

Framing the Truth – A Chain of Retellings

Auteur: Marleen Spierings

Instelling: <https://www.analyticalpha.nl>

Vak: Engels

Doelgroep: Havo-Vwo 3

Type: 2 lessen

Duur: 2 x 50 minuten

Thema: Taalbewustzijn, Scenario-based (language awareness – framing – fake news or facts)

Summary:

Students read *It's Quite True!* by Hans Christian Andersen and discuss how retelling alters a story using framing techniques. In groups, they write a neutral event, then rewrite it in turns, gradually changing details until the final version differs significantly. They present their stories, analyse framing effects, and write a short reflection on its impact in real-life communication.

Learning Aims

By completing this assignment, students can:

- recognise and explain how language choices shape meaning and audience perception.
- reflect on their own language use to understand its effects on others.
- develop critical awareness of media framing and its consequences.

Final Objective 11(H) – Language Use and Reflection

Students can show understanding of language choices in different situations by:

- **Explaining language effects:** describe how words change a reader's response.
- **Reflecting on their English use:** think about how they write and speak online and offline, and how others see it.



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TASK DESCRIPTION

1. Reading & Discussion (20 min)
 - Read Hans Christian Andersen’s “It’s Quite True!” (see below) on your own and in silence.
 - Discuss in the group how the story changes with each retelling. What elements are exaggerated? What new details are added?
 - Identify framing techniques used (based on a teacher’s handout: e.g., distortion, bias, selective detail). See below.
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2. Writing a Chain Story (40 min)
 - In groups of three or four, write a short, neutral event.
 - Now write about the event again. This time, pass the story to the next group member, who must retell it with a small but intentional change. “Have you heard about...?”
 - Continue passing and changing the story until all four members have rewritten the first version of the story and it is completely different than the small factual situation. The final version should be dramatically different from the original.
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3. Presentation & Reflection (30 min)
 - Read the rewritten version aloud, comparing how the story evolved.
 - Together define framing and discuss how each retelling shaped perception.
 - Individually, write a short reflection on how framing influences real-life communication.
 - Hand in the group story (factual short version and retold version), and the individual reflections.



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STORY

It's Quite True!

A translation of Hans Christian Andersen's "Det er ganske vist!" by Jean Hersholt.

"It's a dreadful story!" said a hen, and she said it in a part of town, too, where it had not taken place. "It's a dreadful story to happen in a henhouse. I'm afraid to sleep alone tonight; it's a good thing there are many of us on the perch!" And then she told a story that made the feathers of the other hens stand on end and the rooster's comb fall. It's quite true!

But we will begin at the beginning and tell what had happened in a henhouse at the other end of town.

The sun went down, and the hens flew up. One of them was a white-feathered and short-limbed hen who laid her eggs according to the regulations and who was a respectable hen in every way. As she settled herself on the perch, she plucked herself with her beak, and a tiny feather came out.

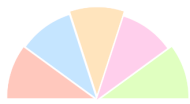
"There it goes," she said. "No doubt the more I pluck, the more beautiful I will get." But she said it only in fun, for she was considered the jolliest among the hens, although, as we've said before, most respectable. Then she fell asleep.

There was darkness all around, and the hens sat closely together. But the hen that sat closest to the white hen was not asleep; she had heard and had not heard, as one should do in this world, if one wishes to live in peace. But still she couldn't resist telling it to her nearest neighbour.

"Did you hear what was said? Well, I don't want to mention any names, but there is a hen here who intends to pluck out all her feathers just to make herself look well. If I were a rooster, I would despise her."

Right above the hens lived a mother owl with a father owl and all her little owls. They had sharp ears in that family, and they all heard every word that their neighbour hen had said. They all rolled their eyes, and the mother owl flapped her wings and said, "Don't listen to it. But I suppose you all heard what was said. I heard it with my own ears, and one must hear a great deal before they fall off. One of the hens has so completely forgotten what is becoming conduct to a hen that she plucks out all her feathers, while the rooster watches her."

"Little pitchers have long ears," said the father owl. "Children shouldn't hear such talk."



"I must tell it to the owl across the road," said the mother owl. "She is such a respectable owl!" And away flew Mamma.

"Hoo-who! Hoo-who!" they both hooted to the pigeons in the pigeon house across the road. "Have you heard it? Have you heard it? Hoo-who! There is a hen who has plucked out all her feathers just to please the rooster. She must be freezing to death; that is, if she isn't dead already. Hoo-who! Hoo-who!"

"Where? Where?" cooed the pigeons.

"In the yard across the way. I have as good as seen it myself. It is almost not a proper story to tell, but it's quite true!"

