AUTHORIZED COURSE OF INSTRUCTION FOR THE

QUINMESTER PROGRAM

DADE COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Language Arts: SHAPING OPINIONS 5113.64
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Language Arts

Written by Charles F. Houghton
for the
DIVISION OF INSTRUCTION
Dade County Public Schools
Miami, Florida
1971
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Course Title: SHAPING OPINIONS

Course Descriptions: A journalism writing course exploring serious techniques used in effective articles that mold opinion. Responsibility, good taste, the problem of censorship, crusading, and propaganda techniques will be studied. Extensive reading of editorials and columns and practice in writing is included. This course is essential for those interested in newspaper staff and is recommended for students interested in politics and law.

I. PERFORMANCE OBJECTIVES

A. The student will explore the concept of a free press and the threat of censorship.

E. The student will investigate the legal and social responsibility of the press.

C. The student will classify types of editorials according to function.

D. The student will analyze the structure of the various types of editorials.

E. The student will identify the emotional and illogical appeals used in propaganda.

F. The student will distinguish between constructive and destructive criticism.

G. The student will evaluate the quality of editorial writing.

H. The student will discern promising editorial topics.

I. The student will write editorials of every type.

(This course is designed sequentially to give students a background in editorial writing prior to the actual writing of editorials. An alternate teaching strategy might be employed by having students write editorials continually. Many learning activities and classroom discussions could then grow out of student work. If this is the desired plan, teachers should refer to Objective "I" and start with that first.)
II. COURSE CONTENT

Until recently, freedom of speech and freedom of the press in high school went as far as the first controversy. Irresponsible articles of student opinion would alarm those ultimately responsible for what was published in a school paper: the principal and the teacher. Administrative definitions of what could and could not be published were established amidst student cries of censorship, resulting in one side having to suppress free thought and the other feeling suppressed.

This problem of suppression was resolved recently with new court rulings regarding student rights and freedoms. Students are now given a say-so in all areas affecting them, not only in dress and discipline but also in choosing our country's leaders through the new 18-year-old vote.

This new freedom underlines the importance of a new responsibility, not just for teachers and principals, but for students as well. Responsibility is the keynote in expressing opinions and molding opinions. The prospective editorial writer will be impressed with this responsibility as he progresses through this quinmester course in preparation for work on the staff of the school newspaper.

Starting with the basic techniques of editorial writing, the student will then learn the various devices used in influencing and persuading others - through appeals to the emotions in propaganda and appeals to the mind in logic. These devices have been employed very effectively by contemporary newspaper editorialists, and students will study these journalists to guide them in their development as responsible writers.

Writing effectively and persuasively is not the end goal of this course. To avoid censorship, student opinion must be tempered with the sobering realization of the rights of others. The rights of others are still protected in our society, and students will learn of their liability with exposure to laws regarding plagiarism, libel, copyrights, obscenity, and standards of good taste.

What is hoped for in this course is the grooming of adult writers who express themselves not only freely, but wisely, fully aware of the impact of the printed word.
III. TEACHING STRATEGIES

A. The student will explore the concept of a free press and the threat of censorship.

1. Read the first amendment of the Constitution to the class regarding freedom of the press. With Chapter 1 in Journalism as a reference, have students consider the following questions for discussion: Why is this freedom included under the Bill of Rights? How has "freedom of the press" developed from the colonial period to now? Is it better to have, as Thomas Jefferson noted, "newspapers without government" or "government without newspapers?"

2. Invite a speaker from the American Civil Liberties Union to help define freedom of the press. Have students ask questions in regard to freedom of student press.

3. From the bibliography of articles listed in the back, have students read about freedom of the press and report to the class major ideas brought up.

4. Several magazine articles have dealt with Agnew's criticism of a free press that has gotten "out of control." After reading several of these articles, students should discuss the validity of the Vice President's comments.

5. Secure copies of various local, underground free press newspapers. Ask students to comment on the value of completely uncensored writing.

6. With various issues of different school papers and local metropolitan newspapers at hand, have students point out differences between the two media. What forces regulate each? Which enjoys more freedom and why?

