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New Journalism -- Narrowing the Gap between Fact and Fiction

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By the middle of the 20th century the conceptual juxtaposition of "history" and "novelist" ushered in a new era of literature coined, "New Journalism", whose most famous proponents include Norman Mailer, Truman Capote, Hunter S. Thompson, and Joan Didion. The results were smashing, as Alfred Kazin of the *New York Times Book Review* wrote of Norman Mailer's, *The Armies of the Night*, a re-creation of the October 21, 1967 March on Washington, "Only a born novelist could have written a piece of history so intelligent, mischievous, penetrating and alive." (Kazin, *New York Times*) While New Journalists derived facts like historians, through primary and secondary sources, they wrote like novelists, which Kazin protests as the source of "alive" history. Through heart felt interviews on Death Row, civil rights protests, the Vietnam War, and the Nixon campaign, New Journalists took notes, but rather than writing newspaper and magazine articles they created non-fiction narratives. What remains is a truthful and mischievously subjective account of history.

Although tremendously enticing and popular novels, New Journalism creates a troublesome quandary. Writers of "New Journalism" do not have the privilege of an omniscient narrator, as would a traditional novelist. When they describe a character's subconscious they undertake an assumptive role which is slightly "mischievous," inventing the psychosis of a character and the formative chain of events that brings them to a literal climax. In Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* for example, Perry rereads a letter from his father that was presented at a parole hearing. As Perry packs his most treasured belongings while leaving Mexico, Capote writes, "This biography always set racing a stable of emotions -- self-pity in the lead, love and hate running evenly at first, the latter ultimately pulling ahead. And most of the memories it released were unwanted, though not all." (Capote, 130) Critically, is it safe to assume that the biography "set a racing stable of emotions"? Capote interviewed Perry extensively, thereby allowing such an assumption to be realistically affirmed. However, is it possible to suppose that self-pity was the leading emotion and hate was the lasting one? With these suppositions comes an intuitive knowledge of Perry's past, his relationship with his father, his view of himself; a view that only Perry, himself, could have. Yet Capote writes Perry's subconscious as a journalist presenting Perry's character, thereby blurring the reality of Perry, is he a character in a novel or an accomplice in the deaths of the Clutter family on November 15, 1959 in Holcomb, Kansas?

While a close reading of Perry's reaction to a saved letter might be a minuscule detail in the schema of *In Cold Blood*, it exposes the complications inherent for journalistic novels. If such a paltry example becomes so controversy laden, consider the implications surrounding 300 page novels such as *In Cold Blood*, or 1,000 plus page novels like *Executioner's Song*. As humans and history become characters and plots, history becomes a novel. Furthermore, the popularity, permanence, and critical acceptance (Mailer alone won the Nobel Prize,

two Pulitzer Prizes, and the National Book Award), makes these presumptuous novels, history.

The narrowing gap between non-fiction history and fiction or fact and fiction demands more attention today than it did fifty years ago. As networks' top ratings come from "Reality" TV; the *New York Times* is slammed not once but several times for crafting stories; Bill O'Reilly constructs an empire around the misnomer "No Spin Zone"; and James Fry makes more money off his novel *A Million Little Pieces* after it is discovered not to be an autobiography as he empathetically stated, but a novel based on actual events; one begins to question what is fact and what is fiction.

Lesson One

The delineation of fact and fiction is one of the myriad objectives of this teaching unit. The definition of "fact" is best achieved through examples. Start this unit by spreading across a table numerous texts of the following kind -- encyclopedias, dictionaries, almanacs, calendars, phonebooks, textbooks, census statistics, news from the "wire", i.e. *The Associated Press*, *Reuters*, "hard news", i.e. *The Wall Street Journal*, *Scientific News*, *The Economist*, *The New York Times*, "editorial news magazines", i.e. *Harpers*, *The New Yorker*, *Atlantic Monthly*, "magazines", i.e. *Rolling Stone*, *Ebony*, *Seventeen*, *Maxim*, *Street Customs*, "Entertainment News", i.e. *The National Enquirer*, *The Star*; and fiction i.e. *Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy*, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, *Kiterunner*. After reading the titles and allowing time for students to read the covers, ask the students to quickly write down three texts that they would like to read that night.

Then assign four students to a group and assign each group the task of ranking texts in terms of how much of the text is factual and how much of its information is based on fact, but not necessarily factual; with one being the most fact laden text and ten being the least factual. After the students have ranked the texts, ask them to write what process they used to determine which texts were most factual and which ones were not. Ask them to include at least four ways a text can be analyzed for facts. Then ask them what complications arise or what was most difficult in determining facts. Lastly, have the students compare their fact rankings with the texts that they ranked as desirable to read. As an exit question, instruct the students to write on the implications of this comparison.

