

# FRONT PAGE NEWS

*Students write earthquake articles typical of those that might appear on the front page of a newspaper.*

## TEACHER NOTES FOR DISCUSSION

This activity allows students the freedom to write in a variety of writing styles (lead story, human interest story, editorials). Students will research information about earthquakes in general, but the actual story is created from their imagination. This is a challenging activity because students need to find facts and create exciting and believable earthquake accounts.

As a way of preparing students for this activity, bring in a newspaper that recently covered a major event that involved more than one story on the front page. Discuss the way all the articles work together. Talk about the different types of articles: the lead story encompasses the headline and the main facts about the event; a human interest story might be someone's harrowing experience; a hero story (or even a hero pet story); and a sidebar story that could include short little snippets of information, graphs, maps, or charts that tie into the main story.

Students should also be briefed on how to write a good article including varied sentence and paragraph length. The finer points of paragraph structure such as interesting words and logical transitions should also be discussed. Students should pay particular attention to these structures as they proofread their own and others' work. You may want to put together a checklist, or use the one provided.

## Objective

After completing this activity, students should be able to:

- demonstrate competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process.
- demonstrate competence in style and rhetoric.
- use grammatical and mechanical conventions in written work.
- read and comprehend a variety of informational texts.
- combine information into a fictional account.
- give and receive critical and editorial input.

## Time Considerations

Instructor preparation:  
50 minutes

Student activity:  
three to five classes

## STANDARDS AND BENCHMARKS

### Language Arts

#### Standard 1. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies of the writing process

prewriting: uses a variety of prewriting strategies

drafting and revising: uses a variety of strategies to draft and revise written work

editing and publishing: uses a variety of strategies to edit and publish written work

- evaluates own and others' writing
- uses style and structure appropriate for specific audiences
- writes expository compositions
- writes narrative accounts

#### Standard 2. Demonstrates competence in the stylistic and rhetorical aspects of writing

- uses paragraph form in writing
- uses a variety of sentence structures to express expanded ideas
- uses some explicit transitional devices

#### Standard 3. Uses grammatical and mechanical conventions in written compositions

- gathers and uses information for research purposes
- uses a variety of resource materials to gather information for research topics
- organizes information and ideas from multiple sources in systematic ways
- writes research papers

#### Standard 7. Demonstrates competence in the general skills and strategies for reading a variety of informational texts

- applies reading skills and strategies to a variety of informational texts
- uses new information to adjust and extend personal knowledge base

# FRONT PAGE NEWS

## UNDERSTAND YOUR MISSION

In this activity, you will use real and created information to write three different articles about a (make believe) earthquake that hits the Mississippi River valley.

### LEARN THE LINGO

epicenter	the place where layers of rock shift is called the focus of the quake; directly above, marking the spot of highest shock intensity on the surface is the epicenter
fault	a fracture in the crust of a planet (like Earth) or moon; one side of the fracture may slip against, above, or underneath the other side of the fault
midplate quakes	infrequent but large and destructive quakes that occur in areas far removed from other tectonic activity
Richter scale	measures the motion of the land surface 100km (60 miles) from the epicenter of the quake; it is a logarithmic scale which means a magnitude 7 quake moves the land 10 times farther than a 6 and 100 time farther than a 5
shock waves	waves come out from the focus and epicenter like ripples; they decrease in intensity as they travel outward
seismic	of or caused by an earthquake
tectonic plates	areas that form the crust of a planet
tremors	discreet small vibrations usually preceding or following seismic activity

### Gather Your Supplies

- interviews
- researched material

## BACKGROUND

### Story Types

#### Lead Story

This details the most important facts. Think about the questions you yourself would have if you heard an earthquake hit the Mississippi River valley. Vital information for a lead story involve answering questions:

- Where did it happen?
- Were people injured?
- How bad was it?
- What's being done?
- When did it happen?

# FRONT PAGE NEWS

## Human Interest

This story can be about any aspect of your earthquake that will appeal emotionally to the reader. Such stories might be about a heroic feat or someone's heart-warming experience. Human interest stories usually have a happy ending.

## Side-bar

These short snippets of information relate to the subject in some small way. It might be statistics on the number of earthquakes throughout the U.S. in the last two years; or warning signs that an earthquake is approaching; or any other charts, maps, or graphs.

## Editorial

Choose an issue and take a side. Make sure to back up your opinion with facts.

