

## Is It News or Noise? Stories about News Literacy

For thousands of years, storytelling has been key to passing history from generation to generation. As a nation, we value the stories about our communities and neighborhoods give us an anchor in an ever-changing world. The following stories and photographs, informative and touching, exemplify the creativity of writers beginning with Alan Miller, a dedicated journalist and leader, and continue to stories about portals, internet sites, civic issues, basic reading and writing, and international challenges. Civic engagement flows through all of these stories whether it is volunteer journalists, community residents implementing good ideas for their neighborhoods, the empowerment of young people when older generations or their peers have faith in them or simply the challenge of getting a great story about a current issue. The following stories from McCormick's Why News Matters grantees document the importance of news literacy and recognize its vital role in education.

### The News Literacy Project

#### Journalist Fellows Volunteer in Classrooms in Chicago and Beyond

By Alan C. Miller



News anchor Cheryl Wills whispers a brief news story to a student at George Jackson Academy in New York City during a News Literacy Project (NLP) activity. The exercise helps students learn the importance of context and facts. Photo by Meredith W. Gonçalves

The News Literacy Project's volunteer journalists are an essential part of the program's success. During the past six years, our journalists have made hundreds of visits to middle schools and high schools throughout Chicago, New York City and the Washington, D.C., area.

I've watched numerous journalists teach students how to discern credible information from raw information, opinion, misinformation and propaganda. They are empowering students in the digital age by giving them the tools to think like journalists. The volunteer journalists' role has been at the heart of NLP's work right from the start. The idea for the project arose from a visit that I made to my

daughter's middle school in Bethesda, Md., in 2006. Then an investigative reporter in the Washington bureau of the Los Angeles Times, I spoke to 175 sixth-grade students about what I did as a journalist and why it mattered. I received 175 specific handwritten responses, telling me just where my talk had resonated. "You brought to life the idea of 'newspaper,'" English teacher Sandra Gallagher wrote, "and opened a new perspective of thinking."

This prompted me to think that if many journalists shared their expertise and experience and brought their real-world skills into the classroom, it could have enormous impact.

I was confident that journalists would answer the call — and they have. NLP has 26 news organizations and more than 225 seasoned journalists as participants. This group includes network broadcast correspondents, authors of best-selling books and winners of journalism's top prizes. Our journalist fellows have taught more than 500 lessons in person; remotely, through digital lessons and videoconferences; and at public events.

In the process, these journalists have shown our students how to use the standards of quality journalism as a yardstick against which to measure the credibility of all news and information they encounter on any platform and in any media. And they have given students an appreciation for the kind of verification, vetting and accountability that it takes to get a story on the front page or the nightly news — and for the vital role that journalism plays in our nation's democracy.



Kristen Schorsch, a reporter for Crain's Chicago Business, listens to seventh-graders at Pulaski International School in Chicago this month. Schorsch discussed interviewing with the students. Photo by Mieke Zuiderweg

## 826CHI

### Reading Is the Beginning of News Literacy



Catherine Galvan, 9, an 826CHI student writer, is all giggles as she tries to read her story at the Printers Row Lit Fest in Chicago in 2011. Photo by Nancy Stone

They have brought real-world learning into the classroom and made the field of journalism come alive. Often, their experiences shed meaningful insight into politics, government, history and international affairs. These diverse journalists — young, old, black, white, Asian, Hispanic, male and female — also serve as powerful role models for students in scores of schools.

In the process, the journalists reflect a growing focus in 21st-century education on using outside professionals to open up the classroom and turn the wider world into a textbook.

Our teachers tell us that at they learn a great deal from the journalists as well and greatly value the opportunity to work with them. In turn, the journalists often say that they get as much out of the program as they give to it.

In our evaluation survey from the 2013-14 school year, 97 percent of the journalist respondents who made classroom visits said they felt that their experience was “very productive.”

“Working with students who are interested and curious about the world of journalism is rewarding professionally and personally,” a television producer wrote. “I get energy from the students as I talk about my work in a setting other than work. I value that I am able to provide them with knowledge, mentoring and encouragement.”



Allan C. Miller is the News Literacy Project president and founder.

### News Literacy Pledge

By taking the News Literacy Pledge, you are making the commitment to:

- Uphold the ideals of news literacy as a news consumer or producer.
- Report news in a fact-based fashion, removing my own personal bias.
- Bring varying points of view into the conversation.
- Take an active role in verifying, understanding and evaluating information.
- Identify misinformation and offer corrections based on fact.
- Make smarter, more informed decisions.