



# ***Signature in the Schools: Here's the Deal***

## **Exercise: *A Living, Breathing Newspaper***

**Subject(s):** History, Theatre, English

**Goals:** Students will be able to:

Use examples from their knowledge and experience to support the main ideas of their oral presentation.

Apply narrative techniques, such as dialog, description, and pacing to develop experiences or characters.

Articulate their values for their community and make arguments in their favor.

Apply civic virtues and democratic principles to make collaborative decisions.

Identify contemporary political issues through discussion.

### **Show Connection:**

In *Here's the Deal*, Mrs. Day asks the students to make connections between their current situation and the figures who advocated for and against the New Deal. To better understand the present and future, we must first understand who and what came before us and the work that they did.

Several scenes are inspired by the techniques of the Living Newspaper and Newspaper Theater.

## Additional Resources to Explore:

[The Living Newspaper – Federal Theatre Project](#) (Library of Congress)

[Theatre of the Oppressed NYC](#)

## Set-Up:

Divide the students into groups of equal sizes in breakout rooms that will take place later in the lesson. (We recommend doing this ahead of time for the sake of saving time, focusing on the exercise, and having fun with the students.)

## Description:

### Part 1: Icebreaker

Discuss with students their thoughts on the current states of the world, the country and their own circumstances. What is on your mind these days? What is in the news that is keeping your thoughts occupied? Do you feel like you have spaces and opportunities to voice how you feel about whatever might be on your mind? When you can voice your views on a matter do you voice them whole heartily? Do you communicate in one method better than another? (Physically, verbally, artistically, musically, visually, etc.)

### Part 2: Living Newspaper

Teach students a bit about the Living Newspaper form of theater:

“The Living Newspaper is a dramatization of a problem – composed in greater or lesser extent of many news events, all bearing on the one subject and [interlaced] with typical but non-factual representations of the effect of these news events on the people to whom the problem is of great importance.” — *Arthur Arent, attributed author of many of the FTP’s Living Newspapers.*

A Living Newspaper is a theatrical production consisting of dramatizations of current events, social problems, and controversial issues, with appropriate suggestions for improvement.

The Living Newspaper as a style of theatre was initiated in the United States in 1935 as part of the Federal Theatre Project (FTP), a program that started as a result of the New Deal.

Akin to the Theatre of the Oppressed founded by Brazilian theater practitioner and politician [Augusto Boal](#) as well as Epic Brechtian theater techniques developed by German theater practitioner [Bertolt Brecht](#). These included quick scene and set changes, flexibility of stage space, using many levels, rolling and hand-carried scenery, projections of settings, statistics, and film, shadow play, sound effects and full musical scores, the use of a speaker to narrate and comment on the action and abrupt blackouts and harsh spotlights. These techniques served to intentionally distance the audience from what they were watching. In being constantly reminded that what they were watching was crafted, audience members would never be allowed sit back. Instead, they’d be invited to lean forward, invited to dissect the issues portrayed.

Living Newspaper pieces often featured the use of puppetry, modern dance, and pantomime. In terms of dramatic construction, directors frequently urged writers and designers to keep the concept of counterpoint in mind when constructing Living Newspapers—alternating quickly between

scenes and voices displaying contrasting viewpoints, to comment on the action and keep the audience involved and aware.

This form of theater highlights the value of drama as an instrument of social change. It became the most effective new theater form developed by the FTP, vividly dealing, in flashing cinematic techniques, with the realities of agriculture, housing, and economics throughout the United States in the 1930s.

### **Part 3: Creating Living Newspapers**

Before sending students into breakout groups, provide them with the following instructions:

Students will be given sufficient time to devise and practice a one-minute-long Living Newspaper-style theatrical piece that utilizes the digital classroom space (playing with camera angles, virtual platform features, etc.), bringing their assigned quotes into a present-day context of their choice. Every student in each group must be involved in their group's performance.

*"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself." - Franklin Delano Roosevelt.*

*"It is not the nature of man, as I see it, ever to be quite satisfied with what he has in life... Contentment tends to breed laxity, but a healthy discontent keeps us alert to the changing needs of our time."  
- Frances Perkins*

*"It takes as much energy to wish as it does to plan." - Eleanor Roosevelt*

*"We have a powerful potential in our youth, and we must have the courage to change old ideas and practices so that we may direct their power toward good ends." - Mary McLeod Bethune*

*"What constitutes an American? An American is one who will fight for his freedom and that of his neighbor. An American is one who will sacrifice... An American is one in whose heart is engraved the immortal second sentence of the Declaration of Independence. Americans have always known how to fight for their rights and their way of life. Americans are not afraid to fight. They fight joyously in a just cause. - Harold Ickes*

Bring the groups back together to present their pieces.

If the instructor feels the groups fell short of expectations send them back with their groups for revision.

#### **Alternative(s):**

Students may also create Living Newspaper pieces that pull quotes from today's headlines and their own communities. These could be constructed with groups or as individuals.

#### **Discussion:**

What benefits do you see in discussing history, the news of the day, or problems that present themselves in the world in the Living Newspaper format? Why might reenactment be a powerful tool in conveying the news?

What issues in the communities that you are a part of do you think could be served well by unpacking them via the Living Newspaper or Theatre of the Oppressed Techniques?