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Prying Open the Oyster:
Creating a Digital Learning Space from the Robert Cormier Archive

I n the basement of the Student Life building, at the end of a twisted, white hallway, is the reading room of Fitchburg State University's archive. What few see are the boxes and folders brimming with primary documents that sit anonymously on gray metal bookshelves. In some of those rows of brown and ice-blue cardboard boxes are Robert Cormier's drafts, letters, papers, and artifacts. But who would know to look for his work here? The Amelia V. Gallucci-Cirio Library website does not mention the collection's presence on its archive webpage. Before we began our project, even a Google search found only a few sources that listed the archive's existence, most prominently the Massachusetts Libraries Board of Library Commissioners. In short, Robert Cormier's archive was all but forgotten; however, digital technologies, particularly open source archival software, can bring these documents out of the basement, into classrooms, and onto mobile devices.

Interested in opening a way for innovative engagement with this rich archive, we argue that digitizing archival material can re-mediate older media and re-invigorate texts often forgotten, invisible, or off the radar of new and/or young audiences. Re-visioning archival space as a digital platform for discovery, exchange, and sharing can invite scholars and students to engage in dialogue with the author through his or her papers. Additionally, using materials from an open archive can help participants adopt an ethos of sharing while deemphasizing the physical limitations of educational spaces. Such models of openness could support efforts toward decentralized classrooms that honor student interests by providing access to a wide array of materials, even those housed outside the school building.

Robert Cormier's Legacy

The young adult (YA) fiction and short stories of Massachusetts author Robert E. Cormier (1925–2000) are known widely across the United States as works of contemporary realistic fiction for adolescents. In Myers's (2000) introduction of her published interview with Cormier, she writes of his impact on YA literature:

> Robert Cormier is so well-known as the founding father of YA dark realism, as the author of almost a score of award-winning and controversial novels, and as the lightning rod for recurrent censorship campaigns that it seems presumptuous to introduce him. With their stark and uncompromising challenges to conventional happy endings and their innovative intellectual and stylistic complexity, *The Chocolate War* (1974), *I Am the Cheese* (1977), and *After the First Death* (1979) made the seventies landmark years and broke new ground for a whole genre. (p. 445)

Especially popular in the later 1970s through the 1990s, his work continues to appear on most lists of challenged books, including the American Library Association's annual "Top Ten Frequently Challenged Books Lists of the 21st Century," where *The Chocolate War* appears as recently as 2009 in the tenth spot, as well as in 2007 and 2006, in the second and tenth positions, respectively (Top ten frequently challenged, 2015). His name appears with current YA authors Chris Crutcher and Lauren Myracle, as well as with

best-selling writers whose audiences often include young adults, including Stephen Chbosky, Stephenie Meyer, and Jodi Picoult. Also sharing space with Cormier on these lists are enduring writers such as Harper Lee, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, and J. D. Salinger.

Cormier was staunchly opposed to censorship and maintained that people will not read what does not move them. Responding to an interviewer's query about the effect of censorship on his writing, he responded, "I'm worrying about writing realistically and truthfully to affect the reader" (Robert Cormier in Silvey, 1985/2013). Because Cormier was frequently censored or challenged, he often had to defend his work. In the Myers interview (2000), he called upon the larger issue of literary quality and value to adolescent readers:

> If *The Chocolate War* has been taught in schools for a quarter of a century despite all the challenges, surely there must be virtues present. Why do they think teachers take the risk of presenting it to students if it weren't teachable? (Robert Cormier, in Myers, 2000, p. 448)

The Chocolate War and two additional titles, *I am the Cheese* and *After the First Death*, helped to establish his preeminence as a YA novelist. In 1991, the Young Adult Services Division of the American Library Association (YALSA) presented him with the Margaret A. Edwards Award, describing these three books as "brilliantly crafted and troubling novels that have achieved the status of classics in young adult literature" ("Robert Cormier," n.d.). The Assembly on Literature for Adolescents of the NCTE (ALAN) also recognized Cormier's contribution to YA literature, naming him the ninth recipient of the ALAN Award in 1982.

