

Not So Innocent: Book Trailers as Promotional Text and Anticipatory Stories

Have a challenge for you before you begin this article. Examine the columns shown below and consider the relationship between the two wordlists.

Olympic Dreams	Confused
Happy	Denial
Hopeful	Detention Center
Devon	Baby
Soccer Player	Hopeless
Normal	Desperation
Mature	Pregnancy
Conscience	Attempted Murder
Straight-A Student	Punishment

Penguin Young Readers Group uses these two sets of words in a 30-second YouTube book video trailer to promote the 2009 young adult novel *After* by Amy Efav (see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUCOBQf2GpQ>). As the trailer opens, each word in the first column moves into the white space of a static video frame to systematically form a uniform block arrangement that mimics a wordle. The block momentarily freezes while the frame expands to incorporate the still image of a slender young woman leaning against a wall. Then one by one, each of the original words disappears and is replaced by a new word from the second column. The new words appear at angles and cut across the frame to create a chaotic, non-rectangular arrangement of the words.

Meanwhile, the image of the young woman transforms to reveal that she is pregnant. When the chaos stops, the words sweep off the screen. The empty

frame horizontally divides in half, white on top and black on the bottom. Now, the video tells viewers: “You’ve done the unthinkable.” The word *unthinkable* appears on the bottom half of the screen. The next frame asks: “What happens . . . *after*?” With dramatic pause, the word *after* is highlighted against the black background. The trailer concludes with a still image of the book cover, which incorporates the book title, author, the Penguin logo, and the book website: <http://www.after-book.com>. Finally, in the YouTube video description box, Penguin’s July 24, 2009, message states: “On sale August 11, 2009,” letting consumers know when the new book will be released.

Just as movie producers commission trailers to advertise their new films, some book publishers and authors now commission online video trailers to promote young adult novels. According to Jerome Kramer, acting publisher at *Kirkus Media* (as cited by Maul, 2006a), book trailers offer “a promotional campaign for books like nothing that’s ever been done” (p. 1). Unlike student-made book videos, which are examined in the context of digital booktalks (Gunter & Kenny, 2008) and school literature response activities (Kajder, 2008), studies of the promotional video campaigns for books appear rarely in the educational research literature. In this article, I investigate the impact of publishers’ promotional video trailers on prospective readers’ expectations for new young adult books. Further, I argue that book trailers are unique texts that include anything that is constructed through language, including silence (Jones, 2008), and can be in any form—“written, oral, signed, electronic, pictorial, etc.” (Bloome & Egan-Robertson, 1993, p. 311).

Table 1. Books titles and URLs for video trailers of current young adult novels

Book Title	URL
<i>After</i> by Amy Efav	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TUCOBQf2GpQ
<i>How I Live Now</i> by Meg Rosoff	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qt_aDmkEPTQ
<i>The Adoration of Jenna Fox</i> by Mary Pearson	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnk1zPw_PHC
<i>The Hunger Games</i> by Suzanne Collins	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TnxXoMpF3c
<i>The Maze Runner</i> by James Dashner	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2-zYcD-dDs
<i>Very LeFreak</i> by Rachel Cohn	http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-OxDa1fl2t0

Video trailers for the books listed in Table 1 will serve as the basis for this article in which I will first discuss the relevance of book trailers for today's digitally enabled youth. Then, I will describe the major attributes of book trailers, proposing that they be viewed both as texts and cultural artifacts. Next, I connect the videos to Wolfgang Iser's (1978) concept that readers develop *horizons of expectation* in response to text. Finally, I present the findings of three studies in which undergraduate college students respond to the promotional book trailers mentioned in Table 1.

Relevance

Digitally Enabled Youth

Today's book trailer trend comes at a time when viewing online videos is a common practice among digitally enabled youth. YouTube (2010) reports that people view 2 billion online videos on YouTube per day, worldwide. Correspondingly, the Kaiser Foundation's Generation M² report (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010) shows that 70% of young people between the ages of 8 and 18 use the Internet on a typical day (p. 20). While online, these young people most frequently watch online videos, engage in social networking, and play computer games (p. 21).

Youth who view online videos likely share a cultural cognizance with them. Smagorinsky (2001) argues: "[T]exts are composed of signs that themselves are inscribed and codified as *cultural artifacts* and are read by people whose ways of encoding are conditioned by participation in cultural practice. . . . [R]eaders and texts share a cultural cognizance" (p. 146). As a result, promotional book video trailers are cultural artifacts within this global cultural practice of viewing online videos.

