

Who Tells Your Story?

Your Response to the Story of History

Introduction

The following collection of stories was created by Rosalie Hirst and Morné Thompson to represent the learning they gained in the pursuit of their research topic. Issues behind the preservation of historical memory are particularly salient in the writing of history textbooks, because minute changes in wording can convey entirely different tones and interpretations of the same events. When the future generation of a nation is reading these accounts, it comes as no surprise that the words used are intensely scrutinized by a number of parties. The hope is that readers will both enjoy and reflect on the following fictional accounts, examining what components influenced their understanding of events and how it relates to textbook writing. The ultimate goal of the entire project was not to provide a methodological solution that ensures historical veracity, or what textbook writing process is ideal; instead, it is to cause readers to re-evaluate their own assumptions in order to better engage with those around them from different cultures and backgrounds. In the following pages, there are 5 different stories, and each one is written in two different ways. Following each story are some questions and a commentary for the reader to better understand the purpose and theme of each story.

Victory

v. 1

The army was advancing quickly. Finally, they broke through the defenses of their enemy, and the capital city was in sight. The men were tired, but their commanders kept encouraging them to keep going. So, they continued with the aim to reach the capital before darkness set in. In the evening, at the time when everybody would normally have the evening meal, the army reached the capital. They asked the people of the city for food which they gave willingly. Finally, the army could relax, for, though they had not won the war yet, taking the capital signaled the beginning of the end of the war.

v. 2

The army was charging ahead. Finally, they burst through the defenses of their enemy, and the capital city was in sight. The men were exhausted, but their commanders kept forcing

them to keep going. So, they continued with the aim to reach the capital before darkness set in, but it was still only nine o'clock in the morning. In the evening, at the time when everybody would normally have the evening meal, the army reached the capital. They demanded food from the people of the city which they gave willingly. Finally, the army could relax, for, though they had not won the war yet, taking the capital signaled the beginning of the end of the war.

Questions:

- Were the soldiers supportive of the fighting, losing hope, or giving up?
- In your opinion, what were the commanders like?
- Were the army's methods necessary? Were the actions of the army ethical?

Commentary:

This story explains how a few words can change the viewpoints and perceptions of readers. As

such, the reader may come to view a certain event, person, or group more or less favourably than they really were. For example, an encouraging or forceful commander can have vastly different effects on their soldiers. Even so, the reader was not in the midst of the fighting, and perhaps forceful commanders were needed in this instance. In sum, while words are the most common way to communicate historical events, they can also be the method that is the most controversial, and lead to many different understandings and opinions.

The Fight

v. 1

It was going to happen at three o'clock behind the oak tree at the edge of the park. The big fight between Mitch O'Connell and Harry Rusk was the talk of the whole 6th grade, and people were starting to take bets. It all started when Mitch was loading his lunch up in the cafeteria, and Harry came up behind him and deliberately shoved Mitch's head into a heap of green beans. "Think you're cool, huh? Don't make me laugh, man", Harry yelled, and then he walked away – or tried to, at least. Mitch leaped up and, vegetables falling from his face, pointed his finger at Harry's back and yelled "3 o'clock, Harry! Don't you chicken out, or *Julia* won't ever date you, no matter how much you keep wishing!" Harry whipped around and glared at Mitch, said "You want a fight? You got it, you little weasel!", and it was on.

3 o'clock came, and a little crowd had gathered, people whispering in hushed tones and making last minute wagers. Mitch was already there with a hugely determined look on his face, scowling something fierce and shadowboxing with deadly intensity. Harry showed up a minute or two later, didn't say a word even when the self-appointed referee, Jimmy Dricks, asked him if he was ready. He just stared at Mitch and Mitch stared right back, matching him glare for glare. Finally, Jimmy said, "Go!" and the two were at each other. Wild punches were thrown, then they grappled each other and ended up rolling on the ground. Finally they headbutted

each other at the same time and both fell back, breathing hard. Harry groaned and struggled to rise, then said "Give up...", and looked at Mitch apologetically. Mitch looked back and said "Yea...sure" and slowly got up, then magnanimously reach over and helped Harry up as well. "Friends?", Mitch asked and held up his fist. Harry bumped it. "Friends".

v. 2

It was going to happen at three o'clock behind the oak tree at the edge of the park. The big fight between Mitch O'Connell and Harry Rusk was the talk of the whole 6th grade, and people were starting to take bets. It all started when Harry was walking backwards in the cafeteria, yelling back at his friend Sam. "Think you're cool, huh? Don't make me laugh, man", Harry joked, and then turned and started walking forwards again... Until out of nowhere Mitch O'Connell started yelling at him. "3 o'clock, Harry! Don't you chicken out, or *Julia* won't ever date you, no matter how much you keep wishing!", Mitch cried, and he looked furious. The green beans falling from Mitch's face helped Harry to realize that he must have bumped into Mitch when he wasn't looking, but it was instantly irrelevant the second Mitch yelled about Harry's deepest darkest secret in front of the *entire* lunchroom, including, of course, Julia. All over a little accident. "You want a fight?", he yelled back, angry now, "You got it, you little weasel!", and it was on.

3 o'clock came, and a little crowd had gathered, people whispering in hushed tones and making last minute wagers. Mitch was already there with a cocky look on his face, trying to look tough and shadowboxing with showy intensity. Harry walked up and didn't say a word to anyone; he was far too focused. He just stared at Mitch and Mitch looked back, trying to match him glare for glare. Finally, Jimmy, the self-appointed referee, said, "Go!" and the two were at each other. Wild punches were thrown, then they grappled each other and ended up rolling on the ground. Finally they headbutted each other at the same time and both fell back, breathing hard. Harry grunted and started to rise, then looked over at the struggling Mitch and muttered "You...give up?",

and looked at Mitch curiously. Mitch looked back and said “Yea...sure” and slowly got up, then apologetically reach over and helped Harry up as well. “Friends?”, Mitch asked and held up his fist. Harry bumped it, feeling gracious. “Friends”. Harry walked home that day with a spring in his step. *I may just ask Julia out tomorrow*, he thought.

Questions:

- Who was at fault? Why do you think so?
- Which of the two is more mature, would you think?
- Why do you think Harry thought about asking Julia out at the end of one of the stories?

Commentary:

As with this story, history textbooks can be written to give their readers a sense of national pride. When a historic battle is retold in such a way that the home country seems to be the victim of a misunderstanding and nevertheless manages to overcome the aggressive foreign nation, pride in the home country’s virtue and power both is established, and citizens are more likely to support their governments. This is obviously desirable for the government, as it promotes national unity and self-sacrifice in hard times, rather than selfish abandonment of one’s fellows. Furthermore, this story shows how easy it is for an event to be remembered in multiple ways. Harry didn’t see Mitch at the lunchline, Mitch didn’t know Harry was trash talking someone else, and both thought the other had given up at the end of their fight. Thus, the effects of history reported in a certain way can have direct impacts on the reader, and the report itself can fully intend to be accurate and still come up with a different representation than another recounting of the same event.

The Feud

v. 1

“Long ago Theodosius Montalet stole a ring belonging to the Lady Chrissana Capague, straight from the sacrificial altar it had reverently been placed upon. Learning of the

theft, Lady Chrissana took her beloved hound with her to find the thief and ask for it back, hoping that she might reason with the obviously desperate soul. Upon finding Theodosius, however, his rejection of her heartfelt entreaties was both forceful and hostile, and her shoulders shook from the shock at seeing such an unrepentant rogue. ‘Very well’, she declared, ‘the House Capague will sever all contact with House Montalet, and the servants of the Montalets will be most unwelcome in the lands of House Capague. Take the ring, rogue, and may your soul reap what it has sown.’ Montalet laughed at this, and went on his merry way, while the Lady and her hound returned home, sorrowful at the evil of this world.

