



Ida Tarbell: Journalism in Action English/Language Arts Lesson Plan



Lesson Focus:

According to UNESCO, investigative journalism is the unveiling of facts that are concealed deliberately by someone in a position of power, or accidentally due to chaotic circumstances, and exposure of all relevant facts to the public. Investigative journalism requires systematic, in-depth, and original research and reporting and relies on the use of public records and data. In addition, it often focuses on social justice and accountability. Through her determination to expose the corrupt practices of John D. Rockefeller and the Standard Oil Company, Ida Tarbell helped to transform journalism. She is largely credited with being one of the first investigative journalists. For her achievements, she was labeled a muckraker by President Theodore Roosevelt. Best known for her 1904 book, *The History of the Standard Oil Company*, Tarbell helped to expand the role of the newspaper in society and stimulate the U.S. Progressive movement. Along with other muckrakers of the day, Tarbell helped to cement investigative journalism's crucial role in democracy. In addition, she became a role model for young women who wanted to become journalists at a time when it went against gender expectations.

Lesson Synopsis:

Investigative journalism is a form of journalism in which reporters investigate a single topic of interest in an in-depth manner. Investigative topics often include serious crimes, political corruption, or corporate wrongdoing. An investigative journalist may spend months or years researching before reporting their findings to the public. A story resulting from exceptional investigative reporting can disrupt major institutions and bring about changes in society. Ida Tarbell's investigation of the Standard Oil Company, Upton Sinclair's investigation of the meatpacking industry, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein's investigation of the Watergate scandal, and Sarah Stillman's reporting on human trafficking are all examples of investigative journalism that changed the way society viewed an institution or industry. Investigative news stories begin in different ways. A journalist may notice a problem or something suspicious and research to find out more, or they may receive a tip from someone else and then work to determine what the full story is, or a source might leak information secretly, supplying all the necessary information, but requiring the journalist to piece together a story and find a way to present it to the public without a named source. The general public does not typically have access to all of the information a journalist uses to write a story. Even if they did, it is unlikely that individuals are going to read all of these resources, no matter how significant their value. Therefore, it is the job of the investigative reporters to package information and data into digestible, engaging stories that the public needs and wants to hear.

In this lesson, students will learn the difference between investigative journalism and conventional journalism. They will describe the process, identify the purpose, and evaluate the impact of investigative journalism. Students will also have the opportunity to apply basic investigative principles such as understanding what makes a story newsworthy, exploring primary source documents, and corroborating sources prior to using information. In addition, students will practice using narrative nonfiction that highlights social issues while clearly and compellingly conveying information to the reader.

Grade Level:

Grades 9 - 12

Time Requirement:

Two 80 minute periods plus additional time for article writing

Essential Understandings:

Students will understand that:

- As a teenager, Ida Tarbell witnessed what became known as the Cleveland Massacre, where dozens of small oil producers in Ohio and Western Pennsylvania, including Tarbell's father, were faced with the choice of either selling their businesses to the Standard Oil Company or attempt to compete with the large company and potentially face ruin.
 - Ida Tarbell was part of a group of journalists that investigated and exposed corrupt business practices during the Progressive Era, from the 1890s through the 1920s.
 - These journalists became known as muckrakers, a moniker given by President Theodore Roosevelt because he believed that their main purpose was to emphasize the bad in order to sell papers.
 - Muckrakers provided accurate, detailed accounts of corruption and social ills caused by big business' practices in a rapidly industrializing nation.
 - Ida Tarbell began writing for McClure's Magazine, first writing biographies on historical figures such as Abraham Lincoln, then moving on to issues of the period such as the Spanish American War, and then writing her famous expose on Standard Oil, where she both praised Rockefeller and chronicled the corrupt practices that made Standard Oil the largest company of its time.
 - American citizens have the basic rights outlined in the first amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which includes the freedom of the press.
 - Investigative journalists work to make sure citizens are not left in the dark about political issues, corruption, and criminal activities that occur.
 - Investigative journalism is imperative to society so the public can make informed decisions and become knowledgeable global citizens.
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Objectives:

Students will:

- Examine the life and journalism of Ida Tarbell.
 - Identify the difference between yellow journalism and muckraking.
 - Understand that in investigative journalism reporters investigate a single story in-depth. These stories often uncover corruption, review government or corporate policies, or draw attention to economic, political or cultural trends.
 - Discuss the role and value of a free press.
 - Determine the role of the media in addressing social and cultural issues.
 - Develop an idea for an in-depth news story.
 - Conduct research to write an investigative new story.
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Anticipated Outcomes:

Students will be able to:

- Define investigative journalism and identify the difference between investigative journalism and conventional journalism.
- Describe the tools used by investigative journalists.