The purpose of this lesson is first to define "fact." By having the students rank texts in terms of their factual content they will quickly discover texts steeped in provable information are most factual. If students' struggle with these concepts ask them questions which will elicit the following answers: Memorial Day will be on May 28, 2006; the capital of California is Sacramento, the President of the United States in 1983 was Ronald Reagan, the word fact is a noun, etc. Such examples will highlight referential texts -- Calendars, Almanacs, Encyclopedias, Dictionaries, etc. -- and demonstrate the reasoning behind highly factual texts. Humanities collective reliance on this empirical knowledge is often taken for granted. Arguably, this information could be uncovered within every source listed above if it was on a pertinent subject. Consider then, the size of a purely factual text, most dictionaries, encyclopedias, phonebooks, etc. are large and lengthy allowing a scholar to instantly access a myriad of information in almost an inclusive way. The varieties of factual texts are limited because facts are constant, and creativity is only manifests itself organizationally and aesthetically. However, as factual information gains opinions the variety and prevalence of this source material increases. Assert the truism that opinion does not necessarily mean adding information, but can also mean omitting information. The less facts the more opinion, and because all opinions are unique, the amount of opinion based information

increases exponentially the less hard facts are included. Also, as facts are expounded it becomes harder to determine, what is fact, and what is fiction?

The popularity of opinion is evident when comparing the students' desire to read fiction or realistic fiction. In other words, on average, a student would rather read a magazine or entertainment newspaper than an encyclopedia, dictionary, phonebook, or news wire. Facts rarely appeal to the emotions and almost never approach the implicit reasoning for actions; they contain small conflicts if any, and similarly do not require or inspire passionate responses. Students will begin to see themselves as purveyors of opinions rather than analysts of facts. This is not a concept that should be condemned, but a concept that needs to be known.

Lesson Two

The second objective is to decipher elements of facts within literature. This could be done through any news article in a local newspaper and should not require much class time. Have the students choose an article from the front page, read the article, and write down in a systematic way -- who, what, where, when, why, and how -- or "5W's and a H". More fruitful results occur through close reading several sentences with particular attention to adjectives and adverbs. Here students will begin to gain a clear understanding of how an author's personality enters into a factual account, thereby adding bias. A fun and illuminating exercise is to have the students rewrite the dissected sentences and, by playing with connotation, convey an entirely different mood, tone, and style to the piece. This could be done with any article. On the sports page of the Saturday, May 27, 2006 edition of the *New York Times* is an article written by Karen Crouse entitled, Jeter Beats Out a Milestone, where Karen Crouse opens, "The night was damp, the Yankees opponent was doleful, the holiday getaway traffic was dispiriting. The reason why 48,035 fans braved a gloomy sky, gridlock, and the Kansas City Royals last night became as clear as an indelible memory in the bottom of the forth inning." Some word choices which are subjective include, "damp", "doleful", "getaway", "dispiriting", "braved", "gloomy", "clear as an indelible memory". Encourage students to create substitutes for these words through a method of your design. "Damp" can become, "Fresh dew", "doleful" can become "serene", "getaway" can become "energetic", "dispiriting" can become "suspenseful", "braved" can become "courageously challenged", "gloomy" can become "intrepid", and "clear as an indelible memory" can become "unforgettable". The rewritten paragraph would then read, "The night was covered with fresh dew, the Yankees opponent was serene, the holiday energetic traffic was suspenseful. The reason why 48,035 fans courageously challenged an intrepid sky, gridlock, and the Kansas City Royals last night became unforgettable in the bottom of the forth inning." As students begin to see the power in these subtle differences they ultimately begin to compare style. It is a writer's style and voice, which differentiates the massive variety of texts on the same subject. Style and voice like faces and personalities are unique to every individual. As a journalism topic have students express why the adage, "all stories have already been told, it is the way they are told which is different.", is true. After having the students share their responses, make sure to make apparent and lasting that in opposition to facts, style, voice, theme, and purpose are completely subjective. Therefore, journalism and history should not be read as exclusively fact, given an author's assumptions and preconceptions.

Exposition on New Journalism -- an Author's Awareness

The presentation of the above objectives is universal and can be used as a mini-lesson or a bridge into a non-fiction unit, a research paper, a journalism class, or other literary outlet. However, such a lesson is absolutely

necessary to a unit on "New Journalism" for it provides the literal implications and impact of the journalist-novel. Norman Mailer's, *Armies of the Night* provides a salient example of the explosion of thought, style, theme, and point of view emanating from a single news article capped at less than 1,000 words. He begins his novel with an empathetic nod to New Journalism: "From the outset, let us bring you news of your protagonist." The word "protagonist" derives from literary theory and most commonly refers to a character's successful struggle over a conflict, often referred to as the antagonist. The terms protagonist and antagonist suggest fictional literature. Following this implicitly fictional statement, Mailer writes, "The following is from *Time* magazine, October 27, 1967". Each word in this sentence is free from bias and factual. One, the article was in *Time* magazine, two, the date was October 27, 1967, and three, the exact text immediately follows as this statement suggests. Therefore, a statement purely factual follows a sentence drowning in fictional implications. The *Time* article, which appears in its entirety, is strongly subjective, negatively reporting Norman Mailer and his contribution to the March on Washington in 1967. Within the first two pages, Mailer addresses four literary genres -- fiction, fact, journalism, and New Journalism.

