Unit 1: Foundations of Digital Journalism and Storytelling

Content Area: **English Language Arts**
Course(s):
Time Period: **Trimester 1**
Length: **9 week cycle class (40-45 days)**
Status: **Published**

Brief Summary of Unit

Students will explore the dynamic world of digital journalism, news reporting, and filmmaking while examining how media informs, entertains, and influences audiences. They will learn to think like journalists by asking meaningful questions, determining what is newsworthy, researching stories, evaluating the credibility of sources, identifying misinformation, conducting interviews, and communicating ideas ethically and effectively. Through the study of multimedia storytelling, students will examine how journalists and filmmakers use visual, audio, and written techniques to inform, engage, and inspire audiences. Students will create news broadcasts, feature stories, short films, and other digital media using industry-inspired production techniques while developing skills in research, writing, scripting, filming, editing, collaboration, and digital publishing. Throughout the course, students will explore the responsibilities of media creators, including accuracy, fairness, responsible digital citizenship, and ethical decision-making. By the end of the course, students will have developed original multimedia work and a deeper understanding of how journalism and digital storytelling shape public understanding and inspire informed civic participation.

Interdisciplinary Connections: This unit is designed to be part of a developmental progression across grade levels and make interdisciplinary connections across content areas including physical and social sciences, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness, and global citizenship. During this course, students are provided with opportunities to develop skills that pertain to a variety of careers. When completing this course, students can make informed choices about how to and what to participate in today's dynamic world of social media.

Revision: July 2026

Standards

Information Literacy: This unit challenges students to locate, analyze, evaluate, and use information effectively. Information literacy includes, but is not limited to digital, visual, media, textual, and technological literacy. Lessons will include the learning and understanding how information is created and produced, critical and analytical thinking, evaluating and use of information resources, research processes and methodologies including identifying the difference between primary and secondary sources, discerning the difference between facts, points of view, perspectives and opinions, accessing peer-reviewed print and digital library resources, and the economic, legal, social, and ethical issues surrounding the use of information.

The identified standards reflect a developmental progression across grades/ levels and make interdisciplinary

connections across content areas including social sciences, technology, career readiness, cultural awareness and global citizenship. The standards that follow are relevant to this course in addition to the associated content-based standards listed below.

District ELA

- LA.L.8.1–5
- LA.SL.8.1.C
- LA.SL.8.1.D
- LA.SL.8.5–6

Reading

- RI.CR.8.1
- RI.CI.8.2
- RI.IT.8.3
- RI.TS.8.4
- RI.PP.8.5
- RL.PP.8.5
- RI.MF.8.6
- RL.MF.8.6
- RI.CT.8.8

Writing

- W.IW.8.2
- W.WR.8.5
- W.SE.8.6
- W.RW.8.7

Speaking & Listening

- SE.8.6
- SL.PE.8.1
- SL.II.8.2
- SL.ES.8.3

Career Readiness / Technology

- CRP7
- CRP8
- TECH.8.1.12
- TECH.8.1.12.F.1
- TECH.9.4.2.DC.3

Essential Questions

- What are the ethical responsibilities of a journalist in the digital age?
- How do journalists and filmmakers shape the way people understand the world and the events that occur?
- How do we determine whether information is credible, accurate, and worthy of sharing?
- What makes a story newsworthy?
- How do journalists gather information, ask meaningful questions, and verify sources before telling a story?
- How do audience and purpose influence the way stories are researched and planned?

Students Will Know/Students Will Be Skilled At

Students Will Know:

- How journalism and filmmaking shape public understanding, influence audiences, and tell meaningful stories.
- How to evaluate the credibility, accuracy, perspective, and bias of information and media sources.
- The characteristics of newsworthy stories and the role of journalists in gathering and verifying information.
- The ethical responsibilities of journalists and digital media creators, including fairness, accuracy, attribution, and responsible digital citizenship.
- How audience, purpose, and point of view influence digital media.

Students Will Be Skilled At:

- Researching and evaluating sources to determine credibility, accuracy, bias, and relevance.
- Analyzing videos and digital content to determine purpose and evaluate how that purpose is achieved.
- Using the MAPS strategy (Mode, Media, Audience, Purpose, Situation) to analyze multimedia texts, including news broadcasts, documentaries, podcasts, short films, and digital media.
- Evaluating how multimedia texts—including websites, news broadcasts, documentaries, podcasts, and digital videos—use elements of craft such as visuals, sound, interviews, sequencing, tone, and design to communicate meaning and engage audiences.
- Developing meaningful interview questions and conducting effective interviews.
- Identifying newsworthy topics and generating story ideas.
- Writing for a specific audience and purpose, including news stories, interview questions, scripts, and multimedia planning documents.
- Curating a collection of mentor texts, including videos, interviews, scripts, and digital media examples, to inform their own work.

Evidence/Performance Tasks

Students demonstrate differentiated proficiency through both formative and summative assessments in the classroom. Based on individual student readiness and performance, assessments can be implemented as formative and/or summative.

The performance tasks listed below are examples of the types of assessments teachers may use in the classroom and the data collected by the district to track student progress.

Formative:

- Teacher Observations
- Accountable Talk, Socratic Seminars/Fish Bowls
- Analysis of multimodal text sets
- Analysis of critical commentary, interviews, documentaries, vlogs, and video diaries
- Writers Notebook (quick writes/drafts/prewrites), emphasizing author's craft
- Close reading analysis of text using evidence as substantiation
- Conferences: Individual and small group, accompanying conference notes
- Reflective exercises and assessments
- Oral Reading and Interpretation
- Peer and self-evaluations of learning
- Entrance and Exit Tickets
- Open-Ended Responses in Journal
- Textual Analysis Reading Responses
- Dialectical Journal
- Rhetorical Precis
- SOAPSTone Analysis

Summative, including Alternative Assessments:

- Create culminating artifacts including, but not limited to the following: story proposal, interview, script, storyboard, production plan.
- Score student videos according to a set of criteria developed as a class, including, but not limited to,

readability, visual appeal, organization, responsible attribution of sources.

