

“Depicting War in Yemen”

Objective:

You will be able to...

- define different types of wars and how they apply to the Yemeni conflict
- identify war’s direct and indirect effects on civilians
- analyze the purpose and efficacy of narrative and investigative journalism
- evaluate how the order of a story affects its meaning

Warm-up:

1. What is war, and what forms can it take? Fill in *only the definitions* on your graphic organizer.
2. Consider the following questions, and write your answers below:

<p>a. How many wars is the U.S. currently involved in? Can you name them? (<i>Note: some wars are declared, some wars are covert; as a result, there is much debate, and it is difficult to say with certainty.</i>)</p>	
<p>b. Have you seen any wars in the news recently? If so, which ones?</p>	
<p>c. What images and words have you seen journalists use to depict these wars? Why do you think some wars get a lot of attention in the media, while others aren’t reported on as much?</p>	
<p>d. How can wars affect civilians, directly and indirectly? Brainstorm as many examples as you can.</p>	

Background:

Yemen’s ongoing civil war dates from 2014. Since that time, the UN estimates that 17,000 civilians have died as a result of the war, while another 2 million have been displaced. In addition to the bombings and killings, the hunger, disease epidemics, crumbling infrastructure, and collapsed economy have led many to single out Yemen’s humanitarian crisis as the worst in the world.

In this lesson, we will explore who the actors in this war are and why the country’s humanitarian crisis has become so dire. However, we will go beyond the facts and figures of this humanitarian crisis and will engage with its human face: who is on the ground, and how are their day-to-day lives affected?

Introducing the Reporting: “From Arizona to Yemen: The Journey of an American Bomb”

1. Read the following excerpt from the introduction to Jeffrey E. Stern’s reporting:

[This reporting] brings readers inside a remote village subjected to a brutal day-long aerial attack in which American bombs and rockets were dropped by American planes, with American logistical support, on civilians and the water well they were digging. The project is part narrative: introducing readers to the victims, and showing readers what it looks, sounds, and feels like to be in a village under attack by American weapons.

The project is also part investigative reporting: tracking one of the laser-guided bombs used in the attack from the moment it rolled off the factory floor at Raytheon Inc.’s Tucson, Arizona facility, until the moment it was dropped on civilians and civilian infrastructure in Yemen—reducing the disconnect between cause and effect and tying readers more viscerally to the effects of their country’s policies.

Comprehension check: What two types of journalism will Jeffrey Stern use in the story you are about to read? What is the purpose of each?

2. Read “From Arizona to Yemen: The Journey of an American Bomb.” While you read, fill in the remaining blanks on your graphic organizer.

Reflection:

On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions:

1. Elaborate on your answers to the second question on your graphic organizer: How is Yemen’s war affecting civilians? Cite evidence from Jeffrey Stern’s reporting. How does the list on your graphic organizer compare with the list you brainstormed during your warm-up?

2. Take a look back at the images and words journalists use to depict wars, which you brainstormed during your warm-up. How is “From Arizona to Yemen: The Journey of an American Bomb” similar to other news you have seen / heard about war? How is it different?

3. In the introduction to Jeffrey Stern’s reporting, he notes that this project is part **narrative**, part **investigative journalism**. Consider:

- How effective do you think the narrative part was in “introducing readers to the victims, and showing readers what it looks, sounds, and feels like to be in a village under attack by American weapons”?
- How effective do you think the investigative part was in “reducing the disconnect between cause and effect and tying readers more viscerally to the effects of their country’s policies”?
- Are the narrative and investigative parts separable? How so, or why not?
- This story is about an airstrike, but the bomb doesn’t even appear until the ninth paragraph. Why do you think Stern begins with the narrative? How would this story be different if it began with these alternative scenes?
 - The airstrike
 - Shadowing Dr. Abdullatif Abotaleb
 - Interviewing the Raytheon employees
 - Explanations of the conflict and humanitarian crisis
 - The first-person section on meeting the airstrike victims
- What is the job of a journalist? Before he could write this story, what work do you think Jeffrey Stern had to do? What work is particular to the narrative part, what is particular to the investigative part, and what is common to both?
 - To find out more about Stern’s reporting process, read “Behind the Reporting: The Journey of an American Bomb from Arizona to Yemen.”

Extension Activities:

Option 1: Data Visualization

Stern asserts that “[t]ogether, the bombing campaign and blockade have spurred the worst continuing humanitarian crisis in the world.” Throughout the article, what evidence does he cite to support this claim? Do some outside research to find out more facts and figures about the current situation in Yemen, using the Pulitzer Center reporting archive as a starting point. (TIP: you can search by country.) As a class, compile a list of these facts and figures, fact-check them, and select the ones you find most significant. Then, create a data visualization that conveys the information in a clear and compelling way. Build your data visualization in one of two ways:

1. **Digitally.** Create graphics and/or interactives, and share them on social media and/or your school website.
2. **Manually.** Create posters and display them in a school hallway to raise awareness.

Option 3: Different Ways of Depicting War

Write an essay that answers the following question: What makes a piece of journalism about war effective, and what media do you find most effective for reporting about war?

To arrive at your conclusion, you could think about the war coverage that you've been exposed to in your own life, discuss the feelings of those around you, or explore these Pulitzer Center projects:

- Text, Photo: "From Arizona to Yemen: The Journey of an American Bomb"
- Text, Photo: "AP Investigation: Food Aid Stolen as Yemen Starves"
- Text, Photo: "As War Rages, Yemen's Fathers and Sons Face an Uncertain Future"
- Text, Photo: "In Inferno of Yemen's War, Child Soldiers Are the 'Firewood'"
- Text, Photo: "How Despair Drives Young Ethiopians to Flee Yemen"
- Text, Photo: "Yemen: Death in Al Ghayil"