7. Explore the government-controlled Pravda and Granma (Havana's official newspaper). Have students identify where news and editorials are biased, giving a false picture of the way things are. What evidence of censorship and regulation can they detect?

8. With underground newspapers and government papers as references, have students discuss what disadvantages there are in each.
9. Have students discuss where censorship is justifiable or even necessary, as in cases involving national security during wartime, "classified" information, etc.

10. Present a hypothetical situation in which an editorial has been censored at your school. Have students write another editorial opposing the censorship, explaining why this was "unjust." Then have them write an editorial defending the censorship.

B. The student will investigate the legal and social responsibility of the press.

1. Have students view the film "Mightier Than The Sword" and then discuss the newspaper's role as "watchdog," crusader against society's wrongs. Review the definition of libel and have students discuss the precedent of Alexander Hamilton's defense: "Truth is the only defense in libel." Which should have highest priority: truth or a man's reputation?

2. Invite a lawyer (preferably one specializing in libel cases) to help define what constitutes libel. Have students ask questions regarding student press and the rights of minors to a reputation.

3. In Law of Libel and Slander (or some other text or periodical dealing with libel), have students read cases of libel, copyright, plagiarism, etc., and discuss why the judge in each case ruled for the defendant or against him.

4. Invite the school principal to talk to the class about censorship, good taste, and responsibility. Stress the responsibility chain of command of student to teacher to principal to superintendent to school board.

5. Have students read the journalism creed in Experiences in Journalism or Journalism. Have them consider the wisdom and advisability of each aspect of this ethical code. Which goals are too idealistic? Which guidelines are easiest to abide by?

6. Have students keep a notebook of editorials with elements of libel, questionable taste, or unfair balance. Have them present their examples for class discussion.
7. After viewing the feature-length movie "Citizen Kane," have students consider the following questions: In what ways did Kane abuse the privilege of free press? What curbs or controls would have eliminated this threat to American society? What parallels can be drawn to an overinfluential head of a student press?

8. Have students read "The Coming Age of News Monopoly" and consider the dangers of a news monopoly. In what ways can the school paper be viewed as a monopoly? What responsibilities are to be realized in cases of monopoly?

9. Have students discuss the advisability of writing editorials dealing with any of the following topics: a) teacher dismissal, b) list of expulsions and suspensions and reasons for them, c) vandalism details, d) performance of teachers in class, e) actual votes in student elections, f) detailed quotes from student council meetings, g) detailed accounting of student club funds, h) critical review of team's performance at football games, i) teacher's age, political preference.

C. The student will classify types of editorials according to function.

1. Have students read about the various types of editorials in Journalism and Scholastic Journalism and discuss the differences between and characteristics of each type.

2. Using local newspapers and magazines, have students cut out examples of the various types of editorials and explain why each editorial illustrates a particular type.

3. Have students show examples of two editorials, one criticizing and another commending the same event. Have them evaluate which editorial treated the subject better.

4. Have students bring in an example of an editorial and the news story that inspired that editorial. Then have students explain how the editorial interpreted the news.

5. Give students a hypothetical story involving a complex curriculum innovation. Have them write an interpretive editorial, showing how this innovation will affect students.
6. Have students compare interpretive editorials in newspapers with those in magazines. Which does a better job? How much time is needed in reflection to write a good interpretive editorial?

7. Using Mad magazine as a reference, have students discuss parody and satire in class. How is humor used in the magazine to comment on news?

8. Have students bring in an editorial that criticizes and rewrite it as a parody or satire to entertain.

9. Have students keep a notebook of a series of editorials from several copies of one paper dealing with the same topic. In their analysis of this crusade, have students think about the following questions: Why was it necessary to write more than one editorial? Which type of editorial was most effective?

10. Have students compile a notebook of different editorial columnists, noting their style and usual choice of topic. In what ways could these columns be considered editorials? How are they different from editorials?

11. Have students write an editorial column, fashioned after one of these columnists.

12. Have students write a personal anecdote, with its accompanying lesson or "moral," into an editorial column.

D. The student will analyze the structure of the various types of editorials.

1. Have students read how an editorial is structured in Experiences in Journalism, Journalism, and Scholastic Journalism. What rules should be followed in writing editorials? Why is it advisable to "preach" or "talk down" to your reader?

