



A NETFLIX ORIGINAL DOCUMENTARY

ATHLETE A

EDUCATOR RESOURCES

FOR EDUCATORS

The educational resources developed for *Athlete A* reveal the power of individuals' stories, incisive journalism, and established law to hold individuals accountable within two storied institutions in the United States—USA Gymnastics and the USA Olympic Committee. Engaging students with the self-paced standards-aligned lessons ("**The Investigations**") offers a unique opportunity for students to learn about practices of an investigative journalist. In their investigations, students will research the issues covered in the documentary and critical for the health of our democracy - the role of investigative journalism to address wrongdoing, the need for and power of survivor stories to stop abuse and assault, and dismantling corrupt and dysfunctional organizations and institutions.

The resources are designed as an online learning experience. Curated film clips from the *Athlete A* are included with links to resources to facilitate students' deep dive into the topics. However, if a classroom, school, or remote learning setting does not have access to a computer or the internet, the "**Lesson: The Investigations**" section is available as a PDF printable document with URLs directing educators and students to the embedded online links.

Note: *If the investigations are printed, it will be necessary to print out all handouts, articles referenced, and transcripts of the film segments as well.*

WHAT ARE THE INVESTIGATIONS?

The investigations are self-paced student-facing lessons modeled on the process an investigative journalist may follow as they report on a story. Students begin by learning about the profession of an investigative journalist before delving into the three Investigations—the role of investigative journalism to uncover wrongdoing, the power of survivor stories to call attention to abuse and assault, and the importance of confronting corrupt and dysfunctional organizations and institutions. After completing all three investigations, students will choose one topic of interest and write a newspaper article no longer than 500 words in the style of an investigative journalist.

LESSONS: THE INVESTIGATIONS

Starting Your Investigation:

Students begin by familiarizing themselves with the history of investigative reporting in the United States and with the roles, practices, and professional ethics that an investigative reporter follows.

Materials/Documents/Evidence Needed:

- The materials can be printed or uploaded to a shared classroom drive
- Copy of **Handout: What is Investigative Journalism?**
- Copy of **Making Change Happen: Survivor Stories**
- Access to the internet and ability to watch one Ted Talk

Investigation Topics:

- **Investigative Journalism and Accountability:** Students will research *The IndyStar* investigation and reporting of Larry Nassar and USA Gymnastics and identify how their investigation and publication supports the ideals of our democratic institutions.

Materials/Documents/Evidence Needed:

- Upload the articles in the lesson to shared classroom drive, or create PDFs
- Copy of **Investigative Article Planner**
- Equipment and internet access to view video clips

- **Dismantling Toxic Culture:** Using USA Gymnastics and the US Olympic Committee as a case study, students explore how individuals, institutions, and the law worked together to dismantle a toxic culture, confront impunity, and achieve justice.

Materials/Documents/Evidence Needed:

- Upload the articles in the lesson to a shared classroom drive, or create PDFs handouts
- Copy of **Investigative Article Planner**
- Equipment and internet access to view video clips

- **Making Change Happen: Survivor Stories:** Students will identify how individual survivor stories in *Athlete A* were essential to holding perpetrators accountable, uncovering the truth, and upholding the law.

Materials/Documents/Evidence Needed:

- Upload the articles in the lesson to shared classroom drive, or share them as PDFs
- Copy of **Investigative Article Planner**
- Equipment and internet access to view video clips

Ending Your Investigation:

Students will synthesize their learning and demonstrate their understanding by writing a newspaper-style article based on one of the investigation topics.

STANDARDS, THEMES & PACING

STANDARDS

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.R.7

Integrate and evaluate content presented in diverse media and formats, including visually and quantitatively, as well as in words.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.2

Write informative/explanatory texts to examine and convey complex ideas and information clearly and accurately through the effective selection, organization, and analysis of content.

Themes: Abuse of power, corruption, rule of law, nationalism, courage, leadership, bystander behavior, competition, and personal and professional ethics.

Aligned Disciplines: Journalism, Media Studies, Health, Physical Education, Law, Sociology, Social Studies, and Gender Studies

Skills: Internet research, writing, media analysis

LENGTH AND PACING

- **Day One:** Complete Starting Your Investigation. If time permits, begin exploring investigations.
- **Day Two:** Complete the three investigations including the Investigative Planner for each topic. Choose your article topic. Homework: Outline hypothesis for article, submit online.
- **Day Three:** Get hypothesis approved. Write article in Class - Homework: Complete article.
- **(Optional) Day Four:** Peer Review and revision of article.

