

Worksheet 1.3

The Waveland Story – analysing the narrative elements

You are going to study a news story broadcast on Channel 4 News on September 6, 2005. It was one of many 'aftermath stories' that followed the Hurricane Katrina disaster. In this first exercise, you will explore what makes this a satisfactory story.

Whether foreign or domestic, the same principles apply when it comes to making your coverage coherent and interesting.

First viewing

After you have watched the sequence, try to reflect on the key elements it contained as a story.

Who fills in the back story to the Waveland tale, providing context? Who is identified as the key **protagonist** in the tale? Is there one?

Here's the cast:

- Jon Snow – main 'New Orleans segment' anchorman
- Jonathan Rugman – ITN reporter in Waveland
- President, George Bush
- Brian Mollere (Waveland resident)
- Brian's armed friend and neighbour
- Phil Reynolds – the Wal-mart pharmacist in Waveland
- Susan St Amant – homeless Waveland resident.

Clearly, Hurricane Katrina is the '**agent of change**' that has threatened the individuals and community, but what are the main **problems** that the story picks out amid the devastation?

What **allies** does the story suggest exist that might help tackle the problems Waveland faces?

What **hurdles** or **forces of opposition** do the people of Waveland face in the immediate aftermath of the hurricane?

What **solution** does the story offer, if any, and what **loose ends** does it leave dangling?

Second viewing

Watch the Waveland story again. This time you have a detailed storyboard to refer to. This asks a number of questions that should help you get closer to the narrative of the story. It also starts to raise others which will get you thinking about the subtext underlying the story in terms of the language used and the images selected.

When describing the function of each element do not repeat the content of the script. Instead, try to explain the job that piece performs to help our understanding of the story.

Does it provide context?

Does it answer one or more of the five Ws (who, what, when, why, where) or how?

Does it set up some of the problems?

Does it introduce key protagonists?

Does it introduce allies or hurdles – likely to tackle or add to the problems already identified?

Does it offer solutions?

Images	Script	Function	Detailed questions
<p>SEGMENT ONE Jon Snow in New Orleans.</p> <p>Map showing the Mississippi and Louisiana coastline and New Orleans and Waveland.</p> <p>Split screen showing Rugman and Snow in their respective locations.</p>	<p>"Now, its hard enough to imagine the rebuilding of New Orleans, but one small town, just down the coast, has been wiped off the map, virtually flattened – left with no power, no water, no phones, no way out! 97% of its homes and businesses were destroyed when the eye of the storm passed right through it – as our correspondent Jonathan Rugman found out. He joins me now from nearby Gulfport."</p>		<p>What elements of the script inject a sense of the scale of the destruction in Waveland?</p> <p>What makes the town's name so poignant – and do you think that may have had an influence on the choice to go there rather than other devastated Gulf Coast towns?</p> <p>"No way out" – is this hyperbole? Spot how this makes reference to a part of the story near the end of the 'package'. How does this link help contribute to the story's overall shape/architecture?</p>
<p>SEGMENT TWO Jonathan Rugman in Gulfport – behind him troops entering a HMMWV military vehicle.</p>	<p>"John – the centre of Waveland looks much as the American South looked after the Civil War. It has been levelled to the ground. Many of its occupants are now sleeping under canvas, still stunned by what has happened to them. In a moment my report from Waveland, but first President Bush speaking today about Waveland and clearly shocked by what he'd seen there.</p>		<p>While much of the southern states were in a pretty poor state after the American Civil War 1861-65, Rugman may be making an indirect reference to the aftermath of the Northern Army of General Sherman marching in 1864 through North and South Carolina burning everything in its path.</p> <p>What does this historic reference suggest about the audience that watches Channel 4 News? Would anyone consider this comparison as a bit insensitive? Why?</p> <p>Rugman makes clear reference to the fact that what we are watching is a 'constructed story'. Can you spot where and what this evidence of story 'construction' might be when we watch the misery of the Waveland populace later on?</p>
<p>SEGMENT THREE President Bush sitting next to Secretary of State, Donald Rumsfeld, at a press conference.</p>	<p>"And you know, I was with the mayor of Waveland the other day – Mississippi - his town was completely destroyed. What I'm interested in is helping that man and that community get back on its feet.</p>		<p>The report begins with President Bush but what is the effect of his appearance? Is what he says reassuring? Could an alternative reading suggest he is far-removed from the disaster – cut off almost? Rugman told us President Bush was 'clearly shocked' - is there evidence of this in this press conference? Where?</p> <p>The sequence feels a bit as if it could have been an afterthought – an event that occurred once the main report was done and had to be added on at the last</p>

