

# **‘It does duty for any amount of mayhem’: Helping Year 8 to understand historians’ narrative decision-making**

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## **Introduction: History as decision**

Histories vary because they are decisions. These decisions reflect the beliefs history makers have about how the past ought to be understood by its audiences.<sup>1</sup>

Understanding what histories are and how they are put together is a key aspect of historical learning.<sup>2</sup> Students cannot make much headway in learning about historical interpretations without coming to understand that histories are *constructs* and without learning something about *how they are constructed*. Developing understanding of decisions that historians make when constructing historical accounts and interpretations is key step along the way to these insights.<sup>3</sup> In particular, it is important that students begin to see historians as active in constructing representations of the past, rather than as passive mirrors of a fixed past, and it is important that they come to see that – no matter what ‘biases’ historians may or may not have – they *needs must make decisions* as they do their work (see Figure 1).<sup>4</sup> As making histories involves making decisions, perhaps we should start to think of histories *as* decisions, as Hughes-Warrington suggests.

*INSERT FIGURE 1 NEAR HERE*

Histories are often – although not always – stories. This is true, as Megill argued, even where the authors of histories think they are doing something other than storytelling, as historians who modelled their practice on social science and who told stories about structures rather than human actors often did.<sup>5</sup> Histories are more than stories, of course. As Grafton has argued, they contain infrastructures of argument to support the superstructures of story that they present.<sup>6</sup>

We were curious, through the work reported here, to explore and develop our thinking about how children understood historical narration, a topic that has tended to be under-explored in history education literature, where attention has tended to be more focused on children’s’ thinking about other aspects of history making, such as evidential or causal reasoning. We were hopeful, also, that we could help them think more clearly about the decision-making that making history stories entails. Although there are exceptions, much work on historical interpretations, has tended to focus on issues other than narration – to ask, for example, about the questions that historians have asked, to focus on the concepts that they use when

interpreting, or to ask about relationships between interpretations and the times in which they were made.<sup>7</sup>

## Contexts and collaborations

The conversations that led to the work reported here began in the spring of 2018, as a result of preparations for work contributing to the bicentenary commemorations of the Peterloo Massacre coordinated for Manchester Histories by Robert Poole, author of *Peterloo: The English Uprising*, a Professor of History at the University of Central Lancashire.<sup>8</sup> One of us was planning to use the occasion of the bicentenary to introduce Peterloo into the curriculum. For the other, the bicentenary was an opportunity to renew and extend history education research based around collaboration with schools and history makers.<sup>9</sup>

The project – which coalesced in the end around work on graphic novels published to coincide with the bicentenary – involved three collaborations. First, between the authors – a history teacher and head of history working in a Manchester school and a history education researcher working in university. Second, between history education, historians working in universities and two artists. Finally, we recruited ideas from different disciplines to work together. Narrative is a key area of interest for historians, and narrative and narration are not infrequently theorized by historians and history educators with considerable sophistication.<sup>10</sup> However, storytelling is theorized more explicitly in disciplines like narratology, and we aimed, through the project we are reporting here, to bring ideas from narratology into play in history.<sup>11</sup>

This article outlines our aims and approach and the materials that we created through our collaboration. It also offers some initial thoughts on the effectiveness of the approaches that we outline, based on two iterations of teaching the materials. A further systematic account of findings arising from this project and relating to impacts on student thinking will follow, when we have had opportunity to analyse the data fully.

## Graphic histories

As Hughes-Warrington points out,

Histories come in all shapes and sizes. They can be written, uploaded, filmed, drawn, mapped and even acted. They can be about one person or about the universe. They can be expressed in a few words or across multiple volumes.<sup>12</sup>

Although there has been a tendency, in English history education in recent years, to privilege academic historians and their monographs as key vehicles for addressing interpretations, there is a long tradition of understanding history and history education more broadly, as a field in which multiple modes of history-making play a role, an approach well-represented in the history of the concept of historical interpretations in English history education.<sup>13</sup> There are many excellent reasons why we should focus on the full range of representations and

constructions of the past in our lessons: for example, students encounter history through contested and contentious narratives in everyday life, as much as in their lessons, and we need to equip them to navigate and negotiate these competing histories. It also seems to us, however, that many of the issues are the same, regardless of genre – that those who tell stories about the past have to make many decisions of the same kind, regardless of the genre of history in which they are writing. Authors of historical narratives in monographs – just as in films or graphic novels – have to decide whose story to narrate, for example, and how to focus that story; they have to decide which aspects to foreground and tell-out in detail, which aspects to summarise or simply leave out; and so on. Graphic novels, it seemed to us, could help us make these decisions involved in narration clear to students in ways that more formal texts might not. Point of view is literal in a graphic novel, for example, but is analogical in conventional textual narrative, where it is applied to words not images. Graphic novels could, we hoped help make abstract issues like narrative decision-making concrete for students.

*INSERT FIGURE 2 NEAR HERE*

### **Peterloo: Witness to a Massacre**

Our thinking began with *Peterloo: Witness to a massacre*, a graphic novel written collaboratively by Robert Poole, an historian expert on Peterloo, who was simultaneously writing a monograph on the topic, and two artists, Polyp (Paul Fitzgerald) and Eva Schlunke (Figure 2). All three authors were active in the Peterloo Memorial Campaign.

*Witness to a massacre* is a particularly interesting graphic novel from a historical and history-educational perspective. Although it is a graphic novel, it is co-authored by an historian. It is a graphic novel and yet it is authentically historical, being ‘told ‘verbatim’ style through the voices of those who were there’ culled from ‘letters, memoirs, journalists accounts, spies reports and courtroom evidence.’<sup>14</sup> It is supported by nine pages of notes at the end – a section of the text where readers are referred to Poole’s 2019 Oxford University Press monograph on Peterloo, *Peterloo: The English uprising*<sup>15</sup> – and two pages of weblinks, lists of main sources and footnotes indicating which sources are drawn-upon on particular pages. The novel is aimed at the general adult reader, is 90 pages long, excluding front matter and notes, and it is written without an identifiable narrator, adopting, where a narrative voice is present, the god’s eye view of an omniscient narrator.<sup>16</sup> Most of the book deals with the events of Peterloo, their context or immediate aftermath and the final nine pages briefly sketch subsequent developments in the campaign for the suffrage and in the memorialisation of Peterloo.

