

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Critical
Thinking
Resource

Communications

About The Wall Street Journal's Critical Thinking Resource

We developed this guide to help you maximize The Wall Street Journal as a resource for your classes. You'll be able to energize discussions and engage students with tangible examples of course concepts that your students can apply in the real world. In addition, with the help of faculty partners, we've curated a special collection of our most popular and thought-provoking articles about communications. For each of these readings, we provide a summary, correlation to course topics, classroom applications and questions suitable for launching discussions and conducting assessments.

Here are some of the many ways to incorporate WSJ into your courses:

- **COURSE READINGS:** Assign articles as required reading alongside your textbook sections. For best results, include assessment questions on quizzes and exams.
- **DISCUSSION LAUNCHERS:** Use articles to spur classroom and threaded discussions in online and hybrid courses on core concepts and current events.
- **EXTRA CREDIT:** Allow students to read optional articles and answer assessment questions for extra credit.
- **GROUP PROJECTS:** WSJ is a rich source of real-world topics for group research and presentation projects.
- **RESEARCH PAPERS AND CASE STUDIES:** WSJ features provide timely citations for research projects.

Subtopic: Journalism

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People Really Want to Ski. Vail is Racing to Keep Up.

REPORTER: Allison Pohle

REVIEWED BY: Maria Marron, University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DATE: Jan. 15, 2022

TOPICS: Vail Resorts, ski properties, Omicron-imposed challenges, innovations,
Mad River Mountain

LINK TO ARTICLE: [CLICK HERE](#)

SUMMARY:

This story is about the challenges that Vail Resorts faced during this Omicron winter. Vail Resorts, “a growing empire of top ski properties around the world” is “plowing into a blizzard of problems.” As the subhead indicates, the challenges this year are worker shortages, long lines at resorts, and less open terrain, mostly because of late snow. This long feature story recounts how Vail Resorts started in the 1950s when Pete Seibert and Earl Eaton “spotted a Colorado mountain and surrounding valley that they deemed ideal for a new ski resort. The resort opened in 1962.” Since then, the company has opened 40 resorts and employs 55,000 in all seasons. It has twice the number of resorts as its next-biggest North American rival and invests heavily in its properties. In 2008, Vail Resorts introduced the Epic season pass, allowing skiers access to several different resorts for one set price. That shook up the industry and provided Vail with cash for winters, crucial in an industry that is subject to the unpredictability of weather. Vail’s rivals soon followed its lead with their own versions of the multi-resort pass. This year, Vail went a step farther and offered a 20% price reduction on its Epic passes as well as discounts on rentals, lodging and more. Early buyers could acquire passes for \$783, a bargain compared with \$200 for single-day lift tickets at flagship resorts. However, when Vail had to limit operations at some resorts, people took to social media to show photos of long lines. Vail said it has nearly 85% of its trails open across its eight largest North American properties, a ratio consistent with recent years. But some people are not happy: For example, Dr. Ali Carine, a pediatrician in Ohio who owns a home at the state’s Mad River Mountain, said the Vail-owned resort cuts its skiing hours this winter due to staffing and weather constraints. Dr. Carine said the limited hours make the mountain feel “less of a gathering spot for locals.”

She doesn't want a refund, she said, but wants Vail "to open my mountain." Vail responded that the company wants to expand hours just as badly as guests do, and it's continuing to hire, "but we won't compromise safety to do so." The company has had to increase the hourly rate for some staff such as those on ski patrol in Park City, Utah, and has offered an end-of-season bonus of \$2 an hour for all hours worked between Jan. 1 and April 15, or the end of season.

"One of the hallmarks of our company is agility and change," Chief Executive Kirsten Lynch told The Wall Street Journal.

CLASSROOM APPLICATION:

There are almost 400 responses to this story (as of Jan. 19, 2022). Please divide the class into groups of students and assign each group a number of responses, e.g., 1–50, 51–100, 101–150 and so forth, depending on the number of students in your class and how many groups you want. Have the student groups do a content analysis of the responses, e.g., what are the responses about, are they positive or negative, do they rely on quotations and/or facts from the story for justification? What do the responses overall indicate about readers' perceptions of the ski industry and particularly about Vail Resorts? Get students to talk with people from their locality who go skiing. Have them find out if those people had any concerns about open terrain, ski lift availability, service challenges, and so forth this winter. Then, have your student groups write a story and/or make a multimedia production based on their interviews. Think about some other winter sports that attract participants, and have your students undertake research to investigate the problems, if any, that such sports encountered this winter and/or because of the pandemic. Have the students reach out to the professional sports association representing the individual sport and to local sport authorities for their comments.

