The human interest news story has been with us for some time—at least since the turn of the 20th century, when Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst deployed them to lure readers away from competing newspapers. What may be the latest and best source of human interest stories today? Crowdfunding sites. Take the personal fundraising site GoFundMe, for example.

In a 2012 interview with *Fast Company* magazine, CEO Brad Damphousse, described GoFundMe as a "human interest gold mine." In this MediaLit Moment, your middle level students will learn how visitors to crowdfunding sites aren't just contributing to a deserving person or worthy cause, but are paying for a good story as well.

Ask students to compare personal crowdfunding appeals with personal interest stories in other media.

AHA!: I'm paying for a story that pulls on my heartstrings!

Grade Level: 6-9

Key Question #1: Who created this message?
Core Concept #1: All media messages are constructed.

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

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

Materials: Computer with high speed internet access, LCD projector and screen.

Activity: Pass out, play or display a human interest news story for your class. Local television news broadcasts and websites are a good source for such stories. Give your students some time to respond to the story. Ask, what do they find interesting about the story? You may wish to display a page or chart of news values, and ask students to identify which news values the story appeals to.

Next, visit the GoFundMe site and browse individual funding appeals. Ask students, if they don't have a close relationship with the person making the appeal, what would make them want to make a contribution? (The story). Discuss Core Concept #1 with students. What appeals do they respond to most? Why? (Most likely stories of personal adversity). You may want to discuss the human interest news values these appeals embody.

Next, draw students’ attention to the business model for each medium. For news stories, the size of readership or the number of viewers helps bring in revenues from advertisers. In the case of GoFundMe, the company deducts an average of 8% from each contribution for processing and other fees. So contributors are paying for the media producer to publish these stories and to publicize these appeals across social media sites as well.

Ask, what information or advice might they want to share with someone who's thinking of using a personal fundraising site to make a contribution?

The Fast Company article on GoFundMe can be found at:
http://www.fastcoexist.com/1680780/crowd-funding-for-everything-else-pets-healthcare-college-you-name-it

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