



SEARCHLIGHTS AND SUNGLASSES

# LEARNING LAYER

## The impact of investigative reporting

Investigations can make a big difference. Yet impact can be difficult to track. Suppose an investigation shows that when prisoners are released early they quickly commit more violent crime. Reacting to the journalism, the state then keeps people in jail longer. Violent crimes, including murders, go down because the criminals are not on the streets to commit them. The investigation saved lives, it seems, but whose lives? People could be walking the streets today totally unaware that they owe their lives to good journalism.

### Activities at three levels:

**Flashlight:** Have students explore past winners of the Journalism Education Association's Student Journalist Impact Award as well as examples of investigative reporting by college students. Discuss the stories. Were they difficult to do? Did they require special tools? Did they have an impact? Why or why not?

**Spotlight:** Contact an investigative journalist from a local news organization. Invite that person to speak to your class. Ask students to prepare by studying the websites of these major investigative reporting organizations to see how they report impact: the Center for Investigative Reporting, the Center for Public Integrity and Pro Publica. Have students ask the journalist to provide examples of the value of investigations. Post a report on the visit on a class blog.

**Searchlight:** Choose an investigative story recently reported locally. Split students into groups. Have them find people who can comment on the story's impact. For example, if the investigation revealed law-breaking landlords, students could interview tenants from the story or others who rent, respected landlords, local officials who regulate housing or even the alleged law-breakers themselves. Did the story change anything? Students who wish to may post their views at the news organization's website.

**Extra credit:** With Knight funds, Livingston Awards for Young Journalists hopes to increase its impact. Winning journalists will participate in community outreach programs to explain their investigations. Ask students to review Pulitzer Prize-winning investigative reports as well as the award-winning investigations featured by Investigative Reporters and Editors. Each student picks at least three

winners. Do the contests explain the impact of the stories? Should they? Blog or tweet your findings.