

# Sensationalized!

Inspired by: Jon Kolkin, David A. Haughton, and The Good News Network  
Grades 9-12

In this lesson, students will be asked to compare and contrast the artwork of Jon Kolkin to the artwork of David A. Haughton, and explore the idea of sensationalized news versus objective news.

Jon Kolkin uses black and white photography to capture compassion, gratitude, healing and mindfulness in his portraits of Buddhist Monks as part of his series "Inner Harmony." In contrast with his series "Angry White Men," David A. Haughton wants to repel the viewer by depicting mass shooters and other criminals.



## Objectives

- Students will observe and compare artworks by Jon Kolkin and David A. Haughton.
- Students will define sensationalism.
- Students will analyze texts and identify techniques that create sensationalism in the media.


## Critical Questions

- Why do we sensationalize stories?
- How can we tell if a story is sensationalized or objective?
- Who benefits from sensationalism?
- How does sensationalism affect both the person consuming the story and the people in the story?
- How does it affect our physical and mental health?

## Materials

- [Sensationalized! Google Slide Deck](#)
- Artist note taking hand out
- Headline sorting activity cards
- Pencils, paper
- Student choice final project materials vary (art media OR digital video OR written word).

## Activities

1. **WARM UP: (5 minutes)** Play this video compilation (slide 4) of TV news show clips for students (preview first to see if your class is the right audience for this video).  
 [Sensationalism Montage](#)  
-After the video, ask students how hearing all of the clips back to back made them feel physically in their bodies. How did they feel emotionally?  
-Alternative (slide 5): look at the sample headlines in the lesson resources and choose a few to look at as a class. Ask students on a scale of 1-10 (1 being completely false, 10 being completely true) how true these headlines seem.
2. **OBSERVE: (15 minutes)** Divide class into groups of 3. Pass out or digitally share the images of David A. Haughton's paintings with half the class (Group A) and share images of Jon Kolkin's work with the other half of the class (Group B). Have them take notes on their observations on questions 1-4 on the attached NOTES worksheet.

3. **SHARE: (10 minutes)** Have a few spokespeople from Group A share their images, and thoughts about the images. While they are speaking, the Jon Kolkin group takes notes on question 5 (How are the two artists' work different?) After group A presents, Group B presents while Group A takes notes.
4. **DEFINE: (10 minutes)** Share the "Objectivity Vs. Sensationalism" slides 9-11 from the lesson resources.
5. **IDENTIFY (10 minutes)**
  - a. Have students go back to their A and B Groups. Keep the Sensationalism Technique guide (slide 14) projected/shared.
  - b. Hand out the stack of headline sorting cards from the lesson resources. The cards should be printed and cut for sorting beforehand (or, create a digital version).
  - c. Instruct students to sort each headline into either 'objective' or 'sensationalized' categories. If the students think the headline presents the event or person without bias, it should go into the objective category. If the headline uses any sensationalism techniques, it should be sorted into the sensational category.
6. **CHECK FOR UNDERSTANDING: (5 minutes)** Go through each headline and have students raise their hands for objective or sensational. If a group is in disagreement with the rest of the class, ask them to state their reasoning. Give other groups a chance to state their position as well, and see if anyone changes their mind. For each sensationalized headline, note which sensationalism technique is used.
7. **DISCUSS: (5 minutes - slide 15)** Ask students to revisit their notes about the two artists. Pose the question: does either of these artists approach their art with objectivity or sensationalism? How?
8. **EXPLORE (5-10 minutes):** Present students with the Good News Network website ([goodnewsnetwork.org](http://goodnewsnetwork.org)) to explore on their own devices. After their exploration, ask students to share:
  - a. How do you feel in your body after spending some time on the Good News Network versus how you felt after watching the "Sensationalism Montage" during warm up?
  - b. How do you feel emotionally?
  - c. Have you ever heard of the Good News Network before? If the answer is no, why do you think that is?
  - d. Why do you think we don't normally see 'good news' stories on TV, in newspapers, or on the internet?
  - e. Who benefits from news media sensationalism?
9. **CREATE:** Students have three options for their final Sensationalized! project. Share the rubric with them along with the following free choice assignment.
  - a. **VISUAL ART: FRONT PAGE FLIP!**

Choose a current news story or real headline/front page of a newspaper or magazine. Your illustration will be displayed side by side with the original headline or front page.

    - i. If it is sensationalized, create an objective presentation of the article. This should include headline, subtitle, and imagery. Take out all identified sensationalism techniques to present the truest, least biased version of the story/event.
    - ii. If it is already objective, create an example of sensationalism of the article. This should include headline, subtitle, and imagery, and use identified sensationalism techniques to punch up the absurdity.
  - b. **WRITTEN COMPOSITION: FLIPPED JOURNALIST!** Choose a short, current news article.

