Framing

It’s not just **WHAT** you say........

it’s **HOW** you say it
What’s in a word?

• By moving a word between sentences we can see its meaning change. In Standard English each of the following has a typical meaning:
  ▫ I see a duck. (a duck is a kind of water bird)
  ▫ Duck! (something is about to hit your head)
  ▫ Don’t duck out on me. (I’m subtlety indicating that I don’t entirely trust you.)
  ▫ Isn’t *The Mighty Ducks* a great movie? (I’m not so subtly trying to bring *TMD* into casual conversation for the first time since the 90s.)

• The punctuation, phrases, etc. (or lack thereof) in each sentence “reframes” the word duck.
Things to consider:

- Who are the “good” guys and who are the “bad” guys?
- What metaphors or symbols are associated with the frame?
- What language choices does the author make? (e.g. "gunned down" vs. "accidently hit by stray fire")
- What are the modes of reference? (e.g. "Castro" vs. "Fidel")
- Who is the audience? And what are the implications?
- What do these frames exclude from discussion?
An infant left sleeping in his crib was bitten repeatedly by rats while his 16-year-old mother went to cash her welfare check. A neighbor responded to the cries of the infant and brought the child to St. Joseph's Hospital where he was treated and released into his mother's custody. The mother, Angie Burns of Milwaukee, explained softly, "I was only gone five minutes. I left the door open so my neighbor would hear him if he woke up. I never thought this would happen in the daylight."
Rats Bite Infant

• What does the language tell us? “infant left... his 16-year-old mother went to cash her welfare check”

• What’s this saying about poverty?
  ▫ Implies that ignorance and lack of personal responsibility are at the root of America's urban problem.

• Who would this article appeal to?
  ▫ Those against welfare
  ▫ Those whose world view stresses personal responsibility
VERSION 2:
Rats Bite Infant: Landlord, Tenants Dispute Blame

An eight-month-old Milwaukee boy was treated and released from St. Joseph's Hospital yesterday after being bitten by rats while he was sleeping in his crib. Tenants said that repeated requests for exterminations had been ignored by the landlord, Henry Brown. Brown claimed that the problem lay with the tenants' improper disposal of garbage. "I spend half my time cleaning up after them. They throw the garbage out the window into the back alley and their kids steal the garbage can covers for sliding in the snow."
VERSION 2:
Rats Bite Infant: Landlord, Tenants Dispute Blame

- Who’s NOT mentioned in this second article?
  - The baby –mama!

- Then who IS being blamed?
  - Another typical way of discussing poverty in the United States, as a kind of "contractual dispute" between parties. The implication of such stories is that "if we had better landlords" (or better teachers, doctors, etc.) and "more responsible tenants" (or more responsible students, patients, etc.), then horrible things like children getting bitten by rats would not happen

- Are we presented with both sides o the argument?
  - The Landlord is given far more space to present IMAGES (eg. Half his time…cleaning up after kids…irresponsible tenants)
Rat Bites Rising in City's "Zone of Death"

- Rats bit eight-month-old Michael Burns five times yesterday as he napped in his crib. Burns is the latest victim of a rat epidemic plaguing inner-city neighborhoods labeled the "Zone of Death." Health officials say infant mortality rates in these neighborhoods approach those in many third world countries. A Public Health Department spokesman explained that federal and state cutbacks forced short staffing at rat control and housing inspection programs. The result, noted Juan Nunez, M.D., a pediatrician at St. Joseph's Hospital, is a five-fold increase in rat bites. He added, "The irony is that Michael lives within walking distance of some of the world's best medical centers."
Rat Bites Rising in City's "Zone of Death"

- What “tools” does the author use to legitimize his claims?
  - Statistics, trusted officials… ←ETHOS

- What is the effect of the phrase “Zone of Death?”
  - What are some other “framing catch-phrases” we hear in the media today?

- The story frames the rat bites as a symptom of a broader public health crisis facing a poor community. This story assumes a relationship between public policy choices (e.g. cutbacks in housing inspection programs) and human behavior.

- Unlike the first two versions, version 3 implies that the reader must share some responsibility for this state of affairs; after all, anti-poverty programs would not be cut if the people would put pressure on politicians to fund them.
Summing it up:

• The stories share little beyond the fact that the child was bitten by rats.
• Each version is shaped or framed by layers of assumptions.
• To say each version of the story represents a different frame means that each has a distinct definition of the issue, of who is responsible, and of how the issue might be resolved.
Introduction to next week’s assignment:

• From “A Bit of Fry and Laurie”
  ▫ Sex Talk in Class

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wwo8qXUit00