THE LEE ABRAMS EXPERIENCE, PP. 26–31: How does the author almost encourage the reader to prejudge Abrams before stripping away the surface of Abrams’s character to reveal a more complex person? Why is that technique effective when writing a profile? What are the different facets of Abrams’s personality and his views about journalism? Is he ultimately an appealing figure? Why or why not? What do you think of Abrams’s earlier efforts at programming rock radio stations? How do you think it helped color his attitude toward newspapers? If implemented, will his ideas return his newspapers to profitability? Why or why not? Would you like to work at a newspaper that has undergone an Abrams makeover? The story makes a comparison between Abrams and Steve Jobs. In what ways are they alike? How are they dissimilar?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES: Since the article was published, the new Chicago Tribune has been launched. Find a copy of the new Tribune and the Orlando Sentinel. Critique them in light of Abrams’s ideas.
If possible, obtain older copies of both newspapers to compare with their remodeled versions. Imagine you were put in charge of a struggling newspaper. Write a memo on how you would make it profitable.

IN THE BEGINNING, PP. 34–37: How does the decline of the consumer movement coincide with the decline of newspapers? Why do you think there has been a decline both in print and on TV in coverage of “the nitty-gritty” of consumer legislation? How is the rise of consumerism connected to the explosion in popularity of the Internet? How do the ideas of someone such as Lee Abrams help feed consumerism at the expense of the consumer movement? How can the rise in consumerism backfire against consumers? For example, in the case of the current financial crisis, has it backfired?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Imagine you have been given the consumer beat on your newspaper, and your editor wants you to cover the beat within the confines of new economic realities of your paper. Write a memo to your editor explaining how you intend to cover your beat, suggesting ten possible stories to write. In your memo, explain how you intend to make your stories interesting and vital to your readers.

THE PLOUGHMAN AND THE PROFESSOR, PP. 38–41: Discuss the term “disintermediation” and its implications for journalists and journalism in general. Would you be more likely to trust the opinion of a journalist expert or a citizen reviewer before making a purchase? Does having a job with a newspaper or a Web site make that person’s opinions more trustworthy than those of someone who is simply familiar with a product, a group of products, or a specific subject area of expertise? What do you think is the best way to gauge a reviewer’s expertise?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Note the potential story ideas that Cornog poses in the right column atop page 41. Select any one of those story ideas or think up one yourself and write the story, localizing it. As a class, create a guide to online consumer guides in a variety of categories. Rate the sites in regard to their usefulness, accuracy, and ease of use. Create a Web site from your guide or distribute it as a pdf.

BOILER ROOM, PP. 48–53: What do you think are the major reasons why, as the subhead says, “the business press is missing the crooked heart of the credit crisis”? Is there a connection between what Starkman says is a paucity of solid reporting on the crisis and the current financial squeeze facing many of the country’s leading newspapers? If so, what could it be? Might there be a connection between an ill-informed electorate and financial problems facing newspapers and the country in general?

ADDITIONAL ACTIVITIES:

Take the quiz on page 50. Did you get any of the answers correct? If not, or if you only got a small percentage correct, what can you do to stay better informed? Read a sampling of business journalists online and in the nation’s largest newspapers. Who do you think has the best handle on the current crisis? Why? Read the transcript of the “This American Life” documentary cited on page 52. What lessons can you learn from the way it reports and relates the story of the crisis? In the penultimate paragraph, Starkman suggests what the real story behind the crisis is. If you were assigned that story, how would you report and write it?