Cormier's legacy, as manifested through his novels and his archive, holds much opportunity for scholars, students, and readers. Daniels (2006) argues for an increase in thoughtful and deliberate analysis of literary works that include, and do not artificially separate, children's and YA literatures by specifically addressing works of several authors. Daniels suggests several authors of high-quality literature that warrant further study, including Robert Cormier, Sharon Creech, Jerri Spinelli, Laurie Halse Anderson, and David Almond (p. 81). She underscores this point by saying, "In this field, there awaits an opportunity to not only expand our knowledge of the young adult genre, but also to expand our knowledge of literature

as a whole and to challenge the restrictions of the traditional canon" (p. 81). Scholars, before and since, have risen to that call: studies resulting from this work include an assertive discussion on why *The Chocolate War* should be understood as a tragedy and its protagonist, Jerry, as a tragic hero (Keeling, 1999); a detailed argument about Cormier's realism and naturalism (Schober, 2014); and an examination of marginalization, border crossing, and liminality in Cormier's *Fade* (1988) and another work of fiction using a cultural studies lens to unpack and complicate ethnic communities' transformations within "an englobing American culture" (Lees, 2014, p. 234).

Robert Cormier's place as an important American author warrants further examination of his works and papers. His efforts to write high-quality literature for a teen audience and his accomplishments in doing so, as well as the challenges he faced, hold relevance for authors, scholars, students, and readers. Digitizing selections of his archive permits access to Cormier—the writer, thinker, and advocate—for audiences who may, as yet, be unfamiliar with his creative work, process, and impact.

Studying Cormier in the Digital Age

During the Spring 2013 semester, we stood in the hallway of our department building and began plotting a long-term project to make portions of Robert Cormier's archive available online. We planned to create themed, digital exhibits annually from 2015–17, the first on censorship, the second on bullying and terrorism, and the third on the sexualization of children. Each exhibit would feature material from Cormier's archive that broaches the theme of the year and would include drafts and discussions around a handful of novels associated with that theme. For example, the current exhibit, opened during Banned Books Week 2015, includes artifacts related to three of Cormier's censored novels: *The Chocolate War*, *I Am the Cheese*, and *Fade*. Our aim with these three exhibits is not to digitize the entire collection but, rather, to feature and promote further teaching and research concerning this rich archive at the secondary, undergraduate, and graduate levels. Huvila (2015) argues that greater participation with an archive begins by taking its materials outside of the archive's physical cloister in a way that speaks to the ideals of desired users (p. 385).

This ethos of inclusion also humanizes archival work and invites those not traditionally considered scholars to feel at home in an archive (an unfamiliar space). Cormier did this himself by habitually including student artifacts and letters in his archive and writing to students to announce that their work would have a place among his own materials.

Our experiment with the repurposing of forgotten archival documents was enhanced by our ability to feature an author who had made a significant impact. As a writer, Cormier was both lauded and prolific. Because of this, his archived papers represent a collection of significant size. The fact that he is deceased permits a degree of retrospective consideration and conversation with the artifacts that, were he still living, would likely have been directed toward his future works. Further, many of the themes in Cormier's work and his self-defense against censorship complement the current debates on information control and remind contemporary Internet users that restrictions and institutional controls remain in play.

Our own inquiries as educators working with the archive of a YA author circled around what effect the ethos of sharing has on imagining the function of education in the digital age when our communicative tools make sharing a default response to encountering compelling information. Across Cormier's storylines, his youthful protagonists lack access to information, a theme that resonates with one of our main reasons for creating this project in the first place. His central characters are children and youth who encounter dark sides of a world they did not create. His stories often revolve around the ways in which youth's lives are complicated, poisoned, and even destroyed by the secrecy, lust for power, and/or malevolence of adults.

Robert Cormier believed in the intelligence and good sense of youth to be able to make choices, to thoughtfully read well-written realistic fiction, and to come away with considered and rational decisions about how they wish to live their lives—not, as censors allege, that the minds of youth will somehow be polluted by planting ideas that will corrupt them (see Fig. 1). Cormier held that books deemed controversial offer great teaching moments. To this end, he suggested study under the guidance of a thoughtful teacher and advocated that parents and their teenaged children take the opportunity to share reading and important conversation (e.g., Cormier's February 24,

1992, letter to M. Cluff, http://cormiercensorship .omeka.net/items/show/68).