When social-networking Internet users enjoy online videos, they may post them to their MySpace, Facebook, or Twitter pages. Facebook alone has a growing audience of more than 400 million active users (Facebook, 2010), which demonstrates that social networking is a global cultural practice, too. Given these statistics, friend-to-friend video sharing of online book trailers could ignite interest in books, since people are most frequently motivated to read and/or buy books based on a friend's recommendation (Publisher's Weekly, 2007).

Familiarity & Novelty

In addition to valuing books recommended by friends, Mackey (1996) argues that young people may also value texts that appear in different formats because they seem more important and "the most worth attending to" (p. 20). This suggests that young consumers may think that a book they have seen in an online video trailer will provide a worthwhile reading experience because it is represented in both textual and digital media.

Consumers may also gravitate toward books that are promoted in a recognizable context. Video book trailers employ the familiar film trailer model to advertise new releases to prospective readers. Kernan (2004), a film trailer scholar, observes that trailers offer "more of what you know and love" and affirm both the familiar and the novel (p. 43). Hale (2002) sees that chain bookstores take up this same ideology in creating displays that highlight familiar and desirable titles, thereby assuring customers that they will not be disappointed with their new book purchase.

Related to this merging of familiarity with novelty, *Kirkus Reviews* inaugurated the Teen Book Video Awards in 2006. Similar to the Academy Awards,

the Teen Book Video Awards help to “promote great books where teens live online,” says Jerome Kramer of *Kirkus Media* (Maul, 2006c, p. 1). For the 2009

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contest, Random House challenged student filmmakers to produce motion picture book trailers for the following novels: *Very LeFreak* by Rachel Cohn (released January 12, 2010); *Fallen* by Lauren Kate (released December 8, 2009); and *The Maze Runner* by James Dashner (released October 6, 2009). The contest mimicked popular television contests such as *American Idol* and *So You Think You Can Dance* with a familiar online voting process. During the month of October 2009, Internet users viewed the three book trailer finalists and voted for the winner at the following website: http://www.kirkusreviews.com/kirkusreviews/book_video/index.jsp.

The video book trailer for *Fallen*, created by filmmaker Benjamin Bliss, won the contest. On December 1, a week before *Fallen* was released, the novel was already #72 on Amazon.com’s best-selling teen book list, which included several books from the *Twilight* series. In addition, *The Maze Runner* was on Amazon.com’s top 100 teen booklist. While it is unclear whether the Teen Book Video Awards influenced buyers, the coincidence is suggestive.

Could online video trailers spark an interest in books in the same way that film adaptations do? A host of books have been adapted for movies over the last several years; among them are *The Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, *Curious George*, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, the Harry Potter series, *The Polar Express*, *Tuck Everlasting*, *Babe*, and *The Lord of the Rings*. In looking at recent book sales after the movie releases, the Association for Library Services to Children (ALSC) Research and Development Committee (2006) notes: “If one judges by sales alone, it appears that movies can generate interest in books and vice versa” (p. 46). Ferguson (1998) observed that more than half of the youth in her survey of book buyers were inclined to purchase a book that corresponded with a movie they had recently seen. At the library, Sturm (2003) also saw a connection between movie releases and chil-

dren’s library book selections. Given these findings, there is potential for video book trailers to influence reader preferences.

Trailer Attributes

Kernan (2004) observes that most film trailers share common attributes, which provide a familiar framework for viewers. These attributes include: a) an opening or closing address to the audience about the source text (e.g., young adult novel); b) an introduction of the main characters; and c) a selection of scenes from the source text or montages of “quick-cut” action scenes (p. 9). The two types of book trailers examined in this article do, indeed, reflect these attributes. The first employs still and/or animated images, and usually includes text and a sound track. Actors and dialogue are usually absent, as in the trailers for *After* and *Hunger Games*. The second type most resembles movie trailers. Like the promotional videos for *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, *How I Live Now*, and *Very LeFreak*, these book trailers include actors, live action scenes, and narration and/or dialogue.

Both types of book trailers in this article provide basic information about the novels. The trailers for Scholastic’s *Hunger Games*, Penguin’s *After*, Henry Holt’s *Adoration of Jenna Fox*, and Random House’s *How I Live Now* and *Very LeFreak* give closing addresses. Each shows the title, author, and book cover in the final frames of the trailer. A message about the release date and/or where the book can be purchased is also provided. Random House tells viewers *Very LeFreak* will be: “Available Everywhere Books Are Sold [in] January 2010.” Penguin, on the other hand, uses the YouTube video description box to inform viewers that *After* will be: “On Sale August 11, 2009.”

