

This Week's Focus: Observation — Honing students' observational skills

As your students begin to write more in-depth, angle-based stories (what some would call a narrative story), they'll need to include more than just interviewing and research to keep readers engaged. That's where observation enters as an information-gathering technique. Observation includes students objectively using all of their senses — sight, hearing, smell, taste and even touch — to help enrich a story and make it more memorable. But honing observation skills is a learned technique. To practice, first I like to share great examples of observational writing so students can see how reporters include it. We also “reverse engineer” that writing to see how a reporter actually gathered that information in the first place. Did they directly observe it or did they get the information some other way (via a detailed interview, for example).

THE LESSON: BE A 'FLY ON THE WALL'

Once you've looked at examples, assign your students to find a place where people hang out — a busy coffee shop, a playground, a mall — and simply record everything they see, hear, smell, etc., and have them share those observations with you. I have mine focus on what I call the “Three D's” — description, detail and dialogue. [Here's an example](#) of an observation I wrote several years ago in our school's media center computer lab.

Note that these observations aren't yet stories. Next week, I'll provide a lesson on how to turn those observations into actual story ideas.

FIND IT AT JEA.ORG

Fact Finding and Observation

Description

In this lesson, students will practice essential skills of a reporter: finding and researching facts, interviewing and observation. The lesson includes a school-wide scavenger hunt that requires students to use their reporting skills to uncover information while familiarizing them with the sources of information in their school.

Objectives

- Students will practice observation as a means of gathering information.
- Students will conduct research and interviews to find factual information.
- Students will become familiar with resources for reporting within their school.

The link

The link to the full lesson is [HERE](#).
NOTE: This lesson is available free to **everyone** during the dates listed at the top of this page. Want to have access all the time? If you're not a member yet, consider joining JEA today for access to all of the resources.



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Flaming's adviser advice:

“Delegate. Don't put anything on yourself that your staff could do instead.”



Team Building

Sue Flaming, Caney Valley HS, Ramona, Oklahoma

WRAP IT!

Create an obstacle course

My editors used chairs, 2 x 4s and round floor waxer pads. Other things used for obstacles could be hula hoops, garden hose, Frisbees, etc. Divide the students into teams. Use plastic wrap to secure each team into a tight bunch. The team must communicate and work together to navigate the obstacle course.

Another version is to have an editor lead each team. The editors must stand outside the course. The wrapped team is blindfolded and the editor must guide them through the obstacle course with voice directions only. This utilizes trust, listening and leadership skills.

JEA members, I want YOU to share your awesome ideas with journalism teachers around the country. Fill out this [GOOGLE FORM](#) to be a part of this newsletter.

You've Got Style

Suggestions from Cindy*

DECADES

No apostrophe when you describe someone's age as in their 20s, but use an apostrophe when you are referring to a year. *The Class of '24*.

Design tips

Make sure the apostrophe goes in the correct direction. In some fonts, you may have to type a single quotation mark twice to get the proper one. Then remember to delete the first one. If you're using a Mac computer, use this shortcut:

shift + option +] = ’

* Style pro Cindy Horchem, CJE, is a retired adviser and the current JEA business and projects coordinator