

# REPORTING AMERICA AT WAR

## CLASSROOM MATERIALS

### Debate: Should the U.S. Government Exercise Press Censorship During Wartime?

**SUBJECT:**

History, Journalism  
Language Arts

**ESTIMATED  
TIME REQUIRED:**

Two class periods.

**OVERVIEW:**

After viewing the film *Reporting America at War*, students will conduct a classroom debate on the topic:

*The United States government should be prohibited from exercising any sort of press censorship during wartime.*

**RESOURCES FOR THIS LESSON:**

Press censorship

National Coalition Against Censorship in the first Gulf War

[http://www.ncac.org/cen\\_news/cn38wartime.html](http://www.ncac.org/cen_news/cn38wartime.html)

NCAC page featuring a column by Tom Wicker regarding censorship in the first Gulf War

<http://www.ncac.org/issues/tomwicker.html>

Text of an interview with John MacArthur, publisher of Harper's Weekly, on censorship and the 2003 Gulf War

<http://www.mediachannel.org/views/interviews/macarthur.shtml>

Newseum "War Stories" exhibit

<http://www.newseum.org/warstories/>

CIA page reviewing "Secrets of History", book about censorship of radio and press during World War II

<http://www.cia.gov/csi/studies/vol46no3/article10.html>

2001 USA Today editorial opposed to censorship <http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/2001-10-23-ncguest1.htm>

Media Ethics and Cases page about censorship of photographs in wartime:

<http://commfaculty.fullerton.edu/lester/writings/military.html>

Constitutional Rights Foundation "War In Iraq" page

[http://www.crf-usa.org/Iraqwar\\_html/iraqwar\\_press.html](http://www.crf-usa.org/Iraqwar_html/iraqwar_press.html)

**SUPPLEMENTAL RESOURCES FOR THIS DEBATE:**

Formal debate structure can be located at

<http://debate.uvm.edu/default.html>

Less formal debate format can be found at

<http://7-12educators.about.com/education/7-12educators/library/howto/htdebate.htm>

A sample rubric that can be used "as is" or adapted to fit a specific class can be found at

<http://7-12educators.about.com/education/7-12educators/blrubricdebate.htm>

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### STRATEGY FOR THIS DEBATE:

The teacher may wish to open this lesson by having students view segments of *Reporting America at War* during class time. Students will probably find the greatest number of incidents of censorship of war correspondents during the World War II era, but may also be able to find instances of censorship during more recent conflicts, such as the Grenada invasion in the 1980s, and the two Gulf Wars.

Next, the teacher should prepare students for developing concepts and ideas for the actual debate. The teacher might wish to open this segment of the lesson by mentioning to students that a debate is essentially a “gentlemanly argument”, and that the purpose of a debate is for contestants to prove their point and sway a judge or judges to their view through the use of logic and evidence. The teacher also needs to ensure that students are aware that scholarly debates, while often adversarial in nature, are also civil in nature.

Here is a format for a typical classroom debate:

**a.** Based on the resolution, one team (usually two students, but can be adapted for more or less) takes the affirmative side, while the other takes the opposing or negative side. The affirmative side, in this instance, is in favor of ending government restrictions on the press in wartime, while the opposing or negative wants to maintain things as they are. In other words, the opposing side is in favor of maintaining the status quo.

**b.** Time frame for the debate goes as follows: each “constructive” speech is eight minutes long, while cross examination is three minutes per session. Rebuttal speeches (one per team member) are four minutes.

**c.** On the affirmative side, the opening statement includes the following information: a stating of the Resolved topic, a short definition of germane topics, and an explanation using evidence that shows that the current policy is inherently ineffective. The opening opposing statement attempts to show that the status quo is effective. The second affirmative speech sets forth their “plan” to change the system to make it more effective, while the second negative or second opposing speech seeks to show that the affirmative plan will not succeed. The rebuttal speeches attempt to review each side’s respective cases, and attempts to remind the judge(s) that the other view is wrong.

**d.** Debate format is as follows:

- First affirmative constructive speech 8 minutes
- Cross-examination (negative asks questions of the 1st affirmative speaker) 3 minutes
- First negative constructive speech 8 minutes
- Cross-examination (affirmative asks questions of the 1st negative speaker) 3 minutes
- Second affirmative constructive speech 8 minutes
- Cross-examination of second affirmative speech 3 minutes
- Second negative constructive speech 3 minutes
- Cross-examination of second negative speech 3 minutes
- First negative rebuttal 4 minutes
- First affirmative rebuttal 4 minutes
- Second negative rebuttal 4 minutes
- Second affirmative rebuttal 4 minutes

**e.** The teacher should develop a rubric to allow the class to judge the debate based on following criteria: speaking style, development of logical arguments, questioning skills, and evidence. Perhaps the best way to do this would be to develop a grid of some sort with a 1-5 scale for each category (1= poor; 5= excellent). The teacher could also add a space for comments on what they felt as far as a critique of the debate. If the school offers an inter-scholastic debate program, the school’s forensics coach may have ballots that may be utilized.