STARTING YOUR INVESTIGATION: WELCOME TO THE NEWSROOM



STUDENT INTRODUCTION

You have just been hired by a local newspaper to join their investigative reporting team. Today begins your orientation with the following exercise to complete on day one of your job. Follow each step and complete what is outlined.

Congratulations and welcome to the newsroom!



REFLECTIVE WRITING

- Are you familiar with any investigative journalism stories?
- What do you think is the difference between investigative journalism and other types of journalism?



READ

- **Handout: What is Investigative Journalism?**
- Online Article ["Ten Noteworthy Moments in U.S. Investigative Journalism"](#)¹
- **Handout: Conventional Journalism and Investigative Journalism**



WATCH

TEDx talk by *The IndyStar* Journalist [Marisa Kwiatkowski](#) on her investigation of Larry Nassar and USA Gymnastics. (runtime: 10:00 min)



HANDOUT

Complete the **TEDx Talk Note Catcher**

WHAT IS INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM?

UNESCO defines investigative journalism as “the unveiling of matters that are concealed either deliberately by someone in a position of power, or accidentally, behind a chaotic mass of facts and circumstances - and the analysis and exposure of all relevant facts to the public.”²

“Investigative Journalism is a form of journalism in which reporters go in-depth to investigate a single story that may uncover corruption, review government policies or of corporate houses, or draw attention to social, economic, political or cultural trends. An investigative journalist, or team of journalists, may spend months or years researching a single topic. Unlike conventional reporting, where reporters rely on materials supplied by the government, NGOs and other agencies, investigative reporting depends on material gathered through the reporter’s own initiative. The practice aims at exposing public matters that are otherwise concealed, either deliberately or accidentally.

Investigative journalism requires the reporter to dig deeply into an issue or topic of public interest. ‘Public interest’ refers to a quality whereby a community will be disadvantaged by not knowing this information, or will benefit (either materially or through informed decision-making) by knowing it. Sometimes, information that benefits one community may disadvantage another. For example, forest-dwellers can demand better prices if they know the market value of trees that logging companies want to sell. Of course, the logging industry does not want this information revealed, as tree prices will rise. An entire country need not be affected by the story and indeed, ‘public interest’ is often differentiated from ‘national interest’. Latter term is sometimes used by governments to justify illegal, dangerous or unethical acts or to discourage journalists from reporting on a significant problem.

Investigative journalism is not instantaneous. It develops through recognised stages of planning, researching and reporting, and has to adhere to accepted standards of accuracy and evidence. The base of an investigative story is the proactive work of a journalist and, where resources permit, his or her team. After receiving a story tip, journalists develop hypotheses, plan additional research, decide on the relevant questions, and go out to investigate them. They must compile evidence by witnessing and analysing answers for themselves, such that they go far beyond simply verifying the tip. The final story should reveal new information or assemble previously available information in a new way to reveal its significance. A single source can provide fascinating revelations, access to insights and information that would otherwise be hidden. But until the story from that source is cross-checked against other sources – experiential, documentary and human – and its meaning is explored, it does not classify as investigation.”

	Conventional Journalism	Investigative Journalism
Research	Information gathered and reported on a fixed schedule (daily, weekly, monthly).	Information cannot be published until its consistency and completeness is assured.
	Research completed quickly. No further research is done once story is completed.	Research continues until story is confirmed and may continue after published.
	Story is based on the necessary minimal information. Can be very short.	Story based on the maximum amount of information, and can be very long.
	Declaration of sources can substitute for documentation.	The reporting requires documentation to support or deny declarations of sources.
Source Relations	The good faith of sources is presumed, often without verification.	The good faith of sources cannot be presumed; no information may be used without verification.
	Official sources offer information to the reporter freely.	Official information is often hidden from reporter, because its revelation may compromise interests, individuals, or institutions.
	Reporter must accept official version of a story, though they may contrast it with other source materials.	Reporter may explicitly challenge or deny official version of a story, based on information from independent sources.
	Sources are nearly always identified.	Sources often cannot be identified for the sake of their security.
Outcomes	Reporting is seen as a reflection of the world and reporter does not hope for results beyond informing the public.	Reporting is aimed at penetrating or exposing a given situation to reform, denounce, or promote an example of a better way.
	Reporting does not require a personal engagement from reporter.	Without a personal engagement from the reporter, the story will never be completed.
	Reporter seeks to be objective, without bias, or judgement towards anyone in the story.	Reporter seeks to be fair and scrupulous towards the facts of the story, and on that basis designate its victims/survivors, "heroes", and wrongdoers.
	Dramatic structure of the story is not primary as the story does not necessarily have an end because the news is continuous.	Dramatic structure is essential to its impact, and leads to a conclusion offered by reporter or source.
	Errors in reporting are inevitable and are usually without grave consequences.	Errors expose the reporter to formal and informal sanctions, and can destroy the credibility of the reporter and the media.