All but one of the five trailers, *Hunger Games*, introduces the main characters either in name or by sight. (The trailer for *Hunger Games* mentions “two teenage heroes.” The main character, Katniss, is identified in the YouTube description box for the video.) Penguin includes the main character’s name, Devon, in a large bold font as part of the first video wordlist. In the live action trailer for *Very LeFreak*, the main character is introduced in the opening scene by her laptop, which chimes “Good morning, Very. It’s time to get up. You’re looking hot today.” Very groans and tumbles out of bed to click the computer on her bed

table. In the trailers for *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* and *How I Live Now*, the main character narrates the video as she appears in the scenes.

Both types of book trailers offer either a montage of quick-cut images or a selection of action scenes from the novel to pique audience interest. For example, in the trailer for *The Hunger Games*, the flickering image of a television screen with static reception is the background to the following text: *Each year in the ruins of North America . . . 24 teenagers are forced to enter the Hunger Games. Only the winner survives. Every moment is televised.* This merging of image and text foreshadows scenes from the novel and creates space for viewer interpretation.

In contrast, the book trailers for *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, *How I Live Now*, *Maze Runner*, and *Very LeFreak* resemble blockbuster movie trailers presenting a montage of scenes from the source text. For example, the trailer for *Maze Runner* is like a movie trailer for a horror film. It features a strange, unforgiving setting called the Glade. Underscored with suspenseful music and eerie sounds, the trailer opens with the main character, Thomas, enclosed in what appears to be a concrete shaft in the ground. All Thomas knows is his name. In the next scene, Thomas meets other young men who are also trapped in the Glade. One of these men reports that the group has been waiting for Thomas to help them find an exit through the maze. In the final scene, Thomas says that he wants to be a “maze runner.” Then the camera turns to a bruised and bloodied young man chained to a table. The boy screams and bucks his body.

On the lighter side, the trailer for *Very LeFreak* presents like a movie trailer for a dramatic comedy. Very wakes to a computer greeting and moves through a series of daily events, each affected by her unabated use of technology. Her school administrator gives an ultimatum and, in the next scene, Very enters an electronic addicts’ rehabilitation center. Here, the electrical outlets are covered with wire cages, and group activities include chanting: *“Faces are better than Facebook. Why Twitter when you can talk?”* For today’s digitally connected teen, such a place could be awful. Very must persevere for 28 days without any of the things that, presumably, help her feel connected to other people. The viewer is left wondering if Very will last in the electronic detox program.

While the latter book videos resemble blockbuster film trailers, there is an important difference. Movie trailers commonly feature actual excerpts from the full-length films, which are the source texts. In contrast, book trailers “give filmmakers an opportunity to share their interpretations of unique stories,” says Susan Muirhead, the filmmaker of the book trailer for *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff (cited from Maul, 2006b). In book trailers, viewers see the filmmakers’ translation of young adult novels. Butler (1995), in his discussion of film adaptations of books submits, says, “As with any conversion from one language to another, the most successful translation [of book to film] is never a strictly literal one” (p. 310). Similarly, the most successful translation of story elements into a promotional book trailer may not be literal. Panaou & Tsilimen (2010) argue that realistically speaking, it is not possible to maintain the very same subject and style of a source text in a translation. Rather, it becomes an interpretive re-contextualization of the source text (Mackey, 2010). Consequently, book trailer viewers actually see a filmmaker’s personal response to a young adult novel, which is inevitably affected by the filmmaker’s past experiences and current interests (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994).

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Book Trailers as Anticipatory Stories

Soter (1999) suggests that in examining a text relative to its author (or a trailer relative to its filmmaker), the text is not so innocent. From this perspective, the rhetorical strategies an author/filmmaker uses to persuade readers are more transparent. According to Kernan (2004), the film trailer is strategically designed to achieve the effects of “a unique form of narrative film exhibition, wherein promotional discourse and narrative pleasure are conjoined” (p. 1). This promotion–pleasure union also exists in book trailers, regardless of whether the video is live action, animation, still images, or a combination thereof.

Moreover, as a form of advertising, trailers are themselves *little story* adaptations of a bigger source text (Kernan, 2004). These *little stories* are expected to foster anticipation and intrigue among viewers. Will Very survive the detox program in *Very LeFreak*? Will Thomas solve the maze in *Maze Runner*? What happens after Devon does the unthinkable in *After*? Who is Jenna Fox, anyway? What are the *Hunger Games* and why does only one survive? As little stories, promotional trailers are infused with “a kind of pregnancy,” which prompts

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viewers to envision “imaginary (as-yet-unseen) film[s]” to satiate their curiosities (Kernan, 2004, p. 13). Instead of the actual source text, we really want to read the idealized films or novels we envisioned in response to the trailer.

