

# **Teaching About Lead in High School Government Class: Understanding the Importance of the Fourth Estate through the Lead Public Health Crisis**

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## **Content Objectives**

### Background of Bodine High School

This three-week unit plan is designed for high school government classes at William W. Bodine High School for International Affairs. Bodine High School is a magnet high school in the School District of Philadelphia. Bodine is located in the Northern Liberties neighborhood of Philadelphia and serves roughly 500 students and selects students based off of middle school grades, attendance, disciplinary records, and state test scores. As the School District of Philadelphia is labeled as a Title I school district, under this policy, all students qualify for free or reduced priced lunch. According to the school district's data, over 95% of students at Bodine live below the poverty line. The school operates on a seven-period schedule. Students attend six class periods a day with 53-minute classes. Bodine offers Advanced Placement courses and International Baccalaureate courses to its upperclassmen. This unit is taught to twelfth grade Social Science (a civics course that focuses on government and economics), but can be used for AP and IB courses as well as for tenth and eleventh grade students.

In my experience, students struggle when dealing with the nuance and complexity of untangling different perspectives of a current event issue. As young adolescents, high school students are often quick to form an opinion. However, where they may encounter difficulty, is when students attempt to have a discourse with each other. Lacking an informed opinion also affects their ability to maintain a civil discourse with their peers, as neither party is often informed of the other side of the argument. These conversations often result in further frustration for each student. While students do not need to always have their minds changed or reach a consensus during each argument they have, it is important for them to understand their counter's point of view and perspective. These skills not only allow for opportunities to strengthen verbal and written rhetoric, improve critical thinking ability, and learn to think logically with evidence-based reason, but students are also able to build empathy and understanding with someone they may otherwise disagree with. The struggles that students find themselves in when debating each other over current events can be best approached by teaching students about the role of the media.

At Bodine, students often initially interpret news outlets as factual, unbiased sources of truth. While this certainly does not apply to all students, this issue has presented itself with frequency. Students initially have a hard time with recognizing credible and reliable news sources. Since almost all students have a smart phone, they rely on social media applications for their news rather than nationally and locally recognized news outlets. They then struggle with untangling each news network's bias. These two issues manifest themselves as students fail to see the importance of the role the media plays in democratic and republican forms of government.

The students in my classroom generally can make sense of why governments and the media exists – as instruments to organize the masses and as a watchdog for tyrannical forms of government, respectively. I believe this is one entry point into the conversation of this unit plan. While students are able to identify the purpose of the rule of law, the role of government, and the media play in society, I wish to push students further into thinking about which groups of people hold power in governments and in the media, how they come to use power, how their ideologies are used to influence societal beliefs and practices, and perhaps most importantly, where their power is derived from.

In my Social Science class, students learn about the origins of contemporary forms of government. In Social Science, students learn about monarchical governments by studying the political philosophical foundations of government. Students are very quick to point out that the more democratic a system of government is, the fairer it is. However, their concept of fair is largely influenced by today's context where they have benefited from the public education system, healthcare programs, and public transportation infrastructure. While students seem very aware of the benefits of a democratic and republican form of government, they often fail to see the historical struggle that brought nations that rely on these forms of government to their contemporary states. Most crucially for the purposes of this unit, students fail to see what influence the media has in democratic and republican forms of government. The media and the circulation of news to the masses has historically made democracies more transparent and government leaders more accountable. Conversely, governments have also manipulated the media in order to promote their own agenda. Students must learn to debate the philosophical questions that I aim to surface during this unit in order to see the tension that existed and currently exists in the United States today between which groups of people wield power and which rights and services are distributed to members of a democratic society.

Students will engage with various philosophical ideas while also reading primary and secondary sources from the local news outlets and various levels of local, state, and federal governments. In order to ground these complex ideas of political ideology, ethics, and government, students will learn about the role of the media and the origin of the "fourth estate." One benefit of learning about the role of the media is that it allows for this unit's content to be easily transferrable to the legislative branch unit in local, state, and federal governments. Moreover, learning about the issues of lead and health will provide students with a concrete issue and framework as opposed to various theoretical ideas that may be difficult for them to grasp. This will allow students to apply the relationship constituents, the media, and congressional lawmakers have with each other. Through these readings, students will be pressed to determine which people, groups, or institutions hold power, which people claim to hold truth, and how these entities provide suggestions and/or solutions as to how society should behave, be organized, and act based on political, ethical, and governmental values that are rooted in philosophy and history.

