



## **Lesson B: Why zines? How can those outside the mainstream get their voices heard?**

**Content Areas:** Media Literacy, Information Literacy

**Level:** Secondary, Grades 10-12

### **Overview**

In this lesson, students compare and contrast both mainstream media and underground/alternative media to determine the advantages and disadvantages of the two forms in sharing and distributing information about elections. Students examine a series of excerpts from the Barnard Library Zine Collection Online Exhibition entitled, "Elections and Protest: Zines from the Barnard Library Collection" in order to discover how zines can give voice to marginalized groups and perspectives and have value in the democratic process.

### **Duration**

60 minutes

### **Lesson Objectives**

Through participation in this lesson, students will be able to:

- make inferences about mainstream media sources and their coverage of elections
- make inferences about zines and their coverage of elections
- evaluate the usefulness of a source for a given purpose
- discuss the importance of censorship and free speech
- discuss the importance of neutrality and reliability

### **Materials**

- Two pieces of chart paper and markers
- Access to the Internet for each student, or hard-copies of newspaper and magazine election coverage
- Examples of hard-copy zines for students to inspect during the **Direct Instruction**

- Access to the Internet for each student, or photocopies of the zine pages from "Elections and Protest: Zines from the Barnard Library Collection"

### **Teacher Preparation**

1) Create two charts, one labeled "Mainstream Media" and one labeled "Underground/Alternative Media." On each chart, make a row for Examples, Advantages and Disadvantages (See samples attached). You will fill these charts in as part of the Whole Group Discussion activities. Fill them in yourself or nominate a student to be the notetaker.

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2) Select one mainstream media source for your students to examine during the **Collaborative Activity** which covers the most recent presidential election. Provide students with URLs of the resource you want them to examine. Some ideas include:

- Election Websites
  - CNN Election Center: <http://www.cnn.com/ELECTION/2008/>
  - Yahoo! Election Coverage: <http://news.yahoo.com/elections>
  - Election 2008 @ NPR:  
<http://www.npr.org/templates/topics/topic.php?topicId=1102>
  - Indecision 2008 @ Comedy Central: <http://www.indecision2008.com/>
- Video Clips of Election Coverage
  - MSNBC video coverage: <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/3032619/>
  - YouTube News & Politics videos:  
<http://www.youtube.com/browse?s=mp&c=25&l=>
  - Comedy Central Clips: <http://www.indecision2008.com/videos.jhtml>
- Election Blogs
  - Don't Blame Me, I Voted for You: <http://www.2008-presidential-election.info/blog/>
  - Election Geek: <http://www.electiongeek.com/>
  - Campaign Stops blog @ NYTimes:  
<http://campaignstops.blogs.nytimes.com/>

3) Create your small groups ahead of time and determine which mainstream media source and which zine from the collection best fit your students ability level and interest.

## Lesson Sequence

**Hook/Motivation (5 minutes):** Ask students what they know about the most recent presidential election. Who are the candidates? What do they stand for? Ask students where they have heard gathered this information. Make a list on the board of possible sources for information about the election. Where would students go to find out who to vote for, what the politicians stand for, or what the implications are for our country based on the election's outcome.

**Collaborative Activity (10 minutes):** Break students into groups of three or four. Assign each group a mainstream media source to examine. In their groups, they should explore the site, blog, or video clip and fill in the **Media Sources Worksheet**, determining:

- What is this source's purpose? What is it trying to do? Is it neutral or does it present an agenda?
- Who owns the source? Who determines what opinions get covered?
- Who owns the ideas on the source? Who profits or benefits from this source?
- Who ensures that the content is accurate?
- What special skills or knowledge went into creating this source?
- What controversial ideas the author is expressing that the candidates might not want people to see or read?

Each group should be prepared to briefly share their findings about the source's ownership and authenticity with the class.



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**Whole Group Discussion (10 minutes):** Ask each group to share out their findings, and write commonalities on a piece of chart paper or on the board. When each group has finished, tell students that the sources they were just looking at are all considered, "mainstream media" sources. Point to the chart you created, and ask students to think about what all of these sources had in common that make them "mainstream." List some of the positive and negative aspects of mainstream media election coverage on the chart.

