the following exercises and ideas in your own time to develop your further knowledge.

 How much media output is devoted to the views and opinions of the various minority

groups within Britain? Select your own and then look through the listings and

magazines racks. Can you find any mention of your specialist area of interest?

 Collect data on who owns the media. This is an area that you should continue to

revisit and study further.

 If it is the readers who determine the character of the media, what can you learn about

the people who read, buy, listen to and watch the following media from their choice of

media?

The Sunday Sport

The Independent,

Classic FM

ITV game shows.

Soap Opera on television

 To what extent are new media forms accessible to ordinary people to put forward

alternative points of view?

 Within a media context and referring to media products; is 'popular' the same as

'good'?

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***What is the News?***

News productions are the result of:

 selection by editors who choose what to report

 interpretation by the audience who choose what to recall or find significant

News and the media are inextricably linked, one cannot exist without the other. News

becomes a form of social and cultural gossip whereby events are discussed

News is ideological in that some events in our society are so important, they deserve our

attention as a society. They are also ideological in the sense that they contain implicit

discussion of our cultural norms, mores and values

Cultural effects theorists such as the Glasgow Media Group , who draw on Marxist

analyses, argue that events are only considered important because they are presented to

audiences as important by the media! This might be worth considering in the light of the

emphasis placed on the coverage of celebrity events in many of the tabloid newspapers.

The media become 'gate-keepers' in the sense that they control access to information and

news events. (Rogers and Dearing)

***What factors create news?***

**News values**

News values are the decisions which editors use to choose the content of their

programmes/ newspapers. These will tend to vary according to media and market.

The importance of news values is that they show that a decision and selection process goes

into making the news. The news therefore cannot be neutral.

Lukes would see this as part of a 'news agenda' as some stories are included and others

rejected.

Rogers and Dearing however, suggest that the media do respond to public desire for certain

types of story which is basically a compromise view between Marxism and pluralism.

The Glasgow Media Group (neo-Marxist) suggest that the journalists will structure their questions to gain a response that will make a good story.

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Stuart Hall (neo-Marxist) says news values are part of the dominant ideology as they

formalise news events. This forms a considerable part of his analysis in ***Policing the Crisis***

Baudrillard (post modernist) suggests that the Gulf War was a media hyped event,

described in codes that were technological, xenophobic and Western ideological.

Eldridge suggests that issues of truth are always at the heart of media reporting and the

reporters take their lead as to what makes news important from other reporters and sources of information.

**Professional culture**

The Glasgow Media Group suggest that there is a professional culture among media

journalists and that they are socialised into certain views of events. The culture is primarily white, middle class, liberal (middle of the road) male, European.

The cultural messages of the media reflect the dominant culture (hegemony) of our society.

**Office routines**

Galtung and Ruge (1976) suggest that the routines of media organisations are constrained

by the bureaucracy of their institutions. Office culture is based on a 24 hour routine and news stories are only significant for that period in time.

Reporting tends to over-simplify events and contract them into bite-sized pieces rather them

allowing their full complexity to develop.

Few people really know and understand the backgrounds to many long running news

events.

**Personalisation**

Chibnall suggests that stories sell through personalisation. Stories are centred on

individuals rather than concepts or understandings.

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The implication of this is that news understandings tend to be small scale and personal so

that real events that cannot be personalised tend to be missing from newspapers.

**Economic Factors**

Tunstall and Palmer suggest that owners may intervene in news reporting and creation.

There is a history of such activity.

Certainly media moguls own vast empires of cross media ownership.

Advertising may influence the content of news programmes and of print news journals.

Companies may withdraw sponsorship of programmes.

News has become entertainment. Dramatic reconstructions are used and the search for

excitement and drama may outweigh significant political news. This is typical of the tabloids

which are in competition with TV news and the inevitable losers in the battle for topicality.

**Political Factors**

McQuail points out that Hitler and other ideologues have controlled news output for

ideological and propaganda reasons. This was very overt during WW2 when an actor would

replay Churchill's speeches for the wireless. You may enjoy research and analysing the propaganda of WW1 and WW2 for the ideological messages which are very overt.

Lull however points out that Chinese people reject the official news and resist propaganda.