Our initial intention was to work primarily with this text in our classroom materials and we began our curriculum design work by reading the graphic novel and by interviewing the three authors of the graphic novel in Manchester in June 2019, asking questions about the novel and their decisions in narrating Peterloo through it.<sup>17</sup>

### **Peterloo: Imagine a World**

Through our conversations with Polyp, Poole and Schlunke, we became aware of a second graphic project: *Peterloo: Imagine a world*.<sup>18</sup> *Imagine a world* retold the story of Peterloo, but with a different audience in mind and with different narrative organisation. This version of Peterloo was supported by Waterloo200 Ltd. and by the Age of Revolution project, led by Dr Ben Marsh at the University of Kent, and it was made available to schools without charge, in hard copy and as a download.<sup>19</sup> This graphic novel is much shorter – it tells the story in 15 pages not in 90 – and it contains a glossary and a page of questions to support comprehension and reflection. The telling is less explicit in its depiction of the violence of the massacre and the story is told by a fictionalised survivor of the massacre, who experienced events as a child and who is represented as looking back on the day and as telling this story to her grandchildren. She is shown doing this on the anniversary of Peterloo and as telling the story of the event to explain why she lights a candle annually to commemorate the day.

Whereas almost every word in *Witness to a massacre* is reproduced directly from historical sources, almost every word in *Imagine a world* is fictional and a plausible representation of what might have been experienced by a child attending the demonstration at St Peter's Field in August 1819 – the story imagines an historical world and aims to help readers do so. *Imagine a world* works on at least three temporal levels: the time in which it is narrated, 1884, the year of a third extension of the franchise; the time of Peterloo (1819) looked back upon through telling; and a future that is briefly speculated about towards the end of the narrative in which democratisation will continue. Although some frames are re-used from *Witness to a massacre*, almost all of *Imagine a world* is newly drawn.

We decided to work with this graphic novel, primarily, in designing our materials, not least because it was shorter and something that students could be asked to read and also because it was freely available and could be downloaded.<sup>20</sup>

### **Narrative decision-making: developing our approach**

An established principle, in teaching to ensure conceptual change and development, is that people do not come to new learning with empty minds, but with ideas shaped by their prior experience of the world and of learning.<sup>21</sup> As well as building new knowledge and understanding, teaching well entails identifying and seeking to change preconceptions and misconceptions that students may already hold.<sup>22</sup> These misconceptions can be first-order, relating to the past, and second-order, relating to how we come to know and organise our thinking about the past.<sup>23</sup>

As we will explain further below, we designed our classroom enquiry to begin with a diagnostic task, that aimed to give us insights into how students were thinking at the start of the sequence of lessons about decisions that historians made as narrators, and we designed things so that students returned to the same question at the end of the sequence. In the sequence itself, we introduced three simple ideas, drawn from narratology and relating to the

idea of a camera as an analogy for telling, to help broaden students' thinking about the decisions that are involved in narrating. We introduce these ideas because they are applicable to all stories, however told, and because they are easy to grasp quickly and concretely, particularly in the case of a graphic novel – where narration is organised through visual frames – or a film or video narration.

The concepts we introduced carry risks. If you talk about cameras in the context of the past, you can introduce anachronism – there were no cameras at Peterloo. Furthermore, if you talk about a camera, you potentially reinforce the misconception that the past is out there to be 'seen', rather than something we construct through argument from evidential traces. We feel, however, that these risks are outweighed by the potential benefits. Making decisions about how to 'show' the past through a camera lens is an easily graspable analogy for active narrative decision-making (see Figure 3). It should help to seed the notions that historians have to decide what to 'point to' and 'focus on' when telling stories about the past, that they have to decide from what 'perspective' in the past or future to tell the tale, and so on. These are all ideas that will, we hope, help trouble naïve notions of a fixed past that an historian should simply mirror passively through story telling. It should be said, also, of course, that one can draw students' attention to the potential danger of anachronism and to the need to take care when working with analogies.

*INSERT FIGURE 3 NEAR HERE*

The ideas we introduced in the sequence of learning and the decisions they relate to were the following.

- From what perspective/s is the story told (and what perspectives are not present)? **[Perspective]**
- What does the story-telling focus on in detail (and what doesn't it focus on)? **[Focus]**
- What aspects of the story are told in detail (as it were, in 'real time'). **[Scene]** and what aspects are cut, skimmed over, or narrated in outline only? **[Summary]**

As well as being simple to grasp and to explain using images, these ideas are inter-related. This is also a potentially useful fact, as it allows students to consider how narrative decisions fit together. Taking a particular perspective is likely to result in a focus on particular story features in detail, and a particular combination of scene dramatization and summary narration.

It seems plausible to suggest that if students have learned to talk about the decisions that authors have made when they construct historical narratives, then they will be much less likely to reach for default ideas like 'bias' when asked to explain how and why interpretations differ. No matter how 'biased' and subjective - or how unbiased or objective - an author is, they still need to make decisions about what to zoom-in on, what point of view to adopt and what to narrate in scene and what to summarise. Indeed, it is by understanding these and

related decisions that historians make that one might be able to explore notions like political positioning with some clarity. ‘Bias’ affects decisions and one can only understand it productively if one can point to the kinds of decision that it might affect and how it might affect them.

We will now explain and exemplify the ideas that we introduced in more detail before outlining our scheme of work in detail and reflecting on the process of teaching.

### **Perspective**

A camera must be positioned and ‘see’ events from a number of possible *perspectives* - from the perspective of one story participant or another, from the perspective of different participants at different times, or from a ‘god’s eye’ perspective above the events and looking at all sides equally from the ‘outside’ the events narrated (see Figure 4).