### The Historical Development of the "Fourth Estate"

In modern views, governments are seen as being responsible for protecting traditional liberal values in society. In today's world, people are born with the right to life, liberty, property, and a variety of other freedoms that previously went ungranted by the State. The monarchy and the clergy held historical rule over those that lived within the borders of the State. These two

categories within the State represented the first estate and second estate, respectively. This classification system of societies in European histories, geographies, and cultures allowed for those belonging to the clergy and nobility to exercise rule (whether political, religious, cultural, etc.) over the masses. At the time, this was due to the governmental belief that the State's primary responsibility was to ensure the safety and protection of its subjects. Because of this framework, philosophers argued that in a world where the State was nonexistent, humans would be in a constant state of violence. This was according to English philosopher Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes, living during a time in which there was civil war, violence, and chaos in England, believed that humans negotiated a social contract with the State. It was therefore the State's priority to ensure that humans would not return to their innate state of nature, as previously described. Rather, they could live in a world that allows them to be protected. Of course, today, democracies and republics run against this philosophical method of thinking.

With the emergence of Enlightenment values in the American Revolution and the French Revolution, political philosophers such as Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès criticized governments for not granting and protecting a new view of mankind's nature: a world in which humans had unalienable rights. John Locke, an English humanist and a doctor, believed that it was not only the State's role to ensure humans protection of their life, but it was also the role of the State to ensure the right to certain unalienable liberties and their property. With this philosophical school of thought, revolutions occurred throughout the western world beginning in the thirteen colonies against King George II's Great Britain and in France against King Louis XVI and the French nobility. In these revolutions, the masses, now referred to as the third estate by Sieyès, overthrew the nobility and the clergy, because they were no longer protecting what humans now believed to be their unalienable rights. However, today, as democracies and republics began to grow popular as forms of government throughout the western world, individuals gave rise to a fourth estate: the media.

The term "fourth estate" is often attributed to Edmund Burke. The term originated in the late eighteenth century when innovations such as the printing press and places of gathering like coffee shops and taverns became popular during the Age of Enlightenment. As printing presses began to print the news, people would assemble in public places to discuss philosophy, politics, religion, and more. These cultural institutions and forums of democracy created what Burke went on to label as the fourth estate. Today, the press comprises much more than a newspaper. New forms of media are seen in journals, newspapers, magazines, and a variety of other news sources. However, the access to this information was still limited by low literacy rates and the lack of a formal public education system in many countries.

As public schooling and post-secondary institutions began to become readily available for the masses, the inclusion and contribution of individuals in their democracies grew. Of course, literacy and education were not the only factors that affected the masses. Many groups of people were and continue to be excluded or marginalized in democratic systems of government. However, in the larger context of western history, societies became more democratic. As technology improved, the digital age gave rise to the internet and eventually, social media applications and platforms. Nowadays, almost all of my students own and know how to operate a cell phone that has internet access. While the berth of the social media age certainly does not

allow for all individuals to become accredited journalists, all humans can certainly contribute to the spreading and dissemination of news.

### Monitoring the News

Students at William W. Bodine High School for International Affairs monitor the local and national news. While they are not the most vigilant in this aspect, they are slowly exposing themselves to how to dissect and interpret the messages, arguments, and claims different networks, stations, and journalists present to them. Students watch local news stations and national news networks. They listen to radio shows, podcasts, and interviews. They read newspapers, tweets, blogposts, journals, and magazines. Perhaps most importantly, students discuss the news (whether it is related to sports, celebrities, or current events) with their parents, guardians, family and community members, teachers, peers, and a variety of other people that are involved in their lives.

Students often grow frustrated when watching the news. They express similar concerns as many of the adults that I have encountered in my life. Students complain of bias, negativity, superficiality, and other issues. These frustrations often lead students to disengage themselves from the news and the media. While they pay attention to news in regards to popular culture, they often avoid news that deals with government or politics. I have tried to remedy this by creating weekly current events quizzes and by incorporating current events into lesson plans, especially since students in my history classes often press me on why the events we study in the past should carry so much weight. I believe I am more persuasive with my students if I can make a direct connection between a historical event and a current event at the time of the lesson. (Of course, this means the constant changing and manipulation of my assignments – a burden I am gladly willing to bear.) However, students often continue to express disinterest in studying the news. I worry that if this attitude continues, they will be unable to understand or appreciate the role news outlets and institutions have in democratic systems of government.

