

Perspective shift

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Vak: Engels

Doelgroep: bovenbouw

Type: lessenreeks

Duur: 1 à 2 lessen

Thema: Creatieve vormen van taal, Literatuur, leesvaardigheid, persoonsvorming, cultuur

Samenvatting:

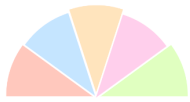
In deze lessenserie kijken leerlingen naar beelden, lezen ze een kort verhaal en denken ze na over bepaalde maatschappelijke fenomenen. Ze ervaren hoe perspectief wisselen leidt tot de ontdekking van hoe anders iets (of iemand) geïnterpreteerd kan, en dus tot meerdere betekenissen. Van perspectief kunnen wisselen is een belangrijk aspect van burgerschap, omdat men moet kunnen nadenken over hoe men denkt, en via deze lessenserie kun je die competitie trainen.

Leerdoelen:

- Leerlingen leren om vanuit meerdere perspectieven te kijken, lezen en denken
- Leerling leren om verschillende interpretaties te ontwikkelen
- Leerlingen ontdekken hoe ze zelf over sociale ontwerpen denken, en hoe andere dat ook doen

Inhoud:

- Docentenhandleiding en lesactiviteit
- Drie beelden van de piramides (bijlage)
- Een kortverhaal van Fredric Brown (bijlage)



Perspective shift: what do you see when you look at it from another perspective?

1. The pyramids: The perspective you take (see images in attachment)

*This is to activate the idea of perspective shifting. Simple procedure: first **observe** carefully, collect information (to feed your thinking): what do you see on each picture? Pick out as many elements as you can; then **Interpret** (=give meanings); then **Evaluate** (= discuss: what do you think, and why?).*

Once you reach picture 2, do not forget to refer to the preceding picture (pic. 2 compared to pic. 1, pic. 3 compared to pic. 2 and pic. 1)

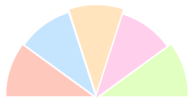
The pyramids: each picture presents the same objects (the Egyptian pyramids) but from a different perspective. I give below a few indications of what you can pick out in the images, and how you can interpret the pyramids differently in each case: this is not exhaustive, and doubtless some learners will think of ideas not listed here.

Slide 1: pyramids dominate the space (top of the picture), they are massive (*compare with people on donkeys*), seem very close to one another; note the contrast blue sky/stone (*solid, ancient*) and their standing there in the desert (*eternal*); pyramids occupy most of the space (they seem isolated, away from everything); size of people is tiny (*suggests we are nothing, we pass and they remain*); note the large part in the foreground occupied by the desert (=reinforces the idea of the pyramids standing on their own in the middle of nowhere)

Slide 2: notice pizza hut, truck (*both signs of human activity*), advertising (*all very humans, of the now*), tourist buses, parking lot (*it's a place people visit and work at*); notice distance between pyramids, their size is much less impressive; pizza hut: prosaic, demeans the magnificence of the pyramids (*would it have been different if it had been a luxury restaurant?*);

Slide 3: size is hard to estimate: are they tiny, is the city gigantic, what is the distance between them? Close to the city: not eternal, almost an added-on to the city, like a suburb; contrast messiness of city (streets etc.) and geometry: pyramids seem almost odd: are they still majestic, ancient, eternal? Refer to pic.2: the pyramids are a part of the city, they are almost demeaned by their proximity to the city.

For all of those images, it's important to keep asking the question: how does the representation of the pyramids affect their interpretation? (how we understand what they are, what they mean).



2. Short-story (see attachment):

'Sentry' possible themes:

You can take that text in a number of directions: colonisation, invasion of countries, dominating local population through violence; but **also** the theme of war and soldiering, with topics like following orders, patriotism, sacrifice. You can relate it to what is happening in Ukraine (they tried to negotiate with Russia who didn't want to, and invaded them without discussion etc.) or keep real events at bay.

You can also **limit it to the change of perspective** caused by the last words of the text, and how shifting our perspective can help us think about it in a new way. You can then discuss the difference between how we think we are, and what others think we are (in the same town, country, or across Europe and further): how we see ourselves (*'We in the Netherlands we're like that...'*) and how others see us (*'The Dutch, they're really like this...'*, *'The french like to do this or that...'* etc., as if individual differences do not exist in a national context). Ultimately, the last words force us to reconsider the text from the opposite perspective (the narrator is the alien, the alien he shoots is a human), and therefore enable us to ask questions of what we, humans, did, how we see ourselves, how we acted in the past towards other humans (Europeans to South-America, for example).

For this text, it is necessary to ensure that:

1. Learners know what the very **last** word means (*'scales'* in the sense of snake/fish)
2. Proper context: after WW2 (see flyboys etc), readers would have known what some words meant (flyboys), and it would have resonated with their own memories of the war.

What follows are indications of themes and topics you can touch upon; how much you discuss the vocabulary and narrative approach is dependent on the time you have, what you want to aim for, and of course the level of your learners

A]. **Observe, collect information: how the story is shaped**

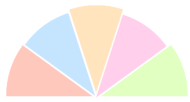
Vocabulary: strangeness, otherness: isolates him from what he knows. Everything is weird, different, unsettling.

Perspective: narrator's voice: angry, resentful, fearful, uncomprehending: how can this happen, and why? Notice how the Other is unknown: their motives are obscure, can't relate to them/don't understand their possible reasons for being the way they are.

Structure: setting the scene, with insistence on strangeness, being far way from home (not 'house', not 'my country' etc); insistence on basic, primary feelings/sensations we can all relate to (cold, hungry, wet, muddy).