- Identify the purpose of investigative journalism.
 - Determine the validity of information researched to be included in a news story.
 - Explain how a journalist acts as a voice for the powerless in society.
 - Evaluate the impact of investigative journalism by summarizing important examples of investigative journalism.
 - Evaluate the benefits and risks of publishing a controversial story.
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Content Standards:

Reading Standards:

- 1.2B** Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly, as well as inferences and conclusions based on and related to an author’s implicit and explicit assumptions and beliefs.
- 1.2G** Integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information presented in different media or formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively) as well as in words in order to address a question or solve a problem.

Writing Standards:

- 1.4A** Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information clearly and accurately.
 - 1.4C** Develop and analyze the topic thoroughly by selecting the most significant and relevant facts, extended definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples appropriate to the audience’s knowledge of the topic; include graphics and multimedia when useful to aid comprehension.
 - 1.4G** Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics.
 - 1.4Q** Write with an awareness of the stylistic aspects of writing.
 - 1.4S** Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research, applying grade-level reading standards for literature and literary nonfiction.
 - 1.4U** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments and information.
 - 1.4V** Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.
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Lesson Activities:

Introductory Activity: Introduction to Ida Tarbell and the Muckrakers

- Option one: Inquiry
 - Think, Pair, Share - Working with the U.S. Capitol Visitors Center online exhibition on Ida Tarbell, “Ida M. Tarbell: Exposing Standard Oil”, <https://www.visitthecapitol.gov/exhibitions/congress-and-progressive-era-part-2/ida-m-tarbell-exposing-standard-oil>
partner groups will take notes on the information found on the site. As a whole class discussion, create a list of observations and facts that students made note of in their partner groups.
- Option two: Video
 - Think, Pair, Share - While watching three video clips, students will use a graphic organizer to organize the information presented in the video clips. (See Appendix A for a graphic organizer template.)
 - Clip one (3:03): 2009 Erie Hall of Fame video on Ida Tarbell, No Man More Dangerous <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Yog7FyAFyA>

- Clip two (2:19): 2020 NBC News video, Muckraking
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsEK_MbfesA
- Clip three (1:50): 2009 eHow video, Careers in Journalism: What is an Investigative Journalist?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kh6bt1cmShM>

Activity One: What is Investigative Journalism? Breaking News Activity

(This activity is adapted from a similar activity at PulitzerCenter.org.)

- Divide students into groups of 2 - 3.
- Provide each student group with a “Breaking News” envelope containing a tip from an anonymous source, chart paper, and markers. For this activity, it is important that at least two groups receive the same anonymous tip.
 - The anonymous tip will be a piece of information that a powerful person or company does not want to be publicized. These tips should be fictional, but realistic pieces of information.
 - For example:
 - Recycling material collected at the biggest company in town does not actually get recycled at all; instead, the company sends it off to the landfill while claiming a tax benefit on the recycling equipment they don’t, in reality, have.
 - Cans collecting money for charity have been placed at several locations throughout the community. The charity identified on the cans does not actually exist and no one knows where the collected money is going.
 - A local restaurant has vegan items listed on its menu, but part of the dish is prepared using an animal product.
 - A local bank has opened an account for a criminal organization that is laundering money.
 - The CEO of an international company headquartered in town is embezzling money from the company.
 - A used car dealership in a neighboring community is falsifying documents and selling defective cars to consumers.
 - A local grocery store claims to give unsold food to a local homeless shelter, but they have been throwing it all in the garbage.
 - Inform students that the tip that they have received is from a source that wants to remain anonymous. In addition, the information from the source may be factual, or it may be false.
 - Student groups should brainstorm answers to the following questions:
 - How would you go about determining whether the anonymous tip is true and what the larger story might be?
 - What steps would you take to investigate the story?
 - What would be some pros and cons of keeping the information secret while investigating it further?
 - What stakeholders are involved in this tip and how might they be affected if the story is published?
 - What would you, as a journalist, be risking if you shared this information?
 - What would be the repercussions if the story were to be published?
 - What would be the repercussions if the story was published but then found to be false?
 - How does this story impact the community?
 - Is this story worth investigating? Why/why not?
 - Once groups have finished brainstorming, two groups with the same tip should form a larger group. The new groups should discuss the answers to their brainstorming questions and develop a plan of

action that outlines the steps they would take to determine the trustworthiness and accuracy of the anonymous tip they received.