As if defining the very essence of "New Journalism" the quoted *Times* news article is pursued by the following statement, "Now we may leave *Time* in order to find out what happened." Mailer's pointed disappointment with the *Times* article is obvious as he dismisses this article as fact, "in order to find out what happened." And as Mailer retells his version he wins the Pulitzer for Non-fiction and a National Book Award, awarded to narrative novels, predominately fiction. Although Mailer's research far surpasses the *Time's* journalist, is there enough research to justify 288 pages and call this text historical or hard journalism? Yet, after reading the book and reviewing the implications of such an introduction one is forced to question, as Mailer would want, which is a more accurate portrayal of history, Mailer's novel (where he himself is included), or the *Times* news article?

Lesson Three

An objective answer to the above questions is much more complex than simply A or B, and realistically the better investigation is what does each text represent, that is what is the style, voice and tone of each piece, and how is this information crafted by the author to create his/her prose? The aforementioned *Times* article and Mailer's heralded text is fascinating, and its implication of bias requires techniques and knowledge already familiar to most English teachers, and could be, in a sense, redundant. However, in no way should this lesson be discourage, in fact, it essential that students are aware that New Journalists are aware of the manipulation of facts. Contemporary novels of New Journalism are often classified as narrative non-fiction, but in the 1950's as Mailer, Capote, Didion, and Thompson reinterpreted societies conception of non-fiction, they also coined New Journalism.

Non-fiction? - In Cold Blood vs. The Things They Carried

The following unit compares excerpts from two texts of varying degrees of non-fiction on a similar theme, murder. Truman Capote's *In Cold Blood* and Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, have distinct styles, are widely heralded, and present murder from drastically different points of view. Although they do not foretell the events of the same murder, a comparative study of their style, their mingling of fact and fiction, and their thematic revelations on murders is intriguing.

By reading these texts, either in part or in full, the unifying element is the notion of New Journalism. "In Cold Blood, the author's ninth published book, represents the culmination of his long-standing desire to make a contribution toward the establishment of a serious new literary form: "the Nonfiction Novel." (Capote, Afterward) Again, this quote asserts Capote's awareness of this fledging genre and his passion to become a contributor. The Things They Carried introduction reads, "This book is essentially different from any other that has been published concerning the "late war" or any of its incidents. Those who have had any such experience as the author will see its truthfulness at once, and to all other readers it is commended as a statement of actual things by one who experienced them to the fullest." (O'Brien, Inset) The notion of "truthfulness" is highlighted to implicate O'Brien as a presenter of the truth of Vietnam; but going one step beyond the New Journalists, O'Brien's stories could possibly have no facts, and the novel is classified as fiction. O'Brien's assertion that his novel is the truest reflection of Vietnam while being marginally factual, lends a trained eye to the presence of New Journalism, a story that is fiction, yet all the while filled with "truthfulness." Because O'Brien's novel follows Capote's by 25 years, (In Cold Blood copyright 1965, The Things They Carried copyright 1990), O'Brien is obviously aware of the contributions to journalism of his elders, Capote, Mailer, Didion, and Thomson.

Yet O'Brien's novel pushes the concept of narrative non-fiction even further. While Capote becomes a living part of the history of the Clutter trial by psychologically mingling with the murderers, and subjectively canonizing their presence in the hearts of readers worldwide, O'Brien invents situations and characters (he does claim they are based on fact), yet gives an account that he believes most accurately represents the soldiers in Vietnam. The distinction is Capote is substantiated historically. On November 15, 1959 in Holcomb, Kansas, Perry Smith and Dick Hickcock murdered the four members of the Clutter family, stood trial and were hung. However, in O'Brien's work the reader is unsure if a Mary Anne really exists, Mark Fosse's girlfriend flown in from the States because she missed her boyfriend, carrying a suitcase and bright blue eyes into battle. The question that surrounds this unit is, do New Journalist's more accurately present the truth? Previously the students defined fact, now students must define truth.

Lesson Four

In defining the word "truth" you will satisfy numerous objectives. First, students will be forced to look at the origins of words. Have them assess their prior knowledge by asking them to define the word truth as accurately as possible. Then ask students to invent a way to present their idea of truth to the class. This could be involved, i.e. posters, lesson plans, overheads, examples, or basic, i.e. exchanging their writings with a partner, read a quick write on truth to the class, etc. After these presentations, support their assumptions and prior knowledge with new information. Bring the students to the computer lab or assign for homework, a Google search using the following search criteria, "define: truth". What appears is a litany of responses, some stating "verifiable truth", "what is perceived to be fact"; others stating that truth is undefinable and does not exist at all. Have students write at least five definitions of the word truth from five different sources.

Then make students aware of the vague nature of truth. Were their definitions wrong? Most likely not, but how could there exist twenty different definitions of the word truth, especially when the word truth often connotes one, absolute answer. Even though this philosophy might be too challenging for some students, by looking intensely and specifically at one word, students will be forced, unknowingly into close reading. Think of the possible discussion that could surround a character, a section of text, a novel, or a genre. If the resources

are available show them a section of the library containing literary analysis; or, have them look up through Google, "literary analysis Hamlet" and record the number of hits they receive. This will not only encourage students to participate, but also show them the validity of their opinions. If one subject composes thousands of pages by thousands of authors with thousands of opinions, can one opinion be absolutely correct? In the analysis of textual material, students should be made aware that, *as long as the student's response can be supported*, others might disagree, but they cannot say that the student is wrong.

As the students read or continue to read *In Cold Blood* and *The Things They Carried*, ask them to begin thinking about the idea of "truth" in these novels. Hopefully, you have disseminated the information presented earlier -- introducing and defining New Journalism, the theme of the unit, Truth, and Capote's and O'Brien's implicit recognition of their knowing contribution to the celebration of truth in their writing. Given that students are mischievously sensitive to the idea of truth and possibly quite gifted at "bending it", use this prior experience advantageously.

Lesson Five

After deconstructing the word "truth" students might be quite confused. Therefore, this practical example can be quite fun. Write a sentence on a sheet of paper, fold it, put it in an envelope, and hand it to a student in the class. State that you are about to give this student a special, top-secret message, and it is the class's responsibility to accurately and truthfully remember this information and recite it. Have that student read the piece of paper silently, fold it, put it back in the envelope, and hand it back to you. Then have the student whisper the sentence in the student's ear closest to her. Continually remind the students that the sentence is the truth and it cannot be altered, it is their duty to present the truth. Depending on your histrionics, you might say that the truth in this statement, if presented incorrectly, could cost them their life or someone else's life. Each student must listen and repeat the sentence in a whisper, from the student on their left to the student on the right (or in a way appropriate to your classroom). This process repeats until there are no longer any students to convey the message. Then have each student write down the sentence as they remember it. The last student takes his/her sheet of paper and returns it to the teacher. Then ask for a volunteer from the class to come to the center of the room and read both statements, the sentence in the first envelope, and the sentence in the final envelope. Are the statements the same, and if they are not, why when each student was told to protect the truth? Secondly, have the students read their own version of the sentence and, as a class, investigate where the truth began to break down.

This assignment closely resembles the process of journalism employed by Capote and O'Brien over a four to ten-year period. The information presented has been filtered, in a way, by numerous encounters over long periods of time. Capote, in writing *In Cold Blood*, interviewed over 100 people associated with the murder case from pedestrians, to mail clerks, to Dick and Perry. This does not take into account the hours of secondary material he filtered, such as news reports, editorials, hearsay, etc. Furthermore, he does not begin to interview these individuals until at least one month after the crime, and continues to do so almost six years after the crime is committed. If a simple sentence is garbled in a matter of minutes imagine how an event can become garbled in six years. Visually represent Capote's influx of sources through a brainstorming chart. Write Capote in the middle of the blackboard, possibly within the outline of a head or brain, and invite students to the board to begin listing all of Capote's sources of information. Hopefully, the board will fill with at least 20 different names and sources. As a continuation, ask the students, "Does this bring Capote closer to

the truth or further away?" Lastly, as a caveat, ask the students to think outside the box, what about Capote's editor, his readers, his critics, and his desire to be successful.

Lesson Six

Whereas Capote reports on a crime he did not witness, O'Brien writes on a war in which he fought. However, the lack of immediacy is still present, his book was published over twenty years after he last stepped foot in Vietnam. With this mind, have the students write a narrative of at least one page describing the experience of the secret message (you might want to call it the Pony Express or Gossip). Students are required to include the necessary factual information, who, what, where, why, and how. However, the objective is for students to use their tone, style, and voice (which will happen inherently if not cognitively) to most accurately retell the events of the secret message. You may inform them, or choose not to, that at the culmination of the unit they will again describe the secret message experience.

By describing an event they experienced in their own voice, the students internalize O'Brien's process. At the end of the unit, have the students write another narrative describing the secret message experience with the same objective, to most accurately present the truth. Have the students compare their earlier work with the later, and decide which narrative they would like to submit to the class-wide New Journalism writing competition. The suggested categories are, Most Truthful, Most facts, Most Interesting, and the Pulitzer Prize, for best narrative overall. Each student will then read their submission, and prizes should be awarded by class vote.

In Cold Blood: Characterization -- The People, the Characters, the Author

The narrowing of fact and fiction is the cornerstone of New Journalism. Approaching this premise in a philosophical discussion is daunting for even the most accomplished teacher, however, including direct citation of *In Cold Blood* and *The Things They Carried* in the discussion, precipitates fortuitous results. Having already deconstructed the word "truth", assign the definition, "a verifiable fact", for the next activity. Ask students to define truth from Capote's or O'Brien's point-of-view, using *In Cold Blood* and *The Things They Carried* to reinforce their suppositions. Furthermore, as these authors narrow the gap between fact and fiction, how do they reinterpret truth? Below is a practical approach to this thesis.