*INSERT FIGURE 4 NEAR HERE*

A camera is not the same thing as a narrator. Nevertheless, the points about perspective apply to a narrator also. An historian can tell their history from one perspective or another, from several perspectives in combination, from a perspective inside or outside the events to be narrated, and so on. Thus, for example, one might decide to write the history of Peterloo ‘from above’ and in a longer-term perspective (the history of the magistrates and their decisions, for example, framed within a wider history of the efforts of the powerful to retain control of law and order during and after the Napoleonic Wars), or one might decide to write this history short-term and ‘from below’ (the history of the experiences of the people in the crowd on the day, for example). One might write the history of Peterloo from the perspective of 1919, looking both from above and below and reflecting on how – if at all – it shaped the subsequent history of democratic reform in England.

### **Focus**

A camera lens can be *zoomed-in* on particular details, to draw attention to and foreground them, at particular points in a narration. It can be *zoomed-out* at others, for example, e.g., to show the ‘bigger picture’. In the Odessa Steps sequence of Eisenstein’s *Battleship Potemkin*, for example, close-up focus is used to dramatize violence – the camera zooms in on the knees of a man who has been shot as he collapses, on the face of a mother who has been shot, on her baby as its pram careers down the steps, and so on.<sup>24</sup> The combination of zoomed-in and zoomed-out narration shapes viewers’ perceptions of the story, what is ‘seen’ clearly, and so on.

What is true of the camera lens is also true of narrative ‘focus’ in written prose. Thus, for example, Marcus Rediker’s *Slave Ship* begins with a zoomed-in micro-narrative of a woman ‘lying in the bottom of’ a ‘canoe in three or four inches of dirty water’ who struggles to see

anything as the canoe moves, and of her attempted escape between shore and slave ship; and David Brion Davis' *Inhuman Bondage* begins with an imagined zoomed-out 'hemispheric traveller' overviewing the world of slavery in 1770 in synoptic manner, overviewing the American continent, and then doing the same in 1880.<sup>25</sup>

### Scene and Summary

Cameras can be switched-on and -off, and not all aspects of a story need appear in filmic representations. If they did, a story lasting ten years would take ten years to watch. Narrators often 'show' some aspects of narratives 'blow by blow,' dramatized as *scenes* in which the time taken up to narrate the episode often mirrors the time that the real episode would take to unfold. On the other hand, narrators often skip over and 'cut' entire elements of stories that don't seem to the authors to contribute to the development of the key plot lines in a narrative. When that is the case, these aspects of stories are often simply summarised, using phrases such as 'next day,' and *narrated in summary* not in *dramatized in scene*.<sup>26</sup> Instead of things being *dramatized* they are simply *stated* (See Figure 5).

To exemplify, with the narrative of the Munich Putsch of 1923 in Ian Kershaw's *Hitler 1889-1936: Hubris*. In pages 206 through to 211 Kershaw narrates developments between around 8.30pm on the 8<sup>th</sup> of November 1923 and around 12.30pm on the 9<sup>th</sup>, a period of 16 hours. The first two paragraphs of page 212, by contrast, take the narrative rapidly through 2023 (one sentence) and to May 2024, noting events deemed to be significant (e.g., elections) very briefly and making summary statements of developments ('the crisis had passed and rapidly subsided').<sup>27</sup>

*INSERT FIGURE 5 NEAR HERE*

## 5. Designing and assessing our enquiry

Having developed our narrative concepts, we faced the exciting challenge of making these ideas about narrative decisions transparent and comprehensible to students in a fairly punchy timeframe. Like other history departments across the country, Jen's department had been productively wrestling with curriculum change at Key Stage 3 for some time and, in an attempt to broaden-out history provision, had made the shift to shorter enquiries: some in depth and others in breadth. The Year 8 curriculum already contained a very wide-ranging enquiry on the meaning of the Age of Revolution, inspired by Will Bailey Watson's work through the Age of Revolutions teacher fellowship.<sup>28</sup> A follow-up enquiry zooming-in on such an important local story felt appropriate and *Imagine a world* gave us a great vehicle to move students' thinking about interpretation on in the short time frame we had available. The metaphor of the camera could allow us to interrogate key aspects of narrative decision making over a 3-4 lesson enquiry, hopefully combining all the elements in a final outcome task. We therefore decided to frame the lessons around the aspects of the camera (Figure 3) which we threaded through the enquiry plan (see Figure 6).

*INSERT FIGURE 6 NEAR HERE*

We wanted to ensure that students' thinking at the outset of the enquiry, and any potential misconceptions, were visible to us from the start, so lesson one began with a simple and open-ended question about the decisions historians make when they create a story. We then had the option of introducing our camera analogy straight away, but decided to delay this until the end of the first lesson. We decided to begin with *Witness to a massacre's* powerful front cover image (the image on the right in Figure 1). From very early on in our collaboration, we recognised that this image had a lot of potential to engage students' thinking on historians' decisions, especially because in our work with the graphic novel authors we came to learn that there were alternative covers considered. The working with the final and with the alternative cover (see the image on the left in Figure 1) allowed us to enter straight into discussions with students about the decision-making process and specifically about focus, as this was a key difference between the two images. One image is focused-in very tightly on a reflection in the iris of a protestor looking up at a cavalry man, and the other focuses on the scene in the field, including the same cavalryman, seen directly rather than in reflection. 'Why the chosen image, rather than the other?' students were asked? What had this decision allowed the historians to make us understand about the story they were telling? We matched this activity with the opportunity to equip the students with some complex vocabulary to help them articulate the decision-making process. What aspects of the cover might make the reader feel 'terrified' and what might make them feel 'outraged'? Where does the difference lie? This process helped the students to understand that every small decision taken by the historians had narrative value, shaping the story that was being told.