- Groups will write their plan of action on the chart paper provided at the beginning of the activity. This can also be done using a slide presentation.
- Groups will then reveal their anonymous tip and explain their action plan.
- In a whole-class discussion, discuss the pros and cons of the action plans presented and ask students for suggestions to improve them. Also, discuss the brainstorming questions that refer to the potential impact of the information on the community.
- Remind students that these are the types of decisions that investigative journalists must make when they are determining what stories to pursue.

Activity two: Investigative Journalism Then and Now

According to PBS NewsHour, muckraking emerged out of the Progressive Era, when reporters like Ida Tarbell, Jacob Riis, and Upton Sinclair shed light on corrupt businesses, government leaders, and terrible societal conditions. Their goal was to appeal to people's emotions and spark social change. Muckrakers did the hard work of combing through evidence, conducting interviews, and analyzing data. They exposed the corruption of monopoly, the squalor of tenement housing, and the danger of unsanitary food. Ultimately, the muckrakers' work ignited a groundswell of support for reform. The public read the articles and reacted. Ida Tarbell's exposé on the Standard Oil Company's monopolistic practices led to the breakup of the company and regulation of the railroad industry. Jacob Riis's book *How the Other Half Lives* inspired many reforms, including set codes for tenement house construction and fire safety regulations. The publication of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* led to reforms in the meatpacking industry and the passage of the Pure Food and Drug Act in 1906.

- Working individually or in partner groups, students will begin by reading the 2014 Brookings Institution article, "Ten Noteworthy Moments in U.S. Investigative Reporting" by Fred Dewes and Thomas Young. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2014/10/20/ten-noteworthy-moments-in-u-s-investigative-journalism/>
- Using the Investigative Journalism handout (Appendix B), students will research Ida Tarbell's investigation of John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Company.
 - Resources for student research include, but are not limited to:
 - Gilbert King, "The Woman Who Took on the Tycoon" <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-woman-who-took-on-the-tycoon-651396/>
 - Constitutional Rights Foundation, "Ida Tarbell and the Muckrakers" https://www.crf-usa.org/images/pdf/Ida_Tarbell.pdf
 - Thomas, Mark. "Ida M. Tarbell's Crusade Against Standard Oil." *Bill of Rights Institute*, 2021, <https://cnx.org/contents/NgBFhmUc@14.5:IRu4WSfR@7/10-3-%F0%9F%94%8E-Ida-M-Tarbell-s-Crusade-against-Standard-Oil>
- Students will choose a second, more contemporary example of investigative journalism to research. This example can come from the 2014 Brookings Institution article, "Ten Noteworthy Moments in U.S. Investigative Reporting" by Fred Dewes and Thomas Young, or from additional examples identified by students.
- Students will complete the Investigative Journalism handout for their second example.
- In a whole-class discussion, students will share some of the information they found in their research.

Activity three: Becoming an Investigative Reporter

- Working individually or in partner groups, students will identify a topic/issue to investigate.
- Students will complete the Investigative Article Planner handout (Appendix C).
- Students will conduct research and using the outline created on their Investigative Article Planner, will write a news article.

Resources:

Lesson Resources:

- “Careers in Journalism : What Is an Investigative Journalist?” *YouTube*, uploaded by eHow, 3 June 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=kh6bt1cmShM.
- Erie Hall Of Fame. “No Man More Dangerous.” *YouTube*, uploaded by ErieHall, 21 Sept. 2009, www.youtube.com/watch?v=5Yog7FyAFyA.
- “Ida M. Tarbell: Exposing Standard Oil.” *U.S. Capitol Visitor Center*, 2021, www.visitthecapitol.gov/exhibitions/congress-and-progressive-era-part-2/ida-m-tarbell-exposing-standard-oil.
- “Ida Tarbell and the Muckrakers.” *Bill of Rights in Action*, Constitutional Rights Foundation, 2019, www.crf-usa.org/images/pdf/Ida_Tarbell.pdf.
- “Investigative Journalism.” *UNESCO*, 7 June 2018, en.unesco.org/investigative-journalism.
- “Journalism in Action.” *PBS NewsHour*, 2020, www.journalisminaction.org/case/ida-tarbell-muckraker.
- King, Gilbert. “The Woman Who Took on the Tycoon.” *Smithsonian Magazine*, Smithsonian Magazine, 5 July 2012, www.smithsonianmag.com/history/the-woman-who-took-on-the-tycoon-651396.
- NBC News Learn. “Muckraking.” *YouTube*, uploaded by NBC News Learn, 2 May 2020, www.youtube.com/watch?v=fsEK_MbfesA.
- Pulitzer Center Education. “The Paradise Papers: A Lesson in Investigative Journalism.” *Pulitzer Center*, 17 Nov. 2017, pulitzercenter.org/builder/lesson/paradise-papers-lesson-investigative-journalism.
- Thomas, Mark. “Ida M. Tarbell’s Crusade Against Standard Oil.” *Bill of Rights Institute*, 2021, <https://cnx.org/contents/NgBFhmUc@14.5:IRu4WSfR@7/10-3-%F0%9F%94%8E-Ida-M-Tarbell-s-Crusade-against-Standard-Oil>.
- Young, Fred Dews And Thomas. “Ten Noteworthy Moments In U.S. Investigative Journalism.” *Brookings*, 16 Mar. 2017, www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2014/10/20/ten-noteworthy-moments-in-u-s-investigative-journalism.

Graphic Organizer Resources:

- “Reading Comprehension Graphic Organizer Tool – Someone-Then Character Summary.” *Action Potential Learning*, 2018, www.aplearning.com/education-resources/item/reading-comprehension-graphic-organizer-tool-someone-then-character-summary.html.

APPENDIX A

Source:		
People:		Setting:
	Conflict/Problem:	
Major Events:		Resolutions:

Evidence/Interpretation Chart

<p style="text-align: center;">Evidence</p> <p style="text-align: center;">I saw/heard in the videos...</p> <p style="text-align: center;">(You must include at least 10 items on you about in the article)</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NOTE: This evidence will be part of your notes for this section.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Interpretation</p> <p style="text-align: center;">I wondered, I made a connection, I thought...</p> <p style="text-align: center;">**Ask at least three questions, make at least three connections, and include at least five insights.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">NOTE: An insight statement is a discovery of understanding that helps to explain why something is happening the way it is. It is being able to see and understand a situation clearly or gaining a new perspective. Think of it as an "aha" moment.</p>

- Additional examples of graphic organizers can be found on the Action Potential Learning website: <https://www.aplearning.com/education-resources/item/reading-comprehension-graphic-organizer-tool-so-meone-then-character-summary.html>

APPENDIX B

Investigative Journalism: A Case Study

1. Who was/were the investigative journalist(s)?
2. Who was being investigated?
3. What was the story? (Summarize in 50 - 100 words)
4. What was the journalist(s) motivation for the investigation?
5. When did this occur?
6. Where did it happen?
7. Why was this happening? What was the goal?
8. How did it happen?
9. What impact did the story have on the general public?
10. What impact did the story have on those committing the wrongdoing?
11. What impact did the story have on those who were affected?
12. What are some of the similarities you can draw between the experiences of Ida Tarbell and the journalist(s) in your second example?

Investigative Article Planner

<p>1 Topic:</p> <p>Hypothesis:</p>	<p>5 Article outline:</p>
<p>2 Methods of investigation:</p>	
<p>3 Sources:</p>	
<p>4 Questions that must be answered to write a valid article (at least five):</p>	

Lesson plan developed for the Oil Region Alliance for Business, Industry, and Tourism by Sara Jones, Social Studies teacher at Titusville High School in Titusville, PA. 2021. sjones@gorockets.org

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The mission of the Oil Region Alliance of Business, Industry & Tourism is to manage the Oil Region National Heritage Area and to increase the prosperity of the Oil Region by enticing all people to live, work, learn and play in “the Valley that Changed the World” through the preservation, promotion, development, and support of historical, educational, natural, recreational, residential, commercial and industrial destinations.

The Oil Region Alliance manages the Oil Region National Heritage Area, which is also a Pennsylvania Heritage Area. The Area encompasses Venango County and the City of Titusville, Borough of Hydetown, and Oil Creek Township of Crawford County. More information is available at OilRegion.org.

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