Lesson Five

Thus far, the logic above is sound, yet difficult to convey, especially to high school students. To make this analysis fruitful have students construct a character chart for *In Cold Blood*. Put the following four characters -- Dick Hickock, Perry Smith, Alvin Dewey, and Truman Capote -- vertically, in the left-hand margin of the page. Title the first vertical column "Perceived truth", Title the second vertical column "Evidence", and title the third vertical column "Characterization". What follows is an analysis and suggested breakdown of the characters of

Dick Hickock, Perry Smith, Alvin Dewey and Truman Capote. As a classroom lesson, you could present the chart, give each group or team a particular character, and have them present that information to the class. Or you could go through each character one-by-one, stopping at each column and allowing students time to research, process, and write their answers. Or, do the first set of analysis together then have the students split into three groups to illuminate the remaining highlighted characters.

Richard Eugene Hickock

The first vertical column is Perceived truth. Richard Eugene Hickock, Dick, is absolutely certain that there will be a large sum of money in Mr. Clutter's house, approximately \$10,000 contained in a safe. He has gathered this information from a fellow inmate in the State penitentiary. Dick is so certain that the money is in the Clutter household that he drives across state lines against probation, steals his mother's car, writes bad checks (with the hope of paying them back with the Clutter money), forcibly enters the Clutter home, and ties up the four person family, only to discover the safe is non-existent. Dick Hickock so firmly believes what his inmate friend has told him is true that he bases an intricate crime and, ultimately, his life upon this information. He is a victim of perceived truth. Represent this knowledge under Dick's heading making sure to use concrete examples from the novel.

When Perry Edward Smith, recounts the events at the Clutter home under interrogation he lends further insight into the psyches of Dick and himself. Dick's stubbornness is codified. It is almost impossible to closely read Dick's character without including Perry. Thus, use Perry's analysis here to learn about both Dick and Perry.

Unlike Dick, Perry is much less resolved to accept the truth from others if it contradicts his perceptions. In other words, he was unable to let go of his perceptions before accepting another's. Perry is more sensitive to the reality of others, considers it, and bases his future actions and reactions upon it. Being friends with Dick then is almost too easy, for Dick's predictability is frustratingly obvious. However, Perry lacks a stable home, a family, and friends, therefore he allows headstrong Dick to control his actions, despite his skepticism. Represent this knowledge under Perry's heading, again using the novel for support.

Perry's intuitive knowledge and Dick's stubbornness are apparent in Perry's confession. When Dick questions Mr. Clutter where his safe is Capote writes Perry's testimony, "Mr. Clutter says, 'What safe?' He says he don't have a safe. I knew right then it was true. He had that kind of face. You just knew that whatever he told you was pretty much the truth." (Capote, 237) At this point, Dick will not believe the man as Perry does. Dick's character prevents him from seeing the nuances of humanity, or possibly he decides to ignore them. "But Dick shouted at him, 'Don't lie to me, you sonofabitch! I know goddam well you got a safe!" (Capote, 237) As Dick continues to question Mr. Clutter, three times, Perry, assure in his first impression, disconnects the phones in the house, and begins to search for items that would salvage the misconceived heist. Perry is a victim to Dick's sense of truth. It is only when Dick attempts to "verify" the truth that Dick is able to overcome his preconceptions. Ultimately, Dick and Perry are hung because of Dick's unwarranted trust. Add this information to what already exists under Dick and Perry's headings.

Dick is a character who is confident in his perceptions, rarely questioning whether what he is doing is right or wrong - honest or dishonest. Have students look for more examples, which prove this as one of Dick's character traits. What other traits do they notice as they further deconstruct Dick's character? Have the students represent their findings and conclusions in the Dick's second vertical column, Characterization.

Perry Edward Smith

Perry Smith is gifted in reading the perceptions of others - he is intuitive. As stated earlier he feels satisfied, and correctly so, that Mr. Clutter is telling the truth and sees Dick's insistence on further harassing Mr. Clutter as a waste of time. As he continues to describe the murders during Dewey's interrogation, he appears much more creditable, and the reader believes him when he states his fear that Dick will sexually abuse Nancy. His powerful intuition is once again correct as he returns upstairs to protect Nancy, Dick is in her room, yet Perry ends this encounter before any real perversion occurs. Because Perry lacks courage in himself and this often trumps his intuition, it leaves him victim to Dick's weakness, foolishness. Perry is intelligent, thoughtful, and caring. He is also sensitive, honest, but at times denies his own strong sense of intuition. Include this information under Perry's heading.

