

Free Press 101: Early Years

HOW DO REPORTERS AND NEWSROOMS GET THEIR STORIES?

This group of learning experiences are meant to be short, informative, and equip learners with skills to better understand topics in journalism and journalistic integrity.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- ☐ Read through this document and **How do reporters and newsrooms get their stories?** in **Free Press 101**.
- ☐ Facilitate learner access to technology as needed.

GOALS OF THESE LEARNING EXPERIENCES:

Learners will demonstrate understanding of how news tips are gathered and stories are developed.

DEFINITIONS:

News tip: a story idea from a community member directly to the newspaper.

News lead: a potential story idea that a journalist is looking into.

Pitch: a journalist's attempt to convince an editor they have a good news story.

EXTENSION OPPORTUNITIES:

These learning experiences take learners through the process of developing a story from an in-person news source. There are many other ways to find and follow news leads, including:

- Conflicts
- Events
- Unusual occurrences
- Trends
- Oddities
- Pop culture
- Social media
- Government schedules and documents
- Freedom of information requests

LEARNING EXPERIENCE 1: LEARNING ABOUT SOURCES

1.
 - Ask learners to identify some of their favourite topics, subjects or extracurricular clubs and teams. Note their answers on the board or ask them to write them down individually. Alternatively, select topics from curriculum.
 - Draw the attention of the learners to the diversity of interests in their classroom (or curriculum). Acknowledge that there are a variety of experts on different topics even in one classroom. For example, one learner may love to draw or play soccer, or a curricular topic such as the lifecycle of a butterfly could be examined.
 - Challenge the learners to come up with a few people they could talk to about each of the topics. For the butterfly example, the students might ask teachers or older students what they know, or they might ask their parents or even someone from a local museum or university. The child who likes to draw may suggest the art teacher or even someone who works in an art supply store or gallery. Write down their suggestions of who they could talk to, and explain that journalists might call these people "sources": places where news tips could come from.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE 2: GATHERING NEWS TIPS

2.
 - Ask learners to come up with two or three questions they might ask of the people on the list. For example: "What was your favourite memory of a butterfly?" or "When did you decide to be an artist?" Write these questions on the board.
 - Have the learners divide into small groups of three or four (or continue as a large group as needed). Each group will choose a topic, list of people, and questions to ask from the suggestions developed as a class. They can record this on their "Source Searcher" sheet (page 3 or [PDF here](#)).
 - Students can now ask their questions of their sources. Older students may pursue their sources outside of the classroom. Younger students can meet with their sources in their classroom, either in small groups or as a whole, scheduled by their teacher.
 - Once they've spoken to their sources, they can fill in "The tip collector" (page 4 or [PDF here](#)) with some ideas for school news.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE 3: FOLLOWING A LEAD

2.
 - Learners can now choose one of their news tips to develop into a story.
 - The story can take the form of a written piece, a comic book, a poster or a piece of art. Regardless of format, the learners should be able to describe:
 1. What the story is about.
 2. Who will find the story interesting.
 3. Why they chose this story.

LEARNING EXPERIENCE 4: PITCHING A STORY

3.
 - Groups will now take turns presenting their news story to the rest of the class.
 - Explain to the learners that this is like a journalist pitching a story to an editor. In order for the editor to accept the pitch, it needs to sound exciting and interesting.

The Source Searcher

Use the sheet below to organize your plan for discovering news tips.

1.	Our topic:
2.	Our sources:
3.	Our questions to ask them:

The Tip Collector

Use the sheet below to collect some ideas for news stories. Make sure you write down who you spoke to AND what their role is in the story. An example is below.

Example:

I spoke to Mr. Wall, Music teacher about choir club.

Two news ideas:

1. The Choir club is just starting, he needs singers.
2. Choir club is very fun.

1.

I spoke to _____, _____ about _____.

Two news ideas they suggested were:

1. _____.
2. _____.

2.

I spoke to _____, _____ about _____.

Two news ideas they suggested were:

1. _____.
2. _____.

3.

I spoke to _____, _____ about _____.

Two news ideas they suggested were:

1. _____.
2. _____.