Newspapers Then and Now: Comparing Modern Journalism and Colonial Publishing

For grades 3-8

Resources:

www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/aa/leaders/franklinb (info and images on Franklin as printer)

www.earlyamerica.com/earlyamerica/past/past.html (January 2, 1750 issue of Pennsylvania Gazette)

http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/becomingamer/ideas (samples of entries from Pennsylvania Gazette 1730-1743)

www.benfranklin300.org/frankliniana (“Join, or Die” cartoon in May 9, 1754 issue of Pennsylvania Gazette)

www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/franklin-printer.html (images of Ben Franklin’s numerous printings)

Objectives:

1. Examining copies of Ben Franklin’s Pennsylvania Gazette as well as recently published newspapers, students will observe the variety of ideas, opinions, products, and techniques conveyed in print in both.

2. Students will understand that current events, political news, advertising, editorials, and cartoons were published in newspapers in the mid-1700’s and continue to be used today to inform, persuade and entertain the public audience.

3. Students will gain an awareness of life in the colonies and identify recurrent themes like slavery, farming, politics, and trade by examining the content of the Pennsylvania Gazette.
Procedure:

1. Conduct a class discussion about newspapers and why we have them. Brainstorm a list regarding their purposes (to inform the public, to entertain with crosswords or humorous articles, to sell things, to announce upcoming events, etc).

2. Pass out recent editions of a daily local newspaper to groups of 2-3 students. Ask each student group to carefully look for the types of information and ideas printed (non-fiction articles, letters to the editor, political cartoons, advertisements, legal notices, etc) and the techniques used to accomplish this (bold print, different-sized fonts, graphics, photographs, cartoons, etc.). Small groups will create a list of what they noticed and will report back to the larger group after about 20 minutes.

3. Explain to students that they will have an opportunity to compare a modern newspaper with one from colonial times to look for similarities and differences. Begin this second part of the lesson by showing images of Ben Franklin as a printer and the press he used in his printing business, and inform students that he was the publisher of a successful weekly newspaper called the *Pennsylvania Gazette*.

4. Give small student groups copies of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* and ask them to note what types of information are conveyed in print (runaway slave notices, “Join or Die” political cartoon, plantation ads, sale of ship passages, etc). Younger students may benefit from having this read aloud by an adult. Students may consider who the audience might have been and why the different types of information might be useful to them. After 20-30 minutes, small groups will share what they observed and how these items reflect what life was like in the 1700’s.

5. The class will compare and contrast what they noticed about the modern and colonial versions of newspapers and will discuss the importance of print and its role in informing, persuading and entertaining the public and providing us with a window into the lives of Americans.
Projects:

For homework, students will read their daily newspaper, then consider what people living 300 years from now will learn about the lives of Americans in 2009 by examining our news. Students will write a short essay about their predictions and insights.

The class may create a class newspaper, with individuals and partner groups each choosing a specific feature to include (editorial, current events article, comic strip, etc.). Edit and publish student contributions and share completed newspapers with families.