

## Using NewsHour Extra Feature Stories

### STORY

#### **Many Americans Unprepared for Transition to All-Digital TV**, 03/26/08

[http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/arts/jan-june08/tv\\_3-26.html](http://www.pbs.org/newshour/extra/features/arts/jan-june08/tv_3-26.html)

Estimated Time: One 45-minute class period with possible extension

[Student Worksheet](#) (reading comprehension and discussion questions without answers)

### PROCEDURE

#### **1. WARM UP**

Use initiating questions to introduce the topic and find out how much your students know.

#### **2. MAIN ACTIVITY**

Have students read NewsHour Extra's feature story and answer the reading comprehension and discussion questions on the student handout.

#### **3. DISCUSSION**

Use discussion questions to encourage students to think about how the issues outlined in the story affect their lives and express and debate different opinions.

### INITIATING QUESTIONS

**1. How do you get television service in your home?**

**2. What are some recent developments in television technology that improve the quality of sound or picture?**

**3. What does it mean if something is digital?**

### READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS – [Student Worksheet](#)

**1. What will happen on Feb. 17, 2009?**

#### ANSWER

The U.S. Congress has mandated that at midnight on Feb. 17, 2009, all transmission of analog TV signals will stop and only digital signals will be transmitted.

**2. Why is the change being made?**

#### ANSWER

The change will free up frequencies for public safety communications, such as emergency rescue, and will allow stations to offer improved picture and sound quality, according to the Federal Communications Commission.

**3. What is the difference between analog and digital?**

#### ANSWER

An analog signal is the transmission of data as a radio wave vibration in the air. A digital signal breaks the data into a string of 0s and 1s that is sent to the television via satellite, cable or a digitally converted antenna signal. A digital signal is not as susceptible to interference and allows for a larger volume of data.

**4. What is happening to the part of the broadcast spectrum that will no longer be used?**

#### ANSWER

The U.S. government has auctioned off those parts of the spectrum that will no longer be in use.

Most of the freed-up airwaves will be used commercially for expansion of wireless and broadband services, while a smaller portion will be used by emergency response personnel. The revenue from the auctions is an estimated \$19 billion.

**5. How do you know if you are prepared for the transition?**

**ANSWER**

TV sets connected to a cable or satellite system do not need upgraded. Analog set do need to be updated. There are about 13 million households in the U.S. that get TV broadcasts exclusively over the air on analog sets, and another 6 million households that have a least one TV set receiving programming over the air on analog TV stations.

**6. Why are there privacy concerns about digital television?**

**ANSWER**

Digital transmission and interactive services will allow for tracking of consumer habits, similar to how companies track behavior on the Internet.

Marketers will be able to collect consumer data, especially through interactive services, enabling them to tailor advertisements to consumers. Consumer advocates fear that viewer data and habits will not only be tracked, but sold and combined with data compiled elsewhere, allowing for the creation of detailed profiles.

**7. What should you do if your television needs to be updated?**

**ANSWER**

For consumers who rely exclusively on analog broadcast via an antenna, the federal government is giving away coupons for the purchase of a digital converter box.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (more research might be needed)

**1. What are the pros and cons of requiring television stations to broadcast digitally?**

**2. Should the government be allowed to require that consumers and broadcasters switch to digital? Why or why not?**

**3. Look at the televisions in your home. Would any of them need a converter box? Discuss the topic with your parents? Do they have plans to order cable, buy a new television or a converter box because of the switch? If so, how do they feel about having to make adjustments?**

**Extension Activity**

Have students write a 300-500 word essay on this topic providing clear examples. Send your completed editorial to NewsHour Extra ([extra@newshour.org](mailto:extra@newshour.org)). Exceptional essays might be published on our Web site.