	That's where my focus is."		minute. What is your view?
<p>SEGMENT FOUR</p> <p>A series of shots showing the scale of devastation in Waveland.</p> <p>A shot of collapsed houses at dawn.</p> <p>A view up a road – collapsed houses on both sides – the road curiously clear.</p> <p>A travelling shot taken from a vehicle showing more destruction beside the road.</p> <p>A view up the road showing a group of dogs barking amid the wreckage.</p>	<p>Jonathan Rugman voice over: "It's the dawn of a new day in Waveland – once a seaside town of 7,000 – now flattened, ripped to shreds, wiped off the map...</p> <p>...entire avenues reduced to rubble...</p> <p>...at least 50 dead here – some of them found clinging for safety from the branches of trees...</p> <p>...a few hungry pets now searching for owners who have fled."</p>		<p>The key thing to note here is the close relationship between the script and the images.</p> <p>Notice the narrative arc in this one section that begins with images of a dawn, takes in shots of broken homes, features a journey into the town and ends with abandoned dogs. Why show the set of images in that order?</p> <p>What is the mood or pulse of this opening? Is it respectful, dramatic, awed, fearful, sad, poignant?</p> <p>At this point is this report entertaining, reminiscent of an adventure film in any respects?</p>
<p>SEGMENT FIVE</p> <p>Interview with Brian Mollere – Waveland resident in the wreckage of his home.</p> <p>Medium shot of Mollere.</p> <p>Close up of his feet and a broom – as he sweeps his concrete floor.</p> <p>Long shot of tattered blue canopy surrounded by wreckage.</p> <p>A long shot of a tattered, unfurled Stars and Stripes flag.</p> <p>Mollere holds Rocky up to his shoulder.</p>	<p>Brian Mollere: "Beautiful morning!"</p> <p>Jonathan Rugman voice over: "But Brian Mollere is staying put...</p> <p>...keeping as tidy as he can what survived the storm...</p> <p>Brian's mother died in the storm...</p> <p>His dog Rocky didn't.</p> <p>Mollere: "He held onto me like this. Rocky was on my arm as we swum out – he couldn't swim, his legs are</p>		<p>What is your reaction to this sequence?</p> <p>Why do you feel the general report about Waveland has now shifted to this tale of one resident's experiences?</p> <p>What makes Brian Mollere a fantastic find? Consider the range of possible reactions there might be to this section:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This is a man in deep shock clinging to the wreckage of his life and trying to maintain a little order to prevent collapsing into grief. • This is a man that well illustrates the strength of the human spirit in adversity. • This is a man engaged in an almost surreal set of behaviours – going through the motions of playing host despite the devastation around him. Hurricanes and other natural disasters do have the power to make our presence on the planet seem puny and absurd. • This is an intrusion into this man's life at a time of grief. • This is a great illustration of the vulnerability of so many in America, the poor who appear to