- Develop a portfolio of mentor scripts, videos or blogs that match students' intended purpose (e.g. Student who plans to record a sports blog might collect example of model sports reports or podcasts and annotate according to strengths and weaknesses)

- Write scripts, transcribe interviews or gather images for digital storytelling project options

Developmental progression across years in both reading and writing is evidenced by multiple benchmark assessment screeners, administered three times per year. Follow up diagnostic assessments are used to target skill remediation. Student proficiency allows for additional or alternative assessment based on demonstration or absence of skill.

Benchmark:

- Benchmark reading and writing assessments, scored using rubrics, district-created and standards-aligned; based on NJSLA, reported twice per year
- Engage in text set analysis using visual literacy and close reading analysis strategies to compose a claim and use evidence as support
- Grade-level Standards-based Rubrics

Learning Plan

Instructional time will be dedicated to whole-class instruction, collaborative learning, workshop-based production, and independent project development. Students will learn the complete digital journalism production cycle through authentic multimedia experiences that mirror professional newsrooms. Instruction emphasizes inquiry, collaboration, ethical decision-making, creativity, and iterative revision as students develop original digital media for authentic audiences. Throughout the unit, teachers will model professional techniques, provide frequent feedback through conferences and peer critique, and gradually release responsibility as students become increasingly independent creators.

Instruction will generally follow the progression below, though pacing and project selection may vary based on student interests and instructional needs.

This unit contains two modules, focusing on how journalists and filmmakers research, evaluate information, develop stories, and plan ethical multimedia content. Please review this scope and sequence for more detail.

Module 1: Foundations of Media Literacy and Visual Storytelling

Students analyze professional journalism, documentaries, broadcasts, and digital media to examine how information is communicated through words, images, sound, editing, and visual composition. Students learn to evaluate credibility, identify bias and misinformation, distinguish news from opinion, and recognize how camera angles, shot composition, lighting, and audio influence audience interpretation.

Module 2: Research, Interviewing, and Preproduction

Students investigate issues and topics worthy of reporting, evaluate multiple sources, generate story ideas, develop interview questions, conduct interviews, and plan multimedia projects through scripting, storyboarding, and production planning. Students consider audience, purpose, ethics, and journalistic responsibility while preparing original digital media.

Materials

The materials used in this course integrate a variety of leveled instructional, enrichment, and intervention materials that support student learners at all levels in the school and home environments. Associated web content and media sources are infused into the unit as applicable and available.

Teachers must refer to the district-approved Core Book List while selecting whole-class or small-group leveled resources.

Instructional Materials

- Masterclass: 8 Tips for Writing a Documentary Script from Ken Burns (https://www.masterclass.com/articles/ken-burns-shares-tips-for-writing-a-documentary-script)
- New York Film Academy: How to Write a Documentary Script (https://www.nyfa.edu/student-resources/how-to-write-a-documentary-script/)
- New York Times: 8 Ways to Teach with Short Documentary Films (https://www.nytimes.com/2022/04/27/learning/lesson-plans/8-ways-to-teach-with-short-documentary-films.html)
- New Yorker Documentary Shorts (https://www.newyorker.com/video)
- NFI: How to Make a Documentary (https://www.nfi.edu/how-to-make-a-documentary/)

Teacher Resources

- Adobe: How to Make a Documentary (https://www.adobe.com/creativecloud/video/discover/how-to-make-a-documentary-video.html)
- Desktop Documentaries (https://www.desktop-documentaries.com/making-documentaries.html)
- IMDB: Top 50 Documentary Short Films (https://m.imdb.com/search/title/?genres=documentary&explore=title_type,genres&title_type=short)
- Text: Film and Literature: An Introduction and Reader, Corrigan
- Text: Making Movies, Sidney Lumet
- Text: Understanding Movies, Louis Giannetti, Prentice Hall
- The Film Fund (https://www.thefilmfund.co/tips-for-short-documentary-filmmaking/?expand_article=1)

Suggested Strategies for Accommodation and Modification

Content specific accommodations and modifications as well as Career Ready Practices are listed here for all students, including: Special Education, English Language Learners, At Risk of School Failure, Gifted and Talented, Students with 504.

Possible accommodations include:

- Access speech-to-text function on computer
- Use visual presentations of all materials to include organizers, charts
- Allow students to set individual goals for writing/reading
- Offer graphic organizaers, note-taking models, strategies for summarizing, and questioning techniques
- Offer oral assessments
- Supply study guide questions and access to class notes
- Work in partnerships
- Give responses in a form (verbal or written) that is easier for the student
- Take additional time to compete a task or project
- Scaffold by chunking material and texts
- Individualize reading choices based on ability and level
- Take frequent breaks
- Use an alarm to help with time management
- Small group and one on one assessment
- Mark text with a highlighter or other manipulative such as a post-it
- Receive help coordinating assignments
- Answering fewer questions or completing shorter tasks
- Modify the length and quantity of assignments to fit individual
- Differentiate roles in discussion groups
- Use digital technology, eBooks,, audio version of printed text
- Create alternate assignments or homework
- Provide distinct steps in a process; elminate unnecessary steps, as needed
- Use art, music, and film to convey alternate interpretation of literature and assessment
- Manage executive function by scaffolding process and amending deadlines

Possible modifications to content during writing workshop include, but are not limited to:

- Adhere to all modifications and accommodations as prescribed in IEP and 504 plan