



Hot topics - Sparking a news story

Time needed for activity 60 minutes plus

Location Indoors or outdoors

Context

This activity plan focuses on how wildfire can impact both our lives and the natural environment, and examines how it's covered by the media.

Natural Resources Wales' purpose is to pursue sustainable management of natural resources in all of its work. This means looking after air, land, water, wildlife, plants and soil to improve Wales' well-being, and provide a better future for everyone.

Curriculum for Wales

Expressive Arts

- **What matters** - Creating combines skills and knowledge, drawing on the senses, inspiration and imagination.

Languages, Literacy and Communication

- **What matters** - Understanding languages is key to understanding the world around us.
- **What matters** - Expressing ourselves through languages is key to communication.

Health and Well-being

- **What matters** - How we process and respond to our experiences affects our mental health and emotional well-being.
- **What matters** - How we engage with social influences shapes who we are and affects our health and well-being.

Digital Competence Framework

Completing this activity provides opportunities to meet the following strands of the Digital Competence Framework.

Interacting and collaborating

- Communication.
- Collaboration.

Producing

- Sourcing, searching and planning digital content.
- Creating digital content.
- Evaluating and improving digital content.



Objectives

Learners will be able to:

- Understand some of the motivation behind media reporting of wildfire events.
- Recognise that there are similarities and differences between people's ethics, values and attitudes.
- Collaborate to creatively combine their knowledge, experience and understanding, to plan a communiqué suitable for a range of different audiences, purposes and outcomes.

Resources and equipment

- Resource cards - Hot topics
- Information note - Fire
- Local wildfire articles (optional)

Background information

This activity uses a variety of true story press headlines to provide a real life context. Wildfire events often garner a gamut of media coverage in local, national and even international press and social media.

The media stories are rarely about the wildfire itself, but more about the way the wildfire affects wildlife and those living on or working the landscape. Wildfire tends to fascinate us and has the wow factor, particularly through visual impact when filmed or photographed.

When a wildfire occurs, people will find out about it on the news and the immediate effects will be covered, especially the effect on populations near the fire, how many homes burned, structures threatened, roads closed, people that have been injured or killed, and evacuations and so on.

The media has a responsibility during a wildfire to help spread information that can save lives. Media stories can be useful tools to provide up to date information on the progress of a wildfire, which can help local people keep their property, themselves and others safe, and help to inform those working to protect the environment and wildlife.

Because it has such an adverse effect on the environment, the economy and local communities, media stories often continue after the wildfire has been extinguished, highlighting the short, medium and long term impacts of such an event.

Some media stories about wildfire can be quite sensationalist. During the UK fire season (March through April, and July through September), stories about wildfire appears almost daily on social media, in newspapers, on radio and in television broadcasts. But few of these stories take the time to present information about wildfire prevention. Planned, harmless fires by landowners managing the land, often to reduce fuel load to help prevent wildfire, rarely get media coverage. The media know that dramatic, bigger wildfire that burn a bigger area, cause maximum damage, affect more people and wildlife, attract the most attention and sell stories. However, the media plays a crucial role in raising the public's awareness of the connection between wildfire events and climate change.

Journalism refers to the activity of collecting and delivering unbiased facts on a wide range of topics. Hard news journalism refers to breaking news about serious or hard-hitting topics that are timely and urgent, usually based on facts and research.

Soft news primarily focuses on entertainment. Soft news journalism focuses more on lifestyle and entertainment. There are different types of journalism but the ones that fit best with this activity are:

- Broadcast journalism: refers to any reporting that is broadcast on television, radio, or the internet including day-to-day wildfire breaking news stories.
- Business journalism: refers to trends and changes in the business world. Wildfire events can effect economic policy and business.



