

## ***A Hidden Life* Teacher's Guide**

### **Final Draft**

#### **About the Film:**

On May 5, 2005, the residents of Spokane, Wash., awoke to one of the strangest headlines in the town's history: "West Tied to Sex Abuse in '70s, Using Office to Lure Young Men." The popular, socially conservative Republican mayor of Spokane, Jim West, had been outed by the town's newspaper, *The Spokesman-Review*. The paper told the sordid story of a man living two lives: In public, he had once sponsored legislation forbidding gays from teaching in public schools; while in private, the paper alleged, he was trawling for young men online, offering them the trappings of his office. But as bizarre as the revelations were, so, too, were the newspaper's methods. For months, a middle-aged "forensic computer specialist" had posed as an 18-year-old boy online, engaging the mayor in a relationship that became more and more intimate, ultimately exploding on the front page of the newspaper.

#### **Watching the Program:**

Teachers can either assign the film for viewing as homework or show the film in class. Suggested discussion questions are provided. The lessons and activities in this guide can be used in the classroom without having viewed the film.

#### **A Note to Teachers:**

For classes in social studies, language arts, current events and media studies; grades 9-12. The film, *A Hidden Life*, includes several descriptions of sexual situations and requires an audience with maturity. The lesson plan examines the standards of journalists and encourages students to evaluate the ethical gray areas facing the media.

#### **Discussion Questions:**

This guide includes a list of questions for students to discuss after viewing *A Hidden Life*.

#### **Featured Lesson Plan:**

Judgment Calls: The Ethical Responsibilities of Reporters and the Media

Students will:

- Learn about the guiding ethical principles of professional journalists
- Evaluate hypothetical dilemmas and determine if these stories should "go to press"
- Determine how to frame a story and when to report it

#### **Additional Lesson Ideas:**

##### **Relying on Unnamed Sources**

Students will determine guidelines for attributing sources.

##### **Student Press**

Students will evaluate the extent to which student publications are protected by the First Amendment guarantee of freedom of the press.

**Additional Resources:**

An annotated list of relevant Web sites and articles.

**Purchasing Information:**

*A Hidden Life* can be purchased from Shop PBS for Teachers:

<http://teacher.shop.pbs.org/home/index.jsp>. Also, teachers and students can watch the program streamed in its entirety on FRONTLINE's Web site:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/hiddenlife/>

**Credits:**

This teacher's guide was developed by Simone Bloom Nathan of Media Education Consultants. It was written by Debra Plafker Gutt, Stuyvesant High School, New York. Advisers were Ellen Greenblatt, University High School, San Francisco, and Greg Timmons, curriculum writer and educational consultant.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Define "privacy." To what extent do public officials have a right to privacy?
2. What is the role of the news media in a democratic society?
3. When referring to the allegation that Mayor Jim West was pursuing underage boys online, why do you think editor Steven Smith differentiated between a legitimate news story and one that is not legitimate when he said, "If he's [Mayor Jim West] engaged in this activity ... we need to know that. If he's not -- there's no story" ?
4. How did reporter Bill Morlin justify the use of a concealed identity on Gay.com as part of *The Spokesman-Review's* and the FBI's "sting operation"? Why didn't Morlin himself create the assumed identity to engage Mayor West online?
5. Under what circumstances, and by whom, is it appropriate to conduct a "sting operation"? (Consider different scenarios such as the media, the government or a private citizen with a suspicion about another private citizen.)
6. Why do you think *The Spokesman-Review* ultimately published so many articles on Mayor West's alleged improprieties?
7. Is Mayor West a sympathetic character? Why or why not?
8. Explain the title "A Hidden Life" from the perspective of:
  - *The Spokesman-Review*
  - Mayor West
  - the citizens of Spokane, Wash.
9. In the final analysis, who benefited from *The Spokesman-Review's* decision to expose Mayor West and his alleged improprieties? Who was hurt? Do you think the outcome was worth it? Explain your reasoning.

## **FEATURED LESSON PLAN**

### **Judgment Calls: The Ethical Responsibilities Of Reporters And The Media**

#### **Lesson Objectives:**

Students will:

- Learn about the guiding ethical principles of professional journalists
- Evaluate hypothetical dilemmas and determine if these stories should "go to press"
- Determine how to frame a story and when/where to report it

#### **Materials Needed:**

- "Group Quotations" student handout, one copy per class, cut into strips
- "Guidelines on Journalistic Standards and Practices" (WGBH/Frontline Guidelines Excerpted) student handout
- "Scruples: A Game of Journalists' Dilemmas" student handout– one game board for each group, cut into separate dilemmas (or distribute uncut game board to each group)

#### **Time Needed:**

10-15 minutes to print out handouts and cut them

30 minutes for warm-up activity: "A Reporter's Checklist"

30 minutes for "Scruples: A Game of Journalists' Dilemmas"

