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News and views: creating lessons based on news and events

One of the many advantages of using the Internet is the currency of information available online. It is so easy to upload any sort of story, be it in a blog, a wiki, or even onto a website. Finding information is equally easy, although one must be quite discerning about what one chooses to use! There is always the risk of finding and using a resource that is unsubstantiated, or is simply not true. There are many websites dedicated to evaluating information and one common criterion is that of authority. Who actually is responsible for the information and what makes that person an authority?

A way of managing the risk of misinformation is to go to credible newspaper sites for relevant news articles. Again, one must be selective as bias, or point of view, can be a problem and one needs to be aware of this. There are many good quality newspapers available though, that endeavour to have a neutral view. There are online newspapers that complement the hard copy and several support education by also providing lesson plans linked to news articles. One of the best available is the New York Times Learning Network.

A simple search using 'South Africa' as a search term on the NYT Learning Network revealed a lesson plan actually based on a book written by Bill Keller called "Tree Shaker: the story of Nelson Mandela."

➡ http://www.nytimes.com/learning/issues_in_depth/20080328.html

links to relevant websites including cross-curricular sites (interdisciplinary connections), wrap-up homework, further questions, evaluation and assessment, vocabulary and extension activities.



Another source of news based lesson plans is the Guardian online newspaper in the United Kingdom. Herewith is a link to a lesson on Zimbabwe ➡ <http://www.guardian.co.uk/education/2008/jul/08/teaching.learnlessonplans>. These lesson plans can be adapted to suit our local context and can also form a starting point for discussion, enquiring if there is there is any sort of bias. These lesson plans can also give ideas on how to create a lesson based on a local story.



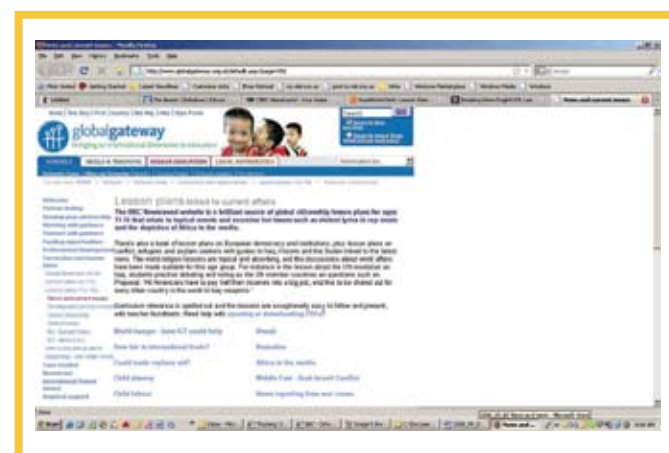
Citizenship is one of the subjects in the UK curriculum and as a result there are many resources available which can be used in Life Orientation. They can also be used as debate topics because generally, there are accompanying websites that have been carefully selected and listed for use in the debate. An example of an interesting debate type site is CBBC NewsRound ➡ <http://news.bbc.co.uk/cbbcnews/>. Learners can also create their own news stories. A site which takes them through the steps is ➡ http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/school_report/4780167.stm.



Two sites for making newspapers are "Making the News" ➡ <http://mtn.e2bn.net/rostra/news.php?r=1&t=2&id=14> and "Creating a Classroom Newspaper" ➡ http://www.readwritethink.org/lessons/lesson_view.asp?id=249.

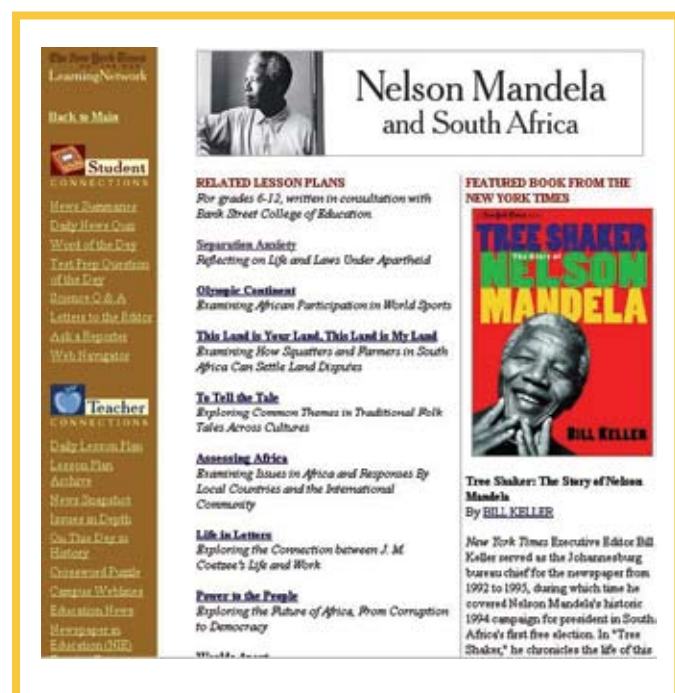
Lesson plans based on current events are available at ➡ <http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/>, an example of which is "Toxic chemicals found in household products" ➡ http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com/0807/080729-household_products.html. What is interesting about this site is that one can receive the lessons in a podcast (audiofile) and also subscribe to new lessons in a RSS Feed (see Andrew Moore's article).

There is also Global Gateway ➡ <http://www.globalgateway.org.uk/default.aspx?page=352>, another site which delivers lessons to do with current events and with global content.



Ideally we will be able to create our own lessons using these ideas and using the Lesson Planning Tool on Thutong.

If you go ➡ <http://www.thutong.org.za>, click on Curriculum then on one of the Learning Spaces. You will be able to access the lesson planning tool tab at the top. The step-by-step process is very easy to follow. If learners write their own stories and lessons based on their stories are uploaded onto the portal, using the Upload Resource tool, we will really be creating authentic home-grown resources. Imagine a school having a newsworthy event which the learners can write about. A lesson based on their story of the event could be created; this would have so much more relevance to the learners than a story, and lesson, entirely foreign to them.



Typically NYT Learning Network lessons are made up of the following components: overview, objectives, resources and materials, activities and procedures,