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# USING THE NEWSPAPER TO REINFORCE READING SKILLS

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For several reasons the daily newspaper can be a profitable addition to materials used in reading classes. In the first place, every secondary student should be able to find interesting, appropriate reading material in a newspaper because of the wide variety of topics in any paper. The newspaper may also be the most relevant of all reading materials since it may be the *only* printed matter in some homes. Furthermore, the use of the newspaper often provides a welcome "change of pace" from the workbooks and skill boosters typically used in reading classes and thus could be an effective means to motivate reading.

There are many valid ways of using the newspaper as reading material. Students might simply browse through the paper during free reading time. Some sources (Decker, 1972; *Innovate!*, 1973) provide specific teaching suggestions for developing units about parts of the newspaper. Newspaper articles may also be used to supplement study in such content areas as social studies and science. In addition to these possibilities, the newspaper may provide material for the reinforcement of reading skills in five broad areas: vocabulary, comprehension, critical reading/thinking, organizational skills, and writing skills.

It is the purpose of this article to present ideas on how to use the newspaper to reinforce reading skills. The following activities have been refined and adapted from their sources, and they all have been used successfully with average and below-average high school readers. They should also be appropriate for average and above-average middle school readers. Although this list of activities is not exhaustive, it does provide one way to bridge the gap between workbook pages and the "real world" of reading.

Before implementing these activities, teachers may wish to consider newspaper readability. Articles vary in difficulty according to type and source. For instance, Razik (1969) found that metropolitan papers are easier to read than

non-metropolitan papers. In both kinds of papers the easiest articles to read (at or below ninth-tenth grade level) are those concerning weather, tragedy, local news, and features. Using a readability formula devised for computers, Danielson and Bryan (1964) found a 6.7 mean reader level for all news stories. Wheat and others (1977) studied the readability of wire service and non-wire articles from metropolitan newspapers. The mean readability level for both kinds of articles was tenth grade, with non-wire articles nearly one reading level lower than wire service articles. Human interest features are easier to read than political news and editorials. Non-wire human interest articles measured as low as 7.0.

## Vocabulary

1. Find twenty abbreviations or acronyms from articles in the paper (for example, CIA, FHA, UAW, NATO). Find out from the dictionary what each set of initials stands for.
2. Make a list of words which seem to be associated with one particular subject in the newspaper. For example, list sports words, police words, political words, etc.
3. Find editorials or sports articles with descriptive words. Cut out the articles and circle all the descriptive words. Some examples are "fateful," "middle-aged," "plump," "buxom," "little," "white-haired," "happy."
4. From three or four articles, compile a list of action words or phrases (like "whipped," "punched," "stole first base").
5. From three or four articles, compile a list of words expressing feelings (like "shy," "bewildered," "frustration").
6. Make a crossword puzzle using terms from a newspaper article.
7. Collect ten figures of speech. These are the three main kinds of figures:
  - a. Simile, a comparison using the



words "like" or "as": "The Phillies look like cold leftovers."

- b. Metaphor, a comparison without "like" or "as": "The Cubs greedily consumed it all in a 9-2 feast."
  - c. Personification, making a non-human thing human: "The ball shrieked past the shortstop with a high wail."
8. Compile a list of words which have prefixes. Write each word, its meaning, and the sentence in which you found it.
  9. From three or four articles, find some unfamiliar words you can understand from context. List each word, the sentence in which it appeared, and your own definition of it.
  10. Divide a sheet of paper into two columns with the headings "said" and "did." Page through the paper and cut out any words that are synonyms (have similar meanings) for either of the two headings. Some examples are "snapped," "snorted," "mumbled," "chuckled," "pleaded," "stood," "sat." Paste the synonyms under the headings.

### Comprehension

1. Act as a copyreader and find at least ten errors of spelling, punctuation, or factual information.
  2. Find three short articles. Write a one-sentence summary of each.
  3. Write different headlines for seven articles. Make sure your headline tells something important about the article.
  4. For four articles, write out the answers to these questions: *Who* was involved? *What* happened? *Where* did it happen? *When* did it happen? *Why* did it happen? *How* was it caused?
  5. Summarize what five political cartoons are saying. Use one sentence for each cartoon.
  6. Turn to the business section of the newspaper. Make a chart in the following form for four articles;
7. Write an outline for one article.
  8. Go to the library and find more information on any topic you have been reading about. Use books, magazines, almanacs, etc. Present this information in the form of a short report.
  9. Cut out a review of a movie, play, or concert.
    - a. Write the name of the movie, play, or concert on the center of a piece of paper. Draw a line half way down the center of the page.
    - b. Write all the positive things said about the show on the right and all the negative things on the left.
    - c. Under this write whether you think the reviewer liked or disliked the show. What words in the review make you think so?
  10. Turn to the sports section and answer these questions:
    - a. Which article(s) could be understood by someone who doesn't know too much about sports?
    - b. Which article(s) could be read by a regular follower of a sport who wants all the details?
    - c. Which article(s) could be read to learn someone else's opinions about sports?
  11. Cut out a short news story.
    - a. Read the article and write a one-word title for it.
    - b. Write one sentence which summarizes the entire story.
    - c. List the specific details of the story that support your summary sentence. Do you think you included most of the important details? If not, look again.
  12. For five days, collect all the happy articles, or stories with happy endings, found in the first four pages of the newspaper. For each one, write a sentence telling what is happy about the story.

