**Week 11 lecture**

**These Words are Not Mine: Feral Narratives**

November 6, 2019

Today

* Interview narrative final drafts due[[1]](#footnote-1)
* “Upset About Budget Cuts to the National Institutes of Health? Blame the National Institutes of Health”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Next Tuesday

* Informative narrative rough draft due[[3]](#footnote-3)
* “The odd, awful downfall of the school librarian of the year”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Attendance

* **Pass attendance sheet around.**

# Course Business

What questions do you have about the interview narratives that are due tonight?

Is Turnitin behaving itself?

# Reading

What did you think about this week’s reading?

* What did you like?
* What did you dislike?
* What stood out to you the most?
* Does the author make a good point?
* Did he convince you that the NIH is wasting huge amounts of money?
* Are you convinced that major cuts to NIH funding is warranted?

Provoke discussion to the point where students are talking about the superficial treatment of the science in the article, about how the author doesn’t ever say why the NIH funded these studies.

## Group exercise 1[[5]](#footnote-5)

Have students form 5 groups of 5 (or as close to it as we can get depending on attendance).

Give each group a folder/envelope containing material explaining the science behind one of five studies ridiculed by the author:

* Hamster sex
* Jazz rats
* Meth texting
* Overweight lesbians
* Stoned quails [I should probably replace this one in the future. Details are sketchy.]

Students in each group should read the material and then come to a common understanding of the science behind the study. They should also discuss whether they feel Boehm was fair to the study and whether they feel the study is worth funding through NIH or whether they feel taxpayer money is being wasted.

My role during this discussion will be to answer any questions and to visit each group to get their thoughts.

Once each group has reached a consensus, move on to the second group exercise.

## Group exercise 2

Each student’s information sheet has a group number on it. Explain that each group member will become an ambassador, conveying what their group decided to others.

Form five new groups. Everyone with “Group 1” should come together as a group. Everyone with “Group 2” should form a group, etc.

In these new groups, each person should explain to the rest the science behind the study they discussed in the previous group. Space should be opened up for members of each group to express an opinion about whether the science behind each study is worth funding or whether they feel it’s a waste of taxpayer money.

## Full class

So what do we take away from this exercise?

* Get ideas from students.

I took away several points:

First, there is a huge difference between relying on primary and secondary sources.

Second, audience, author, and message. These are at the core of every writing project. However, no matter how careful we are, there is always the possibility of unintended audiences, audiences we never imagine and whose motivations we can’t begin to guess.

This is a special case in point.

NIH funding is extremely hard to come by. Competition is fierce. Imagine the competition to get into medical school or vet school. However, the consequences of not getting in don’t just affect you, but also a lab full of techs, post docs, graduate students, student workers, etc. who are relying on the outcome for their livelihoods.

However, there is a broader, related point as well. Namely, narratives are at the heart of every society. However, we are often embedded in competing narratives.

How we understand the facts and even the facts we accept are deeply and profoundly affected by the other narratives we’re caught up in.

In this article we see at work the competing narratives of scientists vying for limited funds and politicians trying to cut those funds. More common examples would be:

* The court room
* Union employment disputes
* Politics
* Religious debates
* History
* And, yes, in the examining room
  + Doctors disagreeing about treatment plan
  + Parents and children giving different stories
  + Patients disagreeing with diagnosis
  + Cure for cancer being held secret
  + Vaccines cause autism

Understanding story, both its power and its structure, can help you navigate the complicated terrain of social life.

# Assignment 4

With our previous two assignments, we’ve practiced telling stories for the sake of stories. The first was telling your own story. The assignment due tonight is telling someone else’s story.

All along, however, we have talked about the power of story to convey highly complex information, to inform, not just to entertain.

This assignment focuses on this aspect of story. Everything you’ve practiced so far is still in effect. You still need a sympathetic character who encounters some kind of clear complication that is resolved after your character takes some kind of action.

An extremely important part of this story, however, will be to educate your audience on some technical aspect of your story.

**Go over writing prompt.**

As a final note, you are free in this assignment to try your hand at complete fiction.

1. For a full description of this assignment, see: <http://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/178301>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. <https://reason.com/2017/03/21/upset-about-budget-cuts-to-the-national/> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. For a full description of this assignment, see: <http://hdl.handle.net/1969.1/186120>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Peltz J. The odd, awful downfall of the school librarian of the year. *AP News*2017. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. This was the first lecture I ever used this variation of think/pair/share. I have not shared the collection of proposals I found due to time constraints. I will try to remedy that in future versions of this lecture. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)