- i. *Is it sensationalized?* If so, FLIP the article to be objective. Research the event to find all the facts, and rewrite the piece of journalism with all the sensationalism techniques stripped away. Strive to present the truest, most objective version of the story you can.
    - ii. *Is it objective?* If it is already true and without sensationalism techniques, FLIP the article to be an absurd example of sensationalism. Rewrite the article using at least three sensationalism techniques discussed in class.
  - c. **VIDEO: FLIPPED NEWSCASTER!** Choose a short, 1-2 minute news clip online. Watch carefully and decide if it is objective or sensationalized.
    - i. *Is it sensationalized?* If so, rewrite the newscaster's script and record a completely objective version of the clip (starring YOU as the newscaster). Research the event to find all the facts, and strip all the sensationalism techniques away. Strive to present the truest, most objective version of the story you can.
    - ii. *Is it objective?* If it is already true and without sensationalism techniques, FLIP the script and rewrite it to be an absurd example of sensationalism. Re-film the clip using at least three sensationalism techniques discussed in class, starring yourself as the newscaster.
10. **PRESENT:** Have a block of time for students to present their FLIPPED! Projects. Students can hang their art gallery style, read or display their written articles, and have a screening of their newscasts.

#### Resources

- Information on slides 11-14, faux headline cards from education company MediaSmarts unit *Beyond Media Messages: Media Portrayal of Global Issues*, created by educator Maureen Baron.
- <https://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/>
- Artist's website: <https://kolkinphotography.com/>
- Artist's website: <https://www.haughton-art-dark.ca/>


# NOTES

Circle which artist are you observing:

DAVID A. HAUGHTON

JON KOLKIN

As a group, discuss the following questions. Take notes on your discussion in the second column.

1. WHAT do you see?	
2. WHICH mood or feeling do these works make you feel?	
3. HOW does the artist create this mood or feeling? Use at least two Elements of art in your answer: 	
4. Why do you think this artist created these works?	
5. After the other groups share their images and thoughts, consider HOW the two artists' work is different?	

Headline sorting activity cards

ELDERLY PEOPLE WITH SERIOUS TOOTH DECAY HAVE AN INCREASED RISK OF EXPERIENCING IRREGULAR HEARTBEATS	SOMETIMES DOGS BITE PEOPLE	APPROXIMATELY 60% OF PEOPLE WILL BE INFECTED WITH A FLU VIRUS IN THE NEXT YEAR	ASTRONOMERS WARN THAT A METEOR, PERHAPS AS LARGE AS THE ONE THAT KILLED THE DINOSAURS, MIGHT STRIKE EARTH IN ANY GIVEN YEAR
YOU MAY HAVE A DEADLY ANIMAL IN YOUR HOME	MANY METEORS STRIKE EARTH EACH YEAR, MOST LANDING IN THE OCEAN. METEORS LARGE ENOUGH TO CAUSE WIDESPREAD DAMAGE OCCUR ONLY ONCE EVERY SEVERAL MILLION YEARS	SCIENTISTS HAVE FOUND A LINK BETWEEN TOOTH DECAY AND HEART ATTACKS	POLICE ARE CLOSELY MONITORING AN ABANDONED TRUCK ON HIGHWAY 15
POLICE SAY IF ABANDONED TRUCK FOUND ON HIGHWAY 15 IS NOT CLAIMED WITHIN SIX HOURS, IT WILL BE TOWED TO THE IMPOUND LOT.	CATASTROPHIC HURRICANE SEASON COULD BE JUST AROUND THE CORNER	UNBELIEVABLE! 100% OF PEOPLE MIGHT HAVE EATEN A SPIDER IN THEIR SLEEP	EXPERTS SAY TO CHECK YOUR CAR FOR THIS ONE FLAW, BEFORE IT'S TOO LATE

## FLIPPED! Final Activity

Visual Art: <b>FRONT PAGE FLIP!</b>	Written Composition: <b>FLIPPED JOURNALIST!</b>	Video Production: <b>FLIPPED NEWSCASTER!</b>
<p><b>Choose</b> a current news story or real headline/front page of a newspaper or magazine.</p> <p>Is the front page sensationalized? <i>If yes, create</i> an objective illustration of the front page. This should include headline, subtitle, and imagery. <b>Take out</b> all sensationalism techniques.</p> <p><i>If it is already objective, create</i> an example of sensationalism of the article. <b>Use</b> identified sensationalism techniques to punch up the absurdity. This should include headline, subtitle, and imagery.</p>	<p><b>Choose</b> a short, current news article.</p> <p><i>Is it sensationalized?</i> If so, FLIP the article to be objective. <b>Research</b> the event to find all the facts, and <b>rewrite</b> the piece of journalism with all the sensationalism techniques stripped away. <b>Strive</b> to present the truest version of the story.</p> <p><i>Is it objective?</i> If it is already objective, FLIP the article to be an absurd example of sensationalism. <b>Rewrite</b> the article <b>using</b> at least three sensationalism techniques discussed in class.</p>	<p><b>Choose</b> a short, 1-2 minute news clip online.</p> <p><i>Is it sensationalized?</i> If so, <b>rewrite</b> the newscaster's script and <b>record</b> a completely objective version of the clip (starring YOU as the newscaster). Research the event to find all the facts, and strip all the sensationalism techniques away. <b>Strive</b> to present the truest version of the story.</p> <p><i>Is it objective?</i> If it is already true and without sensationalism techniques, FLIP the script and <b>rewrite</b> it to be an absurd example of sensationalism. <b>Re-film</b> the clip <b>using</b> at least three sensationalism techniques discussed in class, starring yourself as the newscaster.</p>