In order to properly understand the values a democratic system of government gives its citizenry; students must understand the foundations of American governmental thought. Students spend weeks in their eleventh-grade year learning about the American Revolutionary War, the founders of the United States of America, the tyrants of Great Britain, and the struggle that was made in order to form a “more perfect union.” However, to understand the media’s (a word that I believe has a component of technology that weighs heavily on its connotation) relation to that historical time period is a difficult task for students. To appreciate the importance of the role journalists, newspapers, news networks, and the general role media play in reporting on the government, current events, and politics, students must first be engaged with a topic that affects them directly. So, I chose a topic that directly engages my students, myself, our school, and our community: the issue of lead and health in the School District of Philadelphia.

### The Media and Its Relation to Lead and Health

The School District of Philadelphia is responsible for sending out a letter to the parents and guardians of students at Bodine High School. This letter warns them of the dangerous levels of asbestos, lead, and mold in the school building. This is not the first time students are exposed to this news. The decay of the building is visible throughout each hallway, classroom, and closet.

There are signs made from spray-paint that show skull and crossbones which read “Do not drink!” over some water fountains in the school building. It is not uncommon to see mice and cockroaches in the building as well. It is common for students to voice their displeasure with the building’s need of repair and renovation. Unfortunately, the building conditions at Bodine High School (while it ranks as one of the worst buildings in the city) are representative of the district. Just this past year, an elementary school had to be closed for several days in order to undergo immediate repairs. During the writing process of this very unit plan, the room that our building uses as a gymnasium and cafeteria underwent what was thought to be a quick and easy repair for some floor tiles. Upon lifting the tiles, school district repairmen found tiles with asbestos. Now, students must eat their lunch in the auditorium during what the district expects to be a two-week remediation service. These experiences have not only become normalized for our students – who leave the building permanently every four years – but also for our administrators, teachers, facilities workers, custodians, food service workers, and other staff members.

This unit aims to explore the role in which the media has in reporting on the public health issue of lead, particularly in urban neighborhoods within the City of Philadelphia. While lead and health is not the primary focus of this unit, it will be used as a vehicle in which students can see the roles and responsibilities the media has in discovering and publishing information to the parents, guardians, students, children, community members, and residents of the city. The goals for students throughout the unit are fivefold: to understand the role of the media, to learn about the process of publishing a story from the perspective of a journalist, to learn how the public and government react to the media, to recognize bias in the news, and to understand the importance of being an informed, voting member of society. I outline these goals in more detail in the following paragraphs:

*Goal One: To Understand the Role of the Media*

The notion that the media serves to inform the public is not new to students. Students are familiar with this fundamental concept, as they use a variety of social media applications, radio channels, television networks, and podcast stations to inform themselves about celebrity gossip, sports, music, and other topics. This unit, however, aims to gather information on how the media serves as a watch dog on the government, how the media surfaces otherwise unknown stories, and how it communicates with and educates the public. In other words, throughout this unit, I aim to make the relationship between the government and the media visible to students.

*Goal Two: To Learn About the Process of Publishing a Story from the Perspective of a Journalist*

Students must not only be able to identify the relationship the government and the media have with one another, but they must also be able to understand the process both parties undergo to make information and policy available to the public.

Similarly to how students learn about the importance of their own writing process to submit pieces of academic writing in high school, journalists have their own writing process before publishing a story. Learning about the journalistic process will allow students to appreciate the research process of writing, a process that many students at Bodine often struggle to navigate.

*Showtime*'s mini-series "The Fourth Estate" follows a series of reporters in order to document the roles journalists play in uncovering and publishing information. The docuseries follows journalists during Donald Trump's first term as President of the United States. While Special Counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into the 2016 Presidential Election, is the main focus of the docuseries, students are able to examine the process journalists go through to publish a story, nonetheless. Students will inquire about how journalists publish stories and which people they communicate with in order to write articles. Students will learn about how journalists get ideas for a story, who they contact for sources, the importance of anonymous and known sources, and other steps journalists take to write and edit stories that will be made public.