Kernan’s (2004) observation that trailers prompt audiences to envision stories before their public

release dates correlates with Wolfgang Iser’s (1978) reader response theory. According to Iser (1978), gaps in a text create “blanks which the reader is to fill in” (p. 169). Bressler (2007) explains that when the text does not provide readers enough information about a character, the setting, an event or relationship, or other story elements, readers must fill in these “gaps” using their own knowledge base. As a result, readers create what Iser calls *horizons of expectations* (cited from Bressler, 2007, p. 85). Readers’ *horizons of expectations* for a source text expand and contract according to the depth of the gaps of the film or book trailers. When readers begin to fill in the gaps with an idealized storyline, the promotional value of the trailer rises because readers will likely see the film or read the book to confirm their expectations surrounding the source text. Once they engage with the source text, readers will frequently modify their *horizons of expectations* to accommodate the conflict, shifts, and changes that occur in the story (Bressler, 2007).

The Studies

The following set of studies examines college students’ *horizons of expectations* in response to the publisher’s

promotional video trailers for the young adult novels *After* by Amy Efav, *How I Live Now* by Meg Rosoff, *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* by Mary Pearson, *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins, *The Maze Runner* by James Dasner, and *Very LeFreak* by Rachel Cohn. The first study considers *After* and *Very LeFreak*. The second study focuses on the four other novels. Three groups of students who were enrolled in my undergraduate classes in adolescent and young adult literature at a large Midwest university participated in the studies as part of the course curriculum.

Methodology

Group A consisted of 4 men and 12 women who consented to participate in the first study during winter term 2010. With the exception of two women, who were older than 30, the students in Group A were in their early twenties and of European American descent. Two groups participated in the second study. Group B included the Group A students along with 8 additional women and 2 additional men, for a total of 26 participants. One woman in Group B was of African American descent, while the other participants were of European American descent. Group C consisted of 15 women and 8 men who participated during spring term 2010. In Group C, 2 of the men and 2 of the women were older than 30. The other students were in their early twenties. Two women were of African American descent while the other participants were of European American descent.

As a class activity, I required that students in my adolescent literature courses view the publishers’ book trailers on YouTube at least twice and write a response to each of the trailers. In the first study, I simply asked Group A students: What do you think the book is going to be about? In the second study, I asked Group B and C students to address the following set of questions in their responses: What do you think the book is going to be about? Would you be interested in reading the book? What do you think are the most significant aspects of the promotional video trailer? The data I present in this article reflects only the responses of participants who had not read the selected book.

Data Analysis

I coded the participants’ responses to the book trailers and categorized them in terms of comments regarding characters, setting, plot overview, significant events,

genre/story descriptors, connections to other texts, anticipated future reading experiences, and aesthetic qualities of the online video. Table 2 shows the results of the first study. Table 3 shows the results of the coding for participants' responses to the book trailers in the second study.

Results: Study I

After. As Table 2 demonstrates, the horizon of expectations of the 30-second text-based trailer for *After* varies among the participants. Thirteen participants think the main character is a girl who became pregnant, while 2 think the protagonist is a boy who gets his girlfriend pregnant. Half of the participants comment that the lead character is a good student. Three expect different murder scenarios, and 4 anticipate that the story will, in part, occur at a jail or a detention center. Other participants foresee that themes related to emotional struggle are part of the book.

Very LeFreak. In contrast to the result for *After*, the horizon of expectations for the 1-minute/53-second live action trailer for *Very LeFreak* are more uniform. For example, all of the participants agree that the story is about Very. Eleven participants (68%) anticipate that technology will be a major theme in the story. Half expect that Very's addiction to electronics will cause her to go to a rehabilitation/camp program. None of the participants in this first study, however, indicate a preference for either reading or avoiding *After* and *Very LeFreak*, based on the promotional book trailers.

Results: Study 2

The Hunger Games. Based on the trailer, approximately two-thirds of the participants expect that *The Hunger Games* is about a deadly contest in which the last survivor wins. While this 1-minute/11-second trailer is entirely text-based with an underlying soundtrack, the participants anticipate that the book will share similarities with a range of survival-based reality television series, select films, and historical gladiator games. Moreover, based on the trailer, 95% of the students in Group C want to read the book.