**Direct Instruction (5 minutes):** Ask students if they're aware of any types of media that exist outside the "mainstream." Hold up your example zine and ask students if they've ever heard of a "zine" before. Define zine as a self-published, small publication. Tell students that although zines are usually produced in hard-copy on a photocopier, in the next activity they will be looking at some zines that have been scanned and displayed on the internet. As students explore these zines, they should keep in mind that they were originally intended to be used and enjoyed as paper booklets. The zine pages they will see are also only excerpts, and each full issue would have more pages and more information.

**Collaborative Activity (10 minutes):** Assign each group one of the zines in this online exhibit to examine. Give the groups time to explore the zine online, fill in the second column on their Media Sources Worksheet in order to determine:

- What is this source's purpose? What is it trying to do? Is it neutral or does it present an agenda?
- Who owns the source? Who determines what opinions get covered?
- Who owns the ideas on the source? Who profits or benefits from this source?
- Who ensures that the content is accurate?
- What special skills or knowledge went into creating this source?
- What controversial ideas the author is expressing that the candidates might not want people to see or read?

Each group should be prepared to briefly share their findings about the source's ownership and authenticity with the class.

**Whole Group Discussion (10 minutes):** As before, ask each group to share out their findings about their zines. When each group is finished, list some of the commonalities among the zines on the chart labeled, "Underground/Alternative Publications." What is it about zines that place them firmly outside the mainstream? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of creating a zine or other alternative publication?

**Summary (10 minutes):** Refer back to the list you generated at the beginning of class. Of the sources the students listed as possible places to get information about the election, which are mainstream and which are underground? Lead a class discussion in which you discuss the possible benefits and drawbacks to using a mainstream source for information about an election as opposed to an underground/alternative source. What do you gain by publishing outside the mainstream? What do you lose? Is authenticity more important than free speech? If you were trying to decide who to vote for in a



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presidential election, would you consult mainstream sources, underground sources, or both? Why? How are both sources important in a free society?

## Lesson Extensions

- Have students look a series of radical election blogs or e-zines to see what underground media is saying about the current election.
- Have students monitor both mainstream and underground coverage of the election and its results
- Challenge students to create their own zines about the election following the models in the exhibit
- Connect this discussion to the work you are doing in class. Ask students to choose another topic or current event, perhaps from history or related to a book they're reading in English class, and investigate the mainstream and underground coverage of it. Some possibilities include:
  - **Current events** - Compare and contrast mainstream coverage of the War in Iraq, Third Wave Feminism, and other topics with the zines available online at the Zine Library ([zinelibrary.info](http://zinelibrary.info)).
  - **The American Revolution** - Compare and contrast British news publications with Thomas Payne's Common Sense
  - **1930s Anarchist and Socialist Movements** - Compare and contrast mainstream media coverage with anarchist materials from the University of Michigan's Labadie Collection (<http://www.lib.umich.edu/spec-coll/labadie/>)
  - **The Beat Generation** - Compare and contrast mainstream media coverage of the Beat generation with their own chapbooks and publications.
  - **The Gay Rights movement** - Compare and contrast mainstream media coverage of the AIDS epidemic with zines from the Queer Zine Archive Project ([www.qzap.org](http://www.qzap.org)) or NYPL's Digital Library LGBTQ Collection (<http://lgbt.nypl.org/>)
- There are many, many more resources on the web for exploring underground and alternative publications. Check the special collections at your local public or academic library!



## Media Sources Worksheet

Directions: Fill in the table with your inferences about your media sources, and be prepared to share your work with the class!

Examine your source, and determine:	Source A: _____	Source B: _____
What is this source's purpose? What is it trying to do? Is it neutral or does it present an agenda?		
Who owns the source? Who determines what opinions get covered?		
Who owns the ideas on the source? Who profits or benefits from this source?		
Who ensures that the content is accurate?		
What special skills or knowledge went into creating this source?		
What controversial ideas the author is expressing that the candidates might not want people to see or read?		

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## Sample Charts

### Mainstream Media

Examples:

Advantages:

Disadvantages:

### Underground/Alternative Media

Examples:

Advantages:

Disadvantages: