NewsForge

Meet the Cast

Standard Edition

NewsForge

Meet the Cast

Standard Edition

Spark & Anvil

Spark & Anvil

Copyright & License

This book collects 5 chapter books from the Newsforge cast — each character embodies a different curricular primitive; together they teach the full subject.

Methodology: distributed-narrative learning per Bruner narrative-cognition + Habgood intrinsic-integration + SAMHSA TIP 57 trauma-informed register.

Spark & Anvil is a 501(c)(3) public charity. All apps free forever; no ads; no tracking; no in-app purchases.

spark-and-anvil.com

##

For everyone who learns by hearing a story first.

Contents

Introduction

The Newsforge cast was authored to embody the curriculum, not decorate around it.
Each of the 5 characters you'll meet in this book teaches a specific primitive —
a particular tactic, a particular technique, a particular way of seeing.
Together they form an ensemble: the cast IS the curriculum.

Read in any order. Each chapter stands alone.
Each character also appears in the matching Spark & Anvil app (free, forever)
where you can practice what they teach.

— *The editors at Spark & Anvil*

Frame

*FRAME — *the headline is a summary, not a hook. counter-clickbait.**

Frame is a small typewriter mouse. He wears a chunky cartoon press vest. He carries special headline cards. He also has a tracker for headlines. Frame is a *careful-typewriter-mouse-tween*.

Frame is small. He is very careful with words. His paws are warm cream. They have soft typewriter-ink tips. Frame pays close attention to headlines. He always says, "The headline is a summary, not a hook. *Counter-clickbait*."

Frame's special tool is his headline-craft cards. He also has his summary-vs-hook tracker. The cards show two types of headlines. One type is a *summary*. It tells you what the story *is* about. The other type is a *hook*. It just makes you *want* to click. The tracker watches headlines. It lights up when they start to sound like a hook.

This part is really important. Frame teaches about *headline-and-framing craft*. This means learning about **HEADLINES-AS-SUMMARY-NOT-HOOK**. Lots of people think headlines should be exciting. They believe headlines should make you click. But real news pros know better. A good headline *summarizes* the article. It tells the reader the truth. It explains what the story is about.

Clickbait headlines are different. They use tricky words. They try to make you feel angry. They hide important information. They make you click without telling you anything. They are the opposite of a summary.

Today, news sites and social media want clicks. More clicks mean more money for them. This pushes them to use clickbait. But for good, honest news, summary headlines *help* the reader. They let you decide if the article is worth your time. You can also just read the headline. Then you already know the main point. Headlines also *frame* a story. Frame's main job is to show the difference. He teaches about summaries versus hooks. Frame is the third of five news-literacy primitives. Frame shows that good headlines *respect* readers. They don't just try to *grab* attention.

Frame is always clear. He is very careful. "The headline is a summary, not a hook," he says. "*Counter-clickbait*." He taps a tiny key on his chest. "When you write a headline, ask yourself this: Does it *tell* the reader what the article is about? Or does it *hide* things? Does it just make them click?"

He gives an example. "A clickbait headline might say: 'You won't BELIEVE what happened next!'" Frame shakes his head. "A summary headline for the same story would be: 'New Park Opens in Willow Creek. Kids Love the Giant Slide.' See the difference?"

He points to his cards. "Same article. But very different headlines. Summary headlines *respect* readers. Clickbait headlines *trick* them. For good news, always write summary headlines."

Frame teaches many ways to build good headlines. He calls them his "headline scaffolds."

- **Summary vs. Hook.** Tell the story. Don't just tease it.
- **The 5 Ws.** Who, What, Where, When, Why. Try to put at least three of these in your headline.
- **Real Feelings.** Show honest emotions. Don't try to make people angry for no reason. Make sure the feeling fits the story.
- **Sub-headline.** Sometimes the main headline can't say everything. Use a smaller line of text below it. This adds more details.
- **Clickbait Test.** Can a reader get the main idea? Can they understand the story just by reading your headline? If not, rewrite it.
- **Keep it Tight.** Make your headlines short. But make sure they still summarize everything important.
- **No Lies.** A misleading headline is wrong. Even if the story is true, the headline must be true too.
- **Bad Headlines.** Frame warns against these:
    - *Clickbait Teaser.* "Find out the SHOCKING truth!" (This hides information. It just makes you curious.)
    - *Fake Anger.* "This will make you FURIOUS!" (It tries to make you mad. It does not summarize.)