<http://wayback.archive-it.org/10611/20160906193350/http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0019/001930/193078e.pdf>, p. 9.

HANDOUT

TEDx TALK NOTE CATCHER: MARISA KWIATKOWSKI

Why did she choose to be a journalist?

What are the responsibilities of being a journalist according to Marisa Kwiatkowski?

What questions does an investigative journalist ask?

How does an investigative reporter know what to research?

What does it mean to fact check? Why is this necessary?

What new insights did you gain about being an investigative reporter from Marisa Kwiatkowski?



INVESTIGATION TOPICS

- INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AND ACCOUNTABILITY
- DISMANTLING TOXIC CULTURE
- MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN: SURVIVOR STORIES

INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AND ACCOUNTABILITY

**“I VIEW INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AS SHINING A
LIGHT ON THINGS WHEN THEY’RE NOT WORKING THE
WAY THEY’RE SUPPOSED TO.”**

- MARISA KWIATKOWSKI, INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALIST



Topic to Investigate

The role of investigative reporting to expose wrongdoing and hold individuals and institutions accountable.



Assignment

Develop an original hypothesis about how the *The IndyStar*'s investigation and report contributed to holding individuals and institutions accountable.

- Whose responsibility is it to reveal and address wrongdoing in our society?
- What are the ethical responsibilities of investigative journalists as they work to report a story?
- What is the relationship between investigative reporting and our democracy?



Questions to Ask

These are your reporter starting questions to explore as you go through the suggested resources, and others you find on your own:

- What was the role of investigative journalism in exposing Larry Nassar, and revealing larger institutional failures at USA Gymnastics and beyond?
- Why was *The IndyStar* uniquely situated to report on USA gymnastics?
- How did the investigative reporting intersect with the internal institutional and legal investigations that were underway before the story made national news?
- How did the investigative reporting intersect with the internal institutional and legal investigations that were underway before the story made national news?



INVESTIGATION – INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM AND ACCOUNTABILITY



1. Watch: Film Clips - *Athlete A*

- Clip One: *The IndyStar* (4:33 - 10:55, runtime: 6:22 minutes)
- Clip Two: The Investigation and Corroboration (16:10-17:38, runtime: 1:28 minutes)
- Clip Three: Accountability and Steve Penny (1:30:19-1:35:51, runtime: 5:32 minutes)



2. Read, Take Notes, Ask Questions

- "Out of Balance" Series from *The IndyStar*³
- "How *IndyStar* Investigated USA Gymnastics"⁴
- "Meet Marisa Kwiatkowski, The Reporter Who Helped Expose Larry Nassar and USA Gymnastics"⁵



3. Complete Investigative Article Planner

INVESTIGATIVE ARTICLE PLANNER

NAME: _____

Click the following link. Using the information on the link, select a topic that you can investigate and localize. Use the information to fill out the outline below: <http://journalistsresource.org/tip-sheets/research/database-checklist-key-academic-research-resources-free-restricted>

1 Topic:

Hypothesis:

2 What are your methods of investigation?

3 Where will you be able to find data?

Who can you interview or ask to help you understand this data?

5 Write a basic outline of your article.

4 Write a list of at least five questions that must be answered in order for you to have a valid article:

INVESTIGATION – DISMANTLING A TOXIC CULTURE THROUGH THE LAW

“USA GYMNASTICS AND THE UNITED STATES OLYMPIC COMMITTEE DID NOT PROVIDE A SAFE ENVIRONMENT FOR ME AND MY TEAMMATES AND FRIENDS TO TRAIN. WE WERE SUBJECTED TO DR. LARRY NASSAR AT EVERY NATIONAL TEAM TRAINING CAMP, WHICH OCCURRED MONTHLY AT THE KAROLYI RANCH. UP UNTIL NOW, I WAS IDENTIFIED AS “ATHLETE A” BY USA GYMNASTICS, THE UNITED STATES OLYMPIC COMMITTEE AND MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY. I WANT EVERYONE TO KNOW THAT HE DID NOT DO THIS TO “ATHLETE A,” HE DID IT TO MAGGIE NICHOLS.”