### *Goal Three: To Learn How the Public and Government Reacts to the Media*

As students understand the process journalists go through to write, revise, and publish a story, students must also examine how the results of a journalistic investigation lead to a reaction by the public or publicly elected officials. When learning about heavy topics such as how communities are affected by lead, students often express frustration at the lack of accountability they see in government. While students may become informed about an issue, students quickly grow frustrated when they do not see governments taking proactive steps to address a problem. This is an issue I must address, as I do not wish for my students to grow discouraged. I believe a strong enough sense of doubt in their mind may persuade them to think that voting does not matter, an issue that must be prevented as turnout levels in Philadelphia are low amongst young adults.

Students will continue with the process of how the public and government react with one another when watching *Vice*'s "Flint Water Crisis." The reports of lead and criminality in Flint, Michigan made national and international headlines. Various levels of government involved themselves with the City of Flint. *Vice*'s report allows students to understand the factors that create public interest both inside and outside of the communities that are most directly affected by the health crisis of highly leaded water levels. The "Flint Water Crisis" episode will enforce how governments and the media withhold or publish information. In addition, these concepts will show students how the media can generate public interest in a topic and even mobilize populations to put pressure on governmental institutions.

### *Goal Four: To Recognize Bias in the News*

As students begin to become informed throughout this unit, students will come across a variety of perspectives on how the issue of lead should be solved. Students will compare and contrast articles written about similar topics. Students can also examine bias when considering solutions. Dr. Needeleman's article, "Low Level Lead Exposure: History and Discovery," poses the following question: Should the government focus on prevention or providing services to those that have already been diagnosed with dangerous levels of lead in their blood? Students will be examining solutions from a variety of different perspectives. They will also be considering perspectives from school administrators, local politicians, neighborhood leaders, and many other groups. By comparing these articles to one another, students will learn how to identify bias and recognize how writer's biases affects their agenda and their proposed solution to the lead and health issue in Philadelphia.

### *Goal Five: To Understand the Importance of Being an Informed, Voting member of Society*

Because the Social Science course I teach is offered to twelfth-grade students, many students are or become eligible to vote while they are enrolled in the course. Initially, many of them see the importance of voting as something that does not matter. However, by teaching students about how the public health crisis of lead has affected their lives, students will be able to engage in an issue that they may seem as worth voting on. While motivating students to vote is crucial, it is equally as important to teach students the importance of becoming informed before voting for candidates and ballot questions. This unit aims to tackle both of these issues.

By structuring the unit this way, students are able to both engage with the issue of lead and health while also understanding the role the media plays in informing the public and putting pressure on publicly elected officials to create and enforce legislation that improves the health conditions of the City of Philadelphia. While students understand the basic responsibility of the media is to inform the public, they struggle with more nuanced understandings of how informing citizens in a democratic system of government is crucial. Part of this is seen in how low voter turnout rates are among young people in Philadelphia and across the United States. As iCivics, a civics-centered education organization started by Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, states, "In its role as gatekeeper, the media decides which stories and issues are important enough to receive public attention—and which aren't. As a citizen, it is important for you to realize there are many serious events and issues you will never hear about on the evening news." It is imperative that students not only understand the relationship between the media and the government, but they must also learn to evaluate their role within that relationship. Moreover, students must understand the various levels of government and news networks. This way, they will come to understand how different levels of government deal with the issue of lead and health in Philadelphia. Students will also see how different news outlets report on the issue of lead. They will compare national and local networks in order to make this relationship more visible. Students will learn how the stories the media decides to tell impacts public policy, legislation, and public opinion. By discussing lead and health in the classroom, students will draw connections to the unit through their own experiences within the School District of Philadelphia and the city as a whole.

This unit will look explicitly at the uncovering of the environmental health issues as it relates to the building conditions in the School District of Philadelphia to understand how the public has reacted and what has been done since. Students will examine leadership at the levels of city government and the school district. Students will examine how the media impacts how non-profit organizations, interest groups, grassroots campaigns, voters, and other groups of people react when a story is shared with the public.

### **Teaching Strategies**

#### Verbal and Written Argument

Much of the information will be given to the students through the use of journals, magazines, government documents, and newspaper articles. Students will be reading and watching videos throughout the unit, as this is the way that many people receive their news today. Students will

be exposed to a variety of texts, films, podcasts, and many other forms of media. As students read and enhance their literacy skills, students will then complete writing assignments that they will use to debate each other and present each other with. This includes a press release that students will create depending on the perspective of their assigned role. This assignment allows for students to learn how to articulate their opinion in written and in verbal format. This will help students present information as journalists present information to them.

