

Unit I: Telling the Story

Lesson One: Before the Correspondents

Time:

3-5 hours

Objectives & Skills:

By performing research, analyzing information, and making informed conjectures, students will critically assess how communication has changed over time, especially with regards to war.

Materials:

[Answer Keys and Assesments](#)

Butcher block paper or chalkboard, computer, encyclopedias, history textbooks

[Handouts For students](#)

Preparations:

Teachers: Briefly review background of the Peloponnesian War, the Norman Conquest, and the French Revolution.

Internet Links:

[Military History from the Canadian Forces College](#)

[Nimitz Museum](#)

Students:

Ask family members or other adults about their memories of learning about the outbreak of a war.

Long before Dan Eldon and his colleagues were using laptops, fax machines, and other technological gizmos to relay their stories and photos around the globe, the world got its first war correspondent. William Howard Russell, like Dan, was a Brit. Already a well-established reporter when the Crimean War (1853-56) broke out in present-day Russia, the *Times of London* sent Russell to cover the story.

Even earlier than Russell and the Crimea, of course, there were plenty of other wars, battles, and violent conflicts, all of which affected people's lives dramatically. Towns were burnt to the ground, lives were lost, history changed course. People would have wanted to know what was happening. But in an era that had never seen a television, much less a telegraph, how did the general population get news?

Premeditation:

- a. Play President Franklin D. Roosevelt's "*Day of Infamy*" speech (available on LP and on several Web sites, including <http://www.nimitz-museum.org/audio.htm>) for students. This was the speech announcing Pearl Harbor and the United States' entry into World War II. Ask the students to imagine how people might have felt upon hearing the speech and news of the bombing. What questions would they have had? What resources would have been available for finding out more information?
- a. As a class, generate a list of questions that you, as citizens, would have if a war were to break out today in your country. List these on butcher block paper or the chalkboard. When the list is complete, review each question and make a note next to it as to what source might be used to get the answer. This discussion will probably help to highlight how technological advances since the 1940s—especially television and the Internet—have revolutionized the way the average person gets information.

Activity:

Step 1:

Ask the students which was the first "radio war" (answer: World War II) and the first television war (answer: Vietnam). A tougher question: which war was the first to be reported by a newspaper correspondent directly from the scene of fighting? The answer: The Crimean War, 1854-1856. But how did people find out about wars before this?

Step 2:

In order to investigate this question, break the class into small groups. Distribute the handout [*Before the Correspondents*](#) and review the directions. Each group must do two things: 1) generate a list of essential questions that would need to be answered in order to determine how people received news about war during various periods in history, and 2) write a brief profile of the four conflicts listed, using the Internet and other resources, and answer the set of questions they just created.

Step 3:

Ask each group to report their findings for at least one section of the handout. After they have reported, ask if other groups have found additional or conflicting information. Using this format, check the entire handout as a class. Follow up with a discussion about the evolution of communication, especially with regards to war and conflict.

Step 4:

Assign the students the following essay assignment:

With the wave of a television remote or the click a mouse, many Americans have almost immediate access to world news events. Do you think this level of access and the speed of information has had more positive effects or negative ones? Provide examples to prove your argument.

Extending the Lesson:

- Write a fictionalized first-person account of someone living through one of these events who is eager for information about a loved one who has gone to battle. What frustrations might this person have experienced that are different from and similar to those of a person living through a contemporary war.
- How would the French Revolution (or another pre-20th century conflict) have been different if television and the Internet had already been invented? Have the students create cartoons or other representations to illustrate a difference.