Later in the lesson the students had the opportunity to consider the powerful double-page spread in the centre of the novel and consider alternative perspectives for a front cover. What sort of story might we have been dealing with had the perspective been that of Mary Fildes, at the centre of the carnage on the hustings and slightly raised above the field? What if we had seen it from an eagle's eye perspective; or from that of a magistrate gazing through a window above the field? Once the students had a real and tangible sense of the impact of decisions about perspective, we could then introduce the camera analogy. Armed with one example of a camera function already, the students were ready to understand the impact of the others.

The lessons then progressed to look at the different camera functions in turn. We designed the second lesson to engage further with the concepts of 'perspective' and 'focus' by analysing the key scenes in terms of each idea (see Figure 4). A gorgeous image of a line of people slowly snaking towards Manchester, illuminated by the rising sun (see Figure 4), allowed us to ask students about the power of a floating perspective for getting across a sense of scale as well as a sense of hope and purpose. Once the students had analysed the impact of these narrative decisions, they summarised their understanding so far through a short set of multiple-choice questions. This allowed all students to access the thinking underpinning



the lessons and served as a means of catching any misconceptions that were persisting; for example, one question asked:

A disadvantage of the perspective taken is:

- a. It is hard to understand why the massacre happened.*
- b. It is biased.*
- c. It only tells one side of the story.*
- d. We can't see the bigger picture, like how Peterloo fitted in with other protests nationwide.*

We know that our students often rush to the concept of 'bias', feeling like it was an easy win, no matter how hard we try to dissuade them. We hoped that these multiple-choice discussion points could serve as an opportunity to air misconceptions and gently guide students, through teacher feedback and class-discussion, to the more fruitful thinking around decision-making represented in some of the other options.

The next lesson allowed students to listen to some of the thought process used by those decision makers themselves. We interviewed the authors of the graphic novel in June 2019 and quizzed them about their decision making, with the intention of using this film in our teaching resources. The resulting interview is fascinating. Painstakingly, we selected short clips where we felt the authors were discussing particular aspects of decision making in a very concrete way that would be accessible to students and that could be linked to frames that we were working with (see Figure 7).<sup>29</sup> At one point, Robert Poole describes the graphic artist Polyp's narrative technique:

His way of drawing is often not to look head on at the main thing, but to look over somebody's shoulder... Jemima in the cellar covering her ears is the same thing, it does duty for any amount of mayhem.

We hoped that these descriptions would open-up discussion.

*INSERT FIGURE 7 NEAR HERE*

Also, crucially, the interview allowed us to show the creators of the graphic novel as people: ordinary people, living in our world today, who had a project in which they were wrestling with storytelling. The lessons concluded with a fairly forensic analysis of how large a portion of the graphic novel is devoted to each part of the day, as well as how much of it belongs in other time periods. Allowing the students to reflect on the fact that the vast majority of the novel focuses on a tiny time frame (between 1 and 2pm on the 16<sup>th</sup> August 1819), it is then possible to ask what impact that 'scene and summary' decision had on the nature of the story.

## Reflections on teaching the enquiry

Work on this project began in the bicentenary year, but thanks to the challenges of Covid and various short-term curriculum changes that resulted, the lessons were first taught in the form originally intended in the summer of 2022. The Year 8 class with whom the lessons were first used in full loved their history; on top of this, many of them had a strong sense of social justice. So far that year, their response in the classroom had been amazing: they had been fascinated by the role of women in the seventeenth century, shocked by the extent of Manchester's links to the transatlantic slave trade and moved to anger by lessons on the construction of race in the early British Empire. They were very ready for a local story which linked so much to the issue of their rights today and some – though not many – had already heard of Peterloo.

So much of their response to the graphic novel was all that we (and presumably the authors) could have hoped for. What worked particularly well about the lessons was that students were really encouraged to pore over the stunning illustrations in Polyp, Poole and Schlunke's work and, through that detailed analysis, they really did start to engage with the decision-making process from very early on. Their discussions around the alternative covers were really fruitful and generated a genuine sense of excitement and almost empowerment in the classroom. This was proper historical work, unpicking these narrative decisions, but the nature of the graphic novel made these discussions accessible to the vast majority of students. There was a genuine 'lightbulb' moment when, during questioning, some students suddenly realised that if the panicked eye on the 'real' cover was staring in horror at them, the reader, then the reflection in that eye – of one of the yeomanry bearing down, sword aloft – is perhaps of them too. This discussion gave students an initial insight into the complexities of narrative decision-making. What impact does the focus and perspective of historians' stories have on the type of stories they tell? In this case, was the story more frightening? Yes, possibly, the students thought. Was it a story where we as the readers almost felt a sense of culpability or guilt? Either way, students were able to discuss the fact that the decisions made by the authors were creating a story which the audience were engaging with at an emotional level.

The baseline task generated some interesting comments. Some students naturally struggled with something so open-ended and in a different context, a more structured task may have worked well here, but reading through their responses definitely helped to shape the teaching of the enquiry. Students' comments tended to focus on choosing sources to use, and many also naturally showed that the historian would be concerned about finding 'the truth.' It was important to be conscious of these initial ideas while teaching and to try to encourage students to consider that accuracy, while important, could not be the only aim for a historian. A useful example for them was the Battle of Hastings, a Year 7 story with which they felt comfortably familiar. Could it ever be possible to tell a fully 'accurate' narrative of a day-long

battle with possibly around 10,000 people involved? The difficulty of answering this question helped students see that historians must have other decisions to bear in mind.

One of the aspects of the lessons which felt most powerful was the students' willingness to imagine themselves as the authors. A group discussed the pros and cons of a bird's eye perspective at one point, with one student pointing out that it gave an emotional distance but another arguing that the sense of scale generated did lend emotional weight to the story. The nature of these discussions always smacked of- 'If I was writing this'- and perhaps the single biggest takeaway from the lessons was that many students really did seem to come away with a sense of the historian as a decision-maker.