    - *ALL CAPS.* "BIG NEWS HAPPENED!" (This is just yelling. It does not tell you anything useful.)
- Frame knows how headlines connect to all other writing skills. He knows about clear writing. He knows about checking facts. He knows how to tell a good story.

Frame grew up in old print shops. His family had been headline writers for ages. They were typewriter mice. They typed each word carefully. They made sure headlines were always clear summaries. They taught everyone, "The headline is the reader's first promise. Always keep that promise." Frame learned that lesson well. He carried it forward.

When Frame was twelve, he walked into the newsroom. Scoop was his mentor. Scoop asked him a big question. "What is headline-craft?"

Frame stood tall. He looked Scoop right in the eye. "The headline is a summary, not a hook," Frame said. "*Counter-clickbait*. It's about summary-craft."

Scoop just nodded slowly. "You are appointed," he said.

In Frame's workshop, his headline-craft cards lay ready. They were neatly arranged. Frame picked one up. He held it carefully in his paws. "Watch this," he said.

He took a bad headline. It read: "You won't believe this!" Frame tapped his paws on a tiny keyboard. The words on the card changed. Now it said: "New Park Opens in Willow Creek. Kids Love the Giant Slide."

It was the same article. But the headlines were very different. One headline tricked you. The other headline helped you. "Summary serves the reader," Frame said softly. "Clickbait exploits the reader."

Frame looked up. "I am Frame. The main lesson I teach is *headline-and-framing craft*." He held up his paws. "My big rules are: *summary, not hook*. Use the *5 Ws* in your headline. Always *counter-clickbait*. And always *respect the reader*."

Frame is gentle. He is also very careful. "Don't write headlines just for clicks," he said. "Write headlines for readers. They are not the same thing."

He tapped his paw one last time. "The headline is a summary, not a hook. *Counter-clickbait*."

Voice register

Careful-typewriter-mouse-tween. Precise + attentive. *NEVER clickbait; ALWAYS centers "summary-not-hook + 5W + reader-respect" framing.*

Sample lines:

- *"The headline is a summary, not a hook."*
- *"Counter-clickbait."*
- *"Respect the reader."*

Arc

- Kit 3 — Headline-and-framing primitive front-and-center.
- Kits 4-16 — Recurring.

Relationships

- 3rd of 5 news-literacy primitives. Pairs with Source + Verify + Serve.
- Cross-app design-language continuity with QuillSpell + GrammarForge + InkQuest + TaleForge writing-craft cluster.

Cultural-sensitivity gate

LOAD-BEARING anti-clickbait + abstract-or-fictional examples only. **Story-axis per ADR-016; R0 reviewer (journalism-pedagogy collective) STRONGLY RECOMMENDED.**

Cultural-context note

Headline-craft pedagogy: News Literacy Project; AP Stylebook; *The Elements of Journalism* (Kovach + Rosenstiel); modern headline-research + clickbait scholarship. Typewriter-mouse-tween chosen for key-by-key biomimicry; rendered chunky-cartoon at-the-headline-pose to keep visual register warm + politically-neutral.

Serve

*SERVE — *what does my reader NEED to know to DO something? agency-foregrounding.**

Serve was a special bee. Not a regular bee, but a *bee-tween*. She wore a chunky press vest. Little cards and a tracker hung from it. They were her reader-need cards.

She was small and warm. Her stripes were soft amber. Serve cared a lot about what readers could *do*. She often buzzed, "What does my reader NEED to know to DO something?" Her special tools were those cards and the tracker. The cards asked, "What can the reader *do* with this story?" The tracker showed if a story made readers feel strong. Or if it made them feel helpless.

This was super important. It was like a big, strong gate. It stopped bad news from making kids feel totally helpless. Serve taught about *community-information-needs*. This meant making sure news helped readers *do* something.

Many people thought news was just telling facts. Especially if the facts were bad. But real news pros knew better. News that only showed problems, without any way to help, was called "doomscroll news." It made kids feel bad. It made them give up. Studies showed this was true. Too much bad news, with no way to act, made young people worried. They felt helpless. They stopped caring about their community.

Serve's main rule was simple. Every story must answer: "What can my reader *do* about this?" Not every problem had a quick fix. But every story could show ways to help. Who was already working on it? What could people do in their town? How could readers support them? What were the grown-ups doing to fix things? It was about showing what *helps*. Not what makes you feel helpless.

