

EDITORIALS AND COLUMNS

MORE THAN JUST THE FACTS

Just like people, news media can have a point-of-view. Things they generally agree or disagree with, like or dislike—in other words, opinions.

The articles they publish that reflect those opinions are known as editorials, opinion pieces or columns.

Unlike news articles, which should contain “just the facts” and strive to be unbiased, opinion pieces are written to try to persuade the reader to agree with their point of view. Whereas news articles are written to let people know what’s happening, opinion pieces wonder “what should be happening?” or “what should not be happening?”

It’s a way of asking, “is there a problem with what’s going on and could it be better?” says Andrew Phillips. He says that helps to put news stories in context—it gives readers more information about what’s happening in the world so they can make more informed decisions about their own point of view.

Phillips is the editorial page editor for the Toronto Star. He and his team of two other editors write the Star’s editorials and decide what will be published on the editorial pages, including columns, opinion pieces, letters to the editor and editorial cartoons.

It’s important that readers know when they’re reading opinion pieces rather than news articles. That’s why reputable news media clearly mark opinion pieces with labels such as “editorial” or “column” or “opinion.” Columns also usually give the columnist’s name (byline) and photo.

Filtering a news organization’s opinions carries with it a lot of responsibility. Phillips’ team

comprises three seasoned journalists, two men and a woman, all of them white. They are responsible for representing the opinions of a very diverse audience of hundreds of thousands of readers.

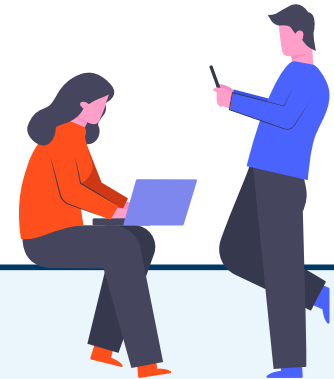
“Diversity of various kinds is on our minds all the time. We know that if we just let the world carry on, it’ll be more like us—we lean against that. We think about it. We try to adjust,” says Phillips. He conducts period assessments of who has been published in the Star’s editorial pages and who its columnists are. Although they are not yet representative of the wide diversity of their readership, a recent assessment showed that about 35 per cent of their columns and opinions were written by persons of colour and about 50 per cent by women, Phillips says.

In addition to diversity, an editorial or column has to meet other criteria including: accuracy, fairness, relevance to people’s lives, how newsworthy and timely it is, and whether it’s interesting. The writer needs to have the expertise to know the topic and cannot have a “conflict of interest.” In other words, they cannot hide the fact that they may benefit from having their opinions published.

Phillips urges young people to write letters to newspapers, including the Star, about something they care about.

“There’s no age limit. If you’re 9 or 11 or 13—if you really feel strongly about something, let’s say it’s about school, (send in a letter). It’s interesting to hear from an actual student.”

And who knows, maybe the letter will be published, and that young person’s point of view will help to inform all readers about an issue.



DEFINITIONS

Editorial: Written by one person on behalf of the news organization. Typically doesn’t have a byline. Editorials follow an organization’s editorial guidelines (rules), including accuracy and reasonableness.

Column: Usually written by a staff writer. Columns have a strong bias for or against something, based on the author’s opinions.

Opinion piece: Often written by a member of the public (for instance, a citizen, politician or business person) who has expertise in a certain field and wants to express an opinion about something that is happening in the news.

Editorial cartoon: A humorous comic about current events that expresses a point of view. (For more information about editorial cartoons, read For the Record’s [“Editorial Cartoons: Pictures that Speak louder than Words”](#) on the Star Classroom Connection website.)

Letter to the editor: Typically about 100 words, letters can be sent to the news organization by anyone to express their opinion. News organizations like the Star receive hundreds of letters a day. A team of several journalists at the Star decides which ones will be published.



WRITE A LETTER!

Do you have a strong opinion about something that is happening in your neighbourhood or school? Why not write a letter to your local newspaper or send an email to a news website? With the permission and guidance of a parent or trusted adult, send your letter to the Toronto Star at: Andrew Phillips, Toronto Star, One Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario M5E 1E6 or email the Star's editorial team at lettertoed@thestar.ca.