We have yet to conduct a systematic comparison between students' responses to the baseline and final tasks, in which they answered the same question – 'Explain the decisions that historians must make when they tell stories about the past.' An initial inspection of responses suggests that some students did not move on much from earlier thinking and this was probably a result of their curriculum up to that point, which had featured plenty of source work but less on interpretations. Several students still responded to the question with comments on sources as if they were simply there to be believed (or doubted) and reproduced or discarded accordingly. Others continued to see interpretations as an imperfect reflection of a fixed past, and regarded scene selection as an alternative to telling the whole story. However, many students talked about focus, perspective and decisions about scenic dramatized narration and abbreviated summary narration, and it seems clear that thinking was shifting in some cases. Some students, at least, were clear that when aspects of the story of the past do not make it into an historians narration this was not because the historian was accidentally omitting them through fault, but because they deliberately discarding them through choice.

## Conclusions

The challenge is, as always: what next? A three-lesson enquiry alone was naturally never going to solve all the challenges of getting students to fully engage with the decision-making processes of historians. The camera analogy will bear plenty of repetition - it has a lot of potential, not least with alternative graphic novel interpretations. One can imagine the analogy enabling fruitful thinking in a scheme of lessons on *Maus*, or, perhaps, on *Wake: The hidden history of women-led slave revolts*. Indeed, one can imagine the camera analogy doing good work in an enquiry around earlier stages in the history of radicalism and revolution using Polyp's 2022 graphic interpretation of the life of Thomas Paine - *Paine: A fantastical visual biography*.<sup>30</sup>

A final thought is that the whole enquiry serves as a powerful example to bring students' thinking back from the maze of misconceptions regarding interpretation and narrative. When working with primary sources of evidence, a key example to help direct students away from the pitfalls of bias is that of Elizabeth I's portraits. They are a memorable part of the Year 8

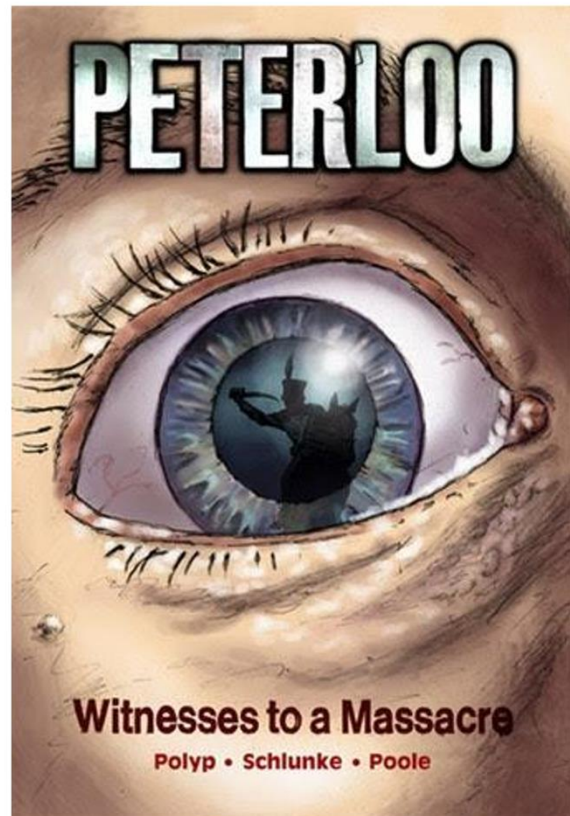
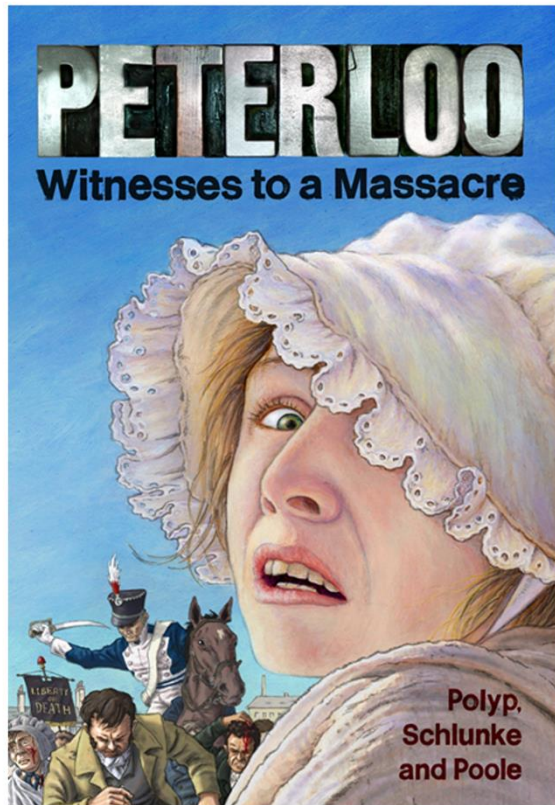
curriculum and serve as a great reminder that an 'inaccurate' source can be useful, depending on the enquiry, and reveal what was being 'done' through representation in the past. Similarly, the Peterloo graphic novels can sit in a history teacher's arsenal as a tool for helping to make vital points about how histories always involve decisions and about the considerations that arise when making these narrative decisions. When a student accuses a historian of 'making it up', or using the dreaded 'Well, they weren't there so they don't know', one can refer back to the interviews with Polyp, Schlunke and Poole. Did those knowledgeable, serious and creative people 'make it up'? Did they 'miss bits out', as if characters and scenes were lost down the back of the couch? Or, rather, did they make responsible and carefully thought-through decisions about the story they told and how best to tell it? The graphic novels also stand, of course, as marvellous examples of the story-telling art, dramatizing the past as much as the decisions involved in telling it. They also do great work in commemorating the victims of Peterloo and help us both to imagine the world at the time and to engage with testimonies that witnesses to the massacre left us.

