

How to Read a Crisis: Iran, Headlines, and What We Know

In this Lesson:

1. Historical Context
2. Activity: Headlines & Narratives
3. Activity: Debating Controversies
4. Concluding the Lesson

Your students may have heard that “a war is happening in Iran.” They may have heard of other conflicts happening across the world.

This story is still unfolding. Numbers can change, claims can be corrected, and countries can still retaliate in ways that shift the situation quickly. That’s exactly why this is a good moment to teach something bigger than “what happened today.”

This lesson isn’t trying to lock in a perfect, final version of events. It’s designed to help students learn how conflict shows up in the news. Specifically, how information moves, how uncertainty is reported, and how to stay oriented when coverage may be emotional, politicized, or incomplete.

This short guide helps them sort what’s happening, how it’s being framed, and what big questions are driving public debate. You can follow these three activities in your classroom, depending on the level of your students’ understanding of the conflict.

Time Needed:

- 45 Minutes (at least).
- This lesson is divided into activities that aid students' understanding of the Iran story, as well as their understanding of conflict. To keep the lesson shorter, you can select only one activity to exercise in class.

Time	Activity	Description
0-3 min	Greeting & learning goal	Welcome, students, and name the media-literacy skill they will practice.
3-8 min	Headline uncertainty	Students mark which claims in crisis headlines seem confirmed, unclear, or interpretive.
8-15 min	Mini-lesson	Introduce verification under pressure, source proximity, uncertainty language, and evolving narratives.
15-30 min	Crisis-reading teams	Compare headlines and source notes to separate confirmed facts, claims, and unanswered questions.
30-37 min	Debrief	Discuss why responsible coverage may contain uncertainty and how readers should respond.
37-42 min	Exit ticket	Rewrite one overconfident headline to show what is actually known.
42-45 min	Homework & closing	Follow a developing story and track one claim as it is confirmed, revised, or left unresolved.

Grade Level:

- High School

Materials:

- Projector or Student Screens
- [Verity's Deep Dive on the 2025-2026 Iran Protests](#)
- Various Verity articles for Historical Context

Objectives:

- Understand the conflict in Iran
- Identify objective facts versus narrative framing in breaking news headlines

1. Historical Context

Goal: build a shared historical understanding and timeline before arguing about meaning.

Why this matters: Your students may be unfamiliar with context. Beyond that, context slows things down. It helps students see why the event is occurring, what's part of a pattern, and what questions may actually matter.

Tell students: “We’re going to treat these pages like a navigation tool. Our job is not to decide who’s right — it’s to track what’s confirmed, what’s disputed, and what questions remain.”

What to look for while reading:

- *The timeline:* what happened first, then next
- *Sourcing:* where each key claim comes from (officials, reporters, NGOs, footage)
- *Agreement vs dispute:* what multiple outlets converge on vs where accounts diverge
- *Uncertainty signals:* “reportedly,” “could,” “unconfirmed,” “sources said,” “without evidence.”

Activity: Understanding the Context

As a class, or in small groups, ask your students to read the following Verity stories. For shorter class periods, ask your students to read Verity’s deep dive, which provides a holistic view of the subject.

Verity’s Deep Dive on the 2025-2026 Iran Protests: This article explains what was happening inside Iran before the current escalation: economic pressure, unrest, and state response.



Discussion

- What have US-Iran relations looked like historically?
- What happened during the 1979 Revolution?
- What was the Iran-Iraq War?

- Why did protests occur in 2025? How did other nations react?
- Ask students to take note of the narratives. How do they differ? What do they tell us about those who are pro vs. anti-Iran?
- What's still being debated?

Verity Context Story on the Israel-Iran Conflict: Students need the baseline. This conflict didn't arise overnight. This helps students understand "why now?"



Discussion

- What are the core claims each side makes about security and threat?
- What represents a pattern vs. something new?

Verity's Coverage of the Missile Strikes: This shows the "breaking news," which is the initial strike. This provides students with a shared timeline for the current event, including what's happening and where the information originates.



