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Journalism and Mass Communication Educator
56:1 (Spring 2001): 96-97.

"Lots of solid facts and quotations, but where's the story?" "Lots of good information, but where's the compelling pitch?" Teach a course in newswriting or advertising copywriting, and your students will become all too familiar with these and similar laments.

Although most students understand what it means to be complete in their information and clear in their writing, it's much more difficult to teach them how to "find the story"-the drama, humor, and/or suspense that distinguishes merely competent media writing from that which truly sparkles.

To the rescue comes Nick Lacey's book, the second installment in a series of three books on key concepts in media studies. Following a professional career in print and television, Lacey is currently Head of Media Studies at a post-16 school in West Yorkshire, England.

The book is worth serious consideration for two kinds of courses. One would be an undergraduate, introductory course in cultural studies or media criticism. It touches on major theorists and their contributions while also including more sophisticated discussions and a fine list of suggested readings.

A second would be for media-writing courses. I would recommend the book for those of us who are searching for novel ways to teach students how to "find the story" in their own work. Because fashioning a compelling narrative is at the heart of much media writing, learning a set of conceptual tools to analyze and refine narratives is a valuable skill that this book would help students build.

Its content lends itself well to either use. The book begins with a clear introduction to narrative theory, relying on Todorov, Propp, Levi-Strauss, and Barthes. Lacey provides in succeeding chapters a history of the development of narrative (counterbalancing the structuralist-inflected introduction with an historical understanding), a more advanced chapter on narrative theory, and concludes with two chapters on theories of genre.

The writing is clear and direct, and the discussions are well-illustrated with examples not only from literary sources, but also from popular culture. In addition, Lacey sprinkles suggested exercises throughout the book that work very well in class discussions to promote discussion and application.

In sum, this book not only helps launch students into the complexities of narrative and genre theory, it also can make them more self-aware narrative-makers. And that's the real story.

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