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## 9. Figures

Figure 1: Decision and representation: two alternative covers for *Peterloo: Witness to a massacre*<sup>31</sup>



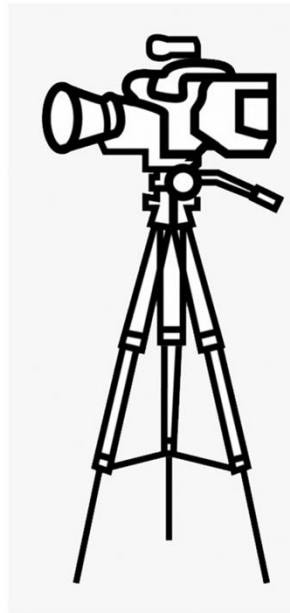
**Figure 2: Robert Poole, Polyp (Paul Fitzgerald) and Eva Schlunke, talking about the process of narrating *Peterloo: Witness to a massacre* in June 2019**



Figure 3: Introducing perspective, focus, and scene and summary to Year 8

We will look at 3 types of decisions that historians make, and use the analogy of a camera to help us think about them. Imagine if we could time travel back to St Peter's Field on 16<sup>th</sup> August 1819 with a camera. What are the decisions we would have to make in order to 'tell' the event in film?

1. **Perspective.** Where will the camera be placed? Among the crowd, or on the edge? Above? Held by someone?



2. **Focus.** How much detail to include? Close up on one person, or zoom out to see 100s?

3. **Scene and summary.** History is moving, not a still photo! How much would you shoot in real time and what would you cut / fast-forward / summarise?



Figure 4: Reflecting on perspective and focus – a grid to analyse frames and two example frames to analyse with the grid<sup>32</sup>

Frame	Describe what you see; whose perspective is this from?	Focus: how closely is this 'zoomed in' on scale 1-10? 1= close up; 10 = zoom right out from?	What's the impact of these decisions for the narrative?	How might this have been done differently?
Page 2: The reformers march to Manchester	A floating perspective, high above the crowds, as the protestors march towards Manchester.	10. The people are tiny, we can't see faces.	Good sense of scale and the sheer numbers of people involved. Reader can clearly see rising sun, making scene feel optimistic.	A perspective within the crowd- you could see expressions closer up, but wouldn't necessarily see the scale.
p4. A magistrate observes the reformers arrive				
p5. The yeomanry gather at the scene				
p6-7. The yeomanry charge				
p10. The reformers flee				
p13. The empty field after the massacre				

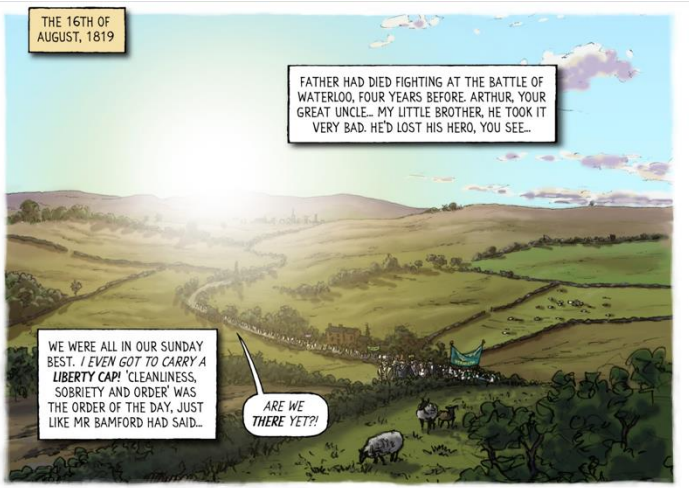


Figure 5. Scene and summary explained<sup>33</sup>

**What do we mean by 'scene and summary'?**



Scene

Four frames are used to tell the story of a few minutes – as Arthur and his Mum talk at the side of the field and as his Mum is then knocked out and a stranger steps in to help.

Dialogue and pictures dramatize the story almost in real time.

Summary

This is 'classic' summary. The narrator sums up developments over a number of years in a few sentences and only one frame is used.

She gives an overview of her brother's career and how she fell out with him.

This is not dramatized – it is summarized.

ARTHUR SORT OF GOT HIS WAY, ABOUT BECOMING A SOLDIER: HE BECAME A CONSTABLE, AND WAS THERE DURING ALL THE HUGE CHARTIST RALLIES. I USED TO TELL HIM HE WAS ON THE WRONG SIDE OF HISTORY, BUT HE DIDN'T SEE IT THAT WAY – HE KEPT SAYING WE NEEDED PROPER ORDER, AND THAT THE PEOPLE COULD BE THEIR OWN WORST ENEMY.

WE LOST TOUCH IN THE END. TOO MANY ARGUMENTS. BUT HE'D NEVER HAVE ACTED LIKE THOSE BRUTES DID AT ST. PETER'S FIELD.



**Figure 6: A summary of the *Imagine a World* enquiry plan<sup>34</sup>**

The enquiry was preceded by one lesson on Peterloo, giving an outline of the reform movement up to 1819 and an activity introducing the basics of the event. Students read the digital download of the graphic novel as homework ahead of these lessons. The lesson sequence was preceded and ended with the simple baseline and endpoint task, each the same question: *Explain the decisions that historians must make when they tell stories about the past.*

<b>Enquiry Question: What decisions do historians have to make when they create a narrative?</b>		
<b>Lesson title</b>	<b>Key takeaways</b>	<b>Activities</b>
1. Introducing the Peterloo graphic novel	Historians make decisions when they tell stories. The perspective used when story telling affects the type of story which is being told.	Students study the front cover and alternative front cover (See Figure 1) to discuss how changes in perspective and focus affect the nature of the story as inferred from the front page. Students use adjectives to discuss the impact of different possible perspectives for a front cover. Teacher explains the camera analogy of narration.
2. What decisions have shaped the Peterloo graphic novel? Focus and perspective	Historians make decisions when they tell stories. As well as perspective, the focus of the historian or narrator also affects the nature of the story being told.	Students use a list of key players at Peterloo to discuss how choice of perspective could affect a narrative. Teacher models how to analyse an example page of the novel to analyse impact of narrative decisions; students complete for other pages (See Figure 4 for examples). Students complete a multiple-choice question summary of impact of narrative decision making studied so far.
3. How have 'scene and summary' decisions shaped the graphic novel?	Historians make decisions when they tell stories. Spending different amounts of time on different aspects of a story is a necessary part of a historians' work and affects the overall story.	Teacher explanation of 'scene and summary' with examples (See Figure 5). Students watch clips of interview with the graphic novel authors (See Figure 2 and Figure 7) to identify what aspects of narration are being discussed. Students analyse 'scene and summary' decisions in the novel by breaking down the novel coverage against a timeline of 16 <sup>th</sup> August 1819.
<b>Enquiry Outcome / Summative task:</b> students complete or plan a design brief for an alternative graphic novel with different narrative decisions being taken.		