Discussion

- What's presented as a fact with sources?
- How do the narratives connect to the historical context we have just uncovered?
- If you have time, click on some sources under the fact bulletins. How do they present the same information?

Review Newer Developments

As the story unfolds, you can ask your students to look at newer developments in the story. Here are a few:

- **The Death of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei**
 - [Global leaders' reactions](#) to the death
 - [The appointment of Ayatollah Alireza Araf](#)i as the jurist member of Iran's interim leadership council

- **War Spreads to Other Countries**

- [Israel & Lebanon](#)
- [Cyprus](#)
- [Kuwait](#)
- [Saudi Arabia](#)

Mini Regional Geopolitics Primer

If students keep reading updates, they'll notice the conflict extends beyond the USA, Iran, and Israel. In regional conflicts, neighboring countries often matter because of geography, alliances, and military reach. For example, locations like Riyadh in Saudi Arabia matter because they host U.S. bases. Other key factors include diplomatic or trading channels, as well as the operation of armed groups across borders.

Students don't need to memorize every country involved, but understand how wars are often not localized. Alliances and geopolitics play a role.

Ask Students

- What are three facts we can confidently summarize right now?
- What are two questions you will keep following for updates?

2. Activity: Headlines & Narratives

Explain: A headline is not the full story. It's the front door to the story. It's a choice about what to highlight first. In conflict, that choice may point towards a narrative. What seems urgent, who seems responsible, and what reactions feel reasonable. Today we're going to practice reading headlines. Noticing focus and labeling the narrative.

Use Verity's "The Spin/Narratives" As the Narrative Guide

When students read a Verity story, point them to the part that lays out competing perspectives.

Take a look at the [Verity Glossary](#) and use it as a vocabulary list for narratives students will see elsewhere.

Add a Quick Source-Check Guideline

- Who is the source?
- What evidence is offered?
- What's the incentive?
- What would change your mind?

Part 1: Model Reading ONE Example

Opinion
US-Israel war on Iran

Sat 28 Feb 2026 15.00 EST

Share 217

Trump wants to distract Americans from scandals at home with a diversionary war

Christopher S Chivvis



Iran strikes are attempt to hijack the global narrative and drown out Epstein and tariffs with the thunder of cruise missiles

This headline is from [The Guardian](#), presenting Christopher S. Chivvis' opinion on the conflict.



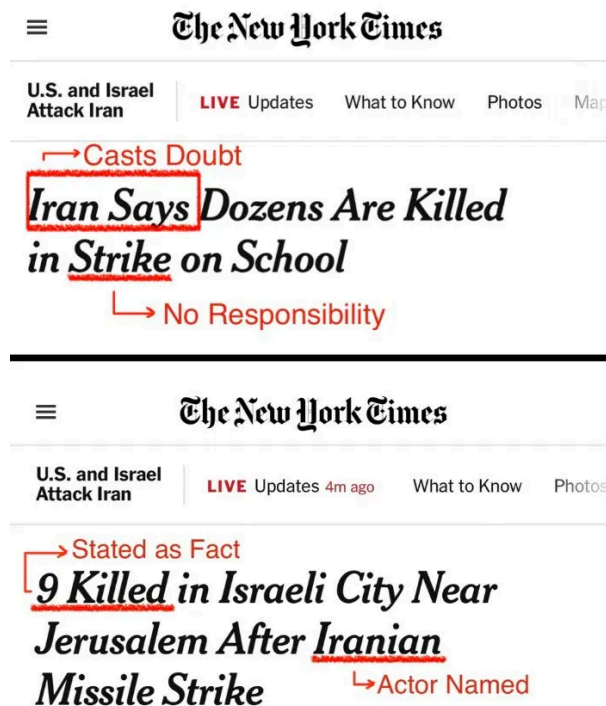
Discussion

Observe the headline

- Is this objective or not?
- What is the headline asking you to care about first?
- What narrative category does it resemble most?

Teacher Tips:

- Point your students to the “Opinion” label.
- Note how the article highlights the motive behind strikes.
- Tell your students to notice what happened. Without reading the story or checking any new facts, we already learned what kind of story this is trying to tell.



