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LESSON

Write for the Flood City Gazette!

by Daniel José Older and New Leaf Literary & Media

Grades 5–9

TYPE

INFORMATIONAL

COMMITMENT

5 Sessions: 1 Hour Each

Presented By

New Leaf Literary & Media

In these five sessions, students will be introduced to the incredible story of Flood City, the last, floating city on Earth after a catastrophic flood. Students are then invited to act as journalists for the *Flood City Gazette*. In the process, they will learn about the different roles needed to produce a newspaper and the fundamentals of writing a journalistic article. Students will work together as a team to tell the story of Flood City and present it to their classmates.

Session 1: Flood City Gazette Job Descriptions

Together, the class will review the Newspaper Glossary and Flood City Summary, then break into their newspaper teams to select an editor-in-chief, review the Beats Sheet, and choose which beat to write.

YOU WILL NEED

- [Video Message from the Editor](#)
- [Flood City Synopsis](#)
- [Beats Sheet](#)
- [Newspaper Glossary](#)

BEFORE YOU START

Review class size and decide on the best division of students to produce roughly even groups that will each be a “paper staff.” The suggested group size is five students, with resources included for four “beats” and an editor-in-chief role, but students could be co-editors, or work in teams of two on their stories, for instance, to accommodate bigger groups.

HOW TO BEGIN (20 Minutes)

Watch Daniel José Older’s [Message from the Editor](#) video then read the [Flood City Synopsis](#) to establish the world and their job—to write for the *Flood City Gazette*!

Then, review the [Newspaper Glossary](#) to lay a foundation for the roles and responsibilities for each group or “paper staff.”

Step 1 (15-20 Minutes)

Students select roles for the group (Who will be the editor-in-chief; who will be journalists).

Students review the [Beats Sheet](#) and choose a beat. In some cases, it may be appropriate for two students to write an article within the same beat. If a student has another idea for a story that doesn’t fit into the four given beats, that is OK! Encourage them to discuss their idea with their group and editor to see if it’s a good fit. (10 minutes)

Step 2 (10-15 Minutes)

Class reconvenes with any questions that have arisen in the breakout group. If time allows, students can begin brainstorming ideas for their beat.

Step 3

As an exit ticket, groups turn in a staff list detailing who will be doing what beat.

Homework (if not decided in class): Students will return to the next session with 1-2 story ideas for their assigned beat.

Session 2: Flood City Gazette Editorial Meeting

Having established their paper staffs and assigned beat in session 1, students will return to their breakout groups and confirm one or two stories that they want to write (as a solo journalist, or some class sizes may necessitate duos or teams working on each beat). This session will establish the number and type of stories being printed in this issue of the paper so the editor can establish a layout and begin considering their contribution.

YOU WILL NEED

- [Flood City Synopsis](#)

- [Beats Sheet](#)
- [Newspaper Glossary](#)
- [Article Worksheet](#)

Step 1 (30 Minutes)

Students work on the [Article Worksheet](#), one for each of their story ideas, to brainstorm 5Ws and facts to include.

Note, students should focus their time on the 5Ws and facts for each story. For now, they can jot down any ideas for ledes and headlines, then return to those sections after the editorial meeting.

Step 2 (20 Minutes)

Each journalist or journalist pair/team presents the story(ies) they'd like to write to the group.

In each case, the newspaper staff should identify the Who, What, Where, When, and Why (explained in the [Newspaper Glossary](#)) in the stories they'll be writing.

The editor-in-chief/editor-in-chief team approves the story if the Five Ws are answered; if not, students should identify the missing or less developed Ws in class or for homework.

The editor-in-chief presents their idea/topic, whether they are choosing to write the "Letter from the Editor" or any other option provided on the [Beats Sheet](#).

Step 3 (10 Minutes)

Class reconvenes with any questions that have arisen in the breakout group. If time allows, students can work on finishing their [Article Worksheet](#).

Homework: All students should complete their own [Article Worksheet](#) in preparation for drafting their article next session.

Session 3: Flood City Gazette Drafting Meeting

Having selected their beats and identified the most important elements of the story (the 5 Ws), in session 3 students will work independently in their group to flesh out their story.