	too short. He made it - through the whole ordeal. Rocky say 'hello'."		<p>have been forgotten – until, that is, when the cameras reached them.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> This is highly sentimental – human interest, but not news.
<p>SEGMENT SIX</p> <p>Close up of Mollere heating water on a camping hob.</p> <p>Shot of shelves containing groceries.</p> <p>Shot of SUV buried in rubble and mud.</p> <p>Mollere in close up – pointing to a point in mid air.</p> <p>Shot from Mollere's point of top of canopy.</p> <p>Mollere in close up.</p>	<p>Mollere: "Getting ready to make some more coffee here..."</p> <p>Rugman voice over: "Christian groups have given Brian food and he now camps beneath the stars – still marvelling how he survived a surge of ocean water 25 feet high."</p> <p>Mollere: "I think I survived. I was above – up to the top of that pole – I would say 25 feet." Unseen interviewer: "What were you doing there?"</p> <p>"I was swimming – I had my little dog under my arm and I'm paddling with the other – going with the current. Trying to stay away from debris and houses and whatever was piled up..."</p>		<p>The story of Brian Mollere continues. What is the effect of seeing him trying to be hospitable to the reporter and camera crew? Presumably, the coffee is for them.</p> <p>We learn of an ally for Brian in his time of need. Some support has reached him, as have the ITN TV crew, but still no sign of a Government response, despite what the President said at the start of the package.</p> <p>What is your reaction to the items on the shelves? How might it underline Mollere's vulnerability?</p> <p>Do you feel this might be just one of those occasions? Is Rugman, asking the kinds of questions, we as the viewing public would ask Mollere if we were there?</p> <p>Mollere is a big man, hardly a victim under normal circumstances. Is seeing a person like him in extremis (strung out) like this particularly powerful?</p> <p>Consider this when you encounter more traditional 'victims' later in the package.</p>
<p>SEGMENT SEVEN</p> <p>Close up of rifle being loaded.</p> <p>Shot of Brian's 'friend' with rifle.</p> <p>Long shot of further devastation – Brian's home in ruins.</p> <p>Shots of Brian</p>	<p>Jonathan Rugman voice over: "Brian shares a gun with a friend to protect themselves from looters..."</p> <p>Friend: "He protects himself with that..."</p> <p>Voice over: "Brian had no property insurance – his</p>		<p>How does the story change at this point?</p> <p>Does your view of Mollere alter in any way?</p> <p>Do you feel this section exposes something of America or is the kind of fear and implied aggression in this segment the kind of reaction that would affect anyone caught up in these terrible circumstances?</p> <p>What do you make of this portrait of paranoia and seeming courage and</p>

<p>sweeping, then combination of close up shots of Mollere and long shot views of him clearly out in the open.</p>	<p>family couldn't afford it. But, he's still house proud and up beat.</p> <p>Question: "You're sweeping the floor today. Why are you doing that when you haven't any walls?"</p> <p>Mollere: Well – this is home. We like to keep it nice and clean. This is where we live right now – nowhere else to go. We have company come by all the time so we like to keep it presentable."</p>		<p>resilience? What is your response to the sweeping up that Mollere's engaged in?</p>
<p>SEGMENT EIGHT</p> <p>Establishing shots of tents.</p> <p>A series of long shots of soldiers distributing food and unloading supplies from a vehicle.</p>	<p>Jonathan Rugman voice over: "One mile back and Brian's neighbours are living in tents in the car park of a shopping mall – picking through Salvation Army boxes for clothes that might fit...</p> <p>Three months ago, these soldiers were driving convoys across Iraq – now they are forming an outdoor supermarket checkout – the food free and donated by Wal-mart – every day the feeding of at least 3000.</p>		<p>Again, assess the effect here as we see the focus on one individual expand to show dozens like Brian Mollere.</p> <p>We also encounter something about the rescue response – a combination of troops just returned from Iraq and donations by one of America's biggest supermarket chains - Wal-mart – associated with low pay, and underselling its rivals.</p> <p>Clearly this section has various undercurrents – discuss the subtext associated with mentioning Iraq and America's military commitments there; the response of Christian charities and the use of the phrase 'the feeding of at least 3000'.</p>
<p>SEGMENT NINE</p> <p>Close up of man in tent interior - baseball cap and dark glasses. He is giving advice about injections.</p> <p>A close up of him writing prescriptions</p>	<p>Jonathan Rugman voice over: "And this is the local chemist – a medicine man so vital – his drugs have to be protected from desperate looters.</p>		<p>What kind of picture does this segment present of the emergency response to the crisis? Does it give you cause for hope or not? Explain your view with evidence from the segment.</p>

