



English & Drama

Breaking news: How was 9/11 represented in the media and other accounts?

Students will have the opportunity to explore the different ways in which the events of 9/11 were conveyed in the media, the factors that influenced this and how it changed over time.

Topic overview

Students will also consider different types of response to 9/11 in different genres, and will think about what makes them distinctive. The final outcomes include a news presentation summarising key events of 9/11 for specific audiences, and a textual analysis of different accounts of 9/11.

The topic is divided into different stages rather than individual lessons. This ensures greater flexibility for teachers and takes account of the significant differences that exist in the length of lessons from school to school.

National Curriculum links

English & Drama

For information on KS3, see below.

The activities are directly relevant to a wide range of aspects of the KS4 programme of study, for example:

Stages 1 and 2 address aspects of reading, including:

- analyse and evaluate information, events and ideas from texts
- develop and sustain independent interpretations of what they read, supporting them with detailed textual reference.

Stage 3 addresses aspects of reading, including:

- relate texts to their social and historical contexts
- recognise and evaluate the ways in which texts may be interpreted differently according to the perspective of the reader.

Stages 4 and 5 address aspects of speaking and listening, including:

- adapting talk to a wide range of... contexts, including those requiring confident use of standard English
- present information clearly... selecting the most appropriate way to structure and organise their speech for clarity and effect.

Stage 6 addresses aspects of reading, including:

- analyse and evaluate writers' use of language in a range of texts, commenting precisely on how texts are crafted to shape meaning and produce particular effects



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- identify the purposes of texts, analysing and evaluating how writers structure and organise ideas to shape meaning for particular audiences and readers
- compare texts, looking at style, theme and language and exploring connections and contrasts
- develop and sustain independent interpretations of what they read, supporting them with detailed textual reference.

The activities are aimed mainly at students in KS4 and include work that could be used as part of controlled assessment (for example, the class discussion on reporting 9/11 (**Stages 4 and 5**) could be submitted as a speaking and listening piece). Other activities – such as those in **Stages 4 and 5** concerned with different responses to 9/11 – could prepare students for responding to and analysing unseen reading texts.

Key Stage 3

It may be possible to adapt some lessons for use at KS3 through simplification or use of greater scaffolding. Ideas for scaffolding include:

- **Stage 2:** Provide specific prompt questions for each of the three newspaper pages or focus on just one aspect of the pages (e.g. language).
- **Stage 6:** Compare just the narrative with the newspaper article.

Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales

These materials can easily be adapted to fit the different curriculum requirements for Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

Northern Ireland Curriculum

www.nicurriculum.org.uk

Learning and Teaching Scotland – Curriculum for Excellence

www.ltscotland.org.uk/understandingthecurriculum

Welsh Government school curriculum for Wales

<http://wales.gov.uk/topics/educationandskills/schoolshome/curriculuminwales>

Cross-curricular links

There are opportunities through this topic to make links to some of the other subject topics, particularly the following:

- **History 1 – What made 9/11 so shocking?**

This builds knowledge of what actually happened on 9/11 and begins to explore why the attacks were so significant. As well as providing valuable contextual information for students, this history enquiry links well to the activity on why 9/11 received so much media attention.

In addition, some of the proposed activities help to develop aspects of the following PLTS: team workers, independent enquirers, and creative thinkers.



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Lessons

Stage 1: Reporting live, reflecting later – a class discussion

Recommended resources

On this website

- **Interactive timeline** (Flash)
- **Factsheet about 9/11** (PDF)

Links to other websites

- **YouTube – BBC World live footage of the 9/11 attack:**
www.youtube.com/watch?v=ys3h3uCKSPc
- **YouTube – BBC Ten O’Clock news (evening of 9/11):**
www.youtube.com/watch?v=SPh7ECq9sc0&playnext=1&list=PLF72AD22BC05DFF3B

Some of the activities draw on ideas from the English and Media Centre’s “Doing News” resource pack, which contains further ideas and resources for teaching about 9/11 and the media. More information can be found at: www.englishandmedia.co.uk.