Table 2. In Study 1, 16 participants responded to 2 book trailers. Their comments were coded and grouped by category, listed by row. The "Comments" column shows the number of participants who share common expectations. For example, 2 participants expect that the lead character in *After* is male and gets his girlfriend pregnant. In contrast, all 16 participants expect that Very is the lead in *Very LeFreak*.

AFTER		VERY LEFREAK	
Total Group A Participants: 16		Total Group A Participants: 16	
Category	Comments	Category	Comments
CHARACTER(S)		CHARACTER(S)	
Female lead character	13	Very is the lead character	16
Male lead character	02	<i>An electronic-aholic</i>	08
<i>He gets his girlfriend pregnant</i>	02	SETTING	
Descriptors of lead character		Rehab / program / camp	08
<i>Good student</i>	08	PLOT OVERVIEW	
<i>Athlete</i>	06	Addiction leads to rehab	08
<i>Perfect/Organized life</i>	04	SIGNIFICANT EVENT(S)	
SETTING		Entering rehab	08
Jail / Detention Center	04	THEMES	
PLOT OVERVIEW		Technology / electronics	11
Girl becomes pregnant	15	Life change	03
Boy murders girlfriend	01	Relationships	01
Lead character murders baby	01	Social skills	01
Other character murdered	01	Irony	01
Bad decision including crime	02		
SIGNIFICANT EVENT(S)			
Pregnancy	15		
THEMES			
Ruined dreams / life	07		
Confusion, denial, fear	02		
Dual lives	01		
Family issues	01		
Guilt	01		
Loneliness	01		
Putting life back together	01		

None of the participants require more information to make their decision about the book. This is not the case with any other trailer.

The Adoration of Jenna Fox. As a result of this 2-minute/3-second trailer, most of the participants (78%) comment that a character suffers a coma in the story. More than half mention an accident as well as memory loss. However, not everybody thinks that Jenna Fox is the lead character. At least 7 participants expect that the protagonist does not know Jenna at all. Approximately 50% of the participants are interested in reading the book. Two participants made connections to other texts.

Table 3. In Study 2, at least 41 participants responded to promotional book trailers for: *The Adoration of Jenna Fox*, *How I Live Now*, *The Hunger Games*, and *The Maze Runner*. Their comments were coded and grouped into common categories, listed by row. The “Comments” columns show the number of participants who share common expectations for each book. For example, 28 participants expect that Thomas is the lead character in *The Maze Runner*, and 17 expect that he lost his memory. Among the 23 Group C respondents to *The Hunger Games*, 22 want to read the book as a result of the trailer. In contrast, 24 participants do not want to read *How I Live Now* after viewing the trailer.