By studying philosophy, politics, government, history, and the media, students will develop critical thinking skills and learn to construct a verbal and written argument using textual evidence. These skills allow students to improve their reading and writing skills while also developing their ability to think logically and form a persuasive and evidence-based argument. By learning these skills, students will be able to apply these concepts throughout periods of time in order to better understand the past and to better understand our political and social climates today.

### Textual Evidence

Because the issue of lead and health is such a personal one to students, it is very easy to receive buy-in from the students. This means that students quickly form an opinion that they are ready to express, as the issue of lead is extremely relevant to them, their classmates, family members, and city. However, throughout the history courses that I teach, students often make uninformed claims. While having an opinion is important, especially as it may peak their interest in voting, it is important for students to inform themselves as well. I regularly ask them to substantiate the points they wish to surface in front of their peers or on an assignment. By studying the articles, podcasts, films, and other forms of media, students will become informed of a topic. The sources students work with will allow them to become more informed. This will not only improve their learning about the issue of lead and health, but it will also allow for students to develop habits of making informed-based claims, rather than using unsubstantiated opinions when discussing topics in history or with current events.

### Critical Thinking

Throughout this unit, students are clearly studying a problem – the issue of lead and other environmental concerns within schools and neighborhoods in Philadelphia. As students grow more informed of the topic of lead and health, I will ask them guided questions such as: How did these issues come to be? Why are these issues more prevalent in certain regions and neighborhoods when compared to others? How are people informed of these issues? How much responsibility does the government have when it comes to the issues of lead and health? Should citizens play a role in addressing these issues?

These questions allow the students to inform themselves about the basic content of the issue. As they grow more informed, students can then begin to analyze the causes of the issues of lead and health in Philadelphia. They will be able to issue blame while understanding which institutions and groups should be held accountable. Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, students must learn how to think of creative solutions to address the issues. After being presented with the information, students must become problem solvers, or agents of change.



## Care for Government

As the unit is very relevant for students, they will learn to see how governments have a presence in their lives. As students learn about the philosophical principles of government and the structures of American government, they will begin to understand how much power a government can wield. Before this unit, students will have learned about the foundations of modern government, the philosophical ideas of Hobbes and Locke, the American Revolutionary War, and the building of the United States as a nation. In the context of the philosophical ideas that they will be introduced to in previous units, this amount of power can be very dangerous. In order for this amount of power to be checked, citizens within a democratic system of government must learn to understand the role of the media and the role of the citizenry. Students will learn to remain vigilant citizens. This will lead to students holding government officials accountable as well as creating a better sense of understanding of how government works in practice in Philadelphia, in Pennsylvania, and in the United States more broadly.

## Classroom Activities

This curriculum unit focuses on the relationship between the media and the local, state, and federal levels of government. In this unit, students will engage in these topics by examining the pieces of news by reading primary and secondary sources and identifying rights and services that are given and not given to groups through the study of lead and health. The following objectives and lesson plans are listed and described below in order to ensure that students properly understand the unit's concepts (*Note: SWBAT = Students will be able to; IOT= in order to*).

Lesson One: Introduction to the News

*Objective:*

SWBAT complete a weekly current events quiz and/or blog post IOT compare different perspectives of issues at the local, state, and federal levels of government and society.

*Materials*

- *Stanford History Education Group's* "Civic Online Reasoning" materials
- *The Washington Post's* "Ranking the Media from Liberal to Conservative"
- A created class current events webpage on *Blogger.com*
- A rotating news network (e.g. *ABC News, CNN, Fox News, etc.*)

*Procedure:*

Students will examine images from different news websites using *Stanford History Education Group's* online materials. Images will display different perspectives on an issue in the news. Through a series of guided questions, students will learn to examine the network that has published the story, any advertisements that are shown, sensationalized headlines, and different types of articles that have been written. This activity shows students the fundamental components needed to read and interpret the news. Students will use these exercises when they are keeping up with the news throughout this unit and throughout the academic year. These skills are also easily transferable to the study of history when working with primary and secondary sources.

As students progress throughout the lesson plan, students will be introduced to a variety of news video clips and articles on similar topics. News networks will include *NPR, MSNBC, Fox News, CNN, The New York Times, The Washington Post, and The Wall Street Journal*. These news networks will be displayed in an image from *The Washington Post's* "Ranking the Media from Liberal to Conservative" article that places each network on the political spectrum.

