



# Global express

The rapid response information series for schools  
on development issues in the news

## The Iraq crisis

*Are we getting the full story?*



How do the media report conflicts?



What is a 'diplomatic solution'?



What are the barriers to reporting the truth?

**THE CONFRONTATION** over Iraqi weapons has filled our TV screens and newspapers over recent weeks. But what messages are children getting, and how are their opinions influenced?

**Global express** helps you teach about this crisis in your classroom.

What is **Global express**?

*Global express* provides a rapid response to topical world events

**AS THEY ARE HAPPENING.**

It challenges myths and stereotypes in media reporting and provides first-hand quotes. It will help you to tackle these issues in class.

## Contains

- Background information
- Photocopiable classroom activities
- Links with National Curriculum KS 2&3
- Questions for discussion

# Getting the full story

**The Iraq conflict, after weeks of build up, is still being played out on our television screens and in our newspapers. With the world's media positioned both in Iraq and reporting from neighbouring countries, it seems we are in a good position to receive fair and accurate news as it happens. But what exactly should and does the media tell us, how does it influence us and how do we respond?**

## Neutrality or not?

Some correspondents, who for years had tried to act as eye witnesses and independent observers, are now publicly questioning their own role in reporting conflict. Some have even stated that the ideal of a neutral journalist is a myth, and perhaps an ideal that should be abandoned. Former BBC war correspondent Martin Bell called on the BBC to abandon neutrality in reporting war and genocide at a News World Conference in 1996, commenting, "I do not believe we should stand neutrally between good and evil, right and wrong, aggressor and victim." Others believe strongly that objectivity is key to the reporter's ability to inform the public.

## Barriers to reporting 'the truth'

Media censorship and manipulation can be used by different sides in a conflict, for example to raise the public's morale and ensure support for what is being done. Some of the information we receive is 'cleaned up' (sanitised) and carried through the public messages of the military or government. And those sections of the media who support one side in a war often convey news in a jingoistic style to encourage public support.

After the Gulf War in 1991, there was much debate within the media itself about how the US and UK governments may have used the media to influence

public opinion. Reference was made to restricting reporters' access to battle zones, dividing them into small, easily controlled groups, and making them rely on military briefings.

The military also play a role in influencing our perceptions by using new technology and sanitised language - talking about 'smart' weapons to ensure minimum 'collateral damage' (civilian casualties) and using computer simulation to show the result of a missile strike rather than graphic images.

In Iraq, all media is under state control, so news coverage does not criticise Saddam Hussein's regime. But at the same time he is encouraging the major news networks - both in the US and the UK - to give him a platform on the international media stage.

## Stimulating debate

The media do play a valuable role by generating debate about what's happening. War correspondents often risk their lives to get information and pictures to us, and to make sure we see some of the horrors of conflict.

But what happens afterwards? It is important to consider what happens when the media have left a war zone. The long-term impacts such as brutalisation of soldiers, psychological trauma of victims and starvation will very often not be reported.

## Quotes...

**"The Northern media always depict developing countries as scenes of bloodbaths where peace is rare."**

Busani Bafana, Journalist, Zimbabwe

**"How would you like it if the media portrayed everyone in your country as being the same?"**

Aisha Mustafa,  
The Environmentalists' Society, Sudan

**"If the Northern media has a positive outlook of a certain country, they disseminate good information. If they have a negative one, they disseminate bad information."**

M Tadelle,  
Women's Association of Tigray, Ethiopia

**"It was amazing. The headlines in South Asia were focusing on the role of the UN and finding a diplomatic solution and in the UK it was being mentioned almost as an afterthought."**

Dipankar De Sarkar, Inter Press Service

**"Journalists should be telling the people what is being done in their name, not what the military says is being done."**

Phillip Knightley, Journalist/Author, UK.

**"The media first shapes public opinion, and thereafter claims that it is simply reflecting public opinion in its advocacy."**

Timothy Weaver, *Crosslines*, December 1995

## Newsbites...

**...CNN, which has 20 people in Baghdad, estimates that it will cost £1 million a week to keep its crew in place...**

**...on January 6 1991 Americans learned they had gone to war only after seeing it live on CNN...**

**...Arthur Kent, who reported for NBC during the last conflict, said he was appalled by the 'show business' direction in which television news was moving...**

**...foreign broadcasters, exiled Iraqi opposition groups and Kurdish factions in northern Iraq are setting up radio operations to give Iraqis alternative news coverage to the state-controlled broadcasters...**



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