THE ADORATION OF JENNA FOX Total Participants: 41 Group B: 18; Group C: 23		HOW I LIVE NOW Total Participants: 49 Group B: 26; Group C: 23		THE HUNGER GAMES Total Participants: 43 Group B: 20; Group C: 23		THE MAZE RUNNER Total Participants: 43 Group B: 20; Group C: 23	
Category	Comments	Category	Comments	Category	Comments	Category	Comments
CHARACTER(S)		CHARACTER(S)		CHARACTER(S)		CHARACTER(S)	
Jenna Fox	12	Girl	12	Two lead heroes	04	Thomas / male lead	28
Girl (general)	11	Girl & her younger sister	2	Teen/Child players	20	<i>Recently abducted</i>	05
Girl: <i>not Jenna Fox</i>	07	Teens (general)	05	<i>Forced to compete</i>	10	<i>Has memory loss</i>	17
Alien	01	SETTING		Viewers of the H. Games	02	<i>Wants be a “runner”</i>	09
Jenna’s father	04	War zone	40	H Game Sponsors	03	Boys / teens	22
SETTING		Wilderness	08	SETTING		<i>Different jobs /roles</i>	03
In the future	14	PLOT OVERVIEW		North America	15	<i>Outcasts from society</i>	02
PLOT OVERVIEW		War occurs	40	Post-war/Apocalyptic	19	<i>Some nearly crazed</i>	01
Character in accident	23	Loss of family and friends	32	Famine/ scarcity	07	Unknown authority group	13
She wakes from a coma	32	Characters try to survive	20	Island location	01	<i>Tests the boys</i>	07
Recovery of memory	22	Characters hide from others	07	PLOT OVERVIEW		Dangerous creatures	04
She relearns and adjusts	14	SIGNIFICANT EVENT(S)		Fight to death: 1 survivor	28	<i>Hunt humans</i>	02
Something mysterious	14	War	40	Hungry people compete	04	<i>Minotaur</i>	01
<i>No control of own body</i>	03	Finding dead soldier	08	Games: world televised	17	SETTING	
SIGNIFICANT EVENT(S)		THEMES		Games: gov’t controlled	02	The Glade	09
Waking from coma	32	Loss	32	SIGNIFICANT EVENT(S)		In the future	03
THEMES		Survival	20	H. Games: Annual event	25	Alternate universe	01
Confusion	06	Death	09	THEMES		Prison	01
Identity & self-discovery	05	Family	07	Survival	28	PLOT OVERVIEW	
STORY DESCRIPTORS		War versus peace	04	Violence / Death	07	Solve the maze	25
Mystery	05	STORY DESCRIPTORS		Competition	04	Escape to survive	19
Suspense/ Thriller	04	Mystery	05	Hunger	04	Fight for survival	06
TEXT CONNECTIONS		Suspense/ Thriller	04	Social commentary	03	Spread of virus	02
<i>Flight of the Navigator</i>	01	TEXT CONNECTIONS		Collaboration/solidarity	02	SIGNIFICANT EVENT(S)	
R.L. Stein scary stories	01	<i>Lord of the Flies</i>	01	Exploitation of people	02	Boy is chained to table	09
READING INTEREST		Cormac McCarthy novels	01	STORY DESCRIPTORS		THEMES	
Want to read book	21	Gary Paulsen novels	01	Suspenseful / thriller	09	Survival	25
Will not read book	12	<i>Terminator</i> (film)	01	Futuristic dystopia / Sci-fi	06	Teamwork	10
Need more information	02	Current war in Iraq	01	Scary	01	Power struggle	08
TRAILER AESTHETICS		READING INTEREST		TEXT CONNECTIONS		Conspiracy	06
Good narrator’s voice	05	Want to read book	19	Reality Television	13	Desire to go home	03
Mystery: mirror reflection	04	Will not read book	24	Gladiator era games	03	Search for Identity	01
Music supports story	03	Need more information	04	<i>Survivor</i> (TV series)	03	STORY DESCRIPTORS	
No action: boring trailer	03	TRAILER AESTHETICS		<i>Gladiator</i> (TV contest)	01	Scary / creepy	16
		Not enough information to capture attention	13	<i>Lost</i> (TV series)	01	Suspenseful / thriller	11
		No context for war	04	<i>Mad Max/Thunderdome</i>	01	Graphic / horror	04
		Depressing and dull	02	<i>Saw</i> (film)	01	Sci-fi	04
		Slow video: slow book	02	<i>The Running Man</i> (film)	01	TEXT CONNECTIONS	
				Sci-fi books (1984; <i>Fahrenheit</i>)	01	<i>Saw</i> (film)	05
				Horror films (general)	01	Horror films (in general)	04
				READING INTEREST		<i>Survivor</i> (TV series)	02
				Want to read book (Group C only)	22	<i>Holes</i> (book / film)	02
				Will not read book (Group C only)	01	<i>Bourne Identity</i> (film)	01
				TRAILER AESTHETICS		<i>Cube</i> (film)	01
				Less information: More appeal	10	Harry Potter (series)	01
				TV static and image are intriguing	10	<i>Hunger Games</i> (book)	01
				Captivating sound track	10	<i>Lost</i> (TV series)	01
				Compelling book reviews at end of video	13	Mythology: Theseus	01
						READING INTEREST	
						Want to read book	26
						<i>Book: “page turner”</i>	03
						Will not read book	11
						Need more information	6
						TRAILER AESTHETICS	
						Good: actors & dialogue	09
						Good: lighting & film craft	06
						Good: sound effects	05
						<i>“Just like a film trailer”</i>	05

The Maze Runner. Based on the 1-minute/40-second video trailer, over 60% of the participants want to read *The Maze Runner*. More than half of the participants noted that the characters' survival in the novel is associated with solving a maze. The textual connections that students made to this book trailer included mythology, film, and another book, which has also been adapted to film.

How I Live Now. Even though the largest pool of participants (49 students) responded to this 2006 Teen Book Video Awards finalist, the results are the most uniform. For example, 81% expect that based on the 1-minute/22-second trailer, *How I Live Now* is about life in wartime. Over 65% expect the loss of friends and family, and over 40% commented on the theme of survival. What's more, 52% of the participants do not want to read the book. The majority of the comments about the aesthetic qualities of the trailer were negative, with 24% of the participants not having enough information to capture their interest. In addition to referencing the war in Iraq, participants connected this trailer to more books than television and film titles.