Students will be briefly introduced to the concepts of liberalism and conservatism within the modern-day concepts of the words. Students will take notes and be provided with examples of liberalism and conservatism. Of course, these words have taken on different connotations with their modern uses. It is important that students understand, for example, the distinction of how conservatism used to lend itself towards the political ideology of monarchism. This way, students can accurately understand the use of the words the way the media and the public use

them today. Students will then research the ownership of each news agency to complete the class. Lastly, for homework, students will examine a current event article from three different news sources. Students will be asked to compare the articles and explain what the articles reveal about the perspectives of the journalists, news networks, and advertised companies.

This lesson plan will be the basis of a reoccurring current events quiz the students will take throughout the academic year. Students will be assigned a weekly, ten-point, multiple choice current event quiz. Students will be asked to follow the news each week according to an assigned news network. Only free news networks and applications will be selected (therefore advertisements will be included) and will be rotated each week to ensure a well-rounded reporting of the news. Local, state, national, and global news networks will be selected throughout the unit as well. This will introduce students to a variety of perspectives outside of the news sources they are already familiar and comfortable with. Most importantly, this assignment will require students to continually be informed about local, state, national, and global current events throughout the unit. I prefer to continue to distribute the weekly current events quiz throughout the entire academic year. However, you may choose to only issue this assignment throughout the course of the unit. I also enjoy making the quiz based off of topics that my students will find interesting. Various news agencies such as *The New York Times* create an online version for students, which may be more convenient and less taxing for you to assign.

## Lesson Two: The Role of the Media

### *Objective:*

SWBAT read and contextualize informational readings and articles IOT identify the roles of the media.

### *Materials:*

- *iCivics* “The Role of the Media”
- *Emmanuel Sieyès* “What is the Third Estate?”
- *ThoughtCo.*’s “What Is the Fourth Estate?”

### *Procedure:*

As students complete their current events quizzes, they will begin to understand the role that the media has. In order to reinforce this idea, students will complete an activity that explicitly states the roles of the media. *iCivics*, a civics-centered education organization started by Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor, explains these concepts very easily to students. Students will read the text and answer a series of guided questions. The class will reconvene in order to properly surface the main ideas of the reading. In order to inform citizens, keeping up on the news is a responsibility of every eligible voting citizen. This reading will further enforce the message of keeping up with a weekly current events quiz.

Students will first read Emmanuel Sieyès “What Is the Third Estate?” They will read this document shortly after completing their unit on the foundations of modern government. Sieyès’ reading will allow the students to understand that the masses represent the third estate. Students will be asked to connect this reading to the article by *ThoughtCo.*

Students will then identify the fourth estate through the third and final reading. Students will be asked probing questions as to why they follow the news (whether it is for celebrity stories, sports journalism, politics, etc.). Students will be pushed to respond why any form of media exists. Who does it benefit? What agenda may the news network have? Who is the news network’s intended audience? How might this affect the network’s message and perspective? Are forms of media necessary components in a democracy? What role does information and education play in checking the government? These questions will allow students to appreciate the role the media plays.

### Lesson Three: The Journalistic Process

#### *Objective:*

SWBAT watch Showtime's mini-series *The Fourth Estate* and *Vice's* "Post-Truth News" IOT understand the process of investigative journalism and the value journalists play in a democratic society.

#### *Materials:*

- *The Fourth Estate*
- *Vice's* "Post-Truth News"

#### *Procedure:*

Before introducing the issue of lead and health, students must learn how journalists uncover and publish stories. While this series focuses on the Russia Investigation during President Trump's tenure in office, the series interviews and follows journalists and how they publish stories. It focuses on anonymous and identified sources, the research process, and other crucial steps towards informing the public. Students will be asked to complete a series of guided questions as they watch clips from the documentaries. They will be asked to make observations that include why journalists investigate stories, how ideas for stories are created, and how journalists develop relationships with their sources.

These observations will then again be tied to the issue of bias in the news. Students will be pressed to consider which sources are included and which are excluded, how information is attained, and what are the motivations of each journalist. Moreover, students will be again asked to consider the role of the larger newspaper or news network that is allowing the journalist to cover the story. Both documentaries deal with contemporary issues in journalism. Students will not only see how the investigative process of how journalists uncover and publish stories, but they will also see how the information they publish can sway public opinion. In the worst cases, students will examine the role of fake news in contemporary society. This will enforce the notion that students must remain vigilant about what they are reading in order to understand the validity of a source and of the message.

