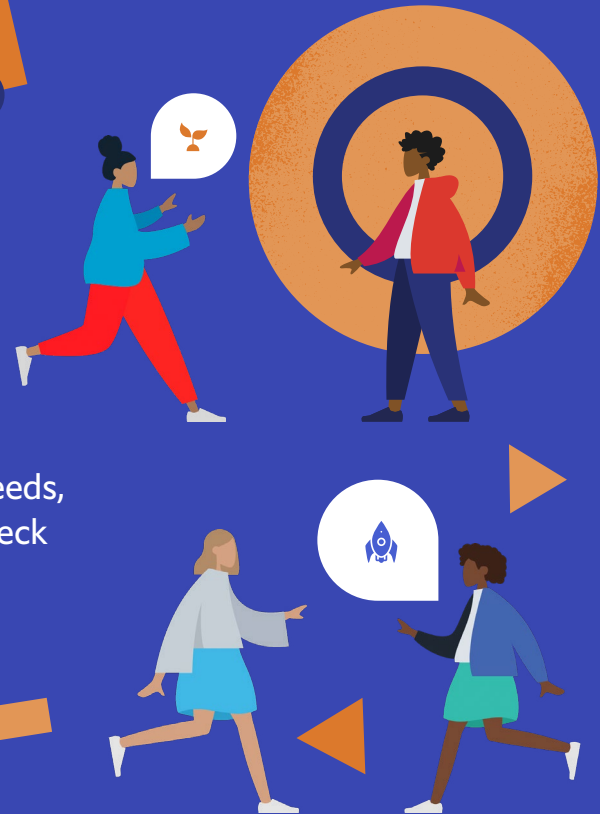


Inclusive conversations about the news

Five ideas from The Economist Educational Foundation to start to help all learners, including those with additional needs, access discussions about the news. For more resources, check out *Topical Talk*; weekly classroom resources for inspiring, informed and open-minded discussions about the news.

talk.economistfoundation.org



IDEA 1

Unlock the language

WHAT

Explicitly teach key vocabulary from the first mention of a news story.

WHY

To communicate how you feel about something, you need the relevant vocabulary to be able to say what you mean. We can't share our opinions on an upcoming election without knowing keywords like *election*, *democracy*, *vote*, or *candidate*. When we teach the vocabulary we give everyone a toolkit for talking from the start.

HOW

- + Get students saying the words aloud – repeat them back, try them backwards, shout them loudly – get any embarrassment of pronouncing them incorrectly out of the way quickly.
- + Visualise the key word. Ask students to draw a picture of the word. Swap with a partner and compare, or draw the word by tracing it with their finger on a partner's back.
- + Connect the new vocabulary with prior learning – what does the word sound like, what does it rhyme with or what is it opposite to?



IDEA 2

Familiarity first

WHAT

Start by telling similar stories that students can relate to – real or imagined.

WHY

It's hard to think about people you don't know in places you haven't heard of, but the concepts that underpin a news story are often familiar: *power, justice, scarcity, democracy*. Start with these first, then hone in on facts and details so that students make links and build confidence.

HOW

- + Start with analogies and stories. A power struggle between world leaders might be told perfectly in a well-known fairytale, or a local election could be similar to the process at school for selecting the student council.
- + Don't dive in too deep. Help students go from "small talk" to "big talk" with low-stakes, imagination-rich conversations before the real-life version. For example, "Who would make a better president, a cat or an elephant?" is an easy route in to a discussion about democracy.
- + Ask students what they already know. Gauge where to begin from their prior knowledge or get them to ask the questions they'd like to find the answers to.



IDEA 3

"Who?" before, "You..."

WHAT

Give the opinions of people who think XYZ before asking for a personal response.

WHY

Sometimes it's hard to say what you think. By listening first and then reacting, students are shown how it's done and given something to bounce their opinions off.

HOW

- + Share two contrasting views. Ask which they agree with most (or definitely disagree with!) then, "Why?" Students can show their thinking physically and move to stand in a particular space, or point or click in response.
- + Order a range of opinions on a scale. Start with "😊 – 😞". Or change the parameters to "best idea – worst idea" or "biggest impact – smallest impact". Better still, let students decide on their own scale before they make the decisions.
- + Share personal opinions last, when confidence levels are higher. Start with, "Who would think X?" and discuss the options before asking, "Who **here** thinks X?"



IDEA 4

Inform but don't frighten

WHAT

Share key, suitable information and remember not everything is necessary.

WHY

It's important to establish the facts with students to avoid misconceptions and fake news. In doing so, we should remain aware of our student's mental health – exposing them to only appropriate, manageable material.

HOW

- + Think about your sources. Use reputable news organisations and provide a range of opinions, as well as the facts. Consider what students might research and where they could end up – suggest safe websites and keep the discussion focused.
- + Break down what's happened. Contextualise events in time and place and name the key players. Start with people and actions, rather than figures and statistics that might overwhelm.
- + Correct misinformation. If a child says something untrue, make sure you correct it. If you don't know the correct answer, openly say that you would like to find out more before you trust it. Put things in proportion and keep to the point – don't allow tangential ideas to cloud the discussion of the facts.



IDEA 5

Show, tell, take time

WHAT

Share opinions in different ways and revisit over time.

WHY

Like adults, not all students will be able to articulate how they feel about a news story. Let them know that they can express their opinion in a range of ways and that it's normal for these to change over time.

HOW

- + Ask students to show how they feel by pointing to a picture, making a shape with their body or pulling a face. Starting here, and asking for an explanation relating to something they have done or chosen, is often easier than a direct explanation of a feeling or opinion.
- + Use simple sentence starters and discussion prompts to encourage everyone to join in. "I agree because..." or, "One thing I heard that interested me was..." are the simplest supports but give a student something to use to break the silence.
- + Come back to the same discussion over days, weeks or months. Ask how students feel and how this might have changed – acknowledge that this change is part of the thinking process.