Note to teachers

You wish to start by establishing how much the students actually remember about 9/11. If you find that they remember very little, it could be worth giving them a brief overview of events. There are plenty of resources on this website that will do this for you – for example the **Interactive timeline** (Flash) of events of 9/11, a **Factsheet about 9/11** (PDF), and various iconic images of the day itself (see the **Image & film bank**).

When introducing this topic, emphasise that one of the key things that made the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Center and The Pentagon such a unique media event was that it was reported live as the events were still developing. Tell them that this presents a dilemma for those producing the news: how do they balance the demand for instant, up-to-the-minute reporting with the need to provide confirmed facts and information about what lies behind the events that can only come after a period of time?

Show the class **BBC World live footage of the 9/11 attack** (on YouTube – see **Recommended resources**). Ask the students to note down the answers to the following questions:

- How does this differ from more traditional news reports you might see on the evening news?
- What is the balance of facts to speculation?
- How do the reporters signal that they do not have all the facts?
- What are the potential strengths and weaknesses of this sort of reporting?



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Go on to compare the live footage with the report on the attacks from the **BBC Ten O’Clock News** later the same day (on YouTube; see **Recommended resources**). Again, ask the students to note down their answers to the following questions:

- How is the commentary different from the breaking news report analysed earlier? What is still unknown?
- How is the tone of the reporting and the language used different?
- How have the focus of the story and the content of what has been reported changed?
- In what ways have the raw events of the first clip been organised into a narrative?

Through a class discussion, show how 9/11 is an example of the way that technology has changed the way news is reported and the way people interact with it. Use some of the following prompts to structure the discussion:

- What has been the impact of mobile phones, 24-hour-news, blogging, twitter, etc. on the way news is reported and how people access it?
- How would people have found out about a major news event like 9/11 if it had happened 20 years earlier?
- The internet allows people to give their views on what is happening in the world and potentially reach a far wider audience than would have ever been possible before. What are the advantages and disadvantages of this?

At this point, it is worth finding out the extent to which the students are aware of conspiracy theories relating to 9/11. This is a good opportunity to counter these myths by discussing the broadly unregulated nature of the internet, issues of provenance and how we select what information is credible and what isn’t. For example, the open and viral nature of the internet provides, on the one hand, opportunities for ordinary people to respond to, engage with and even shape news and events in ways that previously wouldn’t have been possible; on the other, rumours, speculation and even fabrications may have a disproportionate currency/influence beyond their relation to the facts.



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Stage 2: Using newspaper front pages to see how the story of 9/11 develops

Recommended resources

On this website

- **Worksheet : How the story develops** (Word)

Links to other websites

- **Three front pages from the New York Times (12, 15 and 17 September):** http://topics.nytimes.com/top/reference/timestopics/subjects/s/sept_11_2001/index.html?scp=1-spot&sq=9/11&st=cse (click on the relevant dates in the “IN PRINT” section – middle column)
- **Newseum – Osama Bin Laden Killed by US Special Forces:** www.newseum.org/todaysfrontpages/default_archive.asp (click on the links for 2, 3 and 4 May 20110)
- **Guardian – Osama bin Laden’s death – how the UK papers reacted, in pictures:** <http://tinyurl.com/3n9g3ww>

Any significant story such as 9/11 will dominate the news over a period of time. As new facts, interpretations and opinions emerge and new events happen as a consequence, the story develops, often changing focus.

Ask the students, in pairs or small groups, to look at **Three front pages from the New York Times (12, 15 and 17 September)** – see **Recommended resources** for the link. Print the pages and get students to annotate them, focusing on choice of images, use of language, headline/overall focus of the main story, and use of quotations. Their observations can be recorded on **Worksheet: How the story develops** (Word).