- Entertainment journalism: refers to topics such as celebrities, film, music, and festivals. Where wildfire events affect celebrity's activities or property, it is of interest to the general public.
- Investigative journalism: refers to the goal to highlight a possible history shaping topic, injustice or unfairness issue. Investigating wildfire events could stir up public debate.
- Opinion journalism: refers to the reporters opinion rather than just reporting facts. Wildfire is a topic that most people have their own opinion on.
- Political journalism: refers to political activities which might be local, national, or international. The links between the climate and nature emergency, and wildfire, can be viewed through a political lens.
- Watchdog journalism: refers to protecting society from illegal activities and holding corrupt or criminal individuals, organisations or governments to account. Wildfire started deliberately and repeatedly in some areas might be looked at by the media in this way.

What to do

1. Ask your learners to discuss what wildfire are and how they start. Who do they think is responsible for preventing wildfire? Discuss their answers. Explain that in order to protect lives, property and the natural environment, it's everyone's responsibility to prevent the starting of accidental or deliberate wildfire. Refer to our [Information note – Fire](#) to help fill in any knowledge gaps.
2. Show your learners the [Resource cards – Hot topics](#) headlines, or some local or recent newspaper snippets about wildfire. Ask your learners to discuss why wildfire is often covered as a human interest media story. Why do the media report on wildfire events? Can your learners identify any particular type or style of reporting? Do the headlines draw them into wanting to know more about the story and if so, why? What kind of job roles are undertaken in media reporting?
3. Explain that for this activity, working together in small groups, your learners will be writing and delivering a news report along the scenario of a journalist reporting on what's happened and interviewing different characters affected by a wildfire incident.
 - Divide your learners into groups of up to 5 learners. Give each group one of the [Resource cards – Hot topics](#), including a headline/reporter card and 4 additional character cards. You could adapt local wildfire articles to meet the brief. The cards are improvisation guides and not intended to act as a script. For example, the headline/reporter card should be used to guide the questioning of the other characters and participants should also be encouraged to think of their own questions for other characters.
4. In their groups, ask your learners to:
 - Read their newspaper headline and discuss what problems could be caused by the wildfire incident.
 - Decide whether their news report will be for use on social media, radio or television, as they will have to adapt their performance to meet the needs of their audience.
 - Share out the character roles and provide with the relevant character card.
 - Plan their report and interview. What are they going to cover? What questions are they going to ask? What information do the characters want to pass on?
 - Consider how the reporter and characters will act? What emotions do they think they need to portray?
 - What tone will the news report take? What style of reporting do the group want to employ? Will it be more sensationalist? For example, fanning the flames and capitalising on people's or nature's losses? Or will it be reporting more about the dangers, risks, warning and informing, possibly making the links to the climate emergency? Will it be advocating for preventative measures and policy change?



5. Allow time to practice before each group delivers their news report. You could film each group's performance if suitable recording equipment is available.
6. Ask each group to peer assess their performance and outputs. What worked well? What could be improved? What could they have done differently to improve their report or performance? What do they think an audience will have gleaned about wildfire from their media report?

Suggested key questions

- Why do people deliberately start wildfire?
- How would it feel if a wildfire happened in your favourite nature spot or very near to where you live?
- How could different individuals or groups of people in the local community be affected by a wildfire?
- What information do the public need to know about wildfire?
- What is the best way to communicate facts and information to others?

Adapting for different needs/abilities

More support

- Reporter only asks questions to characters that can be answered using the information on the character cards.

More challenge

- Learners could create a backstory for their characters and consider additional ways each character could be affected by the wildfire which hasn't been mentioned on the character cards.
- Create additional wildfire headlines and affected characters.
- Specify a timescale for the report for your learners to work to.

Follow up activity/extension

Why not try our:

- [Activity plan - 3 c's of wildfire](#)
- [Activity plan - Wildfire escape](#)
- Write a news article that would go alongside your headline.

Learning in, learning about, and learning for the natural environment.

Looking for more learning resources, information and data?

Please contact: education@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk or go to <https://naturalresources.wales/learning>

Alternative format; large print or another language, please contact: enquiries@naturalresourceswales.gov.uk 0300 065 3000