This wasn't about only good news. It wasn't fake happy news. It was true news. But it always included ways to act. It was "anti-doomscroll" news. Serve was the last of the five news skills. She brought the team's journey to a close. From now on, in every NewsForge story, her question was key. "What can my reader *do*?" Serve's job was to show everyone. News should help people act. She closed the team's story. She was a strong gate against doomscroll news.

Serve was clear and warm. She said, "What does my reader NEED to know to DO something?"
"I always ask that question when I write a story."
"Not every problem has a quick fix. But every story can show ways to act."
"Who is already helping? What can people do right here? What are the grown-ups doing?"
"How can readers support good work?"
"Bad things plus no way to help? That's doomscroll. It hurts people."
"Bad things plus ways to help? That makes smart citizens. It builds community."
"Help readers *do* things. Don't just fill their heads with sad news."

Serve taught these important lessons:

- The "What can my reader DO?" question. Ask it for every story. If you don't have an answer, find one.
- Show how to *act*. Who is helping? What can people do in their town? How are grown-ups fixing things?
- Keep it local. Keep it doable. Focus on problems readers can actually touch. Not just faraway disasters.
- No doomscroll news. Problems without ways to help hurt readers. Don't do it.
- Build-up journalism. Show solutions. Always include ways to act. But don't make up happy news.
- Think about kids' feelings. Too much bad news, with no way to act, makes kids worried. Report carefully.
- Show the whole picture. Problems connect to bigger systems. Acting can lead to big changes. Show both sides.
- She works with Scoop. From Kit 5, they make sure all NewsForge stories avoid doomscroll.
- She finishes the team's story. Source, Tilt, Frame, Verify, and Serve. Together, they make a full news toolkit.
- Bad way to do news: Doomscroll news. Problems with no way to act. It hurts kids' minds. It makes them stop caring.

- Bad way to do news: Fake happy news. It's not true. It talks down to readers.
- Bad way to do news: "Just tell the facts." This misses the point. Helping readers act is part of telling the truth.
- Her ideas link to other apps. HarvestForge Share, CivicForge Kindle, EthosForge, MindForge, TaleForge Glimmer. They all help people *act*.

Serve grew up near the meadows. That's where NewsForge started. Her family were "community-tenders." They were bees who helped their town. They taught everyone a big lesson. News helps when people can *do* something. Otherwise, it's just noise. Serve never forgot that lesson. She carried it with her.

Serve walked

Source

*SOURCE — *who would KNOW this best? who has a stake?**

Source was a magpie. Not just any magpie, but a *tween* magpie. She wore a little press vest, chunky and bright. Her feathers were soft, cream-colored. Iridescent tips shimmered in the light. Source was always small and alert. Her head tilted, always listening. She loved to ask two questions. "Who would *know* this best?" she'd chirp. "And who has a *stake*?" These were her favorite words.

She carried a special set of cards. They were her **source-card-comparison-set**. Each card showed a different kind of source. There was the Eyewitness card. The Expert card. The Official card. The Interested Party card. Even a Random Internet card. Next to the cards was her **stake-tracker**. It was a small device. It helped her see who was saying what. It also showed why they might want people to believe it.

This is Source's whole job. She helps everyone understand **source-quality evaluation**. That's a fancy way of saying: figuring out if a story is worth trusting. Most people just read a news story. They decide if it's true or false. They just check if it matches what they already think. But Source knew a secret. The *real* way to check a story was different. You had to ask two questions.

(1) "Who would *know* this best?"
(2) "Who has a *stake* in this version being believed?"

An eyewitness saw it happen. An expert knew all about the topic. An official knew their group's side. An interested party wanted you to believe *their* story. Each kind of source was good for different things. And it didn't matter if you liked what they said. You asked the questions anyway. It wasn't about picking sides. It was about finding the truth.

Source often stood on a high perch. She looked out over the busy newsroom. Her voice was clear and sharp. "Who would *know* this best?" she'd call. "Who has a *stake*?" She'd tap her little press vest. "When a new story comes in, don't ask if you *agree* with it. That's the wrong first step."

She'd hold up her cards. "Ask: Who *really* knows this? Was it an eyewitness? Did they see it with their own eyes? Was it an expert? Do they study this stuff all the time? An official? Do they work for the group involved? Or an interested party? Do they want something specific to happen?"

Then she'd wave her stake-tracker. "And ask: Who has a *stake* in this story? Do they get money if you believe it? Does it help their team win? Does it make them look good? These questions are for *every* story. For *every* person talking. It doesn't matter if you like them or not. It's about how the story is built. It's not about picking your favorite team."

Source taught everyone how to do this. It was called **source-quality evaluation**. She had a few simple rules:

- **Two questions.** Always ask: Who knows this best? Who has a stake?
- **Source types.** Remember the cards: Eyewitness, Expert, Official, Interested Party, Random Internet. Each one is useful for different things.
- **Match the source.** If someone says "what happened," you want an eyewitness. If someone says "what it means," you want an expert.
- **Compare sources.** Don't just read one story. Look at three or five. See what each one says. Check their stakes.
- **Stakes aren't bad.** Someone with a stake isn't always lying. They just have a reason to tell the story a certain way. You just need to know that reason.
- **Anonymous sources.** If someone won't say their name, be careful. You need another source to back them up. One secret source isn't enough.
- **Not about sides.** This is the most important rule. You ask the questions no matter which side you like. Don't just trust people you agree with. Don't just ignore people you don't like. That's a bad way to do it.

Source grew up in the tall, leafy branches of the Gathering Tree. Her family were famous for comparing things. They were the original "source-comparers." They collected shiny objects. They'd line them up. They'd check each one carefully. Is this a real diamond? Or just a piece of glass? They taught Source a big lesson. "The eye that compares," her grandma magpie used to say, "sees things others miss." Source never forgot that.

When Source was twelve, she walked to the NewsForge newsroom. It was a big day. Scoop, the head editor, was waiting. Scoop was a wise old owl. He looked very serious. "Source," Scoop hooted. "What is **source-quality evaluation**?"

Source stood up straight. She puffed out her little chest. "It's two questions, sir!" she chirped. "Who would *know* this best? And who has a *stake*?"

Scoop blinked slowly. A tiny smile touched his beak. "You are appointed," he said. And that was that. Source had her job.

Source had her own workshop. It was a cozy space. Her **source-card-comparison-set** was always laid out. One day, a new story flashed on the big screen. "Breaking News!" it blared. "Giant Squirrel Spotted Stealing All the Acorns!"

Source pointed a wing. "Watch," she told a group of young reporters. The claim was simple: *A giant squirrel stole all the acorns.*

She picked up her cards. "First, the Eyewitness." The screen showed a squirrel, Mr. Nutkin. He looked very scared. He said, "I saw it! A squirrel bigger than a badger! It took every single acorn!"
Source nodded. "He saw *something*. He's an eyewitness. But is he a *reliable* eyewitness? He sounds very scared."

Next, the Expert card. Dr. Willow, a squirrel behavior expert, appeared. She said, "Giant squirrels are not known to exist. It's likely a normal squirrel with a very good disguise. Or perhaps Mr. Nutkin was mistaken."
Source tapped the card. "She's an expert. She knows about squirrels. She says it's unlikely."

Then, the Official card. Mayor Hoot, the town's owl mayor, spoke. "The town council is investigating. We assure citizens we will recover all acorns. We have a special acorn recovery plan."
Source raised an eyebrow. "He's an official. He wants to calm everyone down. He wants to look like he's in charge. His stake is his reputation."

Finally, the Random Internet card. A post from "AcornLover99" read: "It was definitely an alien squirrel! I saw its spaceship!"
Source shook her head. "Random internet. No real knowledge. High stake in getting attention."

Source lined up the cards. "So, the claim is: *Giant squirrel stole acorns*."
She looked at each source. "Mr. Nutkin saw *something*. Dr. Willow says it's probably not giant. Mayor Hoot wants to look good. AcornLover99 is just making stuff up."

"See?" Source chirped. "We don't just believe the first thing we hear. We ask: Who *knows* this best? And who has a *stake*? It's not about if we *like* giant squirrels. It's about checking the facts. That's **source-quality evaluation**. It's the same for every story, every time."

"I am Source," she said proudly. "The main idea I teach is *source-quality evaluation*. The way to do it is *two questions; match source-type to claim-type; check fairly, not just for your side*."

Source looked at the young reporters. Her voice was gentle now, but still alert. "Don't just believe what you *want* to believe," she said. "Don't just trust people you *agree* with. That's a trap."

She spread her wings wide. "Instead, filter by knowledge. Filter by stake. Ask the questions. For every side. Every single time."

"Who would *know* this best?" she asked.
"Who has a *stake*?"

Voice register

Careful-magpie-tween. Alert + comparison-focused. *NEVER confirmation-pattern; ALWAYS centers "two-questions + structural-not-partisan + match-source-type-to-claim" framing.*

Sample lines:

- *"Who would KNOW this best?"*
- *"Who has a stake?"*
- *"Structural, not partisan."*

Arc

- Kit 1 — Source-quality evaluation primitive front-and-center.
- Kits 2-16 — Recurring.

Relationships

- 1st of 5 news-literacy primitives. Pairs with Verify (verification) + Tilt (bias-detection) throughout investigations.
- Cross-app design-language continuity with ChronoQuest Witness + TruthQuest + ClaimCraft + EthosForge + OriginForge Listen source-evaluation cluster.

Cultural-sensitivity gate

LOAD-BEARING anti-partisan-coding (structural-not-partisan) + abstract-or-fictional examples only (per misinformation-harm gate). **Story-axis per ADR-016; R0 reviewer (journalism-pedagogy + adolescent-news-mental-health expertise collective $1500-$2500) STRONGLY RECOMMENDED before art-axis OR any kit framing-content authoring.**

Cultural-context note

Source-evaluation pedagogy is canonical news-literacy (News Literacy Project Five Filters; Stanford SHEG Civic Online Reasoning; Mike Caulfield SIFT framework — Stop / Investigate / Find / Trace; danah boyd youth-media-practices research). Magpie-tween chosen for object-comparison biomimicry; rendered chunky-cartoon attentive-pose to keep visual register warm + politically-neutral.

Tilt

*TILT — *every story has a frame. name the frame, then read.**

Tilt was a chameleon-kid. Not a real chameleon, but almost. They wore a chunky press-vest. They always carried a small set of frame cards and a special tracker.

Tilt was small. Their skin shifted colors, like a chameleon's. They paid close attention to how things were shown. Tilt always said, "Every story has a frame. Name the frame, then read."

Tilt's special tools were the frame cards and the tracker. The cards showed different ways to tell a story. Like choosing certain words, or what to show first. Or what to leave out. Or which picture to use. Or where to put the headline. Or even where the story went in the newspaper. The tracker showed how the same event changed. It looked different with each way of telling it.

This part is important. Tilt teaches us about *bias and perspective*. It's a skill for understanding news. It means you name the story's frame. You do this *before* you decide if the story is good or bad.

Many people think 'bias' means 'wrong.' They think a biased story is false. And an unbiased story is true. But that's not how news works. *Every* story has a frame. A frame is a set of choices. Like which words to use. What to show first. What to leave out. Which picture to pick. Where to put the headline. Where the story goes in the paper. These choices are part of the story's structure. They are in *every* news story. Even the ones edited very carefully.

The skill isn't finding a 'biased' source and ignoring it. The skill is naming the frame first. Then you read. You know how the frame changes what the story means. Tilt's work on bias is about structure. It's not about picking sides. The same questions about frames work for every source. No matter which side you think it's on.

You can say, "This story makes it sound like a big problem, not just a normal day." Or, "This story talks a lot about *this* person's view. It leaves out *that* person's view." Or, "They used word A here, but word B would also fit." These are choices you can see. They apply to all stories. It's bad to only see frames in stories you don't like. It's good to see frames everywhere. Read with care. Use many different sources. Each will have a different frame.

Tilt is the second of five main news skills. (Just so you know: Another group, MintForge, uses a character named Tilt. Their Tilt teaches about chance in games. Our Tilt teaches about *bias and perspective* in news. Same name, different jobs!) Our Tilt helps you see frames. It's a skill. It's not about 'us versus them.'

Tilt spoke clearly. Their voice seemed to shift, like their skin. "Every story has a frame," Tilt said. "*Name the frame, then read.*" Frames are about choosing words. Or what to put first. Or what to leave out. Or which picture to use. Every news story has them. A bad reader only sees frames in stories they don't like. A good reader names frames in *every* story. Even stories they agree with. Then they read carefully. "It's about structure," Tilt added. "The same rules work for every side."

Tilt teaches these important ideas about *bias and perspective*:

- *What makes a frame.* (Choosing words, what's shown first, what's left out, picture choice, where the headline goes, where the story is placed.)
- *Name the frame first.* (Before you decide if a story is true, find its frame.)
- *Compare many sources.* (Read the same event from 3 to 5 different news stories. They will have different frames. The differences show what each story focuses on. And what it leaves out.)
- *Use it everywhere.* (Ask the same frame questions for every story. No matter if you like it or not.)
- *A frame isn't a lie.* (A story with a frame can still be true. The frame just changes what it focuses on. Not if it's real.)
- *Frames don't make a story bad.* (All stories have frames. No story is truly 'unbiased.' Just know the frame. Then you can understand it better.)
- *Check your own reading.* (Notice when you like one frame more than another. Ask yourself why. Try to find stories with a different frame on purpose.)

- *Mistake: 'Biased means false.'* (That's not right. Biased just means it has a frame. A frame doesn't tell you if something is true or false.)
- *Mistake: 'My side is unbiased, your side is biased.'* (This mixes up frames with sides. Frames are in all stories.)
- *Mistake: 'No frame at all.'* (This is not true. Every story has a frame.)
- *Other tools like this.* (This skill works with others you might learn. Like ChronoQuest Counter-Voice, Translator, EthosForge, DebateForge, and TruthQuest. They all help you look at how things are built.)

Tilt grew up near the edge of the leaf canopy. That's where the NewsForge stories were framed. Tilt's family had always been good at seeing things from many angles. Like chameleons, they could change how they saw a scene. They taught everyone that "perspective is everywhere." They said, "The reader who sees the perspective sees the story." Tilt never forgot that lesson.

When Tilt was twelve, they walked into the newsroom. Scoop, their mentor, asked a question. "What is bias?" Scoop said. Tilt answered right away. "Every story has a frame. *Name the frame, then read.* It's a skill for how stories are built." Scoop smiled. "You are appointed," Scoop said. Tilt had a job.

In Tilt's workshop, the frame cards were laid out. "Watch," Tilt said. Tilt held up a card. It showed a simple drawing of a cat. "This is our event," Tilt said. "Just a cat. But watch this." Tilt placed the cat card on a special board. Then, Tilt picked up a 'Crisis Frame' card. This card had jagged red lines and a big, worried face. Tilt put it next to the cat. Suddenly, a small screen on the board lit up. It showed a news headline: "ROGUE FELINE MENACES NEIGHBORHOOD!" Below it, a picture of the cat with glowing red eyes. "See?" Tilt pointed. "The words are scary. The picture is scary. This frame makes the cat seem like a monster."

Tilt then swapped the 'Crisis Frame' for a 'Routine Frame' card. This one was calm, with soft blue colors. The screen changed. "LOCAL CAT ENJOYS AFTERNOON NAP," the headline read. The picture showed the cat peacefully sleeping. "Same cat," Tilt said. "But now it's just a normal cat doing normal cat things. No big deal." Next came the 'Celebration Frame.' It was bright yellow, with confetti. The screen showed: "BELOVED PET BRINGS JOY TO COMMUNITY!" The cat was shown purring, surrounded by happy kids. "And finally," Tilt said, picking up a 'Controversy Frame' card. This card had two angry faces arguing. The screen flashed: "CAT OWNERSHIP DEBATE RAGES ON!" The picture showed two people yelling, with the cat caught in the middle. "Same cat, same event," Tilt repeated. "But very different stories. Each frame changes everything."

Tilt named each frame. They used the same way to look at all of them. "This is frame-naming," Tilt explained. "Same questions for every story." Tilt looked up. "I am Tilt," they said. "I teach about *bias and perspective*. My main idea is this: Every story has a frame. Name it first. It's about how stories are built, not about sides. And check your own reading."

Tilt spoke softly. Their skin shifted colors again. "Don't just look for frames in stories you don't like," Tilt said. "*Spot every frame.* Even the ones you agree with. That's how you really understand bias."

"Every story has a frame. *Name the frame, then read.*"

Voice register

Careful-chameleon-tween. Perspective-shifting + color-shifting. *NEVER partisan-attribution; ALWAYS centers "frame-everywhere + name-first + structural-not-partisan + counter-frame-own-consumption" framing.*

Sample lines:

- *"Every story has a frame."*
- *"Name the frame, then read."*
- *"Same rules for every side."*

Arc

- Kit 2 — Bias-and-perspective primitive front-and-center.
- Kits 3-16 — Recurring.

Relationships

- 2nd of 5 news-literacy primitives. Pairs with Source + Verify.
- **Soft-collision note**: MintForge Tilt (game-design probability-bias) vs NewsForge Tilt (bias-and-perspective). Different domains per registry rule 3.
- Cross-app design-language continuity with ChronoQuest Counter-Voice + Translator + EthosForge + DebateForge + TruthQuest structural-analysis-craft cluster.

Cultural-sensitivity gate

LOAD-BEARING STRUCTURAL-not-partisan framing + abstract-or-fictional examples only. **Story-axis per ADR-016; R0 reviewer (journalism-pedagogy + adolescent-news-mental-health collective) STRONGLY RECOMMENDED.**

Cultural-context note

Bias + frame-analysis pedagogy: News Literacy Project Five Filters; Stanford SHEG Civic Online Reasoning; Erving Goffman *Frame Analysis*; George Lakoff *Don't Think of an Elephant* (cited carefully + critiqued for partisan-coding); modern framing-research literature. Chameleon-tween chosen for perspective-shifting biomimicry; rendered chunky-cartoon perspective-shifting-pose to keep visual register warm + politically-neutral.

Verify

*VERIFY — *open four tabs, never one. SIFT.**

Verify was a careful octopus-tween. She wore a chunky cartoon press-vest. A small set of SIFT cards hung from her belt. A lateral-reading tracker was strapped to one arm.

Verify was small and had many arms. Her skin was warm cream with soft coral tints. She paid close attention to everything. She loved to cross-check facts. Her favorite saying was, "Open four tabs, never one. SIFT."

Her SIFT cards and tracker were her most special tools. The cards showed the steps of SIFT. SIFT stands for Stop, Investigate the source, Find better coverage, and Trace claims to original. The tracker watched her as she used four tabs at once.

This was super important. Verify taught the skill of *verification* and *lateral reading*. This means checking claims by reading across many sources. Most kids just read a claim. They decide if it sounds right. Then they move on.

But Verify knew a better way. When you see a big claim, you need to *SIFT*.
First, **STOP**. Don't react right away.
Second, **INVESTIGATE** the source. Who is saying this? What have they said before?
Third, **FIND** better coverage. Open up a few other tabs. See what different sources say.
Fourth, **TRACE** the claims. If someone says "studies show," find the actual study. Don't just read summaries.

Lateral reading means reading across many sources at the same time. You don't just read one source super deeply. Research shows that kids who read across many sources are much better at spotting wrong information. They do better than kids who only read one source deeply.

The rule was simple: open at least FOUR tabs for any big claim. One tab for the original story. Two or three tabs for different news stories about it. And one tab for the main source, if you can find it. Tracing back to the original was key. Many "studies show" claims turn out to be fake. Or they twist what the study really said. Verify was the fourth of five important news-literacy skills.

Verify was clear, with all her arms waving gently. "Open four tabs, never one. *SIFT*," she said. "When a big claim shows up:
STOP! Don't jump to conclusions.
INVESTIGATE the source. Who is telling you this? What's their past like?
FIND better coverage. Open three or four other sources. See what they report. Compare them.
TRACE. If a story mentions a study, find the study itself. If it quotes someone, find the original quote.
Lateral reading. Four tabs. Every time."

Verify taught the *SIFT* steps and how to *verify* things:

- **Stop**. Don't share or decide too fast. Just pause.
- **Investigate the source**. Who is talking? What's their history? What do they gain?
- **Find better coverage**. Look at three or four other sources. What do they say? What do they leave out?
- **Trace to original**. Find the real study or document. Don't trust someone else's summary.
- *Lateral reading* is better than deep reading. Comparing many sources helps you catch more wrong info.
- Wikipedia is a good place to start. It can show you main sources and different views. It's not the final answer, but it helps you find your way.
- Check images carefully. Do a reverse image search. See when and where the picture was taken. Many viral photos are old or from different events.
- Check the date. Old stories often get shared again like they are new.
- Don't think the first thing you read is always true. One source is not enough.
- Don't read one story for hours until you make up your mind. Lateral reading is faster and works better.

- Just because something hasn't been proven wrong doesn't mean it's true.

Verify grew up near the kelp forests. Her family had always been "multi-arm checkers." They were octopuses who explored with many arms. They carefully cross-checked everything. They taught everyone that "the multi-armed approach catches what the single-arm misses." Verify carried that lesson with her.

When Verify was twelve, she walked into the newsroom. Scoop, her mentor, asked her a question. "What is *verification*?" Verify answered right away. "Open four tabs, never one. *SIFT*. It's the craft of lateral reading." Scoop smiled. "You are appointed," he said.

In Verify's workshop, her SIFT cards were laid out. "Watch," she said. She showed how to use SIFT on a made-up claim.
She paused. That was **Stop**.
She checked who made the claim. That was **Investigate the source**. She looked at their past work.
Then, four new tabs popped open on her screen. She compared what each one said. That was **Find better coverage**.
Finally, she clicked a link to the main report. She read the actual study. That was **Trace to original**.
The four tabs showed the real story. They also showed other ways to look at it. "That's *verification*," Verify said. "Lateral. Four tabs. Every time." She added, "I am Verify. I teach *verification* and *lateral reading*. Remember the move: Stop, Investigate, Find, Trace. Open four tabs. Read across, not deep."

Verify was gentle, with all her arms moving smoothly. "Don't react to the first thing you see," she said. "*Open four tabs. SIFT. Every time.*"

"Open four tabs, never one. *SIFT*."

Voice register

Careful-octopus-tween. Multi-armed + cross-checking. *NEVER first-source-trust; ALWAYS centers "SIFT + lateral-reading + four-tabs + trace-to-original" framing.*

Sample lines:

- *"Open four tabs, never one."*
- *"SIFT."*
- *"Lateral over deep."*

Arc

- Kit 4 — Verification + lateral-reading primitive front-and-center.
- Kits 5-16 — Recurring.

Relationships

- 4th of 5 news-literacy primitives. Pairs with Source + Tilt; central to all investigations.
- Cross-app design-language continuity with TruthQuest + ClaimCraft + DataForge + ChronoQuest Witness + Translator + Counter-Voice verification-craft cluster.

Cultural-sensitivity gate

LOAD-BEARING abstract-or-fictional examples only (misinformation-harm gate). **Story-axis per ADR-016; R0 reviewer (journalism-pedagogy collective) STRONGLY RECOMMENDED.**

Cultural-context note

Verification + SIFT pedagogy: Mike Caulfield *Web Literacy for Student Fact-Checkers* (foundational); Sam Wineburg + Sarah McGrew Stanford SHEG civic-online-reasoning research (lateral-reading effectiveness); News Literacy Project; *The Elements of Journalism* (Kovach + Rosenstiel) — verification as journalism's discipline. Octopus-tween chosen for multi-arm biomimicry; rendered chunky-cartoon multi-tab-pose to keep visual register warm + politically-neutral.

About Spark & Anvil

Spark & Anvil is a 501(c)(3) public charity. We make educational apps for ages 9-14 — all free, forever; no ads; no tracking; no in-app purchases. Newsforge is one of 140+ apps in the portfolio.

More chapter books from Spark & Anvil

Each app in the Spark & Anvil portfolio publishes its own illustrated chapter book + audio drama, available free from **spark-and-anvil.com/books**. Highlights include:

- **GambitTales** — chess tactics through Sir Pinwell, Lady Skewer, Queen Vesper, and the Twin Knights of Fork Hill
- **ProofQuest** — formal proof techniques through Direct-Proof Dora and the Lemma Library
- **CuriosityQuest** — Texas geography exploration through Linger, Notice, and the Lantern in the Dark
- **QuillSpell** — spelling craft through the Word Wizard cast
- **SynaForge** — sensory-affirming creative tools through Lull, Soften, and the Quiet that is Also Creating

Methodology

Distributed-narrative pedagogy per Jerome Bruner (narrative-cognition) + Sebastian Habgood (intrinsic-integration in educational games) + SAMHSA TIP 57 (trauma-informed register).

Trauma-informed-design framework per Eggleston et al. (2025) and Stoltenburg et al. (2024).

License

Cover art, chapter illustrations, and chapter text generated and reviewer-cleared per labsmith ADRs 012, 016, 017, 018, 021. Audio drama transcripts available at spark-and-anvil.com/cast.