

**CREATE AND RUN YOUR OWN NEWSPAPER:
A JOURNALISM UNIT WITH A SIMULATION GAME**

Part 1: Publish a Newspaper

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INTRODUCTION

In this interdisciplinary language arts and social studies journalism unit, middle school students write articles and create their own newspapers. Then, they use a system dynamics model as a game to understand how their own newspaper businesses run. Finally, students learn more about the model itself through a series of self-guided exercises on the model. The unit can be adapted for use with older students.

The unit is presented in three separate parts.

- In this paper, “*Create and Run Your Own Newspaper, A Journalism Unit with a Simulation Game, Part 1: Publish a Newspaper,*” students write and paste up their own classroom newspapers. All of the student assignment sheets and assessment rubrics for creating the student newspapers are included. This hands-on project takes about three weeks as students progress from being rookie reporters to editors-in-chief.
- In second paper, “*Create and Run Your Own Newspaper, a Journalism Unit with a Simulation Game, Part 2: Play the Game,*” students become newspaper owners and try to run successful businesses on a STELLA model. The model is a system dynamics management flight simulator that was built with the help of Gary Hirsch, a professional system dynamicist. Playing with the model, students begin to understand the consequences of their actions, the complexity of the journalism system, and the basic feedback loops that drive their businesses.
- In the final paper, “*Create and Run Your Own Newspaper, A Journalism Unit with a Simulation Game, Part 3: Examine the Model,*” students take a closer look at the model itself. They test their strategies to see how sensitive they are to various changes and learn more about feedback loops.
- All three of these papers and the system dynamics model are available from the Creative Learning Exchange at <http://www.clexchange.org>, or through the MIT System Dynamics in Education website at <http://sysdyn.mit.edu/cle>.

BACKGROUND FOR THE UNIT

The School

This unit was developed at the Murdoch Middle School, Public Charter School of Chelmsford, Massachusetts, founded in 1996. Housed at one end of an office park, it is a school serving 176 students in grades 5 through 8. Teaching is structured to support student-centered learning, interdisciplinary units, a hands-on approach, authentic assessments, and teachers as facilitators. Emphasis is placed on problem-solving skills, understanding cause and effect relationships, and applying knowledge. Systems thinking and system dynamics are written into the charter. Dan Barcan and Leah Zuckerman are teachers on the 7/8 Team. Dan teaches social studies; Leah teaches language arts.

The Students

The seventh and eighth graders who worked together on this project had been studying journalism for four weeks before beginning the project. Their schedule is structured to allow for large interdisciplinary projects supported by traditional skills instruction. For this unit, students first spent four weeks in separate language arts and social studies classes developing journalism skills and studying freedom of the press and related issues. They learned how to conduct interviews and write news and feature articles. They examined newspapers to compare different voices for different audiences.

Then, for the next four weeks, the students worked on the interdisciplinary project described in these papers during longer combined social studies/language arts class blocks. Putting their new journalism knowledge and skills to use, students created their own newspapers and played with their simulated newspaper businesses.

Before beginning this project, the students also had an introduction to system dynamics modeling. Earlier in the year, they had played hands-on games from the *Systems Thinking Playbook*, by Linda Booth Sweeney and Dennis Meadows, 1996 (available from Pegasus Communications, www.pegasus.com, 1-800-272-0945). They had learned about causal loops and stocks and flows, and they had built basic bank balance models on the computer.

Other Ways to Use the Unit

In this paper, Part 1, students create their own newspapers before playing the simulation game described later in Part 2. The model comes second because it was still under development during the earlier weeks. Another option would be to play the game first so that students could use what they have learned from it as they create their own newspapers because playing the game helps students define “quality” in a newspaper.

The unit and the model can be adapted for use with older students. The game and the modeling exercises in Part 3 are certainly challenging enough for high school students studying journalism or system dynamics.

THE UNIT: CREATE YOUR OWN NEWSPAPER

Journalism: “Where Am I? How Can I Communicate What Goes On Here?”