Make sure there is time for the student groups to share and compare their findings. In particular, ask them to suggest the following:

- how the focus of the story changes in the days following the events
- what additional details about 9/11 appear in the later front pages
- how changing priorities and feelings are reflected (e.g. identify any changes to the balance of personal, political and economic content)
- whether there are any views missing/not represented.

To help the students, get them to consider how the following might have affected coverage of the story:

- Additional information emerging in the hours and days after 9/11
- Emotions turning from shock, fear and confusion to grieving and outrage



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- A gradual realisation of the scale of the 9/11 attacks and the wider and longer-term consequences – to the US economy, to the airlines, to international relations, etc.

For a more current focus, this activity could be extended to compare the coverage of the death of Osama Bin Laden on different UK newspaper front pages. (For front page images, visit **Newseum – Osama Bin Laden Killed by US Special Forces**; see **Recommended resources** for a link to this website. Alternatively, you can see **Osama bin Laden’s death – how the UK papers reacted, in pictures** on the *Guardian’s* website.)

Print out some of these front pages if you can. Rather than focusing on the coverage of a single paper over time, allow the students to explore the coverage of this event across different papers. Once again, ask the students to work in small groups to annotate these newspaper front pages before recording their observations and coming to a considered view about how the death of Osama Bin Laden was covered by the media.

Stage 3: Looking at news values and how they affect media reporting

Recommended resources

On this website

- **News values** (PDF)
- **Worksheet: Comparing news values** (Word)

Links to other websites

- **BBC – Famine in Malawi report (shortly after 9/11):**
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/1844748.stm>

Explain to the students that everyday editors make decisions about what to report on and which stories to give precedence to. But what influences their decisions and makes a story “news”? For example, which would be given greater prominence on the evening news: a train crash in India in which 50 local people were killed, or a train crash in Britain with a single fatality?

Introduce the concept of news values – the criteria journalists use to decide whether a story is newsworthy (e.g. unexpectedness; unambiguity; meaningfulness) – using **News values** (PDF).

Ask the students to look at the **BBC report on Famine in Malawi** (shortly after 9/11) – see **Recommended resources**. While there are no official statistics for hunger-related deaths in Malawi, data collected by civil society groups suggests a figure in the range 1,000–3,000 over the course of the famine. Is it a story the students were familiar with?

The students should then complete **Worksheet: Comparing news values** (Word), scoring 9/11 and the Malawi famine out of ten for each of the news values and giving reasons why. Before starting, they should be aware that all the news values will not necessarily be relevant for all news stories.



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Move on to a class discussion using some of the following prompts to focus the students' responses:

- Why was 9/11 the bigger news story?
- Which news values were the most influential? (Here you might want to explore with the students the impact of the story if different aspects were changed, e.g. if it happened in a different country, if fewer people were killed, if the attack were less visually spectacular, and if it was triggered by a different cause.)
- What does this tell us about the way that disasters and tragic events are represented?
- The events of 9/11 also included an attack on the headquarters of the United States Department of Defense at The Pentagon in Washington. Based on what you understand about news values, why did this get relatively little coverage compared to the attack on the Twin Towers?
- How far was 9/11 specifically designed by the terrorists for massive media coverage?
- How is news of international disasters such as the 2004 South Asian Tsunami or the 2011 Japanese earthquakes made more relevant for a British audience?

Round off this session by asking the students to complete a short piece of written work answering the question **Why did 9/11 receive so much media attention?** Remind them of the news values that influence the extent to which events are covered, as well as the motives of the terrorists who wanted to achieve global coverage of their actions.