"True, true, every word of it," said the pigeons, and cooed down into their poultry yard.

"There is a hen, and some say there are two hens, who have plucked out all their feathers in order to look different from the rest and to attract the attention of the rooster."

"Wake up! Wake up!" crowed the rooster, and flew up on the fence. He was still half asleep, but he crowed just the same. "Three hens have died of a broken heart, all for the sake of a rooster, and they have plucked all their feathers out! It's a dreadful story, but I will not keep it to myself. Tell it everywhere!"

"Tell it everywhere!" shrieked the bats; and the hens clucked and the roosters crowed.

"Tell it everywhere!"

And so the story travelled from henhouse to henhouse until at last it was carried back to the very same place from where it had really started.

"There are five hens," now ran the tale, "who all have plucked out all their feathers to show which of them had lost the most weight through unhappy love for their rooster. And then they pecked at each other till they bled and all five dropped dead, to the shame and disgrace of their families, and to the great loss of their owner."

And the hen who had lost the little loose feather naturally didn't recognise her own story; and as she was a respectable hen, she said, "I despise such hens, but there are many of that kind! Such stories should not be hushed up, and I'll do my best to get the story into the newspapers. Then it will be known all over the country; that will serve those hens right, and their families, too."

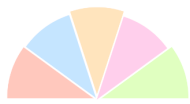
And it got to the newspapers, and it was printed. And it is quite true. One little feather may grow till it becomes five hens.



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ASSESSMENT RUBRIC FOR REFLECTIONS AND REWRITTEN VERSION (CEFR B1)

Criteria	Excellent (10-9)	Good (8-7)	Satisfactory (6-5.5)	Needs Improvement (5)	Unsatisfactory (4 or lower)
Content Knowledge & Understanding	Demonstrates a clear and thorough understanding of the topic, providing accurate and insightful reflections.	Shows good understanding, with minor gaps or slight misinterpretation of the topic.	Demonstrates basic understanding, but lacks depth or clarity in some areas.	Shows limited understanding, with significant gaps or inaccuracies.	Demonstrates a lack of understanding or incorrect information.
Content Analysis (Framing Techniques)	Provides a thorough analysis of framing techniques (e.g., distortion, bias, selective detail, exaggeration, understatement), explaining their effects on interpretation and perspective.	Provides a good analysis, covering relevant framing techniques, though some details or effects may be underdeveloped.	Provides a basic analysis, with limited explanation of framing techniques or their effects.	Provides minimal analysis, focusing on only a few framing techniques or misinterpreting them.	No meaningful analysis of framing techniques provided; lacks understanding of their impact.
Effective Organisation	Ideas are clearly structured, with a logical flow and seamless transitions that enhance understanding.	Well-organised with minor issues in flow or clarity; ideas are generally easy to follow.	Organisation is apparent, but structure and transitions could be improved.	Organisation is unclear, making it difficult to follow the ideas.	No clear organisation; the content is confusing and lacks logical flow.
Language	Uses precise and varied language with few errors; vocabulary is appropriate and sentences are well-constructed, enhancing clarity.	Language is mostly clear and appropriate, with some minor errors that do not hinder understanding.	Uses basic language, with noticeable errors, but meaning remains clear.	Language is limited; frequent errors make comprehension more difficult.	Language is unclear or inappropriate; errors significantly hinder understanding.
Creativity	Demonstrates originality and nuance in the rewritten version, showing a fresh and thoughtful approach to the material.	Shows some creativity in the rewritten version, offering a fresh perspective or slightly new elements.	Demonstrates minimal creativity; the rewritten version is basic with little originality.	Lacks creativity in the rewritten version; approaches the material in a very conventional or formulaic way.	No creativity is evident; the rewritten version is overly simplistic or does not engage with the material meaningfully.



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TEACHER HANDOUT: FRAMING TECHNIQUES

- **Distortion:** The act of altering or misrepresenting information to create a misleading or false impression, often by changing or manipulating facts or data.
- **Bias:** A tendency or preference for a particular perspective, idea, or group that influences judgment or interpretation, often in an unfair or unbalanced way.
- **Bias by Omission:** A form of bias where certain important facts, details, or perspectives are deliberately left out, leading to a skewed or incomplete representation of the situation.
- **Selective Detail:** The practice of choosing specific details that support a particular viewpoint or argument while ignoring others that may contradict or offer a more balanced perspective.
- **Exaggeration / Overstatement:** The act of presenting something as more extreme, dramatic, or significant than it truly is, often for emphasis or effect.
- **Understatement:** The act of downplaying or minimizing the significance or importance of something, often to create a more subtle or restrained impression.