QUESTIONS:

1. This story is about Vail Resorts and the challenges the company faces this winter. What are the challenges listed in the story, and what are the two key phenomena that underlie those challenges?
2. What are the elements that make this story "flow" well? Please comment on the writer's literary style, e.g., "This season it is plowing into a blizzard of problems." And "The pandemic is making the slopes slippier for many ski resorts across North America. . ." Also, please discuss the use of direct quotations and paraphrasing in this story. And assess the use of numbers in the story: Do they enhance the story and tell the reader more about Vail Resorts' and other resorts' business?
3. Agility and change are hallmarks of Vail Resorts, according to the end sentence of this story. What indications are there in the story that Vail Resorts is an industry leader? Do you think the company is well managed? Please justify your answer with examples.
4. The headlines and subheads of The Wall Street Journal stories have a certain style. What are the stylistic elements that you noticed in the headline and sub-head of this story? How do they compare with those of other stories in the Journal?

Omicron, Inflation and Labor Shortages: CEOs Brace for Change in 2022

REPORTER: Emily Glazer and Chip Cutter

REVIEWED BY: Maria Marron, University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DATE: Jan. 15, 2022

TOPICS: Omicron variant, chief executive officers, business challenges, worker, raw ingredient and shipping container shortages, inflation, enhanced benefits, technology

LINK TO ARTICLE: [CLICK HERE](#)

SUMMARY:

This feature story is a trend story that relies on the chief executive officers of many companies to discuss the challenges facing their businesses as a result of the Omicron variant, inflation, and labor shortages. The story points out that these executives have plenty of challenges, but they remain resilient and are “shifting their operations in ways that allow them to better cope with future surprises.” To combat worker shortages, for example, and to lure people back to the office, some companies are rolling out broad-scale testing to allow larger gatherings of workers. Cloudflare is offering a credit card with perks that are activated when an employee “badges into the office.” Houston-based Hewlett Packard Enterprise Co. has made its offices more open and tech enabled, taking into account social distancing and temperature measurement that allows the company to check if too many people are in a room. Inflation is another consideration for the executives. Ann Mukherjee, CEO of Pernod Ricard North America, said that import costs are going up, and the cost is getting passed on to consumers. There also are shortages of bottles and cans; a lack of shipping containers means a lot of freight has to be moved by air; and fewer drivers means that overtime pay is a big concern, Mukherjee said. Furthermore, the raw ingredients needed for some alcohol are in short supply, but she expects the market will catch up in the coming years.

A key problem facing the executives is their lack of experience in handling inflation as they have not had long periods of high inflation throughout their careers. Thus, they are rethinking pricing strategies and adopting new processes to cope. Companies are trying to address worker shortages by enhancing pay and by investing in more affordable housing in some cities so that staff can afford to buy a home. “Attracting talent, in my opinion, requires more than good pay,” said CEO Tim Schellpeper of Meatpacker JBS USA Holdings, Inc.

Additionally, some companies are relying more heavily on technology to fill positions. Case in point: Waste Management Inc. has introduced more than a dozen advanced optical sorters into a recycling plant in Chicago, allowing it to hire 30 workers rather than the 150 largely temporary workers it would have needed. Although there are fewer jobs at the plant, the jobs that are there are higher-paying ones in technology. CEO James Fish Jr. said that the company also has enhanced benefits in its efforts to overcome the tight labor market.

CLASSROOM APPLICATION:

Divide your class into groups and assign each group an interview-based multimedia story with key leadership, management, and staff people in a local company to determine what their challenges are in the current climate and how they are addressing those challenges. Get your students to undertake profiles of each company's chief executive in their locality, outlining the leader's education, personal background, leadership, and management philosophy. Make sure the students get direct quotations from the executive and are fully prepared for their interviews by having done in-depth research on the executive before the interview. Also, have students interview management professors in the school or college of business at their university to learn more about the professors' research and to gain their perspectives on the challenges in the current corporate environment.

