

PUBLISHING SENSITIVE IMAGES

Description

Students will look at the photo printed by the New York Post of a man who had been pushed in front of an oncoming subway and discuss whether a newspaper should print such pictures. Then, students will examine editorials and blogs about the same situation.

Objectives

- Students will consider the ethical ramifications of publishing photos of tragic moments.
- Students will understand key times when ethically questionable photos were published.

Common Core State Standards

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.5

Analyze in detail how an author's ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or larger portions of a text (e.g., a section or chapter).

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.6

Determine an author's point of view or purpose in a text and analyze how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose.

CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RI.9-10.8

Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning.

Length

45 minutes

Resources

[Class set: Rubric – publishing photos](#)

[Link: NY Post cover on December 4, 2012](#)

[Link: Should NY Post have published photo of a man about to die?](#)

[Link: The NY Post defends its indefensible photo](#)

[Link: Outrage over NY Times front page photo](#)

Class sets of articles/blogs/editorials about the controversial photo published in the New York Post of the man who was pushed in front of an oncoming subway

Note: This lesson covers sensitive topics (death and impending death), and we suggest having a good sense of your classroom personalities before proceeding.

NPR has a great resource on this called, [“Documenting Tragedy: The Ethics of Photojournalism.”](#) Their usage policy for K-12 educators is: “K-12 teachers may make up to 30 copies of transcripts of NPR content for one-time classroom use. NPR’s copyright notice must be legible.” According to their policy, K-12 teachers may NOT use audio without appealing for prior consent.

Lesson step-by-step

1. Building background – 15 minutes

Have students work with a partner or small group to answer the following question: Is it appropriate for a newspaper to publish a picture of a person who is about to die?

a. Once students have spent time discussing that question, put a copy of the original picture up on a screen for students to see (I would try to show the original picture WITHOUT the original New York Post headline/front page art—you can use the link provided to create a screenshot without the headline). Ask them to discuss again. What about this picture? Should this specific picture be published?

b. Again, once they have discussed and shared out their perspective, show them a picture of the photo exactly as it appeared on the front page of the Post, with the giant headline “Doomed” and everything. How does the design and the headline treatment change or strengthen your opinion of this photo’s appropriateness?

2. Discussion – 25 minutes

Pass out any of the linked articles that discuss the appropriateness of printing this picture. Give students time to read, then ask students to discuss some questions in small groups. (Based on the specific article you use, you can adjust or change these questions).

a. What is the author’s perspective of the printing of this picture? What evidence does the author provide to back up that opinion?

b. What specific arguments does the author make that you think are effective? Are there any specific arguments the author makes that you think are not effective?

c. Overall, is this article effective in convincing you of the author’s opinion? Why or why not?

3. Homework/Assessment – 5 minutes

Students should find an example of an ethically questionable photo that a newspaper published. They should print off a copy of the photo and write a paragraph that summarizes who published it, why it was ethically questionable, and the student's opinion of whether or not the photo should be published.

Differentiation

For a group of students who are strong readers, you can give them a pair of articles (instead of a single article) and they can discuss/answer the questions by comparing the arguments that each author uses.

For students who struggle academically, teachers can give them examples and/or web addresses that point students to specific controversial photos and explanations (such as [this article at the NY Times Lens Blog](#)).