<p>(scripts in US English). A low angle shot of him taken to include the camouflage trousers of a soldier and a rifle butt.</p>	<p>Q: "What kind of medical problems have you encountered?" A: "Most people lost all their medicine. If you look over at the store, we had over 15 feet of water here and so anyone who lived from here to the Gulf, their homes were completely underwater, destroyed. So they have no medicine for heart, blood pressure, diabetes..."</p>		<p>Notice this quite artful shot – capturing both the humanitarian effort of the doctor but suggesting the harsh reality of living in such a place – the need for a military presence. We have heard a lot about looters and seen a lot of guns but what, so far, has the evidence been in this report that such looting is a real danger?</p>
<p>SEGMENT TEN A curious shot showing a shadow on a tent. Then a slow pan across the chaotic interior of the tent. Close up of Susan St Amant. A shot of the tent exterior and of groceries and possessions piled up in a supermarket trolley. Close up of Susan St Amant weeping.</p>	<p>Jonathan Rugman voice over: "But shortage of medicine isn't Susan St Amant's problem – it's how to fit her family of six inside this tent with another four relatives arriving tonight." Susan St Amant: "It's hard – I thought I had it hard raising three kids on my own, but it's harder now, because they don't understand what's going on, they don't understand we have nothing." Jonathan Rugman interview question: "How are you going to pick yourself up – you've no job, no house? You're living in a tent." Susan St Amant: "I don't know... I don't know...."</p>		<p>Susan St Amant represents a second face of the crisis in Waveland – what evidence does the film segment provide visually of her miserable situation? Why do you feel the artful shot of Susan's shadow on the tent was used rather than just cutting straight to her? Do you feel that Susan St Amant is more of a victim than Brian Mollere? Does the fact that she comes second suggest how much worse her situation is? Does the segment seem to imply a hierarchy of suffering? What is your reaction to the reporter's questions and the fact that the camera continues to film her even though she is clearly distressed? Notice how sound – the beginning of Rugman's questions to St Amant - begin while we are seeing exterior shots of the tent. Using sound to 'bridge' a cut in the film is a good technique that makes the sequence flow better – but is such technical excellence and the general 'slickness' of this film segment curiously out of step with the chaos that it catalogues?</p>

<p>SEGMENT ELEVEN</p> <p>Exterior long shot of blonde child in nappies wandering around the car park in between the piles of groceries and possessions.</p> <p>Long shot of damaged railway lines.</p>	<p>Jonathan Rugman voice over: "And so this is life in all its grim reality in Waveland... ...a town so devastated that its railway tracks don't know where they're going.</p>		<p>The report is winding up now – what evidence is there in the report that it is being brought to a neat, if not comforting, end?</p> <p>What is your reaction to the railway track shot and comment? Is this just cleverness or does it add to our understanding of the plight of those in Waveland?</p>
<p>Jon Snow – medium shot. Behind him, from his vantage point above them, the flooded streets of New Orleans.</p>	<p>"Jonathan Rugman from the very sad town of Waveland. We'll be back later, but first..."</p> <p>REPORT ENDS</p>		<p>The return to Jon Snow should not be ignored. It injects a sense of continuity and familiarity after the problems and suffering we have been witnessing. We may never hear of Brian Mollere or Susan St Amant again, but Jon will be back with us soon and there's another story coming up. Do you feel this is a cynical view? After all we need Jon to link the stories from across a vast region affected by Katrina, but what are the consolations of seeing him again at the end of the Waveland piece?</p>

Other issues

This is a story several days after the storm and the first news of the flooding – now the need is to move on and to provide information about the human face of this crisis, particularly given the slowness, at that point, of the authority's rescue reaction.

- Do you feel this story fulfilled this objective?
- Do you feel this story is news?

What are your feelings seeing the plight of these human beings? Do your reactions to the victims differ? How are they represented?

Your reaction to this story sitting in class is going to be very different to the TV viewer watching from the safety of their homes. Can you think of how different people might react to this story?

1. A pro-Bush American on holiday in the UK.
2. A person with anti-Bush sentiments, who regards the Iraq war as folly.
3. A child.
4. A parent with three children.
5. A dog lover.
6. A doctor.

Are there any elements of this story that could be described as 'entertainment'? Is there anything about the way the film is presented and put together that 'mutes' its emotional impact?

This is a highly professional, almost slick piece of filmmaking – remarkably so, given the undoubted time pressures that applied as it was being put together. Notice the linkage throughout of words to images and the clever film angles and subtle, unobtrusive editing

that is employed. But this is a story about a disaster and human suffering. Is there a sense in which, like poetry used to describe powerful emotions, the form of a TV news broadcast imposes order and coherence on chaotic and incoherent situations? The debate is whether or not this is inevitable and unavoidable and whether part of the news function on TV is to provide these kinds of consolations, and whether or not this is an unfortunate thing?

Can you think how the Waveland story could have been presented in a more impassioned, less distant way?

Imagine if Jonathan Rugman broke down and shared Susan St Amant's misery, for example. Would that have been appropriate to include in the package?