

Facing Risk: Journalists and their Families

Objective:

You will be able to...

- Reflect on the mission of a journalist, and the challenges that journalists face when reporting on global conflict
- Evaluate factors to consider when determining whether or not to take a reporting project
- Define the steps that journalists and their loved ones should take before departing on a potentially dangerous reporting project
- Research and prepare action plans for embarking on reporting projects that could be potentially dangerous

Warm-up:

Fill out the following table with your own answers:

1. What do you think is the role of a journalist? Why might you become a journalist?	
2. What is your dream reporting project? If safety weren't a concern, what story would you want to pursue?	
3. What factors do you consider before deciding to embark on a reporting trip?	

4. What does a journalist need before embarking on an international reporting trip?	
5. What factors do you think make a reporting project “risky” or “dangerous?” What are your “red lines,” or the factors that would lead you to not take a reporting opportunity due to the level of risk?	
6. Who would be impacted if something happened to you on a reporting trip? How could they be impacted?	

Introducing the lesson:

Imagine you were presented with the opportunity to report one of the most pressing, essential stories on a global conflict. What story would that be? Select a story, and use that story to reflect on the following questions:

1. Where would you have to go to report the story?
2. Who would you want to speak to? What would you want to ask?
3. What might be some of the risks involved in reporting this story?
4. What would you prepare before embarking on your reporting trip?

The film attached explores the experiences of three journalists who were kidnapped while reporting some of the most pressing global conflicts: **David Rohde** was held hostage in Bosnia for 10 days and then Afghanistan for 223 days. **Michael Scott Moore** was held hostage in Somalia for 997 days. **James Foley** was held in Libya for 44 days and Syria for 636 days. He was killed by ISIS on August 19, 2014 in the Raqqa region of Syria.

If you are unfamiliar with these journalists and their experiences being held hostage while reporting on global conflicts, conduct a quick search to find out more about them.

As you conduct your research, consider the following:

1. What were the stories these journalists were reporting, and why did they choose these reporting projects?
2. What questions do you have about how the journalists prepared for their reporting projects? What questions do you have about your government's hostage policy?
3. What do you want to know about the impact of these reporting projects on the journalists and their loved ones?

Introducing the Resource:

Resource 1: “Facing Risk” by Pulitzer Center Associate Producer Evey Wilson

The film “Facing Risk” examines how the families of the journalists described above were impacted when their loved ones were taken hostage. As you watch the [film](#), write your responses to the following questions:

Write down your answers to the following questions on a separate sheet of paper.

1. What images and moments are sticking with you from the film? What are you taking from the film?
2. How does the advice given by the journalists and their families in the film compare to what you already do when considering a reporting project, or what journalists in your community do before embarking on a reporting project?
3. In the film, Michael Scott Moore says, “No story is worth your life...Almost no story is worth getting kidnapped for, in fact, I can't think of one that is.” What are your thoughts on this statement? To what degree do you agree/disagree with Moore?
4. In the film, Diane Foley says, “I would ask any of you who love a journalist to insist on having a difficult discussion.” What should journalists and their families discuss before a journalist embarks on a reporting trip? What might be challenging about that conversation? How might journalists and their families navigate moments of disagreement?

5. David Rohde says in the film, “You also have to have that conversation with your editors, and many freelancers are afraid of bringing it up, but good editors are going to respect you and trust you because you bring up those awkward conversations.” What should journalists discuss with their editors before starting a reporting project? Why might that conversation be uncomfortable? What are ways that journalists and editors can work together to prepare for a reporting project that could be potentially dangerous?
6. At the conclusion of the film, Diane Foley says, “The work you do is vitally important to our democracy, but it’s very dangerous today in the world.” How can journalists balance a responsibility to cover challenging stories with the potential impacts of getting into a dangerous situation while reporting?

Extension Activities:

Option 1: Reflecting on the Impact of Reporting Global Conflict

Imagine you were in a situation where you were taken hostage while reporting an important story. Write a short reflection examining how your family and community would be impacted. Consider the following questions as part of your reflection:

1. Who would be impacted if you were taken hostage while reporting a story? How would they be impacted?
2. How would you talk to your family and loved ones about the potential risks involved in a story you want to report? What would you want them to know?
3. What should your family expect to happen if you are taken hostage? What steps could your family take to help you? How would you determine if the risk required for a story is worth the potential impact on your family and community if you are taken hostage?
4. Consider this same question from the perspective of your loved ones. What would you do if a loved one or family member of yours was taken hostage?

Option 2: Creating an Action Plan

Go back to the situation you imagined at the start of this lesson, the important story you would be interested in reporting in a potentially dangerous environment. Using the strategies outlined in the film and as part of your discussion, create a list of steps you would take before reporting that project. Consider, what steps could I take now that would prepare me for reporting projects in the future? What questions might I need to ask my editors and family in advance of embarking on this project?

Option 3: Designing a Resource for Preparing a Potentially Dangerous Reporting Project

Using information from the film, your discussion, and additional research, create a list of steps that journalists should take before starting a reporting trip in a potentially dangerous location. Consider, are there tips and strategies that you discovered in your research that you weren't aware of before? How could this information be made more readily available to journalists? Using the list that you created, design a resource for journalists outlining strategies that they should take before starting a reporting project. Design a campaign that will help get the resource to the largest number of journalists and news outlets.