30 minute for "Framing the Story" (this could be completed as a homework assignment)

#### **Procedure:**

##### **Part One: "A Reporter's Checklist"**

1. Divide the class into seven different groups and distribute a different quotation to each group. (If you prefer to use fewer groups, choose one quote per group.)
2. Instruct the students to follow the directions on their strip of paper and to record the group's discussion in each of their notebooks.
3. Distribute copies of "Guidelines on Journalistic Standards and Practices" (WGBH/Frontline Guidelines Excerpted). Students will follow the directions on the handout. They will discuss these standards and compare them to their quotations.
4. Reconvene as a class. Lead the students through a brief discussion of what they believe are the most important standards for a journalist. Encourage students to evaluate whether their group quotation adheres to these standards. Take notes on the board and instruct students to do the same in their notebooks.

## **Part Two: "Scruples: A Game of Journalists' Dilemmas"**

1. Explain the rules of the game, "Scruples: A Game of Journalists' Dilemmas."  
Students, in the role of reporters, will have to decide whether or not to pursue the reporting or publishing of particular stories. Using their checklist from the preceding activity, they will decide if reporting on these "gray" areas is ethically appropriate. Each student will draw a card, or point to a box, read it out loud and offer a decision. The students will then go around the small group and compare their views.
2. Divide the class into groups of four. (It is not necessary to keep the same groups from Part One.) Distribute "Scruples: A Game of Journalists' Dilemmas" to each group as either a game sheet or eight separate cards.

## **Part Three: "Framing the Story"**

1. With the teacher acting as "editor," assign each student a dilemma from "Scruples: A Game of Journalists' Dilemmas" for further exploration.
2. Students will spend time thinking about *how* and *where* to tell this story. They will produce a "mock-up" for this story, which must include:
  - a description of the medium (TV or print)
  - (if print) an actual headline and lead paragraph
  - (if print) an explanation of where in the newspaper to print the story
  - (if TV) an actual preview announcement (like a teaser advertising the upcoming story) and the anchor's text
  - (if TV) appropriate visual(s) and explanation about how much time to dedicate to the story out of a 23-minute news broadcast

### **Methods of Assessment:**

- Completion of note-taking assignments
- Participation in small group and class discussions
- Completion and quality of framing news stories

## Student Handout Group Quotations

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"It is so difficult to draw a clear line of separation between the abuse and the wholesome use of the press, that as yet we have found it better to trust the public judgment, rather than the magistrate [ruler], with the discrimination between truth and falsehood. And hitherto [therefore] the public judgment has performed that office with wonderful correctness."  
Thomas Jefferson, 1803

Thomas Jefferson was the third president of the United States and the principal author of the Declaration of Independence.

Discuss the meaning of Jefferson's quote. With regard to the media, what important principle does Jefferson emphasize?

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"We live in a dirty and dangerous world. There are some things the general public does not need to know, and shouldn't. I believe democracy flourishes when the government can take legitimate steps to keep its secrets and when the press can decide whether to print what it knows."  
Katherine Graham, 1988, "Secrecy and the Press"

Katherine Graham was the publisher of the *Washington Post* from 1963-1993. She was publisher during the Watergate scandal, when her newspaper broke the scandal that led to the resignation of President Richard M. Nixon.

Discuss the meaning of Graham's quote. With regard to the media, what important principle does Graham emphasize?

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"... There were Three Estates in Parliament; but, in the Reporters' Gallery yonder, there sat a Fourth Estate more important than they all. It is not a figure of speech, or a witty saying; it is a literal fact, ... Printing, which comes necessarily out of Writing, I say often, is equivalent to Democracy: invent Writing, Democracy is inevitable. ..."  
Thomas Carlyle, 1795–1881, English author

This quote references a statement allegedly made by Edmund Burke, an English statesman.

Discuss the meaning of Carlyle's quote. With regard to the media, what important principle does Carlyle emphasize?

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"The function of the press is very high. It is almost holy. It ought to serve as a forum for the people, through which the people may freely know what is going on. To misstate or suppress the news is a breach of trust."

Justice Louis D. Brandeis

Justice Louis D. Brandeis served on the United States Supreme Court from 1916-1939.

Discuss the meaning of Brandeis' quote. With regard to the media, what important principle does Brandeis emphasize?

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"The greatest felony in the news business today is to be behind, or to miss a big story. So speed and quantity substitute for thoroughness and quality, for accuracy and context. The pressure to compete, the fear somebody else will make the splash first, creates a frenzied environment in which a blizzard of information is presented and serious questions may not be raised."

Carl Bernstein, 1992

Carl Bernstein is a journalist. When working for the *Washington Post*, he and Bob Woodward broke the Watergate scandal about the Nixon Administration.

Discuss the meaning of Bernstein's quote. With regard to the media, what important principle does Bernstein emphasize?