Unlike Dick, however, Perry questions himself and his actions and often regrets not trusting his unusually strong intuition. When giving his statement Perry closes by saying, "Right there, in those few seconds before we ran out to the car and drove away, that's when I decided I'd better shoot Dick. He'd said over and over, he'd drummed it into me: No witnesses. And I thought, He's a witness. I don't know what stopped me. God knows I should've done it. Shot him dead. Got in the car and kept on going till I lost myself in Mexico." (Capote, 245) Had Perry killed Dick would he have successfully escaped, for its only Dick's continuous check forgery on his mother's account that locates them. At another point in his confession, Perry suggests a disconnection from his reality. It is obvious that Perry is capable of murder, he just murdered a family of four, yet he refrains from killing Dick, "I don't know what stopped me."

In the same fashion, Perry is unable to explain why he slits Mr. Clutter's throat. The following quote is the best example in terms of investigating Perry, and Perry and Dick's relationship. Perry says "After, see, after we'd taped them, Dick and I went off in a corner. To talk it over. Remember, now, there were hard feelings between us. Just then it made my stomach turn to think I'd ever admired him, lapped up all that brag. I said,

'Well, Dick. Any qualms?' I said, 'All right, Dick. Here goes.' But I didn't mean it. I meant to call his bluff, make him argue me out of it, make him admit he was a phony and a coward. See it was something between me and Dick. I knelt down beside Mr. Clutter, and the pain of kneeling...But I didn't realize what I'd done till I heard the sound. Like somebody drowning." (Capote, 244).

This statement explains his resentment against Dick, his ban from the state of Kansas insinuating his lack of a home or a sense of belonging, and his anger at himself for trusting Dick instead of himself. With these things in mind he is almost unable to control his rage. Thus, another character trait of Perry's is blind rage. This text and the ones prior demonstrate Perry's perceived truth and his characterization and should be represented in the appropriate columns. However, the novel is filled with justification for these generalizations; use the novel and evidence in a fashion best suited for the classroom.

Alvin Dewey

Alvin Dewey, the lead prosecutor, is constantly questioning what he perceives to be true. As a way of showing this, Capote includes a small tale of his race to become Finney County Sheriff. Capote writes, "when practically every vote had been counted and it was plain as plain he'd won, he said- I could have strangled him -- said over and over, 'Well, we won't know till the last return.'" (Capote, 213) In part, making the truth as verifiable

as possible is his job. He must so convince eleven jurors that Perry and Dick are guilty of murder that he must make certain every known detail leads in that direction. With this in mind, he hopes to coerce the murderer, Dick and Perry, into confessing their crime. As a way of ensuring their confession Dewey sets up a code of silence, as Dick and Perry are arrested for parole violations there is to be not one hint that they are also prime suspects in the Clutter murder. He is cautious and sneaky, trapping the murderer in delusion and using that to expose the truth.

These facts help in characterizing Dewey's perception of truth. He lulls Perry and Dick into a trap using perception to his advantage. If, while being integrated, Dewey surprises the parole violators with the Clutter murders they will be caught off guard and reveal telling evidence which will make clear whether they are the killers or not. Regardless of what he believes to be true, he requires thoroughly convincing evidence to fully accept his premonitions. Thus, Dewey could be characterized as cautious, scientific in his reasoning, and skeptical, yet daring and sneaky. Also, by the nature of his profession, his opinions are only justified when the general public shares them with him. He has a constant awareness of his peers. He must not only convince himself of the truth, but also eleven jurors. Use these factual examples and analysis to fill in Alvin Dewey's section of the character chart.

Truman Capote

Truman Capote is the most intricate character in terms of perceived truth. He is not only the author of *In Cold Blood* but also the narrator. Therefore it is important to consider his audience and his intentions. Truman Capote is already a well-established, wealthy author (not a journalist), most famous for his fantastic novel *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. He enjoys his fame and his eccentricity and hopes, as we stated earlier, to make a significant contribution to New Journalism. It is safe to characterize him as confident, intelligent, and aware of the impact of his literature. He is also guilty of pride, yet his pride is supported with success such as *Breakfast at Tiffany's*. His presence was already discussed when dissecting Perry's reading of his father's parole letter. But further examples are productive.

The first evidence of Capote's presence is in his subject matter. He has chosen to write on the Clutter murders with no knowledge of the town of Holcomb, Kansas. He has neither murdered anyone, nor studied law formally. He has also never been a journalist, establishing himself as a writer of fiction however realistic it might seem. He chooses to follow the crime in a chronological fashion. He begins with a description of setting, introduces supplementary characters and approaches the conflict slowly and deliberately, stretching out the first of the novel's climaxes, Perry and Dick's murder of the family. He refrains from describing the murders from his point of view and uses the words and reactions of the town of Holcomb to progress the plot.

The first full description of the murders comes from the mouths of the defendants themselves. In this way, Capote has attempted to keep the crime as objective as possible. But he has chosen to leave the confessions until the 3rd quarter of the book, imbuing the crime and the criminals with personalities and emotions. Subjectivity, and therefore the narrowing of fact and fiction, should also be made known to the students at this time. Authors choose what to include, in what order, and in what format. By making certain choices and using certain words, Capote has made a murder likable, distorting perceptions of morality and persuading the reader to agree with his bias. As readers we find it hard when Perry confesses not to feel at least a tinge of sympathy. Capote's motivation is to soften the killings, to make them seem acts carried out in pain rather than preconception, further persuading readers to hope for Perry's redemption. Objectively Perry is a savage, guilty of four counts of first degree murder, but through Capote's subjectivity he is a hurt child questing for his place and comfort in a society which has abandoned him. But the key to such generalizations is Capote's

method.