Company	Location	Product	How Product does/does not benefit country
Ford Motor Co.	Detroit, Mich.	Automobiles	Transportation is basic to our economy, but pollution ruins the environment and oil supplies are a problem.



### Critical Reading/Thinking

1. Choose a comic strip you like. Cut three or four examples of this comic from the newspaper. After reading all the comic strips, write a paragraph describing the personality traits of one of the main characters (for example, Charlie Brown or Snoopy in "Peanuts").
2. Choose an editorial. Which readers might be angered by this editorial? Why? Which readers might agree with this editorial? Why?
3. Draw a cartoon for an article. See the editorial page of the newspaper for an example.
4. Predict the outcome of three events you have read about.
5. Choose an article from the editorial page. Underline ten statements in the article and tell whether each is a fact or an opinion.
6. Cut out one article from the front page and one from the editorial page that are on the same topic. (Often the editorial will be printed several days after the news story.) Underline the key facts and details in each.
  - a. Which key facts and details are the same? Which are different?
  - b. What is the difference between the front page and the editorial page?
7. Select a letter to the editor. Then write a one-sentence response to all of those questions which apply to your letter:
  - a. What is the topic of the letter?
  - b. What does the writer want done?
  - c. Does the writer have any personal reasons for this request?
  - d. How will this idea benefit the writer?
  - e. Will this idea benefit others? Hurt others?
  - f. Is this a fair, reasonable request, or a narrow, personal request?
8. Find an article that makes you laugh or smile. Ask a friend to read the article. Compare your reactions:
  - a. Did you react in the same way to the article? If not, why not?
  - b. Do you believe that the writer's purpose was to amuse the reader?

If not, what was his/her purpose?

9. From newspapers in the library, find articles on the same baseball game. For instance, look at a Chicago paper and a New York paper of the same date for a Chicago Cubs-New York Mets game. What differences do you see in the two articles?
10. In the most recent *World Almanac* find the list of large-city newspapers. Write and mail a letter to the editor of one newspaper, asking for a complimentary copy of the paper for a certain date. When it comes, write one page comparing the content and appearance of its front page with the front page of your local daily paper for the same date. (This has been an especially successful activity. Most editors have been willing to provide complimentary copies of their papers.)

### Organizational Skills

1. Find and clip two items for each of the following categories: general news, personal opinion, sports, business, comics, arts, classified ads, weather.
2. On one sheet of paper put the title "Local News," on a second sheet "National News," and on a third sheet "International News." Paste all the articles from the front page of the paper on one of these sheets.
3. For one week keep a scrapbook of articles that would be of interest to a particular group, such as farmers, doctors, teachers, automobile dealers, labor leaders, students, etc.
4. Turn to the sports section. List all the sports covered and tell whether each is an individual sport or a team sport.
5. Turn to the "Help Wanted" section. Clip ten ads for jobs which require experience. Clip ten ads for jobs which appear to be part-time or temporary positions.
6. Organize any fifty items from a newspaper into a scrapbook. "Items" could be different kinds of articles, headlines, want-ads, cartoons, graphs, tables, games, photos, etc. After collecting the items, organize them into groups and label them to form "chapters" according



to the kinds of items included. (Teacher guidance with this aspect of the project should be determined by the sophistication of the students' organizational skills. Some students might need partial or complete organizational schemes, while others may be able to organize their scrapbooks independently.)

### Writing Skills

1. Write one classified advertisement for each of the following: Lost and Found, Help Wanted, Apartments for Rent, Houses for Sale, and Automobiles for Sale.
2. Pretend you are a reporter, and write an interview with one person you have read about or with one person you actually interview.
3. Write a short story based on a news item.
4. Choose two "Help Wanted" ads from the Classified Advertisement section of the newspaper. Write a letter to each employer, telling him/her why you want the job. (Don't mail these letters.)
5. Find an article about a person you admire. Write this person a letter, explaining why you admire him/her, and include the article. You can probably find addresses in the library from *Current Biography*, *Who's Who in the U.S.*, or the most recent *World Almanac*. If you actually mail your letter, you might get an interesting answer.
6. Write a letter to the editor about any subject that concerns you.

7. Find three articles about the same subject. Write a well-organized paragraph which summarizes the important ideas of all three articles.

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