In the “olden days,” people primarily relied upon newspapers for their news, and the papers were clearly labeled by section -- “News” “Features” “Opinion.” Through everyday use, newspapers trained their readers to expect the international and national news on the front page, and state and local news in following pages, and to flip through the pages for articles about local heroes or topics of interest like Home and Garden, Sports, or their favorite columnists and Editorials. Today, such labels are abandoned when articles are lifted as links and shared via social media, or when people check YouTube for the latest news, or when people accept their friends’ postings as “news.” When you read your news on Facebook (and many people do!) you are not alerted to the genre of the story, and it’s often hard to tell which category the story may fit. Especially difficult is distinguishing news reports from opinion pieces.

Ask students to illustrate their understanding of the difference between an editorial and “hard” news.

AHA! Authors or producers generate stories with a purpose and an audience in mind.

Grade Level: 7-9

Key Question #1: Who created this message?

Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed.

Key Question #3: How might different people understand this message differently?

Core Concept #3: Different people understand the same media message differently.

Key Question #5: Why is this message being sent?

Core Concept #5: Most media messages are organized to gain profit and/or power.
A Link to Confusion

Written by Beth Thornton
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**Materials:** Links to articles/YouTube videos in various genres for projection in front of the class.

**Activity:** If computers are available, break students into small groups and give them a specific story to research online. Ask them to find examples of a news report and an opinion piece on the same story. Or, do this as a class using a projector. Use the Key Questions, and Definitions (provided below).

Ideas for research topics: 2017 Super Bowl, 2017 Oscars, Kim Kardashian jewelry theft, Bob Dylan Nobel Prize. All of these topics have news reports as well as columns and op-eds that circulated widely on Facebook. For starters, check NPR for news reports, and Entertainment or Sports web sites for columns and opinion. *Can your students identify the differences? Do they or their friends mis-take opinion for news? Why is it important? What will they do differently?*

Definitions:

**News** – news reports are meant to be factual, verifiable accounts of an event. They are descriptive reports that rely on interviews with knowledgeable people and outside sources. News articles by professional journalists are assumed to be researched and fact-checked. “Hard” news is typically time-sensitive, judged by editors to be the most recent and important events and happenings of interest to readers, viewers or users.

**Op-Ed** – this is an opinion piece (editorial) written by someone with a distinct point of view. An Op-ed reflects the opinion and bias of the author (i.e. politics, sports…) and is not subjected to the same scrutiny for accuracy or for representation of various views in the content.

**Columnists** – a columnist is hired to write personalized editorials on a regular basis. They develop a following by expressing their opinions in their own unique style.

**Feature** – features are human-interest stories that are not time-sensitive “hard” news. A Feature is an in-depth story of a person or event typically written to educate or entertain, to attract an audience.

The Five Core Concepts and Five Key Questions of media literacy were developed as part of
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