Figure 7: Scenes from *Witness to a Massacre* with related quotations from the author interviews<sup>35</sup>

Study these images from the full version of the graphic novel and read the quote from the author underneath. Can you try to explain in your own words what the author is saying about the reasons why they created this image as they did?



Robert: "It does duty for any amount of mayhem"



Paul: "We could have done close ups of... faces but it's just set against a grass background with some minor spatters of blood..."



Paul: "We did just show a clear blue sky... And that's obviously us making it quite clear what our opinion is"

## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Hughes-Warrington, M. (2014) 'Introduction to the third edition: history, histories', in *Fifty Key Thinkers on History*, 3rd edition, London: Routledge, p.xi.
- <sup>2</sup> Chapman, A. (2017) 'Historical interpretations', in I. Davies (Ed.) *Debates in History Teaching, 2nd ed.*, London & New York: Routledge, pp. 100–112; Chapman, A. (2016) *Developing Students' Understanding of Historical Interpretations*, Oxford: Pearson, available at: [https://www.academia.edu/30525006/Chapman\\_A\\_2016\\_Developing\\_Students\\_Understanding\\_of\\_Historical\\_Interpretation\\_Oxford\\_Edexcel\\_Pearson](https://www.academia.edu/30525006/Chapman_A_2016_Developing_Students_Understanding_of_Historical_Interpretation_Oxford_Edexcel_Pearson); Historical Association, (2019) 'What's the Wisdom on Interpretations of the Past', in *Teaching History 177, Building Knowledge Edition*, pp. 22–27.
- <sup>3</sup> For research on children's understanding of historical interpretation and on barriers to understanding see Lee, P.J. (1998) "'A lot of guess work goes on": children's understanding of historical accounts', in *Teaching History 92, Explanation and Argument Edition*, pp. 29–35; Chapman, A. (2011) 'Understanding historical knowing : evidence and accounts', in Perikleous, L. and Shemilt, D (Eds.) *The Future of the Past*, Nicosia: Association for Historical Dialogue and Research, pp. 169–214, available at: [https://issuu.com/ahdr/docs/low\\_ahdr\\_volume\\_a5\\_en](https://issuu.com/ahdr/docs/low_ahdr_volume_a5_en); Lee, P. and Shemilt, D. (2004) "'I just wish we could go back in the past and find out what really happened": progression in understanding about historical accounts', *Teaching History, 117, Dealing with Distance Edition*, pp. 25–31.
- <sup>4</sup> A point developed, in relation to enquiry and conceptualisation in Chapman, A. (2011) 'Twist and shout? developing sixth form students' thinking about historical interpretation', in *Teaching History 142, Experiencing History Edition*, pp. 24–33.
- <sup>5</sup> Megill, A. (1989) "Recounting the past: 'description,' explanation, and narrative in historiography," *The American Historical Review* 94, (3), pp. 627–53.
- <sup>6</sup> Grafton, A. (1997) *The Footnote: A Curious History*, Cambridge, MA and London, Harvard University Press.
- <sup>7</sup> Examples of work that does focus on narration include D. Banham and R. Hall (2003) "JFK: the medium, the message and the myth," *Teaching History 113, Creating Progress Edition*, pp.6–12 and Foster, R. and Goudie, K. (2019) "A, b, c, D, e? Teaching Year 9 to take on the challenge of structure in narrative," *Teaching History 175, Listening to Diverse Voices Edition*, pp.28–38. An example of work focused on analytical decision-making is Chapman, A. (2011) "Twist and shout? Developing sixth form students' thinking about historical interpretation," *Teaching History 142, Experiencing History Edition*, pp.24–33. A leading example of a contextualising approach is Card, J. (2004) "Seeing double: how one period visualizes another," *Teaching History 117, Dealing with Distance Edition*, pp.6–11.
- <sup>8</sup> The 2019 Manchester Histories Peterloo Programme can be explored here: Manchester Histories, "Peterloo 2019 programme," 2021, <https://manchesterhistories.co.uk/projects/project-2/>.
- <sup>9</sup> Earlier work was reported in these pages in Chapman, A. (2011) "Twist and shout? developing sixth form students' thinking about historical interpretation," *Teaching History 142, Experiencing History Edition*, pp.24–33 and in Chapman, A. and Goldsmith, E. (2015) "'Dialogue between the source and the historian's view occurs': mapping change in student thinking about historical accounts in expert and peer online discussion," in Chapman, A. and Wilschut, A. (Eds.) *Joined Up History: New directions in history education research*, International Review of History Education, Volume 8, Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc., pp. 183–2010.
- <sup>10</sup> Berkhofer, R.F. (1995) *Beyond the Great Story: History as Text and Discourse*, Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1995; Lang, S. (2003) "Narrative: the under-rated skill," *Teaching History, 110, Communicating History Edition*, pp.8–13; Mandler, P., Vallance, T. and Lang, S. (2011) "Debates: narrative in school history," *Teaching History, 145, Narrative Edition*, pp.22-31. Schama, S. (1991) *Dead Certainties: Unwarranted speculations*, Cambridge.
- <sup>11</sup> Bal, M. (2017) *Narratology: Introduction to the theory of narrative*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press; Herman, D. (2004) *Story Logic: Problems and possibilities of narrative*, University of Nebraska Press; Fludernik, M. (2009) *Introduction To Narratology*, London ; New York: Routledge.
- <sup>12</sup> Hughes-Warrington, M. (2014) "Introduction to the third edition: history, histories," in *Fifty Key Thinkers on History*, London: Routledge, 2014, p.xi.
- <sup>13</sup> The breadth in which interpretations can be understood can be scoped in McAleavy, T. (2000) "Teaching about Interpretations," in Arthur, J. and Phillips, R. (eds.) *Issues in History Teaching*, London: Routledge. The argument that interpretations has been narrowed recently is made in Chapman, A. (2020) "Narrowing