And that is why, little Cara Capague, we have ever feuded with the Montalets, for they refuse to let us alone, and instead interfere with every business dealing or diplomatic envoy we send to other Houses, working the most terrible sabotage out of a spiteful petulance for our disdain of their ancestors. Be most careful never to trust one, for you will only be hurt, dear one.”

v. 2

“Long ago Lord Theodosius Montalet II found a ring that had been tossed on a pile of stones in the woods. Piously thanking the gods for their gift to him, the Lord went on his way, thinking no more of it until two days later he was beset by a raving woman and her ferocious beast. He recognized her as Chrissana Capague, of the House Capague, but couldn’t believe the vile rhetoric spewing from her mouth. ‘Lady Capague’, Lord Theodosius humbly began, ‘I take it you wish to take this ring you see upon my finger. I swear to you I have come upon it honestly, and intend it as a gift to my beloved daughter, but if you claim it is yours, I am of course willing to return it’. However, as he said so, he was stunned to see Chrissana’s shoulders begin to shake. She was laughing! ‘Well, well’, she chortled, ‘the House Capague will sever the fingers of those belonging to House Montalet, and the servants of House Montalet will always be MOST welcome in the lands of House Capague, Lovers of Rings. Delightful rogue, may your soul find refuge from mine own, for your sake’. Lord Theodosius gasped at this, and left

with haste, thinking to himself, “The head of House Capague is most certainly mad; we must be careful to never let them grow too mighty, or the corruption at their core will spill over and infect all the land. The gods have given me this ring to symbolize that very purpose, I see it now’. And that is why, little Manfred Montalet, we have ever feuded with the Capagues, for they worship their mad ancestor in all their dealings. It is our sacred purpose to defend the land by keeping them in check any way we can, however dangerous it may be. No business dealing or political scheme of theirs may escape our diligent work, for we are the noble family tasked with holding their malice in check.”

Questions:

- Who was at fault here? Why do you think so?
- Should the two families try and reconcile? What would the one House need to say to the other if they were to try?
- What values do these families have that influence their viewpoints?

Commentary:

These stories represent the parts of history textbooks that justify potentially immoral actions by a state against another state, or even a people group within a state. Religion, filial piety, and other noble convictions can lead to a determination to bring justice to the world or resist a perceived threat to international peace and security. When events are so easy to misinterpret, to hear incorrectly, or simply appear so foreign that it becomes logical to assume insanity of the other party, it’s no surprise that many conflicts around the world are prolonged by both sides believing themselves to be doing ‘the right thing’.

Learning to Ride

v. 1

“I want a bike, Mommy,” 5-year-old Ernest said to his mother one morning.

“Ok, Ernest, you can go with Daddy to the store on Saturday and pick out a bike, and then Daddy

can teach you how to ride one,” his mother replied.

Ernest was thrilled. He could now be like the rest of the kids that he saw in his neighbourhood.

They always went zooming by his house so fast that a gust of wind blew at him as they went by.

It was going to feel like a long time until Saturday.

Three days later...

Finally, Saturday was here. Ernest awoke very early in the morning very excited. “Let’s go now, Daddy,” he begged his father.

“We can’t right now, Ernest. The store isn’t open. You have going to have to wait a few more hours. I promise I will teach you how to ride your bike as soon as we buy it, though, so you can practice all afternoon.”

At the store, there were so many bikes of different sizes and colors. Ernest’s father took him to a section where the bikes were his size, and he picked out a red bike which his dad called a tricycle for some reason. When they got home, Ernest’s father assembled the bike, making sure to put on the training wheels. At last, the bike was complete and his father explained and demonstrated to Ernest how to ride the bike. It was a slow start. At first, Ernest’s legs would get tangled in the pedals, and his feet kept coming off the pedals. He was also not used to pedaling and steering at the same time, and he fell a few times and got several bumps, bruises, and minor scratches. And, when he went down the small hill on his street, he had to remember how to brake. With a few hours, however, he had learned how to ride and felt like he was flying down the street like the other kids.

v. 2

“I want a bike, Mommy,” 5-year-old Ernest said to his mother one morning.