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"The first duty of a newspaper is to be accurate. If it be accurate, it follows that it is fair."

Herbert Bayard Swope, 1958

Herbert Bayard Swope was an editor and journalist.

Discuss the meaning of Bayer Swope's quote. With regard to the media, what important principle does Bayer Swope emphasize?

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"If all printers were determined not to print anything till they were sure it would offend nobody, there would be very little printed."

Benjamin Franklin, c. 1730

Benjamin Franklin, one of America's founding fathers, was also one of the American colonies' earliest printers. He was a printer's apprentice at 12 years old and eventually published *The Pennsylvania Gazette*.

Discuss the meaning of Franklin's quote. With regard to the media, what important principle does Franklin emphasize?



## Student Handout

### **WGBH/FRONTLINE Guidelines on Journalistic Standards and Practices (Excerpted)**

Note: FRONTLINE is a PBS program produced by the WGBH Educational Foundation in Boston, Mass. FRONTLINE develops documentaries which often cover controversial subject matter. WGBH/FRONTLINE journalistic guidelines are excerpted below. There are many other groups who publish guidelines. Please see the "Additional Resources" section of this guide for links to other guidelines

Directions: Review the following excerpted guidelines. Together with your group, compare the quotation on your strip of paper to the WGBH/FRONTLINE Guidelines for Journalistic Standards and Practices. How do the guidelines reflect or not reflect the principle you identified in your quotation? In your notebook, respond to this question.

### **FAIRNESS**

... Since publication of truthful, accurate information is the prime mission of our nonfiction national programs, it should be clear that willful misrepresentation or falsification of program content will be considered unprofessional conduct and will carry the severest consequences.

In the pursuit of truthful information, the producer must be sensitive to issues of fairness if the program is to have credibility. Truth is an elusive combination of fact and opinion, of reason and experience. ... In turn, we promise that the subject matter and the people in the program will be treated fairly.

Specifically, fairness means that producers:

- a) will approach stories with an open and skeptical mind and a determination, through extensive research, to acquaint themselves with a wide range of viewpoints;
- b) will try to keep personal bias and opinion from influencing their pursuit of a story;
- c) will carefully examine contrary information;
- d) will exercise care in checking the accuracy and credibility of all information they receive, especially as it may relate to accusations of wrongdoing;
- e) will give individuals or entities who are the subject of attack the opportunity to respond to those attacks;
- f) will represent fairly the words and actions of the people portrayed;
- g) will inform individuals who are the subject of an investigative interview of the general areas of questioning in advance and, if important for accuracy, will give those individuals an opportunity to check their records;
- h) will try to present the significant facts a viewer would need to understand what he or she is seeing, including appropriate information to frame the program; and,
- i) will always be prepared to assist in correcting errors...

### **... Consult before Employing Hidden Cameras or Listening Devices**

Depending on the circumstances, electronic listening and the use of hidden cameras and recording devices are illegal in a number of jurisdictions, and therefore should not be undertaken without the Executive Producer's approval and consultation with the WGBH Legal Department. This guideline does not apply to situations where a telephone conversation is recorded with the consent of both parties (one is sufficient in some jurisdictions) for purposes of accuracy. ...

### **... Avoid Misrepresentation**

In general, a person whose participation or cooperation in a documentary production is sought should know the identity of the producer and why the producer is seeking the person's involvement...

### **... Do Not Pay for Testimony**

It is WGBH's policy not to pay for interviews on its programs. Not only does it establish a bad precedent, but also the credibility of any interviewee who was paid is rightly called into question.

**Student Handout**  
**Scruples: A Game of Journalists' Dilemmas**

Directions: Each student will draw a card or point to a box, read it out loud and offer his/her decision. Then, go around the group and compare each participant's views.

<p>A public official, who you know is about to be indicted, asks that you not publish until he has a chance to talk with his family. Do you honor that request? Explain why or why not.</p>	<p>A top official provides you with classified information. Do you report on it? Explain why or why not.</p>
<p>After having access to a candidate's medical records, you learn that a she has a history of mental illness. Do you report on this? Explain why or why not.</p>	<p>Do you air graphic images of war when the casualties are from your community? Explain why or why not.</p>
<p>When reporting about a public official, do you publicize his rumored private indiscretions? Explain why or why not.</p>	<p>You are assigned to report on sex predators who use the Internet to attract minors. Do you pose as a minor in a chat room to expose them? Explain why or why not.</p>
<p>Do you publish what a particular community may find inflammatory? Explain why or why not.</p>	<p>Is it acceptable to use hidden cameras to uncover a news story? Explain why or why not.</p>