This session introduces the students to the concept of news values and how these influence media coverage of events. Through the class discussion and activity, they are able to appreciate some of the factors that made 9/11 so unique. The notion of significance is developed in more detail through one of the history topics on this website: **What made 9/11 so shocking?**

Stage 4/5: Producing news reports on 9/11

Recommended resources

On this website

- **BBC editorial guidelines – extracts** (PDF)
- **Factsheet about 9/11** (PDF)
- **Image & film bank**

Links to other websites

- **Wikipedia – The Falling Man:** http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Falling_Man



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Introduce the class to the **BBC editorial guidelines – extracts** (PDF). Explain that covering news stories – especially high-profile stories such as 9/11 involving loss of life – requires a great deal of sensitivity and an understanding about how different audiences might react. With this in mind, the BBC has a set of editorial guidelines that set out “the standards expected of everyone making or presenting the BBC’s output”. These include a specific section on covering war, terror and emergencies.

Before asking the students to read the guidelines, it might be worth asking them to suggest what they think the guidelines might include. Once they have read them, ask them to discuss some of the following questions:

- Why are guidelines such as these needed?
- What might news look like without them?
- How far is it possible for news to be truly impartial?

Organise the students into pairs or small groups. Drawing on the guidelines and their understanding of events from previous work (provide them **Factsheet about 9/11** (PDF) to help them recall some of the precise details), ask the students to produce a short (1–2 minute) script summarising the events of 9/11 for the day after the attacks.

Different groups could produce script summaries for different programmes/audiences (for example, BBC World; BBC 3; BBC Newsround). The students could also select relevant images from the **Image & film bank** and present them via PowerPoint to support the script. There is a close link between this activity and the final activity in the history topic called **What made 9/11 so shocking?** There, the students are required to decide which experts should be invited to take part in a fictitious TV debate on 9/11.

Once they have completed this task, the students should present their news reports to the rest of the class. As they view the different presentations, ask them to reflect on how they differ in language, content and tone. Discuss the choices the students made and the reasons behind them, including how they were informed by the editorial guidelines and their perception of the audience.

If you have time, conclude with a further discussion, using some of these prompts:

- In the case of disasters like 9/11, are there images or footage that should never be shown?*
- What factors made the events of 9/11 challenging to report?
- Why is the BBC as an institution particularly concerned to demonstrate its impartiality?

***Teacher’s note:** Here you may wish to discuss the controversial ‘Falling man’ picture taken by photographer Richard Drew, of a man having jumped from the North Tower (see link in **Resources** section). It was widely used by newspapers the following day, but then rarely afterwards as there were many complaints that this exploited the man’s death and stripped him of his dignity.



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Stage 6: Comparing different accounts of 9/11

Recommended resources

On this website

- **Different responses to 9/11** (PDF)
- **Worksheet: Different responses to 9/11** (Word)

There have been many different responses to 9/11 in print – both at the time and in the years after. Each writer chose a particular form or type of writing for a reason related to their audience and purpose.

Ask the students to read **Different responses to 9/11** (PDF) –including a newspaper report, an eyewitness account, a political speech, an email, a narrative and a poem. Get them to analyse the extracts through exploring language, structure and purpose, and to record their ideas on **Worksheet: Different responses to 9/11** (Word). Before you hand out this resource, make sure you have removed the page of the PDF containing the sources of the extracts.

Once the students have completed the task, reveal the sources of the different extracts and ask them consider the following questions through a class discussion:

- In what different ways can the extracts help readers to understand and respond to the events of 9/11?
- What are the strengths and limitations of the different types of writing in conveying 9/11?
- If you were producing a TV programme reflecting on the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks, to which of the extracts would you give priority and why?

For a final written task, return to the overall theme of this topic: **How was 9/11 represented in the media and other accounts?** Ask the students to compare and contrast the newspaper report along with two other accounts, noting their key features and exploring which extracts they think were the most effective at conveying the impact of the events of 9/11 and why. They should use their notes to help them.

This session extends the previous one by getting the students to compare a wider range of accounts of 9/11. They are able to see how the events of 9/11 have been conveyed through different genres of writing and how this adds to their overall understanding of the impact of 9/11.

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