Discussion

Given that the two studies are limited to students who were enrolled in my adolescent literature course, generalizations of the results are not widely applicable. These studies suggest, however, that promotional book trailers can both positively and negatively influence prospective readers' *horizons of expectations* for young adult books. For instance, 95% of Group C wants to read *Hunger Games*, while only 30% of this same group is interested in the 2005 Printz Award winner, *How I Live Now*.

Results from the first study show that the participants' *horizons of expectations* regarding the characters, plot, and themes of the novel *After* were more varied than their expectations for *Very LeFreak*. One possible explanation for this difference is that the director of the *Very LeFreak* video, Rosie Lambert, emphasized a single character and plotline in the persuasive *little story* she developed for the 1-minute/53-second live-action book trailer. Such emphasis is not as apparent in the 30-second text-based trailer for *After*, even though the trailer highlights pregnancy. In this instance, readers infer meaning from a combination of

textual clues that support multiple interpretations and could broaden readers' *horizons of expectations*.

Through the literary lens of Cultural Poetics, by which text is a "social production" (Bressler, 2007, p. 224) that reflects the cultural discourses in which it is situated, the second study shows that book trailers are both social productions and cultural artifacts. As products of today's digital Internet culture, online video trailers incorporate visual, audio, and textual modes into a digital storytelling framework. They also promote storytelling and reading in different formats. For instance, book trailer content is based on creating a little story narrative that highlights a bigger story narrative, which is primarily available in traditional book formats. Successful trailers influence viewers to deviate from digital video media in order to engage with the bigger source text in another mode.

As artifacts of popular cultural practice, compelling book trailers also prompt readers to make connections to other stories and media. *The Hunger Games* trailer provides a fine example. Over 46% of the participants read the trailer in the context of popular culture and made connections to reality television; mentioned were current shows such as *Survivor*, *Lost*, and *American Gladiators*; films such as *Saw*; as well as popular science fiction books. Similarly, at least 30% of the viewers of *The Maze Runner* trailer identified commonalities with television and film text, particularly the horror movie *Saw*. These connections stem from the cultural practice of reading and referencing popular media text as part of contemporary discourse.

These connections also reinforce the theory that readers recognize and relate to stories through multiple formats that extend beyond books (Mackey, 1996; Rosenblatt, 1978/1994). For instance, 11% of the viewers of *The Maze Runner* trailer volunteered that they liked the trailer as an independent story. One viewer comments: "[B]ecause the trailer consisted of all live actors and was shot like a very well-done horror film, I almost just want to watch the movie of this

As artifacts of popular cultural practice, compelling book trailers also prompt readers to make connections to other stories and media.

book.” In this instance, the reader resonated with the film format of the story. Hence, the narrative world is not restricted by format. Only readers are limited by modality.

The studies also demonstrate how video trailers can positively and negatively influence readers. Participants’ responses to the trailer for *How I Live Now* offer insight. Nearly half of all of the participants reported they had no desire to read the book after viewing the trailer. Thirteen viewers specifically commented that the book trailer does not provide enough

information about *How I Live Now* to convince readers to engage with the source text. One student writes, “I don’t think I would be interested in reading this book based solely on the trailer. It doesn’t seem to give much information about what direction the book would be going, or really who the characters are and why

they are running through the woods with a compass. Nothing about it really grabbed my attention, so I can’t say I would go out and read the book.”

In addition to not having enough information, at least two participants saw a parallel between the aesthetic qualities of the video trailer and the aesthetic quality of the book. One student observes, “It took 30 seconds for the film trailer to get to the point, which makes me think that the book would lag.” This comment reveals how potential readers may link the filmmaker’s pacing of the trailer with their own *horizon of expectations* for the pacing of the novel. In this scenario, the filmmaker’s translation of *How I Live Now* as a persuasive little story does not foster broad audience appeal among prospective readers.

On the opposite end of the spectrum, at least three participants commented that based on the trailer, they think *The Maze Runner* will be a page-turner. One student writes, “Yes [I’d read the book], the trailer makes it seem really suspenseful. I like page-turners.” Another student comments, “The trailer was very fast-paced, which made me think that the book will be fast as well, and I love action-packed books.”

Unlike the respondents who saw a negative connection between the aesthetic quality of the trailer and *How I Live Now*, these students equate the suspense the filmmaker Brighton Linge created in the video trailer for *The Maze Runner* as a marker for the quality of the book. In this situation, Linge’s little trailer story influences the viewers’ *horizons of expectations* for *The Maze Runner*, and they anticipate a page-turner.

Finally, in response to the trailer for *The Hunger Games*, a viewer writes, “I don’t know what the book is about, and I don’t care. The video served its purpose—I am very interested in finding out more about the book” Given that the *Hunger Games* trailer does not feature actors and dialogue like the trailers for *How I Live Now* and *The Maze Runner*, this viewer’s response suggests there is no apparent rule that live-action trailers garner more interest among viewers of online videos than other trailer formats.

The filmmakers’ ideal audience, however, is apparent in book trailers. Iser (1978) calls this ideal audience the *implied reader*. So, this implied reader may be someone who is very familiar with online videos and takes interest in the specific text, images, sounds, and film craft that movie/book trailers present. Likewise, the implied reader for *The Hunger Games* may be a person who has cultural knowledge of survival contests and the relatively recent phenomenon of reality television. This reader also recognizes the white noise of scrambled audio frequencies, the appearance of static television reception, and the view through the lens of a video recorder. In other words, the ideal reader is steeped in popular culture and able to connect with text on multiple levels and modes.

Implications

The results of the studies imply that as digital, multimodal texts, promotional online video trailers can strongly influence viewers’ expectations of books and affect readers’ decisions to purchase, borrow, and/or read new book titles. Moreover, the studies suggest that readers’ engagement with online book trailers is shaped by cultural practice and informed by the readers’ knowledge of popular culture.

So, what does this mean for teacher and teacher educators? Statistics such as those at the beginning of this article indicate that online video viewing and sharing is an established cultural practice. (Scholas-

In other words, the ideal reader is steeped in popular culture and able to connect with text on multiple levels and modes.

tic's promotional trailer for *The Hunger Games* that was uploaded prior to the first book release in September 2008 has been viewed approximately 80,800 times on YouTube as of this writing.) This suggests that there is an ongoing paradigm shift. Digitally enabled youth are using multimodal Internet tools to interact with books in ways that did not exist even ten years ago. In addition to viewing promotional trailers, they are engaging in activities such as directing, producing, and sharing their own fan-made book videos; creating soundtracks for books; writing book reviews; communicating with authors via websites and blogs; participating in social network book clubs; and publishing fanfiction that expands their favorite books. As a result, teachers and teacher educators may find themselves at a crossroads. They can follow the business-as-usual route, or they shift directions and begin to incorporate new modalities into their literature and language arts programs.

In shifting pedagogy to integrate multimodal cultural practices into the classroom, it is important for teachers and teacher educators to understand how young adults use Internet tools to support their personal literary objectives. For example, a respondent to the trailer for *The Adoration of Jenna Fox* writes that she tested her hypothesis about the book by viewing a fan-made video, "which confirmed immediately that the book was about perceptions of reality . . ." Another participant decided to visit book review websites because she was not satisfied with the trailer for *How I Live Now*. Other students reported that after seeing the trailers, they conferred with friends and siblings online about the books. A few even shared that once they responded to the promotional trailers for class, they continued watching book videos that were listed on the same YouTube pages. These voluntary activities reflect students' routine engagement with Web-based technologies.

As a first step in a new direction, teachers and teacher educators might start at the YouTube website, where they can view book trailers and fan-made videos, and consider their own curiosities and *horizons of expectations* about the source text. From here, they can determine which Internet resources will further their engagement with the book and investigate the connections they make with the text.

Conclusion

When readers begin to envision an idealized text to fill in the gaps of little trailer narratives, the trailer's promotional value rises and the filmmaker's assumptions about what the implied readers desire are also reinforced (Kernan, 2004). However, once readers engage with the book, they may need to modify their expectations to accommodate the actual story. Consequently, if the book exceeds readers' trailer-driven expectations, the readers might argue that the trailer didn't do the book justice. If the book *doesn't* meet readers' expectations, the readers might declare that the book wasn't as good as the trailer. Either way, promotional book trailers can influence readers' initial interest in a book.

As young people's interaction with technology increases and the spectrum of video sharing and social networking platforms grows, the examination of the interplay between promotional book trailers and young adult literature continues to be relevant. This article suggests that through online book trailers, prospective readers are positioned to conjure *horizons of expectations* that could be satisfied by reading the featured novel. There are no guarantees, however, that the filmmakers' translation of the novel into promotional discourse will actually appeal to readers. In the end, we cannot judge a book by its trailer, and more research is needed to describe adolescents' engagement with promotional book videos in and outside of the school setting.

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