QUESTIONS:

1. Just as in the story about Vail Resorts in *The Wall Street Journal*, also on Jan. 15, the Covid pandemic underlies the challenges that the chief executives in this story are confronting, i.e., worker shortages, raw ingredients, inflation. What are the management issues that this story details?
2. This feature story relies on interviews with a number of chief executives. What direct quotations stand out to you from these executives? Do you think the reporter effectively used direct quotations from them?
3. The cross-heads suggest what the paragraphs that follow are about, i.e., "The future of the office," "Rising inflation," "War over talent." Is there effective use of the cross-heads here? Do they break out the key elements of the story? What other purposes do the cross-heads serve?
4. What is the key characteristic of the chief executives who were interviewed? Do they come across as true leaders? As champions of their employees? As resilient? What can you extrapolate from this story about what it takes to be CEO of a major company?

Everybody on Martha’s Vineyard Knows the Mercedes Called ‘Big Blue’

REPORTER: Mike Jordan

REVIEWED BY: Maria Marron, University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DATE: Jan. 15, 2022

TOPICS: Fletcher Wiley, Les Williams and B.J. Wiley Williams, “Big Blue” Mercedes-Benz, Black community, Martha’s Vineyard

LINK TO ARTICLE: [CLICK HERE](#)

SUMMARY:

The story of “Big Blue” is the story of Fletcher “Flash” Wiley, a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Academy, Harvard Law School, and the Harvard Kennedy School. A successful lawyer who was one of the founding members of the Black Entertainment and Sports Lawyers Association, he and his wife Bennie spent summers on Martha’s Vineyard since the 1980s. It was on the island that Flash first spotted “Big Blue” and told the Mercedes-Benz 450 SEL’s former owner that if he ever wanted to sell the vehicle, he, Flash, would be “first in line.” The guy sold it to Flash in 2003 for \$5,500. After Flash suffered his third stroke in July, he passed the car to his daughter B.J. Wiley Williams and her husband Les Williams, who are co-custodians of the vehicle with B.J.’s brother Pratt. The car is well known on Martha’s Vineyard and is “a workhorse car,” making trips to the stores and to the town dump every few days. It gets waves from staff at the local coffee shop and has made celebrities out of the occupants. Les, co-founder of Risk Cooperative, a risk management firm in Arlington, Va., says he is proud that Flash gave him the keys to the car. People recognize it as “more than just a nice car that’s well maintained; it represents the work the family has done in Boston, and also on Martha’s Vineyard, for the Black community,” he says.

CLASSROOM APPLICATION:

Assign students to groups of no more than three to discuss what they like—or dislike—about this story and have them come up with other topics for human-interest stories from their locality. What other story ideas could be generated from this one story? The writer of the story is like a shadow on the wall behind Les Williams who is telling the story of his father-in-law and “Big Blue.” Is the writer an omniscient narrator in this story, or is Les Williams solely the narrator of this story? There are myriad responses to this story. One such response is “Beautiful car, beautiful man and beautiful story.” Have your students read through the responses and discuss them. Then have them view other story responses or comments and have them discuss the role of responses or comments at the end of stories.

QUESTIONS:

1. This is a human-interest story that spans two generations and focuses on a 1979 Mercedes-Benz 450 SEL. What are the qualities of the story that make it a human-interest story? What is the literary device that gives “Big Blue” a human-like aspect? Is it personification? Onomatopoeia? Alliteration? After all, this is a vehicle that even has a name.
2. Although this is a human-interest feature story, the writer does not use direct quotations to convey what Les Williams has told him. Rather, it seems that Les Williams narrates the story from start to finish. What is the role of the writer, Mike Jordan, in this story?
3. The photographs used to document “Big Blue” are eye-catching, particularly the top photograph that spans the page with Les and B.J. standing alongside “Big Blue.” Do you think there is effective use of photographs in this feature? If you were the photo editor, what other photographs might you have wanted to use?
4. Les Williams says on the island he and his wife “stand out—young Black folks driving around in a 1979 Mercedes-Benz in damn-good condition.” What does that statement suggest to you? Does it portray Williams’ thoughts about how Black people are perceived? Does it suggest that there may be racist attitudes toward Black people? Why?

PROJECTS:

1. Assign students to groups of no more than three to discuss what they like—or dislike—about this story and have them come up with other topics for human-interest stories from their locality,
2. What other story ideas could be generated from this one story?
3. The writer of the story is like a shadow on the wall behind Les Williams who is telling the story of his father-in-law and “Big Blue.” Is the writer an omniscient narrator in this story, or is Les Williams solely the narrator of this story?
4. There are myriad responses to this story. One such response is “Beautiful car, beautiful man and beautiful story.” Have your students read through the responses and discuss them. Then have them view other story responses or comments and have them discuss the role of responses or comments at the end of stories.