Governments have deliberately orchestrated events to gain the desired effect. The news of

the death of George VI was held over to the wireless news broadcasts.

Keane suggests that Western governments can make themselves immune to criticism by

astute news management.

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***Media Control and Freedom***

***How representative is the British Media?***

The following opinions can be identified as either Marxist or Pluralist. Arrange them

according to the perspective which they seem to represent.

 Editors can choose what to put into the newspapers and they exercise this choice as

a matter of professionalism and judgement. They will select the news items that people want to buy and must respond to their market.

 Editors are highly paid employees of very powerful media moguls. How free is an

editor to annoy his owner? S/he is after all an employee on a very good salary. There

have been cases of media tycoons dictating the content of TV stations and

newspapers.

 Journalists are free to report what they like and many have been critical of

government. They must stay within the law but can draw attention to the worst excesses of the government. Corrupt politicians have been exposed.

 Journalists have more freedom in Britain than in totalitarian governments when they

frequently 'disappear'. However, very few have been openly critical of government

policy and those who have are often the subject of police attention (e.g. Duncan

Campbell)

 There are some legal limits on the press. These are in place to protect national

security or personal freedoms.

 Legal limits on the press have been used to cover up nuclear accidents and other

events which are probably in people's interests to know more about.. A number of

recent scandals illustrate the extent to which the press have been mislead or gagged.

 Politicians do not attempt to control the press. They merely exercise their rights to

work without undue interference from intrusive press activity.

 The media are constantly attacked by politicians claiming left wing or right wing bias.

A scandal in the early 19980s was the 'Spycatcher' case where the government tried

to stop the publication in Australia of a book about the British Secret Service. The

BBC and other papers were condemned by the government of the time for reporting

the progress of the case!

 Anyone can start a newspaper or publish a pamphlet.

 Only the really rich can afford to publish newspapers.

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***To what extent do television news programmes embody a middle***

***class ideology and value system?***

Suggest your general conclusion here:

Consider the argument taking into account the following issues:

1. The nature of ideology in news collection and interpretation

2. Marxism and analyses of the bourgeois hegemony

3. Pluralism and the role of the democratic argument

4. The work of the Glasgow Media Group and 'Bad News'

5. The content of the news programmes and the editorial priorities disclosed

6. The ownership and control of the news programmes

Any other issues which come to mind?

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Ideology and the News

Ideology refers to the ideas that people use to underpin their beliefs about the world. It will affect their habits, ideas, activities and behaviour and can be based on rational, religious or

political belief.

Most words that end in an -ism refer to an ideology. Write down as many -isms as you can think of.

Dominant Ideology refers to the beliefs which most of us hold at any time and which are

held or imposed by those in power. Suggest beliefs and ideas that are typical of dominant

ideology.

What is the dominant ideology of your school or college? Who sets the ideology?

In your view, which political party seems to represent the dominant ideology of our society? Think about how each party is seen by voters.

What ideologies about the world can be detected in news programmes such as News at Ten? Be subtle and clever here.

What ideologies can you detect in tabloid newspapers? What ideologies are typical of

broadsheets? How do they differ?

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**Moral Panics and Mugging**

Before this lesson, all students should have made some notes and read what they could on

Hall *et al.* (1979) ***Policing the Crisis*** in a variety of textbooks. Haralambos and Holborn

***Sociology Themes and Perspectives*** is particularly recommended.

Students will summarise their notes on Hall *et al*.

**Discussion points are:**

 Which perspective is Hall working in?

 How will that influence his work and his findings?

 What is a moral panic?

 What is mugging?

 Why did Hall *et al*. claim that mugging was not a new crime?

 What is the **inter-class truce** that Hall describes? Why had it failed?

 What was the position of the black working class in the early 1970s?

 How did newspapers treat the story of the 'new' crime of mugging? To what extent did

Hall feel they were guilty of creating the moral panic?

 Were the media responding to public interest or did they create the atmosphere of

racism and mistrust within which the police worked?

 Are there any aspects of the work with which you are uncomfortable?

 How has this work been treated by other writers in the sociological tradition?

 How significant and important is Hall's work to an understanding of the relationship

between the media and society?

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Resources Editor: Janis Griffiths

ATSS Ltd.

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