Overall Objectives for the Unit:

- Students will read and write news, feature, and opinion articles, and report through photography.
- Students will produce front pages with mastheads, headlines, and correct text and photo layout.
- Students will work in teams to master journalistic writing and layout to complete one issue of a four-page newspaper.
- Students will use a STELLA model to understand how a newspaper business works.

Topics by Class:

Social Studies

Interviewing

Photojournalism and captions

Layout and design

Perspective and angle of a story

Creating newspapers with correct layout

Editing

Language Arts

Writing news articles

Writing feature articles

Writing opinion articles

General Schedule:

Week 1: You are a rookie reporter

Mini-project: collecting information through interviews and writing news articles

Week 2: You are the front-page editor

Mini-project: writing feature, opinion, and news articles and using layout techniques to create a front page

Week 3: You are the editor-in-chief

Mini-project: preparing four-page newspapers, building on the front pages

Week 4: You have bought your own newspaper

Mini-project: using a STELLA model as a game to run a business and learn about feedback loops (Described in the next paper, “Part 2, Play the Game”)

Assessment

Assessment rubrics accompany the mini-project assignments. Students are handed the rubrics along with the assignment sheets so that they will know just what is expected of them from the very beginning. The goals are clear; students can refer to the rubric as they work. Students work in pairs to check each other’s work against the rubric standards. Often they read their articles aloud to one another. Student then makes revisions to improve the finished product. Ultimately, of course, the teachers go through the same process with each student to assign a grade, but students are encouraged to work together and edit their work frequently along the way.

THE GREAT TRAIN WRECK

The scene: You are a rookie reporter working for a newspaper/magazine. You are copy editing a story for spelling, grammar, and punctuation errors when sketchy details of a train wreck near the Oklahoma/Texas border came over the associated Press (AP) wire. The AP is a nationwide news service company that covers hundreds of events around the world. They provide the bare details so that newspapers can pick and choose where to send their reporters.

Here's what comes up on your computer:

(Higgins, TX, Today) A passenger train bound for Amarillo, TX jumped the track early last night after departing Tulsa, OK, at 4 PM. No other vehicles were involved in the crash, which took place in a densely wooded area just over the Texas border.

Two passengers and two engineers survived the deadly accident; it is unknown at this time how many passengers were on the train when the crash took place. Rescue crews from as far as Oklahoma City have converged on the scene to aid in sorting through the burnt remains of the train. Representatives of the National Transportation Safety Board are also on hand to aid with the investigation.

Recent safety examinations of this train showed no mechanical problems. Both front and rear emergency brakes were on when the crash occurred.

It looks pretty routine, but a big disaster is always big news, so you call the Oklahoma State Police and find out that the train was a normal passenger train with several luggage cars. You also find out that the trip is roughly 400 miles and takes 6.5 hours, stops included. The train's most recent stop was in Oklahoma City, where it departed the station safely. Seven witnesses are available to speak with the press in Higgins.

You talk to your editor, who puts you on a plane to Texas to find out exactly what happened. (Rookie reporters always get sent to these sorts of disasters.) You arrive hours later to find the scene crawling with reporters, law enforcement officers, rescue workers, and mysterious men and women in business suits who pick up all sorts of data. Another reporter tells you that they are from the FBI and that they will talk to no one until their press conference in a few days.

These people are available to talk to you: **the front engineer, the rear engineer, a passenger, Amtrak's president, a rep from the FBI, a hiker who was nearby in the woods, a hunter who was also nearby.** [Other students play these roles.]

This is your big chance to impress your editor. Like all rookies, you are required to hand in one interview per story and all your rough drafts.

Due date: _____

Due: One final draft of a news article (typed or neatly written), one rough draft, and one 7-10 question interview with the answers to your questions.

