

Dealing with Disasters

Lesson plan 6: Activities using the media

Getting the story

Age group: 11 - 14

Aims:

To show that there are different ways of constructing news articles. To explore ways in which news is presented. To think about the issues facing journalists who are reporting on disasters.

What to do:

Collect a range of broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. Photocopy **Shafiqul Alam's story** (below) and the **Bangladesh information sheet** (below) so that every student has a copy.

Give students copies of the Bangladesh background information sheet and the selection of newspapers. In groups of six, ask them to imagine that they are journalists or news reporters, preparing a report on Bangladesh. They should remember that their job is to present an exciting report to catch the public's attention. Using the selection of newspapers as a guide, they should decide what sort of newspaper or TV channel they are working for and what story they want to present. What sort of people will they interview -- those affected by flooding, people working for the government, people working for UK-based charities, businessmen, community leaders? What sort of messages do they want to convey to their readers? What sort of photos and headlines will they use? Students can then have three minutes to present their reports verbally to the class, with different students saying quotes and reading reports.

Now hand out Shafiqul Alam's story. As a class, discuss how it must feel for Shafiqul documenting a disaster in his own country. How do students think what he says would be similar or different to what they say? What are some of the problems that journalists face when reporting on disasters (for example, language barriers, access to particular places...)? How do students think this will affect their reports? Would students wish to change their articles in the light of what Shafiqul says? How do students think that foreign news reports differ from those written by journalists who live in the country concerned?

Further work

Imagine that the tables are turned and you are with a Bangladeshi news crew doing a report on the UK. The news crew want to show a racy news item which will interest viewers, but one which you think will give a negative image of your country. What do you think would be chosen? How would you feel if this negative news style provided the only information people got about your country? How do you think the Bangladeshi people feel about the way we present their country in our news items?

Whose news?

Age group: 11 - 14

Aims:

To understand that different media reports reflect diverse points of view.

To encourage students to question the media reports that they are presented with.

What to do:

Download and photocopy **newspaper articles one and two** (below) so that you have enough for each pair of students to share both articles. You could find your own articles if this is more appropriate.

It is helpful if students have some understanding of Bangladesh -- they may read the Bangladesh background information sheet (below) beforehand as preparation.

In pairs, ask students to read both of the abridged newspaper articles that were written in August 1998. Ask them to consider what the similarities and differences are between the two reports. Is one article more positive about Bangladesh? How is this presented? Why do they think there are differences between the articles? What do these things tell us about the media?

Fact or opinion?

Age group: 11 - 14

Aims:

To examine bias and neutrality in the media.

What to do:

You will need a variety of coloured pens. Photocopy a variety of press articles on the disaster you wish to cover. Give each pair of students two coloured pens and one or more press cuttings.

Ask each pair to use different colours to underline words and phrases that:

(a) are intended to arouse the reader's emotions;

(b) express a judgement on the news reported.

Make sure that no confusion arises by ensuring that the same colour pen is used by each group for (a) and (b). Put all the sheets up on the wall and you should have a graphic demonstration of fact in relation to opinion in each of the articles -- emotive language and subjective commentary should be highlighted.

Now ask the class to consider to what extent the articles were biased or neutral. Was it easy to tell the difference between fact and opinion? To what extent were opinions expressed supported by facts. Were there more facts or more opinions? Could all the facts be checked? Why do we expect newspapers to give us facts?

Analysing the news

Age group: 11 - 14

Aims:

To show that there are different ways of presenting the same news story.

What to do:

Collect a range of newspaper articles on one particular disaster. These should be from a range of broadsheet and tabloid newspapers. Photocopy the articles so that each pair of students will have two different articles. Alternatively, you may wish to download and photocopy the **articles provided** (below).

Give each pair of students two articles and ask them to compare their two stories, looking in particular at who is interviewed, what impression is conveyed, whose point of view the story is told from, what type of words appear most frequently, how much of the article is based on fact and how much on emotion.

Pairs of students could then report back on how different their two articles were and how this affected their understanding of the event. As a class, students could discuss what they think about presentation of news, whether on TV or in newspapers. Were they surprised by their findings or not?

Curriculum links

England	Scotland	Wales
English: - Group discussion and interaction; taking different views into account. - Reading for meaning - analyse and discuss alternative interpretations; how ideas, values and emotions are explored; identify perspectives; how meanings are changed when texts are adapted to different media. - Media and moving image texts - nature and purpose; choices and response of audiences; how meaning is conveyed.	English: - Listening in groups; listening in order to respond to texts; talking in groups; talking about experiences, feelings and opinions; audience awareness ; reading for information; awareness of genre. Environmental Studies; Society: - Developing informed attitudes.	English: - Group discussion and interaction - contributions to groups; taking different views into account. - Reading for meaning - analyse and discuss alternative interpretations; how ideas, values and emotions are explored; identify perspectives; how meanings are changed when texts are adapted to different media. - Media and moving image texts - nature and purpose; choices and response of audiences; how meaning is conveyed.

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Worksheet: Shafiqul Alam's story

Case study: Interview with Shafiqul Alam

Shafiqul Alam is a photographer who has worked for many newspapers and magazines. He has always lived and worked in Bangladesh.

"In 1991, there was a big cyclone in Bangladesh. I worked at a photographic agency. One day we collected many magazines together and spread them out on the floor. We wanted to see what pictures magazines were showing about the cyclone.

We got the impression from looking at the photos that Bangladesh had been totally destroyed. We realised that this was not true, and began to try and do something to change this. I travelled to the cyclone area and took so many photos of people surviving. They were rebuilding their houses and preparing their fields. But we found that many magazines abroad weren't so interested in getting these pictures.