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### THE LESSON:

The teacher should begin the lesson by distributing copies of handouts (debate format sheets, etc.) that the students should have. Next, allow the students to view either the whole episode or selected segments of *Reporting America at War*. The teacher should suggest to students prior to showing the segments of the video that they might look for specific information/quotes from the film to use as evidence in developing their case.

In addition, the teacher should require students to conduct supplemental research for information regarding the resolved topic. While the amount of material in this area (press censorship) is substantial, a few example web links are included as a “springboard” for web-based research. The teacher may also suggest to students that they look at other war related freedom of the press and freedom of speech cases, including Schenck v. US, and New York Times (and Washington Post) v. US (the Pentagon Papers case).

### ASSESSMENT:

The teacher may wish to have the class “score” the debate or bring in outside “judges” (for example, other teachers) to judge the debate and determine a winner. Generally, the winner is determined by which team scores higher in the rubric. According to the rules of interscholastic debate, the negative or opposing side (since it represents the status quo and the affirmative has the burden of proof to show change is needed) wins any tie.

### ALTERNATE LESSON FORMAT:

If the teacher desires to involve more students, they may elect to change the debate format into one of a panel discussion on the *Resolved* topic. While the issue under consideration is the same, the format and outcome are somewhat different. In a discussion, the group works together to reach a consensus decision.

In interscholastic forensics competitions, discussion groups usually include six to seven students, but the teacher may decide to increase or decrease the number to fit their class situation. The teacher may also elect to divide the debate topic into smaller subtopics, such as “Should press censorship in war come only after Congressional legislation allowing it?”, or “Should the US Government allow an appeal process during wartime for censored publications?”. Should the teacher decide to break the *Resolved* topic into subtopics, several discussions may be generated, including larger numbers of students.

The format of the discussion is somewhat different, also. In a discussion, one of the participating students is selected as the “leader”. It is their job to keep the discussion going smoothly, maintain order, allow all participants an opportunity to speak, and summarize each of the discussion segments. In some discussion formats, the leader is scored and assessed separately from the other participants. The leader has the right to add comments and participate in the discussion, as do the other participants.

Once the leader is selected (either by the teacher or other participants), the following format is maintained (within the scope of the class period):

**Definition of terms**

**History of the situation/problem**

**Problems with the current situation**

**Solutions to the problems identified by the group**

Again, there is no set time frame for any one segment of the discussion, however, the teacher and group should recognize that if this is a one class period activity, enough time must be set aside for each segment as well as the summaries by the group leader.

Once the discussion is completed, participants can be evaluated in a rubric created by the teacher. While the teacher may wish to develop their own assessment too, a sample rubric is included below:

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### SAMPLE DISCUSSION RUBRIC:

1. **Knowledge of the subject material (20 points):** How much research did the participant do toward the discussion? How effective was the research used? \_\_\_\_\_ points total.

2. **Participation (20 points):** How often did the participant speak? Was the participation worthwhile? \_\_\_\_\_ points total.

3. **Development of logic skills (20 points):** How well did the participant utilize logic skills in making points and demonstrating viewpoints? \_\_\_\_\_ points total.

4. **Speaking ability (20 points):** Did the participant make points well? Use correct grammar? Were they able to be heard by the audience? \_\_\_\_\_ points total.

5. **Cooperation (20 points):** Did the participant act in a manner of cooperation toward the leader and other members of the group? Did the participant tend to monopolize the discussion, or did they contribute significantly to the final solution? \_\_\_\_\_ points total.

**Total score (100 points):**  
\_\_\_\_\_ points total.

### RELEVANT STANDARDS:

This lesson addresses the following national content standards established by **Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**.

Understands the influence of media on society as a whole (e.g., influence in shaping various governmental, social, and cultural norms; influence on the democratic process; influence on beliefs, lifestyles, and understanding of relationships and culture; how it shapes viewer's perceptions of reality; the various consequences in society of ideas and images in media).

Understands legal and ethical responsibilities involved in media use (e.g., censorship; copyright laws; FCC regulations; protection of the rights of authors and media owners; standards for quality programming; regulations for broadcast repeats; forms of media self-control; governmental, social, and cultural agencies that regulate media content and products).

Understands the role of the media in addressing social and cultural issues (e.g., creating or promoting causes: U.N. military action, election of political parties; use of media to achieve governmental, societal, and cultural goals).

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Michael Hutchison is Technology Curriculum facilitator for the Vincennes Community Schools in Vincennes, Indiana. In 1996, Michael was named a national winner of the 21st Century Teacher competition, a recognition that was repeated in 1997. In 1998, Compaq named Michael a first-place prizewinner in its Teacher Lesson Plan contest, and in 1999, Michael was named the Midwest regional winner in Technology & Learning magazine's Teacher of the Year program. In 2002, Michael was named "Teacher of the Year" by the Indiana Computer Educators and "Technology-Using Teacher of the Year" by the International Society for Technology in Education. In addition, Michael hosts a weekly social studies forum for TAPPED IN and serves as a faculty member of Connected University, as well as a member of the PBS TeacherSource Advisory Group.