Source: [Assal Rad via X](#)

Ask: Why would two NYT headlines differ in certainty?

You can point to the different stages of verification in the reporting process. Journalists want to report facts, so using language like “reports say,” or “according to,” or “may have,” can avoid overstating what isn’t confirmed yet. As more reporting comes in, headlines often become more direct and certain.

However, headlines may also sharpen or soften what’s happening through charged language. Let’s take a look at charged language in the next section.

Part 2: Compare Protest Coverage

Let's examine the coverage of the protests that have followed the outbreak of the war. This is an easy way for students to understand narratives without having to search for casualty numbers or updates.

Present the following headlines to your students, giving them a couple minutes to think.

Here's a headline from [Fox News](#).

Anti-US protesters funded by pro-China tycoon mobilize as first bombs fall on Iran

Nonprofits funded by tech tycoon aligned with the Chinese Communist Party unleash anti-US protests and propaganda supporting the regime in Iran



By Asra Q. Nomani · Fox News

Published February 28, 2026 12:27pm EST

Here's a headline from [The Guardian](#).

The screenshot shows the top of The Guardian's website. The navigation bar includes links for News, Opinion, Sport, Culture, and Lifestyle. Below this, a row of topic-specific links is visible: US news, US politics, World, Climate crisis, Middle East, Ukraine, US immigration, Soccer, Business, Environment, Tech, Science, Newsletters, The Filter, and Wellness. The main headline is "Protesters rally across US after strikes on Iran that killed Khamenei" by Edward Helmore, dated Sat 28 Feb 2026 18:49 EST. A partial image of a protest is visible at the bottom of the article preview.

Here's a headline from [Al Jazeera](#).

News | Israel-Iran conflict

Ten killed in pro-Iran protest at US consulate in Pakistan's Karachi

The protest erupted following the assassination of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei in joint US-Israeli strikes.



Listen to this article | 4 mins ⓘ

For each headline, students answer four questions:

- *Focus Check*: What's the first thing the headline highlights?
Funding/influence? Protests?
- *Narrative Label*: Which category from our list does it fit best? Pro-Iran?
Pro-USA? Anti-USA?
- *Evidence Check*: What would you need to see in the article to trust it?
- Are the headlines mainly describing events, or are they interpreting events?

Headlines don't just inform you, they steer you. Naming this steering helps you take control.

3. Activity: Debating Controversies

Say: “Public debate during a crisis is mostly debate about the future. We’re going to practice making careful predictions with evidence — and being honest about uncertainty.”

Use these controversies from Verity’s website as the debate questions:

- [Full-scale Israel-Iran war?](#)
- [Will the Current Iranian government collapse?](#)

Debate format (Likely/Unlikely):

- Group A: more likely full-scale war
- Group B: less likely full-scale war
- Group C: more likely government collapse
- Group D: less likely government collapse

Debate format (Public Figures):

- Assign each student a public figure, and organize a Socratic seminar/roundtable. Each student is tasked with studying their public figures’ statements and opinions, and using them to win the debate.
- OR Assign groups of public figures, and organize a debate. Assign speaker roles and ask each student to argue from the perspective of the public figure.

Why this matters:

It teaches students how to argue responsibly when facts are incomplete — the exact situation they’ll face in every future breaking-news cycle.

4. Concluding the Lesson

When conflict news is unfolding, being informed doesn't mean being certain. It means having a method:

- build context,
- track what's confirmed vs. unknown,
- recognize narratives,
- and update your understanding as new reporting arrives.

When you see a headline, ask:

1. Is this early reporting or a later update? (certainty changes as evidence comes in)
2. What's being stated as fact, and what's being attributed or interpreted?
3. What words are doing the most work? (verbs, labels, who is the subject)
4. What would you need to verify next? (another source, direct evidence, clearer numbers)

Your goal isn't to 'pick the best headline.' Your goal is to track reality as it becomes clearer, and to notice when a story is shifting because facts changed versus when it's shifting because the frame changed.