YOU WILL NEED

- Completed [Article Worksheets](#)
- [Flood City Synopsis](#)
- [Beats Sheet](#)
- [Newspaper Glossary](#)

Step 1 (30 Minutes)

Each journalist or journalist pair/team works independently on writing the actual article that will appear in the newspaper.

Step 2 (20 Minutes)

The editor-in-chief/editor-in-chief team reconvenes the team from their independent writing to do a status check with each journalist/journalist team. They could ask each journalist to share:

- What’s going well? Share your strongest line or paragraph with the group.
- Where do you need more facts or details?
- Where are you stuck?

As journalists/journalist teams share and discuss their work, the rest of the team should be ready to provide ideas that further develop their story and suggestions to overcome any sticking points.

Step 3 (10 Minutes)

Students return to their own article, using this time to add ideas and suggestions from the team.

Homework: Before the next class session, students should finish the first draft of their article.

Session 4: Flood City Gazette Revision Meeting

Students will provide feedback on the stories they’ve read.

YOU WILL NEED

- Finished first drafts (paper or digital)

BEFORE YOU START

Students should come to this session with a finished first draft to share for peer review.

HOW TO BEGIN ()

Preview how students will participate in the peer feedback process—providing written feedback for one team member’s article, then sharing that feedback during a team meeting. Clarify how team members will swap pieces (e.g., make a digital copy of their article and share with appropriate team members or swap their paper first drafts) for review.

Step 1 (30 Minutes)

You may opt for students to use a peer feedback strategy that has worked well for your group in the past, or try the “T.A.G.” peer review activity, a simple peer review strategy used for writing revision. With this strategy, students swap writing pieces and create three “T.A.G.” notes for each piece they review:

T — Tell the writer something you like about their writing.

A — Ask a question about their piece.

G — Give the writer a positive suggestion.

Students should swap drafts to review and “T.A.G.” at least one other story from their team (including the editor-in-chief’s piece) and be prepared to share this feedback in their group. The editor-in-chief should ensure each story has at least one reader providing feedback.

Step 2 (20 Minutes)

After all team members finish their review, they should convene as a paper staff.

The editor-in-chief calls on each journalist/journalist team one at a time and the members of the staff who reviewed that story provide feedback in person. It may be helpful for each group to elect a timekeeper for the revision process, spending roughly 5 minutes per article, depending on the size of the group.

Each journalist should take notes and ask questions about feedback they are given so they can incorporate the changes in class and/or as homework.

Step 3 (10 Minutes)

Final revision time in class! If students don’t finish their article in class, this revision will be homework.

Session 5: Flood City Gazette Presentations!

Students will present their newspapers and respective stories to the class. As an optional extension, students can format their articles into a newspaper template.

YOU WILL NEED

- Completed Articles
- [Flood City Newspaper Template](#) (optional)

BEFORE YOU START

Optional: Before or after students present their stories to the class, you may opt to build in additional class time for students to transfer their final articles onto the [Flood City Newspaper Template](#). To use an editable version of this template, follow these steps:

1. Open the template in Google Slides by following the link.
2. In the top left corner of the Google Slides bar go to 'File' – 'Make a Copy' – 'Entire Presentation.'
3. In the Google Drive of the account used, there should now be an editable copy of the presentation. You can add student editors to the same template via the share option, just make sure to check the 'edit' option!
4. Students can rearrange the template as they wish, changing fonts, sizes or arrangement to fit their vision of the *Flood City Gazette*.

Step 1 (15 Minutes)

Explain to students that each “paper staff” will have five minutes total to present their newspaper to the class. Post presentation requirements on the board—all presentations should include:

- An introduction by the editor-in-chief(s) that provides an overview of the paper (was it a slow news day in Flood City? Or did a big event dominate news coverage?) and share a section from their piece of writing.
- Each team member should take a turn introducing their stories. Students should share their interest in the story and identify the 5Ws. If they wish, they can share a line or section from their story as well.

Provide 5-10 minutes for students to prepare in groups.

Step 2 (45 Minutes)

Paper staff presentations!