interpretations,” *Public History Weekly* 8 (7), available at: <https://doi.org/dx.doi.org/10.1515/phw-2020-16989>. Exemplification of a broad account of history making can be found in Samuel, R. (1994) *Theatres of Memory, Volume 1: Past and present in contemporary culture*, London and New York: Verso. A recent stellar exploration of the range of history making (and a theorisation of 'history making' as a term) can be found in Clark, A. (2022) *Making Australian History*, Sydney: Random House Australia.

<sup>14</sup> Quotations are from the inside cover of Polyp, Schlunke, E. and Poole, R. (2019) *Peterloo: Witness to a massacre*, Oxford: New Internationalist.

<sup>15</sup> Poole, R. (2019) *Peterloo: The English Uprising*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, available at: <https://global.oup.com/academic/product/peterloo-9780198783466?cc=gb&lang=en>.

<sup>16</sup> Poole's monograph is Poole, R. (2019) *Peterloo: The English uprising*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, it is available at: . Modes of narration are explored in Booth, W.C. (2010) *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

<sup>17</sup> We would like to thank Chris Chambers, of Manchester Metropolitan University for facilitating the interview for us and by providing a room in which to conduct it.

<sup>18</sup> Polyp and Marsh, B. (2019) *Peterloo: Imagine a world*, Oxford & Canterbury: New Internationalist & The Age of Revolutions Project, available at: <https://www.keepandshare.com/doc/8240427/peterloo-imagine-a-world-pdf-32-5-meg?da=y>.

<sup>19</sup> Age of Revolution, (2020) "About us," Age of Revolution, available at: <https://ageofrevolution.org/about/>.

<sup>20</sup> *Imagine a world* can be downloaded here: <https://ageofrevolution.org/the-peterloo-graphic-novel-available-free-to-schools-now/>.

<sup>21</sup> Donovan, M.S., Bransford, J.D. and Pellegrino, J.W. (2000) *How People Learn: Brain, mind, experience, and school: expanded edition*, Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, available at: <https://doi.org/10.17226/9853>.

<sup>22</sup> Donovan, M.S. and Bransford, J.D., eds. (2005) *How Students Learn: History in the classroom*, Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, available at: <https://doi.org/10.17226/11100>.

<sup>23</sup> Carretero, M. and Lee, P. (2014) "Learning Historical Concepts," in R. Keith Sawyer (Ed.) *The Cambridge Handbook of the Learning Sciences*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp.587–604.

<sup>24</sup> Bordwell, D. (1985) *Narration in the Fiction Film*, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985.

<sup>25</sup> Davis, D.B. (2008) *Inhuman Bondage: The rise and fall of slavery in the New World*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p.1; Rediker, M. (2007) *The Slave Ship: A human history*, London: John Murray, p.1.

<sup>26</sup> These – and related – aspects of narration are reviewed in primers in narrative theory and narratology such as Bal, M. (2017) *Narratology: Introduction to the theory of narrative*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press; Cobley, P. (2014) *Narrative*, London and New York: Routledge; Herman, D. (2004) *Story Logic: Problems and possibilities of narrative*, University of Nebraska Press; Toolan, M. (1991) *Narrative: A critical linguistic introduction*, London and New York: Routledge; Hühn, P. (ed) (2016) *The Living Handbook of Narratology*, Hamburg: Hamburg University, available at: <http://www.lhn.uni-hamburg.de/>.

<sup>27</sup> Kershaw, I (1999) *Hitler, 1989-1936: Hubris*, London: Penguin Books, p. 212.

<sup>28</sup> Bailey Watson, W. (n.d.) 'What did 'revolution' mean in the Age of Revolution? Age of Revolutions Teacher Fellowship outcomes and resources,' available at:

<https://www.history.org.uk/secondary/module/8669/teacher-fellowship-programme-teaching-the-age-of/9455/what-did-revolution-mean-in-the-age-of-revolution>

<sup>29</sup> Excerpts from interviews with the authors are embedded our lesson materials - in the PowerPoint on slides 43-46. These materials can be accessed here: <https://londonhiesig.wordpress.com/interpreting-peterloo/>.

The links to the videos are provided here also for ease of reference: Clip 1 - <https://youtu.be/cujOC6qDJFob>; Clip 2 - <https://youtu.be/P6fafZCPzS4c>; Clip 3 - <https://youtu.be/tKYdWLWxzQgd>; Clip 4 - <https://youtu.be/NKbbbNOs5g43>.

<sup>30</sup> To order the graphic novel please go to: <https://thomaspaineuk.wordpress.com/>.

<sup>31</sup> Images from *Peterloo: Witness to a massacre* are reproduced with thanks to Polyp and Schlunke.

<sup>32</sup> Images from *Peterloo: Imagine a world* are reproduced with thanks to Polyp, Waterloo200 Ltd. and the Age of Revolution project.

<sup>33</sup> Images from *Peterloo: Imagine a world* are reproduced with thanks to Polyp, Waterloo200 Ltd. and the Age of Revolution project.

<sup>34</sup> A full version of the scheme of work can be downloaded here:

<https://londonhiesig.wordpress.com/interpreting-peterloo/>

<sup>35</sup> Images from *Peterloo: Witness to a massacre* are reproduced with thanks to Polyp and Schlunke.