



Lesson Plan: Reporting on War

OVERVIEW

In this lesson, students will compare and contrast two news stories about an incident in which an improvised explosive device (I.E.D.) killed Danish soldiers in Afghanistan. They will then use a video clip from a documentary as an information source for writing news stories about a similar event. Finally, students will describe the impact that reports from different news sources can have on how events in Afghanistan are reported in the media.

For news writing tips and background information on Denmark's role in the war in Afghanistan, please see the [Resources](#) section of this lesson.

The video clip used in this lesson is from the film **Armadillo**, a documentary that shows the points of view of members of a platoon of Danish soldiers as they serve a six-month tour in Afghanistan in 2009.

Please note that much of the film is in Danish with English subtitles. Also, the filmmakers' version of the film contains graphic images of war, profanity and explicit sexual content. If you would like to use the entire film in the classroom, consider recording the broadcast version or borrowing it from the POV lending library – FOR FREE! Note: POV documentaries can be recorded off-the-air and used for educational purposes for up to one year from their initial broadcast. Get started by joining our [Community Network](#).

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students will:

- Explain the value and limitations of different types of news sources.
- Compare and contrast two news stories that report on the same event from the war in Afghanistan.
- Write a news story about a similar event, pulling information from a documentary.
- Describe the impact that reports from different news sources can have on how events in Afghanistan are reported in the media.

GRADE LEVELS

9-12

SUBJECT AREAS

Journalism, Current Events, Language Arts, World History, International Studies, Geography, Social Studies

MATERIALS

- Internet access and equipment to show the class online video
- Handout: [News Story Analysis](#) (PDF file)
- Handout: [News Writing Exercise](#) (PDF file)

ESTIMATED TIME NEEDED

One 50-minute class period, plus time outside of class, if needed

FILM CLIPS

Clip: “Platoon Commander Rasmus Is Hit by a Roadside Bomb” (length 6:19)

The clip begins with a night vision shot of an explosion, followed by a scene of soldiers playing combat video games. Commander Rasmus describes the situation after the explosion by saying, “So far we know that a civilian car approached the gas station . . .” The clip ends with the words “I’m sick of hugging sweaty guys by now.” (Note: This clip includes an aerial shot of a bomb dropping on several men.)

ACTIVITY

(Note: This lesson assumes that students have previous experience writing news stories.)

1. Ask the class to rank the following in terms of how reliable each would be as a source of information for a journalist reporting on an event from the war in Afghanistan:

- Military press release
- Direct observation
- Interviews with participants
- Internet stories written by other journalists

Have students explain their thinking, discussing the value and limitations of each source.

2. Give each student a copy of the News Story Analysis handout. Instruct student pairs to choose two of the following news stories about the same event and complete the handout:

The Copenhagen Post: “Danish Soldiers Killed in Afghanistan”

<http://www.cphpost.dk/news/international/89-international/45992-danish-soldiers-killed-in-afghanistan.html>

BBC: “Danish Troops Die in Afghanistan”

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/8105554.stm>

Reuters: “Three Danish Soldiers Killed in Afghanistan”

<http://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFLH86484620090617>

The Daily Star: “3 Danish Soldiers Killed”

<http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=93084>

Top News: “Three Danish Soldiers Killed in Afghanistan, Copenhagen Says”

<http://www.topnews.in/three-danish-soldiers-killed-afghanistan-copenhagen-says-2179188>

3. Next, distribute the News Writing Exercise handout and tell students they are going to watch a video clip from a documentary that shows a soldier in Afghanistan being wounded by a roadside bomb. Students should record observations, quotes and other information on their handouts as they watch the video. Then they should follow the steps on the handout to write news stories about the event and reflect on how different news sources can affect how events in Afghanistan are reported.

EXTENSIONS AND ADAPTATIONS

1. Explore other POV and PBS resources that portray the experiences of soldiers and war journalists. Most resources provide video, background information and educator materials online.

- *Obama's War* (<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/obamaswar/>) provides on-the-ground reporting from 2009 on the war in Afghanistan.
- *Regarding War* (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/regardingwar/>) includes an extensive collection of war stories submitted by site visitors, video exploring the impact of war and a wealth of links to related resources.
- *Soldiers of Conscience* (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/soldiersofconscience/>) explores the moral dilemmas of killing.
- *War Feels Like War* (<http://www.pbs.org/pov/warfeelslikewar/>) tells the story of journalists who risked their lives to provide first-hand reports on the war in Iraq.

2. Investigate what motivates some soldiers to fight. In the film **Armadillo**, the reasons cited by soldiers include to bond with others in their platoon, to test themselves and to experience the challenge of combat. Have the class compare these reasons to those found in the 2003 study, "Why They Fight: Combat Motivation in the Iraq War" (<http://www.strategicstudiesinstitute.army.mil/pubs/display.cfm?pubID=179>), which includes an overview of previous research on this topic. Students may then use the perspectives of soldiers from the film and study as sources of inspiration for developing stories, song lyrics, art or other creative projects.