Continuity of that experience with our own, both personal (cold, hungry, displaced) and collective (war hasn't changed; differences between simple soldier/officers)

Then description of what he's doing there, with rising anger/frustration: left alone there to defend something that's not even his (American soldiers in Irak etc): *'Like this damned planet of a star he'd never heard of until they'd landed him there. And now it was sacred*



ground because the aliens were there too: see World Wars, Vietnam etc: any empty piece of ground that has no value will be contested as if sacred. 'He'd never heard of it': it's not his country, he doesn't know anything about it, yet he must be prepared to die to defend it.

NOTE: the sentence 'Contact had been made with them near the centre of the Galaxy, after the slow, difficult colonisation of a dozen thousand planets'. This does not mean that only the Aliens were colonisers: the narrator's people could have been too!

Then return to setting, to reinforce this sense of solitude, abandonment, bewilderment (picks up the 1st parag.): transition to the last closing part where the story comes together with the arrival of the alien.

Then ending: the narrator is the alien (relative to us) while the Alien of the story is human.

B] Ask questions, elicit and interpret: use the info collected

Storyline: 2 camps fighting to the death without communicating with each other, knowing each other, or, seemingly, trying to know each other. They just seem determined to destroy one another, but one side (the 'aliens', i.e. ourselves) seems even more aggressive (they didn't want to talk or negotiate)

Who's the narrator?

A simple soldier feeling lonely, afraid and far away from what he knows/holds dear [*he was fifty thousand light-years from home. A strange blue sun gave light and the gravity, twice what he was used to, made every movement difficult*]. **NOTE**: the sun is blue, the gravity is different: what, where, how don't matter, only the feeling of alienation, distance, strangeness, and homesickness.

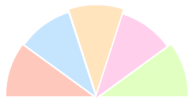
He's just told to be there (where: he doesn't know: somewhere far and alien: see vocabulary.), risking his life for a cause he doesn't quite understand, defending a place deemed important but nowhere in particular: a battleground with strategic importance (but strategy decided at higher level).

- Is that special to the story?
- How do you think it feels to be sent thousands of miles away to defend a country that's not your own?
- Why do armies do that? Why do soldiers do that?

Similarities with war, soldiering; patriotism, freedom; morals of such a cause (this world is far away from his home so he's not defending his family etc.).

Chain of command: don't think, just fight.

- Do you think he has a choice? As soldier probably not, although soldiers have rebelled against their superiors before: WW1 for example, when the orders given were illogical and leading to massacres.
- Is a soldier right to disobey if he thinks the order doesn't make sense? (but an Army is not a democracy...).



- Can a soldier see the whole picture and decide whether a small part of it makes sense in relation to the whole?
- And if the order given to the soldiers leads to their needless death, isn't that wrong in itself, or does war negate that morality?
- As a member of a society/culture: should he not feel he **must** defend that way of life?

The Enemy: how is the enemy presented/represented?

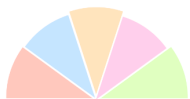
Cruel, ruthless, pitiless: assimilation or destruction are the only possibilities. Peace, discussion, moderation, consensus are impossible.

The enemy has been colonising the galaxy: **what does colonising mean? What is involved in colonisation in our own history (European, say)?**

Going somewhere, invading, seizing possession of, and in the process killing, decimating populations, changing belief systems (imposing others), social structures: ethnocide: changing the way of life/culture/beliefs of the Other to make them like ours.

The ending: how do you understand it? How does the story look like when we know the narrator is an alien, and the bad guys are people like you and me? (*forcing the reader to think about what we have done through history*)

- Why do you think the story is done that way: what does it suggest about humans?
- Has mankind ever acted in the way the aliens did in the story? Where? Are there traces left of this?
- Do you think taking a people's country without discussion is still happening?
- In the story, the 'aliens' are presented as 'cruel, hideous, repulsive': why does the narrator find them so repulsive?
- What do you find repulsive: spiders? Cockroaches? Little insects? Is it more difficult to kill a beautiful butterfly, or a repulsive cockroach?
- Can you call someone ugly or repulsive and still consider them your equal?
- Do you think it's possible we sometimes call something – or someone – ugly so that it makes it easier for us to e.g. kill them or take their possessions?



3. Activity: Point of view affects thinking

We have many ideas about the world around us, but very often we don't question those ideas – in fact, we don't even know how or why we think what we think...So it's important to remember that to understand others, we often have to change our perspective on things, and try to understand theirs.

That's easier to do if you know why you believe what you believe about the world around you.

Look at the list below and then:

- a) Complete the activity (n.1 and n.2) **on your own**
- b) **In a group**, compare your answers and identify the main differences between them. Then discuss the reasons for your own explanation: does your vision come from...
 - a. Your personal experience?
 - b. The experience of people you know?
 - c. Do you have first-hand knowledge of that thing, or second-hand knowledge?
 - d. Do you understand how and why your group-mates see it the way they do?

1. Consider the following list of ideas/concepts and what you think about each of them (don't take too long to reflect):

the environment	politics	homeless people	education	wealth
science	marriage	vegetarians	life in America	
wealth drug use	the police	elections	the world in 20 years	

2. Now complete the sentences, on the model given below. Of course, you complete the sentence with what YOU see.

For example: 'When I look at Marriage, I see an institution without much meaning anymore'

1. When I look at _____, I see (from my point of view)
2. When I look at _____, I see (from my point of view)
3. When I look at _____, I see (from my point of view)
4. When I look at _____, I see (from my point of view)
5. When I look at _____, I see (from my point of view)
6. When I look at _____, I see (from my point of view)
7. When I look at _____, I see (from my point of view)
8. When I look at _____, I see (from my point of view)
9. When I look at _____, I see (from my point of view)
10. When I look at _____, I see (from my point of view)