## Lesson Four: The Effects of Lead

### *Objective:*

SWBAT read and discuss reports and studies on lead and health IOT evaluate how lead impacts children and communities.

### *Materials:*

- *Elsvier's* "Low Level Lead Exposure: History and Discovery"
- School District of Philadelphia's letter to parents and guardians

### *Procedure:*

Now that students will have had time to understand the investigative journalism process and the importance of the media, students will need to study how lead affects their school and community. Students will examine the health effects of lead in order to understand the gravity it poses as a public health crisis. Students will take notes from a PowerPoint on the history of the use of lead. Students will gain information about why lead was originally used and what its benefits and drawbacks are.

Students will continue their readings by analyzing documents that explain the relationship between Philadelphia's water supply and lead and health issue. Students will gain information about Philadelphia's water supply and the condition of pipes throughout the city. Students will examine how these things contribute to the quality of life for Philadelphia residents by first examining the letter that is sent home to them warning their families of the lead, mold, and asbestos that exists at Bodine High School.

## Lesson Five: The Flint Water Crisis

### *Objective:*

SWBAT examine the case study of Flint, Michigan IOT identify how various levels of government are checked by the media and citizenry.

### *Materials:*

- *Vice* “Flint Water Crisis”
- Bill Pugliano’s “Water Is a Human Right” photograph
- Carla Campbell, Rachael Greenburg’s, Deepa Mankikar, and Ronald D. Ross’ “A Case Study of Environmental Injustice: The Failure of Flint”

### *Procedure:*

After students understand the health implications of lead and health, students will examine the case of Flint, Michigan. This way, students will understand how local and state levels of government play a significant role in individual’s lives. Often times, students focus their attention on national issues and the federal government. By introducing students to the government’s involvement with lead and health through the case study of Flint, Michigan, students will see how state and local levels of government impact their citizenry tremendously. Students will use this case study to visualize the relationship the news has in publishing information about lead and health. Students will examine the famous photo of the lead crisis in Flint that broke the story.

After watching *Vice*’s episode on the Flint Water Crisis, students will be asked to research headlines from the Flint, Michigan water crisis. Students will be given a list of key figures and moments in time in order to create a class timeline. The students will then display the timeline in the classroom in order to see how the investigation of Flint, Michigan led to the media and the public checking government officials at the local, state, and federal level.

## Lesson Six: Lead and Health in Philadelphia

### *Objective:*

SWBAT read and discuss local, state, and federal primary sources IOT identify how the public health crisis of lead has affected residents of Philadelphia.

### *Materials:*

- Barbara Laker, Wendy Ruderman, Dylan Purcell, Jessica and Griffin's "Toxic City, Sick Schools: Danger: Learn at Your Own Risk"
- President Bill Clinton's Executive Order

### *Procedure:*

After students have successfully read and verbally expressed their perceptions of the Flint Water Crisis, students will examine the lead and health environment in their own city. Students will continue to examine a recent report conducted by *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. The report is a detailed analysis of classroom and building conditions throughout the School District of Philadelphia. Readers can look at individual classrooms, closets, and other areas of each school building to see whether it is believed to contain lead paint, asbestos, mold, and other hazardous building conditions for children and adults. While these reports do not directly relate to the issues in Flint, students will be able to draw from how there was a public outcry after the Flint Water Crisis at the national level. Students will compare the issue of lead and how it is presented at a local level in the City of Philadelphia.

Students will learn about what type of reactions journalists solicit from public figures after they publish stories. Students will also look at the federal government's response to it by reading an executive order that was written by President Bill Clinton. These readings will engage students because of their proximity to the issue of lead. Furthermore, it will teach them how governments and the public react to stories that are published by the media and how governments at all levels respond to newly published stories. These documents not only ask students to conduct deep, meaningful research into their own city, but they also examine how different bodies of government create change as a result of journalists and media institutions publishing information.

If possible, I will contact journalists from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* to teach a lesson in my classrooms on the issue of lead and health within Philadelphia. Journalists will review how they researched the information in order to publish the article. Students will be prepared to ask questions about the research process, how the government, school district, and public reacted, and what steps were taken by the government after the article was published, and other important questions that students submit.



## Lesson Seven: Lead in the School District of Philadelphia

### *Objective:*

SWBAT research and write their own media release statement IOT inform their own audience about the lead and health issue in Philadelphia's schools.

