

Turning News into Learning Opportunities



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Students today are bombarded by news on television, the Internet, and social media, and they often find the events confusing and troubling. Educators and parents need to ease student anxiety, but they can also use these moments of curiosity to encourage kids to conduct good research, gather facts, and then form their own opinions.

Children receive a constant stream of messages via various media outlets and online voices, but we know that they are not generally prepared to determine the accuracy of the message or the credibility of the source. Educators and parents can help students develop the capacity for assessing accuracy by connecting them to trustworthy resources.

Although Google is relatively convenient and easy to use and can allow anywhere/anytime access to original sources and data, it is not always the best option for research. The following list of websites offer free, authoritative government resources for data and statistics.

USA.gov

www.usa.gov

This official federal search portal allows users to search across federal, state, and local government agency websites, including agency YouTube channels. This portal allows you to easily explore the entire world of government resources without the noise of less-credible information. For example, a simple search of “news” returns a link to English news from the Voice of America. VOA provides complete coverage of the U.S., Asia, Africa, and the Middle East.

U.S. Bilateral Relations Fact Sheets

www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn

Published by the U.S. State Department, these wonderfully-informative booklets provide basic facts on a country’s land, people, history, government, political conditions, economy, and its relations with other countries and the United States. Illustrations include the country’s flag and a map. Links from the index page show maps that explain which countries belong to specific regions of the world. Additional links take you to related State Department information.

U.S. Central Intelligence Agency World Factbook

www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/index.html

The site explains, “The World Factbook provides information on the history, people, government, economy, geography, communications, transportation, military, and transnational issues for 267 world entities. The Reference tab includes: maps of the major world regions, flags of the world, a physical map of the world, a political map of the world, a world oceans map, and a standard time zones of the world map.” There is a Kids’ Zone with games and puzzles and a parent/teacher section full of resources, lesson plans, and discussion points.

Country Studies

memory.loc.gov/frd/cs

Part of the Library of Congress, each volume in the “Country Studies” series presents a description and analysis of the historical setting and the social, economic, political, and national security systems and institutions of countries throughout the world, including maps and other illustrations. The site allows searching across individual country studies. For example, searching the term “Islam” returns references to chapters in several country studies that would assist you in developing lessons on the importance of Islam as both a religion and a political force.

Conclusion

There is an abundance of information available from the government, and these suggestions are only a few of the many research options out there. You can even use a simple press release from the Department of State to spark ideas and prompt exploration of issues that are in the news. Be sure to use free government resources to help students learn good research skills and develop a better understanding of the news and its impact on the world.