## **ADDITIONAL LESSONS OR EXTENSION IDEAS**

### **Relying on Unnamed Sources**

Select a book, movie or television program that depicts reporters determining the reliability of sources. For example, students will read *All the President's Men* or view the movie. They will identify the times when the editors were challenged about printing particular stories. Students will determine the criteria the reporters used to attribute their sources and what made a source reliable. They can consult The *Washington Post's* guidelines for rules of attribution at

**<http://www.poynter.org/column.asp?id=53&aid=61244>**

### **Student Press**

Students will examine the United States Supreme Court case *Hazelwood School District v. Kuhlmeier* to understand the extent to which student publications are or are not protected by the First Amendment. Students can write an op-ed piece commenting on the court's decision. Encourage them to submit their op-ed pieces to the school or community newspaper. This case can be found at **[http://www.splc.org/law\\_library.asp?id=1](http://www.splc.org/law_library.asp?id=1)**

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

### **A Note about Internet Resources**

Students need to be aware that Web sites sometimes present only one view of an issue. Encourage them to think about Web sites even as they are reading. Guiding questions as they review Web sites are: What did you learn from this site? What didn't you learn from this site? Who sponsors this site? What bias might the sponsor have? How current is the site?

### **WEB SITES:**

#### **A Hidden Life**

**<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/hiddenlife/>**

The companion site to the FRONTLINE documentary includes extended interviews with Jim West and others, Web-only video of reaction to the scandal, a guide to *The Spokesman-Review's* coverage and the opportunity to watch the full program online in high-quality video.

#### **PBS Teacher Source**

**<http://www.pbs.org/teachersource/>**

A search for "media ethics" connects to dozens of excellent lesson plans.

#### **U.S. Department of State's Media and Ethics**

**<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itgic/0401/ijge/ijge0401.htm>**

U.S. Department of State, International Information Programs, Media and Ethics publishes links to articles and journals concerning contemporary American journalism.

#### **Indiana University School of Journalism Ethics Cases Online**

**<http://www.journalism.indiana.edu/gallery/ethics/>**

This site is a terrific repository of hypothetical scenarios confronting journalists. Teachers are encouraged to download these case studies for classroom use. This Web site offers many different situations, ranging from how to report on a child's suicide to how to consider the activities of a reporter's spouse.

#### **Future of the First Amendment**

**[http://firstamendmentfuture.org/report91806\\_student.php](http://firstamendmentfuture.org/report91806_student.php)**

In 2006, 15,000 students and their teachers were surveyed about their attitudes concerning the First Amendment. Students might be interested to learn how their peers feel about whether freedom of speech "goes too far."

#### **Student Press Law Center**

**<http://www.splc.org/hspresslawtest/>**

Students can take this 30-minute interactive quiz concerning student press.

### **Society of Professional Journalists**

**<http://www.spj.org/ethics.asp>**

This professional organization provides useful resources such as their Code of Ethics, questions concerning the ethics of covering war, case studies and links to the codes for other journalism organizations.

### **Radio and Television News Directors Association (RTNDA)**

**<http://www.rtna.org/ethics/coe.shtml>**

Students can look at the ethical guidelines for radio and television programs. RTNDA's High School Journalism Project provides student handbooks, teachers' guides and lesson plans for media related topics such as the film "Good Night and Good Luck."

### **National Press Photographers Association: Code of Ethics**

**[http://www.nppa.org/professional\\_development/business\\_practices/ethics.html](http://www.nppa.org/professional_development/business_practices/ethics.html)**

Students can look at the ethical guidelines and professional standards for photojournalists.

### ***The New York Times Ethical Journalism – A Handbook of Values and Practices for News and Editorial Departments***

**[http://www.nytco.com/pdf/NYT\\_Ethical\\_Journalism\\_0904.pdf](http://www.nytco.com/pdf/NYT_Ethical_Journalism_0904.pdf)**

Students and teachers can use this document as a comprehensive example of journalistic standards. Special attention should be paid to "Introduction and Purpose" and "Our Duty to Our Readers." (PDF file, Adobe Acrobat or Apple Preview required.)

### **ARTICLES**

#### **"Ethical Journalism is Not an Oxymoron"**

By Lee Wilkins and Renita Coleman

**<http://www.nieman.harvard.edu/reports/05-2NRsummer/52-53V59N2.pdf>**

This article analyzes the results of a University of Missouri study that gathered information on the ethical habits of many different professions. Wilkins and Coleman also collaborated on the 2005 book *Moral Media: How Journalists Reason About Ethics*. (PDF file, Adobe Acrobat or Apple Preview required.)

#### **"U.S. Journalists Fare Well on Tests of Ethics, Study Finds"**

By Peter Johnson

**[http://www.usatoday.com/life/columnist/mediamix/2005-02-01-media-mix\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/life/columnist/mediamix/2005-02-01-media-mix_x.htm)**

Easy to read, this article also reports on the University of Missouri's study. Includes a chart of journalists' scores compared to nine other professions.