## CHART A COURSE FOR EXPLORATION

An earthquake hits along the New Madrid fault. You are the top reporter at your newspaper and are sent to cover the story. You must send back three articles for the front page. Take everything you know about earthquakes and apply it to the articles that could appear on the front page of a newspaper covering breaking news. Begin by gathering background information on earthquakes. Use at least five sources.

Write the feature article. It should incorporate facts and figures to back up your fictional account. Use the *Formula for a Well-Written News Article* and the provided examples as guides.

Choose two more articles from the three remaining types. If you find it necessary, do additional research. Remember to give your articles snappy titles that grab the attention of the reader. Proofread your work. Make sure to have at least two other people give you their input before you revise your works into their final drafts.

## Go Beyond

Use desktop publishing software to professionally layout your front page. Add pictures, drawings, cartoons, and advertisements to make it look real. Post all the front page stories around the room to be enjoyed by everyone.

# FRONT PAGE NEWS

---

## **THE NEW MADRID SEISMIC ZONE**

Although most Americans associate earthquakes with California, the tremors that shook the Mississippi valley in southeast Missouri from December 16, 1811 through February 7, 1812, are among the most violent quakes to ever hit the North American continent in recorded history. Collectively known as the New Madrid earthquakes, these 2000 tremors affected more than 1 million square miles. (By comparison, the 1906 San Francisco earthquake affected only 60,000 square miles.) Three quakes were estimated to be 7.5 or greater on the Richter scale, making it the site of the largest earthquake in the continental U.S. (The only other larger event was the great Alaska earthquake in 1964.)

The tremors were felt hundreds of miles away throughout the U.S. and into parts of Canada, even ringing church bells in Boston and Washington, D.C. Fortunately there were few people in these U.S. locations at that time. The quake zone was in constant movement during this period. Five towns in three states disappeared; islands vanished in the Mississippi River; lakes formed where there had been none before, and it is said that the river flowed backward for a brief period. Because the faults crossed the Mississippi, vertical displacement of the ground dammed the river and diverted it. Reelfoot Lake in Wisconsin resulted from this activity.

The New Madrid seismic zone is named for the Missouri town which first witnessed its might—New Madrid. The fault extends 150 miles southward from Cairo, Illinois, to Marked Tree, Arkansas. It crosses five state lines (Illinois, Missouri, Kentucky, Tennessee, and Arkansas) and the Mississippi River in at least three places.

# FRONT PAGE NEWS

## Example Article 1

This stunning account was one of the first to tell the rest of the nation about San Francisco's devastating earthquake. The quake and the resulting tidal wave and fire destroyed nearly all of San Francisco's city center.

SAN FRANCISCO BURNING UP!  
 Earthquake Topples Down Hundreds of Buildings,  
 Killing or Injuring 1500 Persons  
*Tidal Wave Sweeps Water Front*  
*St. Louis Post-Dispatch*  
 April 18, 1906

San Francisco, April 18—With the entire north section of the city in ruins and with the flames leaping from building to building in all directions, San Francisco seems doomed.

Unless the wind shifts to the west and blows the flames towards the bay, nothing can prevent the destruction of the city. The Fire Department, working frantically without water, is dynamiting building after building in the path of the flames, but the wind is carrying a roaring river of fire across each gap and it appears impossible to check the [conflagration].

One by one the finest structures in the business section are being reduced to wreckage. Every building surrounding the Palace Hotel is in flames. Fire is eating its way into the 16-story building of San Francisco Call, a morning paper, and the rear section of the 11-story Monadnock Building has collapsed, spreading the fire in all directions.

The Postal Telegraph Co. is preparing to vacate its building, and this will shut off all telegraphic communication with the outside world.

The death list is added to every moment. Aside from those that lost their lives nearly 1500 are injured, it is estimated. It is utterly impossible to care for the wounded as they should be, and many are lying in the streets breathing their last, with the people in their madness unable to get them to places of safety. Men, women and children with broken limbs can be seen vainly trying to reach medical aid. Physicians from Oakland, Berkeley, Alameda and San Rafael have arrived on the scene and are doing good work in caring for the injured. With no water to fight the flames and the town being gradually consumed and the moaning and cries of the injured, the city has been thrown into a panic. The awful scenes of dead bodies lying around on the streets have caused widespread horror. The Waterworks is destroyed.

# FRONT PAGE NEWS

---

## Example Article 2

San Francisco, April 18, 10:15 a. m.—There has just been another shock, which intensified the panic. People have started to rush into the streets, but the shock was of short duration and alarm subsided.