3. Look more closely at the challenges of covering conflicts far from home. Have students read the 2004 POV "Interview: Covering the War From All the Angles" (http://www.pbs.org/pov/warfeelslikewar/special_covering.php) and discuss the financial and logistical challenges the *Los Angeles Times* and other U.S. news organizations face when covering the war in Iraq. How do such challenges affect what stories are told about a particular war? How can what is reported about a war in turn impact public opinion, foreign policy and elections? Then, create small student groups. Assign each group a budget and a historical conflict its members have studied and have the group act as the foreign desk editor for a news organization and develop a plan for reporting on the group's assigned conflict as effectively as possible. Once the groups have developed their plans, ask them to present those plans to the class for peer feedback.

4. Track the history of war journalism. Have the class listen to the 2003 NPR report “[History of War Journalism](http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1211831)” (<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1211831>), which describes the ever increasing speed with which news reports from the frontline are brought to the public, from the Mexican War to the 1991 Gulf War. Then, have students research and produce a follow-up report that continues the story, describing developments from the 1991 Gulf War to the present.
5. Study the differences in reporting for various media. Ask students to write alternative versions of their news stories from this lesson so that they have reports (including descriptions of the visuals they would use, if applicable) for distribution on television, radio, in print and online. (See the [Resources](#) section of this lesson for news writing tips for different media.) Then, have students provide written analyses that compare and contrast the versions of their stories, discuss the unique needs of each medium and describe how these needs could affect how a story is reported.

RESOURCES

Background Information on Denmark and the War in Afghanistan

Denmark.dk. “Denmark at the Front Line in Afghanistan.”

<http://www.denmark.dk/en/menu/Business-Lounge/Focus-Denmark/Articles/DenmarkAtTheFrontLineInAfghanistan.htm>

This article from the official website of Denmark provides statistics on the country’s financial and troop investments in the war in Afghanistan and makes the case that the effort is building hope and a better future for the Afghan people.

FRONTLINE. “Chronology: The Afghan War.”

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/obamaswar/etc/cron.html>

This multimedia timeline outlines key milestones of the war in Afghanistan from 2001 to 2009.

PBS NewsHour. “Afghanistan: 10 Stories in 10 Years.”

<http://www.pbs.org/newshour/rundown/2011/06/afghanistan-stories.html>

This selection of stories from 2001 to 2011 provides an overview of the war in Afghanistan and how it has evolved. A photo essay is also included.

POV. “Slideshow: Armadillo, Afghanistan.”

http://www.pbs.org/pov/armadillo/photo_gallery_armadillo.php

Some of the soldiers featured in the film appear in this series of stylized photos and are shown serving at a combat operations base in southern Afghanistan.

POV. “Background Information.”

<http://www.pbs.org/pov/armadillo/>

POV provides a succinct summary of Denmark’s role in the war in Afghanistan.

News Writing

Cyberjournalist.net. “A Dozen Online Writing Tips.”

<http://www.cyberjournalist.net/news/000118.php>

This article summarizes some basic tips for writing news that will be read online.

Ball State University Writing Center. “‘Hot 100’ News Writing Tips.”

<http://jdwritingctr.iweb.bsu.edu/workshop/hottips.html>

This article provides 100 ways to produce stronger news writing.

MediaCollege.com “How to Write a News Story.”

<http://www.mediacollege.com/journalism/news/write-stories.html>

This concise overview of writing news stories is a helpful reference for students as they complete the writing assignment for this lesson.

Mervin Block. “Television Newswriting Workshop.”

<http://www.mervinblock.com/?q=node/29>

This set of tips pertains to news that people listen to and view rather than read.

Then Again. . . “Using Historical Sources.”

<http://www.thenagain.info/classes/basics/usingsources.html>

This article describes primary and secondary sources and suggests techniques for evaluating them.

STANDARDS

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science and Technical Subjects

http://www.corestandards.org/assets/CCSSI_ELA%20Standards.pdf

RH.9-10.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

RH.11-12.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary that makes clear the relationships among the key details and ideas.

RH.9-10.9 Compare and contrast treatments of the same topic in several primary and secondary sources.

RH.11-12.9 Integrate information from diverse sources, both primary and secondary, into a coherent understanding of an idea or event, noting discrepancies among sources.

SL, 9-10, 11-12.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups and teacher-led) with diverse partners on [grade-appropriate] topics, text and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

SL, 9-10, 11-12.5 Make strategic use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understanding of findings, reasoning and evidence and to add interest.

W.9-10, 11-12.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences.

W.9-10, 11-12.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience.

Content Knowledge: (<http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks/>) a compendium of content standards and benchmarks for K-12 curriculum by McRel (Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning).

Geography, Standard 13: Understands the forces of cooperation and conflict that shape the divisions of Earth's surface.

Historical Understanding, Standard 2: Understands the historical perspective.

Language Arts, Standard 1: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process.

Language Arts, Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media.

Language Arts, Standard 10: Understands the characteristics and components of the media.

World History, Standard 44: Understands the search for community, stability and peace in an interdependent world.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cari Ladd, M.Ed., is an educational writer with a background in secondary education and media development. Previously, she served as PBS Interactive's director of education, overseeing the development of curricular resources tied to PBS programs, the PBS TeacherSource website (now PBS Teachers) and online teacher professional development services. She has also taught in Maryland and northern Virginia.