2. Have students view the film "From Sentences to Paragraphs," which illustrates the explaining paragraph, and then discuss how the ideas brought forth in this film can be applied to the writing of editorials.
3. Some students will have difficulty in different writing areas. Once these problem areas are identified, have students work on individual SRA units in contemporary composition (#1-12). Particularly noteworthy are units dealing with Diction and the Informative Paper (see Bibliography).

4. Lecture students on the basic 5-paragraph essay with its controlling purpose. From a list of general topics or statements, have students write down three examples that substantiate or illustrate each statement.

5. Have students bring in editorials which contain statements that are unsubstantiated or not clarified with examples.

6. From a list of statements, have students pick ones that need amplification and ones that are self-explanatory.

7. Have students examine leads of various editorials in the local newspaper and discuss why each is or is not effective. In cases where the lead is ineffective, have students rewrite to improve the editorial.

8. Have students examine conclusions of editorials from the local press. Was a specific action noted in the end of these editorials? If not, is the conclusion still effective? Have students rewrite conclusions to improve ineffective editorials.

9. Have students keep a notebook of editorials with each part clearly labeled: lead, body, and conclusion. In cases of editorials that deviate from this usual structure, have students discuss why they are or are not effective.

10. Have each student choose an editorial topic and outline his plan for preparing an editorial, including the following information: What research is needed? What questions should I ask and to whom? Where can I obtain my information?

11. Have students bring in examples of how editorial writers make their ideas easy to understand through the use of comparison, contrast, and analogy.
12. Lecture students on logic: inductive and deductive reasoning, syllogisms. Give students a list of statements and have them write sentences that will logically lead up to these conclusions.

13. Have each student write an editorial that is opposite to what he believes to be true. Then have each student write another editorial according to his own beliefs, including and dealing with the beliefs of the opposing side. Why is an editorial that anticipates its opposition better?

E. The student will identify emotional and illogical appeals used in propaganda.

1. Have students view the film "How to Judge Facts," dealing with platitudes, false analogies, assumptions, and double meanings, and then discuss how these devices weaken an editorial's effectiveness.

2. With the film "Propaganda Techniques" and the two texts Journalism (pp. 335-337) and Scholastic Journalism (pp. 316-319) as references, have students discuss the characteristics of each propaganda device. Is propaganda ever good? Have students give examples that differentiate between good and bad propaganda.

3. Have students clip examples of newspaper and magazine ads in which propaganda is used to sell a product and identify which devices are used.

4. Have students clip examples of newspaper and magazine editorials in which propaganda is used to sell an idea and underline the statements that illustrate each device.

5. Have students bring in examples of editorial cartoons, preferably ones that go along with an editorial. Have them point out how the artist has used emotional symbols to illustrate the editorial stand of the paper.

6. Lecture students on differences between slanting and propaganda, using Scholastic Journalism (pp. 312-316) as a reference. Have students bring in examples of slanting in editorials from large metropolitan newspapers, small area newspapers, magazines, and school papers, and discuss the audience for which each editorial is written.
7. Have students read in Journalism about the faulty syllogism, a subtle fallacy in logic. Have students practice rewriting paragraphs into syllogistic form to determine if the logic is faulty.

8. Have students bring in examples of editorials where conclusions are made that are not borne out logically by the evidence there.

9. Have students compile a list of clichés and discuss why it is inadvisable to use them in editorials.

10. Have students examine editorials that cite an authority figure to support their arguments. How valid is the authority? Could an equally reputable authority be used for the opposing side?

11. Have students prepare and tape a panel debate on some controversial issue (e.g. mercy killing, welfare, etc.). Then have students review the tape and identify any emotional appeals and illogical statements used in the arguments of the participating panel members.

F. The student will distinguish between constructive and destructive criticism.

1. Have students view the film "Effective Criticism" and then discuss the nature of criticism, constructive and destructive.

2. Keeping in mind that convincing his audience is the editorial writer's prime consideration, have students write up possible reactions of students, teachers, parents, and administrators to an editorial appearing in a recent school paper. Would these people regard the editorial as constructive or destructive in nature?