DIG DEEPER

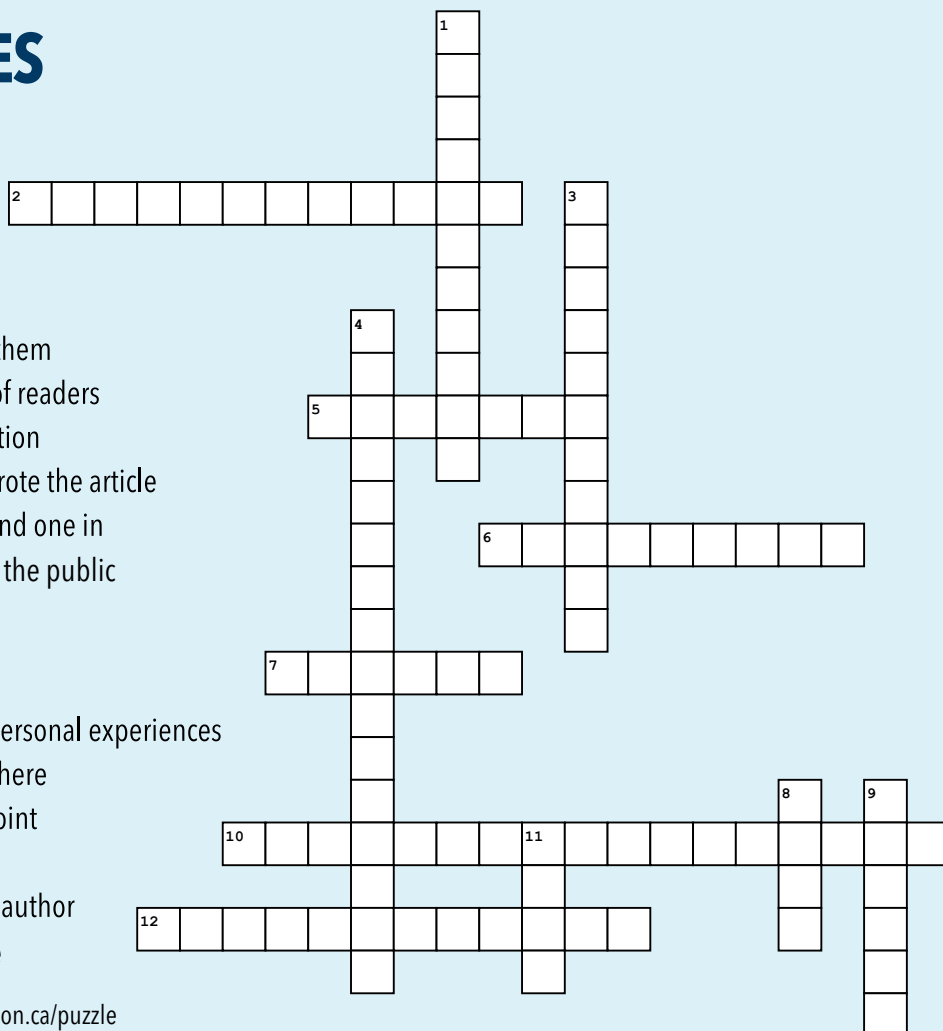
Why do you think columns include the author's photo and name? How might getting to know a columnist help you, the reader, form your own opinions?



DID YOU KNOW?

In large newspapers, editorials were often printed on one page, and columns on the page next to it. It was known as the Op Ed page ("opposite the editorial"). Today, of course, editorials and columns are published in many places including online and in videos.

OPINION PIECES CROSSWORD



ACROSS

- 2. News articles should contain them
- 5. Reflecting a broad spectrum of readers
- 6. Opinion of the news organization
- 7. Name of the journalist who wrote the article
- 10. Members of the public can send one in
- 12. Often written by a member of the public

DOWN

- 1. A way of thinking, based on personal experiences
- 3. Articles are published online here
- 4. A humorous way to make a point
- 8. Slant
- 9. Often includes a photo of the author
- 11. Across from the editorial page

See answers at: www.classroomconnection.ca/puzzle