

Example 3 In the news room of ISPY World

This work is described in more detail in a paper 'Bringing Newspaper Reports into the Classroom: Citizenship and Science Education' published in the School Science Review.

The example outlines a lesson devised by Mary Kelly while she was a PGCE student at the Graduate School of Education, Queen's University Belfast and on school placement at The Integrated College, Dungannon. Mary is now teaching in St Brigid's High School, Armagh and we acknowledge, with appreciation, her permission to include her ideas and the script of her play, in this CDROM

This lesson is designed for a Key Stage 3 group (thirteen-year-olds) who were studying 'energy'. It was presented toward the end of the topic, after they had considered 'renewable energy sources', including 'wind power'.

Anticipated Learning Gains

The intention of the session was that the children should come to understand that newspapers are an important source of science-related information. However, there are certain characteristics of newspaper reporting of science which should be borne in mind by readers. Additionally, and also relevant to citizenship education, they should be aware that socio-scientific issues are often complex and different people may have different viewpoints and these may lead to conflicting calls for action.

The first aim is important. Much newspaper reporting is thoughtfully researched and written and young people should be alerted to this as one source of lifelong learning in science. However, the second aim is also important. There are certain characteristics of newspaper reporting about which young people should be aware. For example, journalists write within constraints (of time, space and, sometimes, expertise); they write for an audience; they write to an agenda. Together, these influence the presentation of scientific and socio-scientific issues in the press. Of these ideas, Mary considered the first, that is that journalists write within certain constraints, to be accessible to her thirteen-year-old pupils.

Introduction

Review what pupils have learned about renewable energy. Then read with the pupils a newspaper article, such as "Wind Power raises a Gale of Protest" taken from the Daily Telegraph CD-ROM 'News in Action 3'. In whole class discussion, the various viewpoints are explored.

Development

Activity 1

In small group discussion, the pupils consider the following, newspaper-related questions:

Why do you think this article was included in the newspaper?

Why does it make a good story?

Who was involved in getting the article into the newspaper?

Pupils then discuss as a whole class their answers to these questions. The end point of this activity is a list of key people (editor, journalist, scientist and local residents) who have contributed to the news story.

Activity 2

Next the script for a short play (see pages 4/5) is distributed.

This features Bob, Sarah, Jenny, Joe and Mabel. The text, however, gives no clue to the part which each of the characters plays in the news story.

The children take part in the drama,

After this, they are invited to identify the editor, journalist etc., justifying their decision. They discuss the role of the editor, the reporter, the scientist and the readers. Finally, they consider how constraints of time could influence what is written.

Through this activity, it is hoped that the pupils will develop their appreciation that newspapers can be valuable sources of science information. In addition they will begin to understand, in a very rudimentary way, how newspaper articles are written. In particular, they should recognise that the time available for journalists to write their stories may be short and that not all have a background in science.

Activity 3

Focus again on the article from the newspaper and consider the position and viewpoints of those who might have contributed to it and those who might read it.

The story is 'news worthy' because of the human-interest element and particularly because of the controversy involved. The pupils consider the arguments for and against, in this example, wind farms and how a case could be presented for each

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viewpoint. They discuss the complexity of the issues involved and how decisions are based on many considerations, of which science is but one.

Extension

Activity 4

An extension activity may be given as a homework assignment or as the theme of the next lesson. The pupils themselves are now cast in the role of news reporters pursuing an energy- or environment-related story.

ISPY WORLD

Welcome to the news room of ISPY World. **You** are now a journalist who needs a story. You have a choice of assignments – but you **must** make the deadline – Tuesday 27 April.

Choose ONE of the following assignments:

The science section of ISPY World needs a 200-word article on solar energy. Make it snappy but inform the reader.

Imagine you have just interviewed a scientist and she has explained to you how coal is formed and why it is considered a 'non-renewable energy source'. Write a 300-word feature article for ISPY World. Remember your story needs to be interesting to catch the attention of your readers!

Write a drama script for a short interview between a journalist from ISPY World and **EITHER** a resident who is annoyed by a wind farm nearby **OR** the manager of the wind farm. When writing, consider carefully how he / she might feel.

You are a journalist for ISPY TV. Write a short news bulletin about the activities of a local environmental group. Tell your readers what they do or what they have done. Record your bulletin on videotape. Remember your story needs to be interesting and entertaining.

When Mary taught this lesson, she set the 'extension' as homework. The pupils left the class talking excitedly about the possibilities. While most prepared short written articles, a number were inspired to attempt more adventurous activities including a recorded 'interview with a scientist' and a short video of an 'outside broadcast' from 'our reporter on the spot'.

In the news room of ISPY World...

Bob: I know a good story when I see one. And this is a good story Jenny. It's got everything - drama, intrigue, human interest - the public will be lining up to buy it!

Jenny: But Bob, I'm not sure, I mean I don't know much about this topic - I'm no expert!

Bob: Look Jen - find someone who does know. Use your contacts. That's what I pay you for!

Jenny: Okay, okay.... But I'm going to need more time - another day. I want to make sure my facts are right. It will take time.

Bob: Time! Time! It's a newspaper I'm running here not a health farm. You've got to 10 pm tonight. A deadline is a deadline!

Jenny leaves the office muttering under her breath..

Jenny: He's never happy [looks at watch] - 5 hours! I'd better get my skates on. I'll have to speak to an expert to make sure I've got my facts straight. Great, that will probably take 3 hours. They never want to give me a straight answer. It's always a case of could be, might be, should be.

[grabs her coat and bag and hurries out of the news room]

At a laboratory across town-----

Jenny: I need to speak to someone who knows something about renewable energy.

Sara: I might be able to help. I've been working on renewable energy for about ten years.

Jenny: Great! Well, can you tell me if this is correct? [Holds out a piece of paper covered in numbers]

Sara: [reads information] Well, it could be true.

Jenny: What do you mean, could be?

Sara: It depends on how this research was carried out. I mean how many readings were taken? Did they have a control? Have the results been reproduced?

Jenny: [getting really annoyed] How am I supposed to know? I've just got this information [points to paper].

Sara: I'd really like to help you but I'd need more information. If I had a little time....

Jenny: Time! That's the one thing I don't have.

Sara: Okay, let's sit down and I will see what I can do.

Next morning at a breakfast table in the suburbs...

Mabel: You know Joe, it's amazing what you learn from the papers. I mean did you know this [points to the newspaper] or that! Well, I never!

Joe: I know, I know woman, sure didn't I hear the news on the radio this morning. It's incredible what those scientist can do!

Mabel: [reads a very worrying story] Oh dear! Oh deary, deary me!

Joe: What's the matter now?

Mabel: Oh deary, deary, deary me!

Joe: Now Mabel, you should know better than to believe everything you read in the papers!

Script written by Mary Kelly, St Brigid's High School, Armagh