3. After providing students with a destructively written editorial, have them rewrite it constructively.

4. Lecture on what constitutes a constructive review and a destructive review. Have students discuss justifications for panning a movie, book, or play. Why is a constructive review preferable to a destructive one?

5. After reading the reviews of Judith Crist, Rex Reed, Cleveland Amory, and Clive Barnes, have students discuss whether or not each reviewer shows evidence of knowing his subject well.
6. Have students decide if the tone in each of the above reviews is destructive or constructive. Have them point out specific examples that back up their conclusion.

7. Have students watch a TV program or movie and write a review.

8. Have students discuss the concepts of the "right to fair comment" versus the "right to privacy," especially in regards to public figures (e.g. Agnew, the Kennedys, the Royal Family). Which of the concepts should take precedence? Do public figures have a right of privacy?

G. The student will evaluate the quality of editorial writing.

1. Invite a guest speaker columnist from a local paper to talk about editorials, good and bad. What considerations come into the judgment of a good editorial?

2. Have students rate various editorials you give them according to the checklist in Scholastic Journalism (p. 119) and Living Textbook (pp. 9, 26). Have them compare their ratings with the ratings of other students and then discuss why they evaluated as they did.

3. Have each student keep a notebook of editorials he considers excellent, and discuss in class why he thinks so. In the same manner, have students collect editorial columns judged excellent by them and discuss in class.

4. Oftentimes, different editorialists will write on the same topic. Have students compare the handling of a topic by two editorialists on the same newspaper staff and then by two writers on separate newspaper staffs. In each case, which is better?

5. Have students survey their school audience (teachers, students, parents, administrators) and determine the various reactions of each group to editorials printed in the school paper. If an editorial did not reach its audience, why not? If it did reach them, why?

6. Have students study the editorial page of an exchange paper and evaluate the quality of the editorial writing on the whole page, as well as specific editorials within the page.
H. The student will discern promising editorial topics.

1. Have students view the film "Public Opinion" and discuss points brought up in the film regarding the nature and development of public opinion, factors influencing public opinion, and methods for measuring public opinion. What is "enlightened public opinion"? What is the role of the press regarding enlightened public opinion?

2. Have students view the film "Does It Matter What You Think?" What is the best side of a topic? Should you write the favored, popular side in an editorial or your own personal view? Have students discuss these questions and the film's message of investigation before deciding what you want to write about and what stand you want to take on any given topic.

3. Have students visit the Miami Herald and talk to editorialists about how they get ideas for editorials. Then have students sit in on an editorial policy meeting of the staff of the Herald to observe how they decide what stand they will take on any given issue.

4. Invite the following school personnel into class to talk to students about problem areas that need correction through effective editorials, or areas needing promotion through effective crusades:

   a. Activities Director -- problems in school spirit and support of activities, programs, assemblies
   b. Asst. Principal, Guidance -- problems in scheduling, college admissions and preparation, tests
   c. Asst. Principal, Administration -- dress code, discipline, rules, fire drills, health procedures, hall traffic
   d. Asst. Principal, Curriculum -- subject matter, innovations in schedules, new courses offered, new equipment
   e. Student Council President -- effectiveness of Student Council, what it is doing and hopes to do
   f. PTA President -- finances available for projects, community support for activities
5. Lecture students on techniques of poll-taking with random sampling, compiling data, etc. Then have students take a survey of student opinion to determine the audience they will be writing for: What are they like? What are they concerned about? Unconcerned about? What philosophy do they share? What prejudices? What values have priority? What do they feel are the biggest problems at school?

6. Have students select from national, local, or world news of the past week several events of interest to students that could be interpreted in the school paper. Have them indicate why it is important that students understand the significance of each event.

I. The student will write effective and responsible editorials.

1. Have students read or view a question-answer interview and write an appropriate type of editorial on particular comments made by the personality interviewed.

2. Have students read a speech and write an editorial interpreting, criticizing, or praising it.

3. Have students watch a press conference on TV and write an editorial criticizing or praising one of the President's statements of policy.

4. Have students write an editorial of interpretation on a poll which is administered to the school.

5. After they research a current controversy (Vietnam, poverty program, etc.), have students write editorials interpreting recent events, slanting toward how this will affect students.