Capote's mastery of the novel, powerfully presents the truth, or veils it. Rather than focusing on the brutal murder, Capote paints a portrait of Perry, shifting the focus off the murders and onto a man consumed by pitfall. After Perry finishes his testimony with his eerie premonition that Dick would be his downfall, Capote uses Alvin Dewey to express his message, "Sorrow and profound fatigue are at the heart of Dewey's silence...but the confessions, though they answered questions of how and why, failed to satisfy his sense of meaningful design. The crime was a psychological accident.... Nonetheless, he found it possible to look at the man beside him without anger -- with, rather, a measure of sympathy" (245-6) Whereas Alvin Dewey must do his job, that of seeing these men to their execution, for murder is a crime punishable by death, Capote must also do his. In a twisted way Capote neither wins nor loses in this dilemma. He aids Perry and Dick in an attempt to spend more time with them, securing them an expensive and strong defense team, and then, when his novel needs a conclusion he retracts his aid. Capote, possibly more than any other character reveals his core, what drives him and what he lives on. Yet this core is enigmatic. Allow students to develop their own interpretations of Capote, what he perceives to be true, who he is (characterization), and the evidence, both biographically and textually, as support.

In this vein, the novel *In Cold Blood* was recently developed into an award-winning movie, which is tellingly named *Capote*. The premise for the film is the novel *In Cold Blood* and its nonfiction plot - the killings of Mr. and Mrs. Clutter, Nancy Clutter, Kenyon Clutter, and later the executions of Perry Smith and Dick Hickock. However, the title of the film suggests it is more about the author. It is important to ask students why a film about the Clutter murders in Kansas epitomized in a book called, *In Cold Blood*, would be titled *Capote*? Through the eyes of these artists, Capote seems to be the unifying figure and main character, and thus a piece of journalism has turned more into a look at the author, his opinions, and actions rather than an objective presentation of facts. If a teacher wishes to, a reading of the novel could invite the following thesis question-- "What is Truman Capote's effect on the outcome of the Clutter murder trial?"

With the analysis of Dick Hickock, Perry Smith, Alvin Dewey, and Truman Capote complete, the students might have one page with four characters and three vertical columns, Perceived Truth, Characterization, and Evidence. Or they might develop these charts into a four-page document, with a character on the top of each page, followed by three completed categories -- Perceived Truth, Evidence, and Characterization. The permutations of this assignment and what to do with the results are vast. One possibility is to have the students pick a character, use the information they have gathered and write a five paragraph character analysis. A second alternative is to have the students write resumes and cover letters for the characters with invented occupations and companies to submit them too. A third possibility is to have the students write on a piece of paper who they would ask if they wanted the truth. Collect the votes and award one of the characters the honesty award. Lastly, you could have the students use their character charts to write an thesis paper answer the question, "How important is the idea of truth to the novel, *In Cold Blood*?"

The Things They Carried, Tim O'Brien -- Three Versions of the Same Story

Capote's *In Cold Blood* is one of the cornerstones of New Journalism, and is classified contemporarily as narrative non-fiction or true crime. Further narrowing the gap between fact and fiction is Tim O'Brien's *The Things They Carried*, a novel classified as fiction. Reread the foreword containing John Ransom's Diary to recall that this is a novel canonized for its "truthfulness" and a "statement of actual things by one who experienced them to the fullest." (Ransom's Andersonville Diary). The coupling of these two novels, one non-fiction and one fiction, both of which are aware of their bias as a tool of realism rather than subjectivity, create a possible

question for students at the end of this unit could be -- Which novel, in your opinion, is a more accurate portrayal of the "truth"?

Lesson Six

The novel *The Things They Carried* is separated into twenty-two chapters, each capable of standing alone. For this lesson focus is directed on the chapter titled *Ambush*. Written in the first person, O'Brien expresses conflicted feelings in telling his daughter the truth or preserving her innocence after she declares, "You keep writing these war stories," she said, "so I guess you must've killed somebody." (O'Brien, 131). At this point, stop the class to do a brainstorming activity on difficult questions to ask parents: Does the tooth fairy exist? Did you do your homework? When was the first time you didn't obey your parents? Are you a racist? Did you ever commit a crime? Did you ever do drugs? Do I look good in this outfit? How was work? Do you love mommy/daddy? Do I have anything to worry about, like bugs in my bed? Is it safe to live here? Do we have enough money for food? These questions are only suggestions and it is strongly recommend to use examples sparingly and only to facilitate the students creativity. Have the students pick one of the brainstorming questions, and script a realistic discussion between a nine year old and a parent, or you can extend this further and have them write as if they are answering their nine year old child.