**THE GREAT TRAIN WRECK
Mini-project Assessment Rubric**

Name:

	Highly Successful	Successful	Not Yet Successful
Interview	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 10 questions & answers • All Y/N questions have follow-up questions • Questions use information gained in earlier questions • Questions aim for information that will be important to the paper's audience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least 7 Q & A • Some Y/N questions have follow-up questions • Either of the last two Highly Successful criteria missing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fewer than 7 Q & A • Y/N questions do not have follow-up questions • New information and audience not considered in questions
Lead	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduces topic of the article • Appropriate to the angle of the article • Creates interest in the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduces topic of the article • Lead is not appropriate to angle of article • Creates interest in the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lead is not appropriate to angle of article • Lead does not generate interest in the reader
Article	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Angle appropriate to audience • Uses information from interviews to appeal to audience • Creates the reporter's version of "the truth" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Article makes some attempt to entice the paper's audience, but does not follow through • Uses information from interviews • Creates the reporter's version of "the truth" 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No attempt to write for the audience • Only uses information from own character's bio OR from first project sheet • Makes contradictory points
Overall Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rough draft completed in time for editing • All three parts handed in on time • Neat; no spelling or grammar errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rough draft completed in time for editing • All three parts handed in on time • Neat; few spelling or grammar errors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not handed in on time • One or more parts missing • Sloppy or many errors

Comments:

THE FRONT PAGE

Congratulations! You have paid your dues as a rookie reporter and been promoted to *front-page editor*! For this week's deadline, you and a partner are responsible for creating a front page with at least 3 stories. Your front page must also be attractive to a specific audience. The higher-ups at the newspaper will be looking at your writing skill, attractiveness to audience, and general layout quality. Good luck on the road to editor-in-chief!

Due date:

Due: One front page, on posterboard 11" x 17" (or larger), per pair of editors with:

- at least three stories, including two news stories and a feature
- a masthead, designed for a specific audience

FRONT PAGE CHECK-IN

List the topic of each article and the name of the student working on each article. Write the names of any additional topics or stories and their authors on the back of this sheet.

Audience for whom you are writing:

Feature Topic:

Author:

News Story Topic:

Author:

News Story topic:

Author:

The rough draft of your feature is due today. Please edit the story with your partner using the following checklist. Read your story aloud to your peer editor and have him/her answer these questions. Then ask your peer editor to read the story checking for spelling and grammar errors.

- | | | |
|---|-----|----|
| 1. Does the lead introduce the topic of the story? | Yes | No |
| 2. Is the lead concise and easy to understand? | Yes | No |
| 3. Does the lead excite the interest of the reader? | Yes | No |
| 4. Does the story have a clear beginning, middle, and end? | Yes | No |
| 5. Does the writer use information and quotes from an interview? | Yes | No |
| 6. What does the reader learn from the feature (list specific facts)? | | |
| 7. What suggestions do you have to improve the feature article? | | |

START THE PRESSES – YOUR OWN NEWSPAPER

Your front page was a success, and your boss noticed. You have been promoted to editor-in-chief! It is now your responsibility to oversee the production of the entire paper. You may continue to work with the partner who helped bring you such success last week.

Your paper will use the front page you created last week and add to it at least two 11” x 17”(or larger) pages. On these pages will be two more news stories, two more features, two opinion articles (one may be a review), photos, and any graphics you think will improve the appearance and quality of your paper.

Remember to continue aiming at the same audience you chose for your front page, so you can continue focusing stories on themes that will sell. Good luck!

Due date: _____, to paste up in class:

- two new news stories (typed or neatly written in pen, in columns)
- two new features (also typed or neatly written)
- two opinion articles (one may be a review)
- standard datelines on each page
- photos
- graphics (optional)

You will be assessed on:

- leads
- articles
- use of photos/graphics
- layout (standardization and attractiveness)
- productivity in class
- following all directions and including all requirements

YOUR OWN NEWSPAPER
Mini-project Assessment Rubric

Name:

	Highly Successful	Successful	Not Yet Successful
Layout & Design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page is balanced and attractive to look at No tombstones or gutters Photos placed to draw eye into text Editorial placed on left side of page 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page is not balanced and attractive AND All 3 other criteria met OR Just attractive and balanced 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Page is not balanced and attractive AND Any 2 criteria from first category missing
Leads	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduces topic of the articles Appropriate to angle of article Create interest in the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Introduces topic of the articles Not appropriate to angle of article Create interest in the reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Do not introduce topic of articles Do not generate interest in the reader Confusing
News Articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Aimed at specific audience Create reporter's version of "the truth" Written in 3rd person Engaging to reader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Create reporter's version of "the truth" Written in 3rd person Not aimed at specific audience Not engaging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Large gaps in story which are not explained Written in 1st person Do not include information from interviews
Feature Articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Goes into depth about a person, event, etc Provides specific facts Uses quotes which help story go into depth Uses appropriate leads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses on a specific person, event, etc. Provides specific facts Uses quotes Uses appropriate leads 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not focused on a specific person, event, etc. No quotes from reliable sources Includes references to the reporter
Opinion Articles	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clearly expresses the reporter's opinion Goes into depth about the topic Supports opinion with more than 3 groups of information Includes introduction, supporting paragraphs, and conclusion Uses 3rd person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Attempts to express reporter's opinion Focuses on a topic Supports opinion with more than 3 groups of information Includes introduction, supporting paragraphs, and conclusion Uses 3rd person 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not express the reporter's opinion Topic is unclear Opinion is supported with fewer than 3 groups of information Does not include introduction, supporting paragraphs, or conclusion Uses 1st person
Overall Quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No spelling or grammar errors All work in on time Productive in class Creative/original 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Few spelling or grammar errors All work in on time Usually productive in class Followed directions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Many errors Sloppy layout Deadlines not met Not productive in class

Comments:

Teacher Notes on Mini-Projects 1-3: Creating a Newspaper

Students gathered their information and wrote their rough drafts for homework. They spent their time in school editing, revising, and pasting up their work. Students worked in pairs on their newspapers doing frequent peer editing.

Students were expected to write articles with a clear voice aimed at a particular audience. This was a big challenge at first. As middle-schoolers, these reporters were not very mobile and they had difficulty finding stories. When they finally realized that they should write about their own surroundings and interests, their writing became more focused and engaging. Some examples:

- A feature article about why the puny lighted Christmas tree in their town center was inferior to the extravagant display in the next town, complete with interviews with the directors of public works.
- Many news articles on their recreation-league basketball games, including interviews with coaches and stars, and play-by-play accounts.
- A feature: “Salt-Water Fish Tank Set Up in Science Department,” with photographs of the tank and the big event.
- Many movie and television reviews.
- Editorials about how teenagers are unfairly stereotyped.
- A feature article interviewing a new teacher at the school.
- News: “Local Boy Visits Dentist: Prognosis Bad”
- News: “Sibling of Student Refuses to Practice the Piano”

Students will eagerly apply their journalism skills if the project is relevant to them. Once they are engaged, they can improve their skills even more.



RUNNING YOUR OWN NEWSPAPER

Now that students have created their own newspapers, they are ready to advance from editors-in-chief to newspaper owners, responsible for all the business decisions of their papers. They have worked hard to prepare a paper for a specific audience. However, in journalism the challenge remains to actually deliver the news to readers. Will people buy and read their papers? Is their quality high enough to attract and retain enough subscribers to stay afloat financially? Will businesses pay to advertise on their pages? Can too many ads affect the quality of the paper? How many editors, reporters, and advertising salespeople should they hire? What does it mean to be a “successful” newspaper?

Students can face all of these issues as they try to run their own successful newspaper businesses on a system dynamics model. It is a challenge that students enjoy. It also lends relevance to the newspaper production work they have just completed. The simulation game, student worksheets, explanations and debriefing are available from the Creative Learning Exchange at <http://www.clexchange.org>. Look for *Create and Run Your Own Newspaper, A Journalism Unit with a Simulation Game, Part 2: Play the Game*, by Dan Barcan, Leah Zuckerman, Gary Hirsch, and Debra Lyneis.

YOUR FEEDBACK

We welcome your feedback on this journalism unit. We would especially like to hear about successes and pitfalls if you try these ideas with students. Please send comments and suggestions for improvements to us through the Creative Learning Exchange at LyneisD@clexchange.org. Thank you.