Teaching Tips | Independent Journalism Today

Essential Question

- What is the relationship between an independent free press and a democracy?

Supporting Questions

- What is the definition of good journalism?
- What qualities are necessary for a journalist to maintain their objectivity?
- What are the greatest threats facing independent journalism today?

Historical Thinking Skills
This resource provides students with the opportunity to practice the following historical thinking skills:

- Developing an Argument
- Developing Civic Understanding and Engagement

Educator Note: *Use the following before, while, and after viewing suggestions for engaging students with this resource and with activities related to this topic.*

Before Viewing

1. Pose the essential question to the class: **What is the relationship between an independent free press and a democracy?**
2. Have students spend a few minutes responding to the question in writing. After they are finished, organize them into small groups to share their reflections.
3. Invite small groups to share a summary of their conversation with the larger class and collect key ideas that arose in the conversations.
4. Transition by introducing the Freedom of the Press Worldwide Map to your students. Ask students to respond to these prompts:
    - What information is this map conveying?
    - What questions do you have about the information?
    - What is one thing that stands out to you from this map?



(Source: Reporters Without Borders)

5. Next, direct student's attention to India, the largest democracy in the world and one that is listed in the “very serious situation” in regard to freedom of the press.

   Explain that as a class, you will be viewing four short clips from a feature documentary *While We Watched,* which follows veteran television journalist Ravish Kumar for two years as he battles a barrage of fake news, falling ratings, and the resulting cutbacks while struggling to maintain fact-based analyses. The context of this story occurs amidst the growing support for Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

While Viewing

Watch the first film segments and spend a few moments discussing the questions and exploring connections. After the first segment watch Clip Two - Four in sequence. You may elect to discuss the suggested questions after each segment or elect to debrief these scenes after watching the three in sequence.

Clip One: 1:05 - 7:30 (runtime: 6:25)

1. Nationalism, or "loyalty and devotion to a nation especially as expressed in glorifying one nation above all others and stressing the promotion of its culture and interests," is used throughout this clip. One of the broadcasters states, "Nationalism is our inspiration, and good governance is our mantra. I am a nationalist, and I believe that being a nationalist is a prerequisite to being a journalist."
    a. Do you agree or disagree with his statement?
    b. Is this statement in support of or at odds with your idea of a free and independent press?
2. The last thing said in this clip was by Ravish Kumar, who said, "When we choose to remain silent, it costs us the truth." What is your reaction to this belief?

Clip Two: 15:40 - 19:44 (runtime: 4:04)

1. What decisions do the journalists make in this clip when reporting on a difficult story?
2. What qualities of character do you see in Ravish Kumar?
3. What statements stand out to you in this clip?

Clip Three: 1:05:18 - 1:06:10 (runtime: .52)

1. In this clip, we watch Ravish Humar drive a colleague home after he has decided to leave the newsroom. This colleague says to Ravish, "You have to show the world what journalism can be."
    a. What aspiration do you hear about the role of journalism in society in this statement?

Clip Four: 1:14:45 - 1:18:55 (runtime: 4:10)

1. What are the key ideas that you heard woven through each of these clips?
2. After watching this final clip, what is your interpretation of the title of the documentary, *While We Watched??*

After Viewing

1. Ravish Kumar says in the documentary, "Indian media is in a state of crisis, and this crisis is not accidental or random but systemic and structural."

- After watching the film segments, what structural and systemic issues affect Indian media?
- Are these issues in journalism and the media being faced in other places other than India?

2. In a recent interview, Ravish Kumar was asked why he felt the need to speak out about the state of Indian media. He responded, "These media groups are not working for dissemination of information. They are working hard to stop information from reaching the viewers and the voters. This situation is very serious. This is not a routine story of media decline." (Source: NPR)
    - What qualities of character do you believe journalists need to have to speak out against injustice?
    - What role do all forms of media play in informing the electorate? What are the current barriers to accurate and accessible information?
    - What solutions stand as a counterbalance to media organizations who limit access to information?

Taking It Further

1. Project or have students go to the Freedom of the Press Worldwide Map again and now go to the full index of the map, Reporters Without Borders/Map 2023 World Press Freedom Index.
2. Have students spend time exploring the index individually or in pairs or for 5 minutes and have each pair complete the following:
    - Compose one declarative summary sentence from their map exploration. For example, "The region of the globe with the most serious conditions for journalists appears to be parts of Asia."
    - Compose one question from their exploration. For example, "What caused this region to be so problematic for journalists?"
    - Have students share their statements and questions in class.
3. Explain that they are going to look closely at the state of journalism in the largest democracy in the world, India, and explore a very important question: **"What is the relationship between an independent free press and democracy?"**
4. Click on India from the index, listed as 161st out of 180 nations evaluated. Read aloud the summary of the state of India. "The violence against journalists, the politically partisan media, and the concentration of media ownership all demonstrate that press freedom is in crisis in 'the world's largest democracy,' ruled since 2014 by Prime Minister Narendra Modi, the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and the embodiment of the Hindu nationalist right."

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In another scene in the documentary, the journalist Ravish Kumar says, “A viewer is defined by their ways of seeing.”

1. Where do you get your news? Discuss the different ways you see and view the news.
2. What tools and skills do you have at your disposal to better understand today’s news media?
3. What do you think are the biggest challenges facing journalists today?
4. After watching and discussing *While We Watched,* how would you answer the question, “What is the relationship between an independent free press and a democracy?”