Through this activity the students have addressed O'Brien's dilemma at the onset of *Ambush*. He then proceeds to answer his daughter's question in three different ways. First, he tells his daughter "of course not." Next, he writes in two sentences, "He was a short, slender young man of about twenty. I was afraid of him -- afraid of something -- and as he passed me on the trail I threw a grenade that exploded at his feet and killed him." (O'Brien, 131). The third retelling is three pages in length.

Lesson Seven

After mapping the three retellings of the story in terms of length, have the students number a blank sheet of paper one, two and three. The students' task is to explain when each of the three scenarios would be retold. The first one is straightforward and already done; he expresses this story to his daughter. Although the reader is aware that this story is false, from the nine-year olds perspective, O'Brien is telling the truth. Therefore, she perceives an image of her father, which is false under the father's pretense. Truth develops another dimension that truth can be hid or rewritten and that it is appropriate and debatably necessary to do so. This might seem odd to students but these type of lies occur frequently and often without our knowledge. Ask them if they can think of any truths that are hidden, from "white lies" -- "I forgot my homework", to significant ambiguity, "Did OJ Simpson murder Nicole Simpson?" Regardless, O'Brien makes clear that lying is sometimes the more appropriate thing to do. Therefore, have the students write examples of when they believe lying is necessary, or in other words, when should humanity be protected from the truth.

The second number on the line corresponds to second anecdotal two-sentence story: "He was a short, slender young man of about twenty. I was afraid of him -- afraid of something -- and as he passed me on the trail I threw a grenade that exploded at his feet and killed him." (O'Brien, 131). Where would this clipped two-

sentence response be utilized? This sort of response would probably come from the guilt-ridden lips of a witness or a soldier describing his trauma to a concerned yet impartial friend. This type of writing is characteristic of a newspaper, a short account including factual details, such as, the man's age, height, and weight; what, where and why the weapon was used; and what happened as a result. This form of truth is objective and contains very little insight into the human behind this killing; the event appears removed like a picture when in fact it was a living experience. If objectivity is the goal then this piece is accurate but it leaves us with no empathy for the narrator who appears like a robot rather than a human being. This analytic response would appear in the area labeled number two.

The third number on the line corresponds to the third narrative description of the event. This retelling most closely resembles the author's perception of the event from his point of view. He includes his emotions, how he felt, whom he talked to, and the process of his decision-making. This type of response would appear in a novel, in a conversation on a park bench amongst friends, or in a documentary on the Vietnam War. Because he includes details as to how that has affected his psyche the piece becomes noticeably subjective bringing it closer to narrative non-fiction than hard news. At this point, the students should have three numbers on their page corresponding to the three anecdotes and where such writing would appear. Next have the students include further illuminating details about three anecdotes, have the students comment on the anecdotes at length, suggested audience, and finally, a ranking, 1-10 as to what most closely resembles the truth. Remain open-minded as the ranking of truth is completely subjective and can be interpreted in many ways. Several students might insinuate that the interaction between the father and daughter is the most truthful event in the chapter. Have them express this opinion with the class.

Lesson Eight

Consistent throughout this story is O'Brien's struggle in presenting and accepting the truth. Place this statement on an overhead and present it to the class. Then have a massive brainstorming activity on the word "truth," helping students to recall everything the class has addressed over the past two or three weeks, beginning with lesson one, the exploration of fact and fiction through published examples, and culminating with lesson Seven. This will take time and require lots of room; for this activity get a paper roll and stretch it around the front, or the entire room. Then give each student a marker and have him/her begin writing ideas they associate with the word "truth," be it examples, definitions, quotes, and philosophies. Also have them recall characters, authors, events, and lessons from the entire unit. Then have the students sit down and look at their writing, and the massive quantity of their ideas they have about truth including textual support. Assess the students on exercises one through eight, not only, through their writing but also through their participation. Throughout the year return to this question of truth in literature. Remind students that the New Journalist's of the 1950's like Truman Capote and non-narrative fiction writers of today such as O'Brien attempt to most accurately present the truth, even though it means narrowing the gap between fiction and fact.

Lesson Nine

As a culminating project have the student's write an expose of "New Journalism", with specific emphasis on solving the question of how to put themselves into their news story. This will not only show the students understand the distinct and subtle differences between fact and fiction, but also will develop an awareness of the effect of their contribution on their community and culture. As a result, students will begin to see creativity and the presentation of facts as directives, with the hope that they will question their perceptions and their basis for what they believe to be the "truth".

Afterword

Truth is a living, breathing thing that we all play with on a daily basis. The search for truth, the tossing back and forth between Truth and Perception, the conversations we have with Truth, the fights and conflicts and lies we tell Truth are constant, and often, as soon as we feel we have found Truth in this external game of hide and seek we lose it. This is the game of New Journalists. And their novels make aware first and foremost, that this is history's game - Truth is a face without a name.

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