



# Journalism and 9/11: Connecting Students to Current Events Through Personal Stories\*

9/11 Tribute Center Curatorial Department

**Grade level: 6 - 12**

**Number of class periods: 3**

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## Objective

Students will explore the oral histories of journalists who reported on 9/11 to understand the challenges that journalists faced when reporting on an unprecedented local and global tragedy. Students will begin to think about the challenges journalists and media producers face when reporting on people's experiences in other tragedies and disasters.

## Common Core Standards

*Comprehensive Common Core Alignments at end of lesson plan.*

- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading 6, 7, 9
- College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing

## Resources

- *Journalists and 9/11*, <http://exhibits.tributewtc.org/oralhistory/journalists-and-911/>
- New York Times, September 11 Archive [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/timestopics/sept-11-2001-archive.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/timestopics/sept-11-2001-archive.html?_r=0)

## Supplementary Resources

- Gilbert, Allison, Phil Hirschhorn, Melinda Murphy, Robyn Walensky, and Mitchell Stephens, eds. *Covering Catastrophe: Broadcast Journalists Report September 11*, Chicago: Bonus Books, 2002.
- Magnum Photographers: *New York September 11*, Brooklyn, NY: Powerhouse Books, 2002.
- CBS News, *What We Saw: The Events of September 11, 2001 – in Words, Pictures, and Video*, New York: Simon and Shuster, 2003.
- Newseum, *Running Toward Danger, Stories behind the breaking news of 9/11*, Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2002.

## Preparation

Ask students to familiarize themselves with the media reporting on the attacks of September 11, 2001 by exploring the stories in the multimedia exhibit *Journalists and 9/11*. Ask students to select the story that made the deepest impression on them, and to write a paragraph explaining why they chose it.

## Activity

### Day 1

Journalists covering the attacks on the World Trade Center on the morning of September 11 captured the images that have shaped our public memory of that history. Discuss how journalists' images have influenced what we remember about 9/11. Have the students share what they learned about individual journalists' personal stories. Have the class as a group make a list of all of the personal challenges journalists faced on 9/11.

\*To be utilized in conjunction with our online exhibit, *Journalists & 9/11: Reporting on Trauma* <http://exhibits.tributewtc.org/oralhistory/journalists-and-911/>



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### Day 2

Ask the students to think about the challenges that major media producers faced when reporting on 9/11 in the first days and months after 9/11. Make a list of challenges both local newspapers and major networks based in NYC faced when reporting on the victims, their families, and the survivors.

### Day 3

Ask students to reflect on a crisis faced by their school community. Ask them to think about what sensitivities they would have to be aware of before producing a media report on the crisis. How would their own feelings as members of the school community affect what they write? How would they approach the people most deeply impacted by the crisis? What parts of the story could they share in a media report? What parts of the story would be too sensitive to share? Why? Discuss how what is published in a media report may help or harm a community.

### Assessment/Reflection

Ask each student to write a paper discussing the role of journalists reporting on a traumatic situation. Students may write either about journalists reporting on 9/11, or about journalists reporting on another tragedy in the news.

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### Common Core Alignments

*This lesson can be adjusted for other grade levels and subjects. It aligns with the following Common Core Standards:*

#### College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading

##### Craft and Structure

Standard 6: Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.

- Students will be examining images of 9/11 and how they relate to the personal stories of journalists. When making a list of challenges faced by individual journalists, students will be assessing how journalists' own experiences shape their content, style and even the visual images they produce.

##### Integration of Knowledge and Ideas

Standard 7: Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse formats and media, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

- Students will integrate information from various news media outlets in order to carefully evaluate how they might choose to cover a crisis facing their own communities.

Standard 9: Analyze how two or more texts address similar themes or topics in order to build knowledge or to compare the approaches the authors take.

- Students will be analyzing the images and stories of several journalists and will compare and contrast the images experience to come up with a summative list of shared experiences of 9/11 journalists.

#### College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Writing

##### Text Types and Purposes

Standard 3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

- Students will be writing narratives, either individually or in groups, to explain the decisions they would have to face if writing about a catastrophe in their own community.

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