### *Materials:*

- The City of Philadelphia's "Bill No. 100011-A."
- Superintendent Hite's "William Hite: The community must come together to fix our aging schools"
- Marilyn Howarth's "Verbal Comments to Philadelphia City Council for Lead in Schools Legislation Final - December 3, 2018"

### *Procedure:*

Students will read a report from city council, a letter from Superintendent William Hite, and other sources of members that have been involved with the issue of lead in Philadelphia's schools. Students will learn examine these documents as reactions to the Toxic Schools Report. Students will then be broken up into groups and assigned a role. Roles will range from the student union, teachers' union, the superintendent's office of the School District of Philadelphia, city council, the home and school association, and other groups that have shown concern regarding the lead and health issue of Philadelphia.

Students will be asked to create a public relations statement from the perspective of their assigned role. This way, students will be able to demonstrate what they have learned about identifying bias in the news. Students will present their brief public relations statements to their classmates. Students must include a component of action. Unions will often encourage their members to call their representatives and administrators will request aid from the local or state government. The students must call for action in order to mobilize the population they are speaking to. This way, students learn to become civically minded.

## Lesson Eight: Contact Your Representative

### *Objective:*

SWBAT call their local city council member IOT voice their opinion and propose a solution about the issue of lead and health.

### *Materials:*

- Cell phone
- *The Committee of 70* website

### *Procedure:*

Because the nature of this unit is very taxing on students because of the conditions of the school district they attend and the city they live in, I wish to end the unit by proposing solutions. Students will research their local and state representatives by using *The Committee of 70's* website. Students will be given a script to follow and will call their local and state representative to voice their opinion about the issue of lead and health in Philadelphia's neighborhoods and schools. Students will be required to explain what they learned during the unit.

Before their phone call, the class will convene as a group to see what kind of solutions students can brainstorm to address the issue of lead and health in the School District of Philadelphia. Students will be asked to draw upon the readings that they have studied throughout the unit as well as conversations that they have had with their classmates. Students can connect their solutions to their assigned perspectives in order to develop ideas for solutions. This may result in students creating solutions from the perspective of a nonprofit organization, the school district, the student union, or the state government.

## Resources

- City of Philadelphia. "Bill No. 100011-A." Ordinance, Philadelphia, 2011.
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- Howarth, MD, FACOEM, Marilyn V. "Verbal Comments to Philadelphia City Council for Lead in Schools Legislation Final - December 3, 2018." Letter, Philadelphia, December 3, 2018.
- Laker, Barbara; Ruderman, Wendy; Purcell, Dylan; and Griffin, Jessica. "Toxic City, Sick Schools: Danger: Learn at Your Own Risk." *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Philadelphia, PA), May 3, 2018.
- "Media and Influence." *iCivics*. Last modified on February 20, 2019. <https://www.icivics.org/curriculum/media-and-influence>.
- Needleman, MD, Herbert. "Low Level Lead Exposure: History and Discovery." *Elsevier* 19, no. 4 (2009): 235-238.
- Sieyès, Emmanuel. "What Is the Third Estate?" *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, vol. 6, *French Philosophers of the Eighteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1899), 32–35. May 19, 2019. <http://chnm.gmu.edu/revolution/exhibits/show/liberty--equality--fraternity/item/3146>
- The Fourth Estate*, directed Liz Garbus, aired May 27, 2018, on Showtime, <https://www.sho.com/the-fourth-estate>.

## Appendix

Below is a list of standards written by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania's Department of Education. These standards will be used as a guideline to allow students to think about the relationship the media has with the government and the roles of each group.

- Standard - 5.2.12.B: Examine the causes of conflicts in society and evaluate techniques to address those conflicts.
- Standard - 5.2.12.C: Evaluate political **leadership** and **public service** in a **republican form of government**.
- Standard - 5.2.12.D: Evaluate and demonstrate what makes competent and responsible **citizens**.

- Standard - 5.3.12.C: Evaluate how **government** agencies create, amend, and enforce regulations.
- Standard - 5.3.12.D: Evaluate the roles of political parties, **interest groups**, and **mass media** in politics and public policy.
- Standard - 5.3.12.H: Evaluate the role of **mass media** in setting public agenda and influencing political life.
- Standard - 5.3.12.I: Evaluate tax policies of various **states** and countries.
- Standard - 5.3.12.J: Evaluate critical issues in various contemporary **governments**.
- Standard - 5.4.12.D: Evaluate the role of **mass media** in world politics.