

PROJECT: COLUMN TRACKING

PHASE 1 of 2

Columns are one of the most important and commonly read forms of journalism in 21st century America. Readers enjoy the comfort and consistency of hearing a take on the day's news by the same person over and over in a familiar tone. It's almost like an ongoing conversation with an old acquaintance. I've actually heard people respond to local news by saying "oh boy, Phillip Morris is going to be all over this one" or to political news by saying "I'll bet you ten dollars the conservative columnists are already drooling over their keyboards writing about this." Whether we love or hate the approaches particular columnists take on issues, they consistently provide reactions that stoke public discourse about our world's triumphs and tribulations.

Sometimes the columnists become newsmakers themselves. Often an individual columnist will take it upon him or herself to bring an important issue into light for the public to discuss before much hard reporting is actually done.

While news articles are straight and narrow, columns give us reverberating reactions to the facts presented in their more stoic broadsheet neighbors.

Project Components:

- 1.) **Collect single editions of SIX columns** you find interesting.
 - At least three different publications need to be represented
 - Each of the following categories needs to be represented:
 - General Interest
 - Politics
 - Sports
 - Advice
 - Other (Food, parenting, religion, education, technology, humor, fashion, health, entertainment, etc.)
 - Each should be accompanied by a paragraph containing the following information:
 - Publication info (publication name/location/date & author)
 - Audience info (do some research – is this a nationally syndicated column? How many publications carry it? What is the readership of those publications?)

- 2.) **Topic Focus:** Pick a current event or issue and find commentary on it by **THREE** different columnists. If a particular columnist writes multiple editions

of his/her column on the topic you may include them both/all, BUT it will only count as one of the three artifacts for this component.

3.) **Columnist Focus:** After all of this column reading you've done, you've probably found at least one columnist who intrigues you. It may be someone you identify with, someone who challenges you to think beyond your normal sphere of knowledge, or someone who outright infuriates you. For the third and final component of this project, you must **investigate your choice of columnist and his or her work.**

- Research his/her **personal background.** Where is s/he from? How did s/he grow up? Are there any life experiences relevant to what he/she writes about?
- Research his/her **professional background.** Where did s/he go to college? What publications has s/he worked for? Has s/he published any books or won any awards?
- Include any **FIVE editions of his/her column,** and analyze how the writer creates his or her own unique style/voice.
- **Write an essay** summarizing your findings. It should be 2-3 pages long.

All three of these components can be presented in one of two ways:

- 1.) Place all components into a binder (use sheet protectors or a three-hole punch).
- 2.) Create a multimedia presentation including all components.