Photo: Shafiqul Alam/Oxfam

There were big differences between what local papers showed in Bangladesh and what was shown abroad. I think that newspaper readers abroad are more interested in disaster stories. That's painful for me. Of course, that is part of the whole picture, but only one part. The other part that doesn't get shown so much is that people in Bangladesh are really strong in spirit and stand up to what they face. When I take photos I want to say 'look at the people and their strengths'.

As a local person I feel that I can cover stories in a way which would not be possible for outsiders. I speak the language. I know how to get to places. Most foreign photographers and journalists come for a very short time and they stay in the city where costs are very high.

My feelings about my job are probably different from someone who is not a Bangladeshi. Maybe others might see their assignment here as 'just another job'. But this is my country. I am proud of it and so I always try and find something positive. I also feel that I have an important responsibility. A photograph can show the truth or it can hide it. My work can change the way people see Bangladesh."

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Worksheet: Bangladesh information sheet

Bangladesh is a small country, just over half the size of the UK. It is one of the most densely populated countries in the world, with a population of approximately 124 million. Despite its rich natural resources, about 78% of Bangladeshis live in poverty, and find it hard to meet their basic needs for food, shelter, healthcare, and education.

Agriculture

Bangladesh is primarily an agricultural country. Two-thirds of Bangladeshis depend on the land for a living. However, land is not equally shared. Most of the best land is in the hands of a few large landowners. About 64 per cent of Bangladeshis are landless or do not own enough land to feed their families. The poor often have no choice but to live on land that is vulnerable to flooding.

The Environment

Bangladesh is the largest delta in the world and, apart from a few hills in the north and south-east, it is flat as far as the eye can see. This means that it is prone to severe and heavy flooding. Flood water is both a blessing and a curse in Bangladesh. The flooding affects about one third of the country every year. The flood waters fertilise the land, giving Bangladesh some of the richest farmland in the world. The great rivers Ganges and Brahmaputra (called Padma and Jamuna in Bangladesh) which flow into the country provide abundant water for growing rice and jute (a fibre used to make carpets and sacks). Flood water can be used by farmers to cultivate their crops.

Flooding

Since 1984, there have been six huge floods in Bangladesh. In 1998, the country was devastated by the worst floods in living memory. Nearly three quarters of the country was flooded and a quarter of the population was forced to leave their homes. When the flood waters went down an even bigger problem remained. The waters left an enormous health problem. Dirty water carries disease and millions of people were at risk of illness and had lost their food crops. Whole villages have lost their homes and livelihoods. The poor have particularly suffered from the floods. They have only just enough to survive from day to day, and when a disaster strikes they have nothing to tide them over. They cannot afford to insure their homes, and lose everything in a disaster.

The response

Communities in Bangladesh have developed ways of coping with emergencies. Flood resistant trees and shrubs have been planted to make the soil firmer. The government has also taken steps. Permanent shelters have been built on higher ground where communities can seek safety. But all of this costs money – one cyclone shelter alone costs £45,000 to build, and Bangladesh, as one of the poorest countries in the world, cannot afford the costs alone.

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Worksheet: News Article 1

BANGLADESH DISASTER CLAIMS 371 LIVES WITH WORSE TO COME

20m in crisis as floods engulf a nation *by Julie Simmons, Foreign Editor*

Despair is etched on the face of fourteen-year-old Tahmina Khatun, drifting along on a raft near her home which has disappeared under torrents of water. She knows she now faces an uphill struggle in life.



A woman stands by the remains of her home in Shariatpur, destroyed by the worst floods to hit Bangladesh in over a decade.

"My companions are my ducks...and sometimes I feel threatened by snakes. But I am still alive."

Twenty million people have been affected by flooding in Bangladesh which has left two-thirds of the country under water. They face sickness and famine as whole communities are marooned, their crops destroyed and houses sunk in a disaster of epic proportions - and the worst is yet to come. Torrents pouring in from neighbouring India are adding to the catastrophe which has so far claimed 371 lives.

Sixty died of illness caused by polluted water and rotting food. Others drowned or were killed by mudslides crushing their homes. Many were poisoned by snake bites. At least 100,000 have contracted diarrhoea and thousands more are falling sick every day, say aid workers. Bangladesh, a country of twenty-five million people, appealed yesterday for urgent international aid to help it cope with the crisis.

"We will welcome any form of assistance from any government or international agencies," said Foreign Minister Abdus Samad Azad. He warned that his country would need "huge resources".

The flooding is the worst in Bangladesh since 1988 when more than 5,000 people died.

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Worksheet: News article 2

TWO-THIRDS OF BANGLADESH ENGULFED AND FLOODWATERS STILL RISING



Syed Ahmeduzzaman in Demra

With millions of people marooned and clinging to their swamped homes, the worst flooding in Bangladesh for 10 years is reviving dreadful memories of the past.

The floods have engulfed two-thirds of this delta country for more than six weeks, and disrupted the lives and work of 25 million people.

"It already looks like the 1988 floods," said Hashem Ali Matbar, aged 57, who lives in Demra, nine miles from the capital, Dhaka. He pointed to a wide waterfront dotted with houses submerged up to their roofs.

The 1988 floods, the worst in recent memory, killed more than 5,000 people. In 1988, he said, speaking

from a boat, "most of our homes had collapsed when the floodwater receded".

He feared the devastation could be worse this time, because the water had remained much longer than in 1988. "I can see a repeat of 1988 and I fear the impact could be more colossal."

The government is asking for "any form of assistance" from any government or agency. It estimates the damage so far at £140 million. Nearly 500,000 tonnes of rice has been ruined in the fields.

Narananganj, a river port 12 seven miles from Demar, was submerged yesterday, witnesses said. "There is no place dry in this town," said a local businessman, Sohrab Hossain. "The water is still rising."