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At the store, there were so many bikes of different sizes and colors. Ernest's father took him to a section where the bikes were his size, and he picked out a red bike. When they got home, Ernest's father assembled the bike. At last, the bike was complete and his father explained and demonstrated to Ernest how to ride the bike. It was a slow and painful start. Ernest was not able to balance on two wheels, and he was not used to pedaling and steering at the same time. As a result, he fell many times, getting badly bruised and scratched. When he went down the small hill on his street, he had to remember how to brake, but, it ended in disaster. His back tire skidded and slipped out from under him. He crashed to the ground, and had to go to the hospital for some stitches and a sprained wrist.

Questions:

- Should the store have opened earlier, so that Ernest could get his bike faster?
- Did Ernest's parents choose the right method to teach him how to ride a bike?
- What were the kids like whom Ernest was comparing himself to?

Commentary:

This story illustrates how parents (or people in positions of authority) have an important voice in a child's education. Ernest, sooner or later, was going to learn to ride a bicycle; however, when he learnt to ride a bicycle before riding a tricycle, he got really hurt (Version #2). The parents could

have decided to teach Ernest to ride the bicycle first, but, as the first version shows, his parents decided that the best way for Ernest to learn to ride a bicycle was first through the tricycle. Similarly, Ernest's personal need to ride a bike did not force the store to open earlier; instead, Ernest also had to relinquish his preferences for a few more hours while waiting for the store to open. The store is a metaphor for the government providing for the education needs of its citizens, and how while it is there to provide bikes for the people, the people's preferences aren't the only factor when it comes to how the store operates.

The Fire

v. 1

GREEN MAN SAVES BLUE BOY FROM TERRIBLE HOUSEFIRE

This week in the capital city of the planet Tryssk, a terrible fire raged in a multi-million credit mansion, caused by an unattended baby drake finding a gas canister. The only person home at the time, young Timol Azure of the Azure Conglomerate, was unaware of the blaze until it was almost too late, running screaming to his parents' room in a panic, only to find a rescuer waiting for him with open arms. Benzer Verdan, a green 30 year old with a criminal record had seen the home's near-destruction and heard Timol's desperate screams; running into the house with no regard for his personal safety, Verdan proved that even men with checkered pasts, regardless of skin tone, have the spark of humanity needed to risk their own lives for the innocent. He has graciously refused a reward from Timol's grateful parents, and asks for no recognition from even the mayor, who has offered him a medal.

v. 2

HEIST TURNED ON ITS HEAD

This week in the capital city of the planet Tryssk, recently released criminal Benzer Verdan, a green, was in the right place at the wrong time. He had chosen an excellent time to break into and steal from the Azure Conglomerate's famed multi-million credit mansion, as no one was home except for a clueless young blue boy, but

unfortunately for him, a fire started after an escaped drake got its claws on a gas canister, and the young blue ran straight into him as he was trying to exit from the master bedroom with loot held in both hands. The boy jumped right into his arms, and clung to him desperately, knocking the loot out of Verdán's grasp as he did so. Stunned, Verdán somehow realized that unless he wanted to leave the boy to the inferno fast approaching, he would need to leave his takings behind and instead leap out of the window. The emergency response team that was arriving at this point saw his 'heroic' actions and roundly congratulated him on his courage, which he quickly accepted while he tried, and succeeded, at making a speedy exit from the scene of his almost-crime.

easy to see how textbooks go beyond reporting history and actually impact the individuals reading them.

Questions:

- Was Benzer Verdán a hero? Does it matter what he was originally in the house for?
- In a society where green and blue people have an uneasy relationship, which story would have a more positive or negative effect on readers? Why?
- Would you be interested in hearing Verdán's version of events? Would you believe him? Why?

Commentary:

History textbooks are capable of giving their readers hope. If the dark sides of humanity could be overcome in the past, after all, why couldn't it happen again? Artists especially know what it is to be inspired by the works of history. Whether as a result of political necessity, ethical preference, or mere happenstance, selfish actions can easily be remembered as heroic, and of course the other way around. When reading a textbook it is important to consider how a prominent historical figure might have seemed to his or her enemies, or perhaps their families, and in this way we can hope to find some good in the most cruel villains and some humanity in the most deific heroes. Not only does such an open-minded approach to representation encourage dialogue, it also reminds us how sensitive we are to stories, how inspirational or disheartening they can be. With such an understanding it is