The gas works, south of Market street, has blown up and an immense fire rages in that vicinity.

The fire in the vicinity of the Palace and Grand hotels is rapidly approaching these buildings and from present indications they will fall prey to the flames within half an hour.

Source: St. Louis Post-Dispatch, April 18, 1906.

## Formula for a Well-Written News Article

### First paragraph

In your first one or two sentences, tell who, what, when, where, and why. Try to hook the reader by beginning with a funny, clever, or surprising statement. Go for variety: try beginning your article with a question or a provocative statement.

### Second/Third/Fourth paragraphs

Give the reader the details. Include one or two quotes from people you interviewed. Write in the third person (he, she, it, they). Be objective (never state your personal opinion unless you are writing an editorial). Use quotes to express others' opinions.

### Last paragraph

Wrap it up somehow. Do not leave the reader hanging. Please don't say..." In conclusion" or "To finish..." (yawn!) Try ending with a quote or a catchy phrase.

## Remember

- Use active words (verbs that show what is really happening).
- Take notes when you interview. Write down quotes.
- Tell the interesting information first

# FRONT PAGE NEWS

## Check list for Peer Review

Answer the following questions yes, no, or somewhat about each article

YES (EXPLAIN)	NO (EXPLAIN)	SOMEWHAT (EXPLAIN)	
			INTERESTING ARTICLES I ENJOYED READING
			COMPELLING, EYE-CATCHING TITLES
			THE FIRST SENTENCE OF THE ARTICLE MAKES ME WANT TO READ ON
			I CAN POINT OUT COLORFUL, DESCRIPTIVE WORDS
			SENTENCES ARE WELL STRUCTURED AND VARY IN LENGTH
			PARAGRAPHS FLOW WELL TOGETHER WITH GOOD TRANSITIONS
			BELIEVABLE ARTICLES
			PARAGRAPHS ARE WELL STRUCTURED WITH SENTENCES FOLLOWING A LOGICAL PROGRESSION
			USES A LOT OF RELEVANT FACTS
			FACTS AND FICTION FLOW WELL TOGETHER.

### Turn in to your teacher:

- three articles
- list of sources
- a classmate's critique of your work
- the name of the person who you critiqued

# FRONT PAGE NEWS

	EXPERT	PROFICIENT	NOVICE
GRAMMAR, USAGE, MECHANICS (G.U.M.) ERRORS	<input type="checkbox"/> contains no more than 2-4 minor errors	<input type="checkbox"/> 4-6 errors	<input type="checkbox"/> 6 or more errors-many serious
SENTENCE STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> no fragments or run-on sentences <input type="checkbox"/> sentences vary in length	<input type="checkbox"/> easily correctable run-ons and fragment sentences	<input type="checkbox"/> many fragments and run-ons <input type="checkbox"/> sentences do not vary in length
PARAGRAPH STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> smooth transitions indicate new ideas and new paragraphs	<input type="checkbox"/> ideas clearly separated, but transitions need to flow better	<input type="checkbox"/> mixes ideas in the same paragraph with unclear transitions
RESOURCES	<input type="checkbox"/> uses at least 5 resources and cites them	<input type="checkbox"/> uses 3-4 resources and cites them	<input type="checkbox"/> needs resources <input type="checkbox"/> needs citations
DETAILS AND INFORMATION	<input type="checkbox"/> uses concrete, relevant, and interesting details and information-it's believable	<input type="checkbox"/> interesting information, but it lacks relevance <input type="checkbox"/> is not totally believable	<input type="checkbox"/> needs to incorporate factual information into narrative
CREATIVITY	<input type="checkbox"/> compelling, imaginative story that captures the readers' attention and uses colorful words	<input type="checkbox"/> understandable with good content, but lacks imagination and colorful words	<input type="checkbox"/> lacks colorful words that help your story express itself
COMPLETION OF ACTIVITY	<input type="checkbox"/> handed in 3 articles, list or references, classmate's critique of your work, and the name of the person critiqued	<input type="checkbox"/> handed in 3 articles but lacks either references or critiques	<input type="checkbox"/> handed in incomplete articles

## REFERENCES

—. "San Francisco Earthquake Spreads Destruction," Microsoft® Encarta® 98 Encyclopedia. 1993-1997.

Kendall, John S. and Robert J. Marzano. *Content Knowledge: The McREL Standards Database*. <<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>>, April, 12, 2000.