6. Have students write a humorous editorial on an administrative-student battle to liberalize the dress code.

7. Have students write a parody on any of the following topics:
   a. hall passes
   b. admits to class
   c. morning announcements
   d. school spirit
8. Have students write editorials of criticism on any of the following topics:
   a. method of student elections
   b. suspension procedures
   c. lack of student parking
   d. the quinmester
   e. homeroom periods
   f. counseling problems


10. Have students write editorials of commendation on any of the following topics:
    a. a retiring teacher
    b. sportsmanship at an athletic event
    c. a PTA project or officer
    d. an assistant principal
    e. an "unsung" hero
    f. a new policy or course of instruction

11. Have students write an editorial of persuasion on any of the following topics:
    a. increase in tax millage for schools
    b. mandatory course in politics
    c. respect for teacher's authority
    d. improved attendance
    e. nearest holiday (Memorial Day -- highway safety)

12. Have students write an editorial supporting a political candidate for President or governor.

13. Have students write a series of persuasive editorials in a campaign for one of the following topics:
    a. student court
    b. honor system
    c. voluntary attendance
    d. pass-fail grades
    e. student involvement in curriculum
    f. improvements in school plant, grounds
    g. need for more equipment, supplies
IV. STUDENT RESOURCES

A. State Adopted Textbooks


B. Non-state-adopted Supplementary Materials

1. Textbooks


2. Media Resource Films (AV Department, Lindsey Hopkins)

Effective Criticism. Coronet, 10 min. B&W. 1-00572.
From Sentences to Paragraphs. Indiana Univ. 30 min. B&W.
How to Judge Facts. Coronet, 12 min. B&W. 1-00178.
Mightier Than The Sword. TFC, 20 min. B&W. 1-10156.
SRA Programmed Learning, Contemporary Composition: Units 1-12. Transparencies. 2-30052 to 2-30063.
3. Periodicals (March, 1959 to March, 1971)

Freedom of the Press

"Double-Barreled." Newsweek, December 21, 1959, p. 82.
"Victory for a Free Press." Saturday Evening Post, April 4, 1964, p. 78.
Underground Press; Suppressed Press

"What's Black and White and Pink and Green and Dirty and Read All Over?" Look, October 1, 1968, p. 20-21.
Libel, Right of Privacy, Ethics

"Right of Solitude; When Is a Story No Longer News?" Newsweek, July 2, 1962, p. 74.
"Right of Privacy: An Approach Worth Considering." Publisher's Weekly, August 26, 1963, p. 244-245.
"Should the Offended Try the Offender?" Time, April 10, 1964, p. 48.
"Right of the Public To Criticize." Publisher's Weekly, January 31, 1966, p. 65.
"Harry the Muckraker." Time, April 21, 1967, p. 84+.
"Limits of Libel; Supreme Court Extends Rights of Press." Newsweek, June 26, 1967, p. 76-77.
"Prime Minister Sues." Time, January 12, 1968, p. 28.
"How Much May One Lie To Get the Truth?" Time, May 31, 1968, p. 54-5.
"Actual Malice Libel Test Applied to Public Figures." Publisher's Weekly, June 24, 1968, p. 43.
Journalism's Role in Society

"Protect the Citizen from the Press?" Rotarian, September, 1960.
"Newspaper's Role." Time, November 20, 1964, p. 49.

Criticism of the Press and Agnew

"Has Our Free Press Failed Us?" Saturday Evening Post, October 29, 1960, p. 36-37+.
"When the Press Shapes the News." Saturday Review, three articles, January 11, 1964; February 8, 1964; March 14, 1964.
"Raising their Voices; Critics of the Press." Newsweek, December 21, 1964, p. 48.
"Journalism: Public Enlightenment or Private Interest?" Annapolis American Academy, January, 1966, p. 79-86.


"What's Fit to Print?" Writer's Digest, January, 1970, p. 54-55.


"Slammin' Spiro," Newsweek, June 1, 1970.


High School Press


Writing Editorials and Reviews


V. TEACHER RESOURCES

A. Textbooks (see listing under Student Resources)

B. Professional Books


C. Films (see listing under Student Resources)

D. Periodicals (see listing under Student Resources)