– GINA NICHOLS, READING MAGGIE NICHOLS’ IMPACT STATEMENT AT LARRY NASSAR’S TRIAL



Topic to Investigate

How the institutional culture at USA Gymnastics failed to protect their athletes.



Assignment

Develop an original hypothesis and write an article about the toxic culture of USA Gymnastics and how it affected families and athletes based on the resources included in this investigation.



Questions to Ask

Keep these questions in mind as you watch the clips and read the articles.

- What policies were in place at USA Gymnastics to protect athletes from abuse?
- Were those policies sufficient and/or legal? Were they followed by staff?
- What cultural norms within the institution prevented individuals within it from acting to stop repeated abuse?
- What new policies have been enacted at USA Gymnastics to protect athletes? Are the new policies effective?



INVESTIGATION— DISMANTLING A TOXIC CULTURE THROUGH THE LAW



1. Watch: Film Clips - *Athlete A*

- Clip One: "The only nice adult there" (18:24-21:46, runtime: 3:22 minutes)
- Clip Two: The Beginning of the Toxic Culture (26:30-28:50, runtime: 2:20 minutes)
- Clip Three: Preserving the Image (34:51-41:30, runtime: 7:19 minutes)
- Clip Four: Timeline of the Cover Up (1:12:50-1:18:40, runtime: 6:35 minutes)



2. Read, Take Notes, Ask Questions

- "USA Gymnastics' Response to *Indianapolis Star's* Report," Published August 4, 2016.⁶
- "Senate panel: Negligence by Olympic, USA Gymnastics officials enabled abuse by ex-team doctor Nassar," July 30, 2019, *The Washington Post*
- "The Women Who Built The Case That Brought Down Larry Nassar," August 27, 2019, *HuffPost*.⁷
- Safe Sport Policy FAQs, 2019⁸
- "Mandatory Reporters of Child Abuse and Neglect: State Statutes," 2019, Child Welfare Information Gateway.⁹



3. Complete Investigative Article Planner

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NAME: _____

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1 Topic:

Hypothesis:

2 What are your methods of investigation?

3 Where will you be able to find data?

Who can you interview or ask to help you understand this data?

5 Write a basic outline of your article.

4 Write a list of at least five questions that must be answered in order for you to have a valid article:

MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN: SURVIVOR STORIES

“ONE PERSON ALONE CAN’T DO THIS (SPARK THE INVESTIGATION). WE NEED TO HELP PEOPLE UNDERSTAND THAT IT TAKES A TEAM AND A COMMUNITY TO RESPOND – HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE – TO GET SURVIVORS’ STORIES HEARD.”

**– RACHAEL DENHOLLANDER¹⁰, FORMER GYMNAST,
ATTORNEY, ADVOCATE, AND AUTHOR OF *WHAT IS A GIRL WORTH?***



Topic to Investigate

The role of survivor stories in *The IndyStar* investigation and report, and their essential role in holding perpetrators accountable, uncovering the truth, and upholding the law



Assignment

Develop an original hypothesis and write an article on the role(s) of survivors' stories in holding individuals accountable based on the resources included in this investigation.



Questions to Ask

Keep these questions in mind as you watch the clips and read the articles.

- What pressures did the individuals who survived abuse face as they decided whether or not to come forward with their stories? What were the consequences for those who did choose to come forward?
- Many of the survivors of Larry Nassar's case were very young when they were abused. What are the specific complications around children and reporting sexual abuse?
- What factors determine the credibility and reliability of survivors' stories?
- What long-term effects of abuse did the survivors in *Athlete A* experience? How did sharing their stories influence their healing and recovery process?



