

Unit I: Telling the Story

Lesson Three: Tellers of the Tale

Time:

1 hour

Objectives & Skills:

Students will compare and contrast the validity and perspective offered by different news sources.

Materials:

Profiles of Thucydides, Paine, soldier from Hastings, and Russell

Preparations:

Make certain that the class understands how to create a Venn diagram. Create some basic Venn diagrams together, choosing current events or characteristics of classmates to chart. You might have students work in groups of three to create a Venn diagram of their favorite music, foods, books, etc.

Dan had a much different vantage point as a reporter in Somalia than he would have had as a reporter in, say, Bosnia. He had grown up in neighboring Kenya and was intimately familiar with the language and customs of east Africa. This allowed him to get closer to the story than many of his European and American colleagues, and his background definitely contributed to Reuters' promotion of such a young journalist. Despite his connection to the story, however, he was a paid reporter, committed to a certain degree of objectivity.

Does it matter who tells a tale? Do a reporter's ethnicity and nationality play into his or her reporting? What if the person giving an account of a war is an aid worker or a religious leader instead of a paid employee of a news organization? In the following lesson, students will compare four different news sources: a historian, a politician, a soldier, and a paid reporter.

Premeditation:

- a. Present the students with the following scenario: "Last night after school, a fight broke out in the parking lot. Two students were hospitalized for injuries and three students were suspended. You were at work and did not witness the fight, however, you've since heard accounts of what happened from the following sources: a good friend who watched from a window in the school and who also happens to be the cousin of one of the suspended students; a school-wide announcement made by the principal; your friend's mother who lives next door to

one of the hospitalized students; and a reporter's story in the morning newspaper. Which account would you most believe? What would be the inherent strengths and weaknesses of each report?"

Activities:

1. Provide the students with a copy of [*Tellers of the Tale*](#). Ask them to read the profiles and then to complete the Venn diagram. Discuss their answers as a class.
2. Many journalists, including Dan Eldon, are successors to William Howard Russell. But who are the modern-day parallels to Thucydides, Paine, and the soldier from Hastings? Have students to go to the library or to a local bookstore to find modern examples of each. Make a class list of modern-day "reporters" and a description of the medium they used to tell their tale (e.g, book, magazine article, documentary film).
3. If you read a major national newspaper, the vast majority of content has been written by reporters, the editorial page being the central variation to this rule. But reporters don't get their information by osmosis. Often, they are not on the scene when a newsworthy event occurs. So they rely on sources. And readers rely on reporters to use reliable sources. Have students cut out three articles from a national newspaper. After reading an article they should find the following:
 - Who did the reporter interview for this article? There may be individuals who are quoted directly, but can you imagine other people he or she may have interviewed? Make a list of people using either their names or titles, or a description such as "a neighbor of the deceased."
 - What other resources do you think the reporter utilized? Be as specific as possible. Instead of saying the Internet, say "a web site about the chemical properties of sleeping pills."
 - Rate the reliability of each source (interviewee) and resource as a 1 (*excellent*), 2 (*probably reliable*), or 3 (*I have some doubts*) and then explain your rating. Consider the motives and interests of each person; in the case of resources, consider their authors' motives and interests.
4. Have students share their findings in small groups, explaining the article they found most interesting. Ask them to discuss their ratings for sources and resources, as this is probably the area in which students will have the most variation.

Extending the Lesson:

- a. Send students into the old microfilm files at the library to find a pre-1900 newspaper article about a major news event of the day (e.g., an election, a crime, a natural disaster, etc.). Then have them find an article on a similar topic

from a current newspaper. Ask each student to give a brief presentation comparing and contrasting the style and content of the two articles.

- b. Have the students poll community members about how they get their news (e.g., newspaper, radio, television, Internet, word of mouth). Create a single class table using their information, color coded to represent different groups, such as age and gender. What can the students interpret about changing views towards the news from the table?