INVESTIGATION – MAKING CHANGE HAPPEN: SURVIVOR STORIES



1. Watch: Film Clips - *Athlete A*

- Clip One: The First Story (10:55-14:20, runtime: 4:05 minutes)
- Clip Two: Reporting (49:52-59:30, runtime: 10:18 minutes)
- Clip Three: The Prosecution Moving Forward (1:19:00-1:30:00, runtime: 11 minutes)
- Clip Four: Maggie Nichols (1:36:00 - 1:40:32, runtime: 4:32 minutes)



2. Read, Take Notes, Ask Questions

- ["Rachael Denhollander: When You Speak Out Against Your Own Community, You Lose Everything," December 21, 2019, *The Guardian*.](#)¹¹
- ["She Warned MSU About Larry Nassar. Now She Wants To Fix The System That Silenced Her," January 19, 2019, *HuffPost*.](#)¹²
- [Reporting on Sexual Assault: A Guide for Journalists:](#)
 - Key Concepts for Thinking and Writing about Sexual Violence, pp 10-13
 - Sexual Violence Prevention: Changing the Way We Tell the Story, pp 35-37



3. Complete Investigative Article Planner

INVESTIGATIVE ARTICLE PLANNER

NAME: _____

Click the following link. Using the information on the link, select a topic that you can investigate and localize. Use the information to fill out the outline below: <http://journalistsresource.org/tip-sheets/research/database-checklist-key-academic-research-resources-free-restricted>

1 Topic:

Hypothesis:

2 What are your methods of investigation?

3 Where will you be able to find data?

Who can you interview or ask to help you understand this data?

5 Write a basic outline of your article.

4 Write a list of at least five questions that must be answered in order for you to have a valid article:

ENDING YOUR INVESTIGATION: WRITE YOUR ARTICLE

You have come to the end of your first investigative reporting exploration and are now poised to write your first article for your local newspaper.

Article Requirements:

- Your article must be typed and no longer than 500 words
- Start with clear hypothesis and written in the style of a newspaper article
- Focus on at least one of the investigation topics from *Athlete A*
- Cite all the resources and research used from the *Athlete A* website
- Follow the Excellent Column of the rubric provided
- **Investigative Journalism and Accountability:**
Develop an original hypothesis based on the resources in this investigation and write an article identifying how the *The IndyStar* upheld democratic ideals. Consider these questions as you compose your article:
 - Whose responsibility is it to reveal and address wrongdoing in our society?
 - What are the ethical responsibilities of investigative journalists as they work to report a story?
- **The Power of a Story to Make Change Happen:**
Develop an original hypothesis based on the resources you were given and write an article on the role(s) survivors' stories play in holding individuals accountable.
- **Dismantling Toxic Culture:**
Develop an original hypothesis based on the resources you were given and write an article about the toxic culture of USA Gymnastics and how it affected families and athletes.

RUBRIC

Research	Needs Improvement	Fair	Excellent
Investigation Topic	Unclear what aspect of the topic is under investigation	Topic inquiries are clear and coherent	Questions are insightful and lead to further questions
Source Clarity/ Credibility	Sources are not clear or credible	Sources are drawn from recommended links	Original research, sources are vetted, strengths and weaknesses assessed
Outcomes	Article conclusions are unclear, or unrelated to research	Conclusions are presented	Conclusions are presented, cited, and questions for further learning are posed.

ENDNOTES

- 1 <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/brookings-now/2014/10/20/ten-noteworthy-moments-in-u-s-investigative-journalism>
- 2 <https://en.unesco.org/investigative-journalism>
- 3 <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/investigations/2016/08/04/usa-gymnastics-sex-abuse-protected-coaches/85829732/>
- 4 <https://www.indystar.com/story/news/investigations/2016/08/04/usa-gymnastics-sex-abuse-investigation/87907306/>
- 5 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/marisa-kwiatkowski-indy-star-larry-nassar_n_5c3d4178e4b0e0baf54063b1
- 6 <https://www.usagym.org/pages/post.html?PostID=18996>
- 7 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/andrea-munford-angela-povilaitis-larry-nassar_n_5c423848e4b0a8db_e1714daf?jnk
- 8 <https://usagym.org/pages/education/safesport/policyfaq.html>
- 9 <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubPDFs/manda.pdf>
- 10 Interview with Blueshift Education, June 8, 2020
- 11 <https://www.theguardian.com/sport/2019/dec/21/rachael-denhollander-interview-advocacy>
- 12 https://www.huffpost.com/entry/larry-nassar-michigan-state-university-amanda-thomashow_n_5c194a91e4b08db99058



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*actual*films

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GUIDE DEVELOPED BY  **Blueshift**
Education