Many of Cormier's characters remind us that coming into the know is how a child turns toward adulthood, and an informed child can be a threat to a system of power. To own or have access to information lends agency and power to the process of self-determination. In many ways, Cormier's stories are coming-of-age tales without happy endings. This archive contains artifacts that show the author addressing these very themes with youth. Cormier replied to a student letter in which the writer, Michael, struggled with the unhappy ending of *The Chocolate War*:
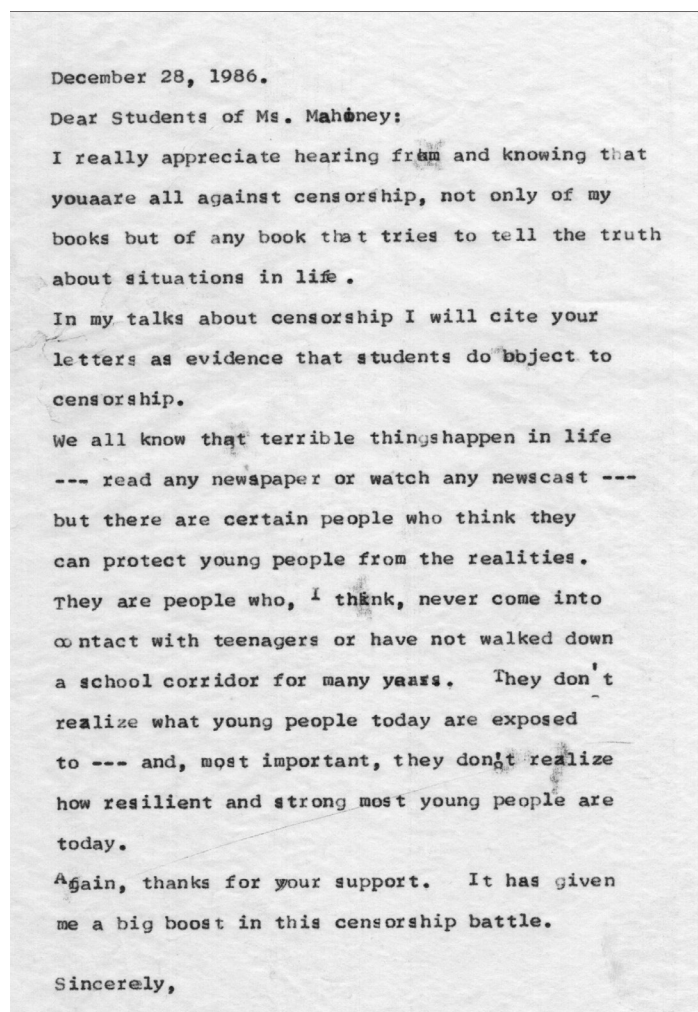

Figure 1. Robert Cormier's letter to Ms. Mahoney's class (available at https://cormiercensorship.omeka.net/items/show/71)

My thanks for your thoughtful letter about *The Chocolate War*—I appreciate your comments and can understand your concern about what happens in the novel. The fact that the story ends unhappily is the most important element in the book. Too often life is sugar-coated to young people who are brought up to believe that goodness always triumphs and that life is filled with role models. While it's important to provide positive aspects to life for teenagers, I think there is room for a bit of truth. The world is a difficult violent place and it's useless to try to disguise this. (Cormier, May 25, 1998, https://cormiercensorship.omeka .net/items/show/66)

Were it not for the opening of the archive, such personal correspondence would not be so easily available for study. And while all the clichés are true—that knowledge is power, and the pen is mightier than the sword—having access and the means to share knowledge reflects a long-standing struggle toward which many have labored, Robert Cormier among them, and which digital communication technologies have greatly aided. Digital access to analogue texts indexed on the Internet potentially empowers a larger audience and invites public dialogue where once private or more localized exchanges were common. Opening Cormier's archive to the Internet is not just a quest to literally provide access, but builds on Cormier's own mission to figuratively provide young adults access to the truths of an adult world through realistic fiction.

> Opening Cormier's archive . . . builds on Cormier's own mission to figuratively provide young adults access to the truths of an adult world through realistic fiction.

External Limitations to Digitizing Archives

Legal Access to the Cormier Archive
Many universities have valuable archive collections that are similarly cloistered and as difficult to access as the Cormier archive. In fact, within a single collection, one can expect to find multiple levels of security that limit access to particular papers due to copyright and/or personal reasons. While we believe in this work, we feel it is important to share some of the difficulties that those interested in similar efforts may encounter. It is essential to understand, for example,

that an archive is established as a legal and binding agreement between the university and the author and his or her family.

Archives typically have their own use agreements and limit what materials can and cannot be copied for use beyond the archive walls. Archive and ownership restrictions represent a significant challenge to those considering constructing digital learning spaces. In fact, many of the materials now in the first exhibit, "Robert Cormier: Censorship and Intolerance," were restricted by the estate in its Terms of Agreement. Receiving permission to share these files digitally had to be tackled at an early stage of our project, particularly given the fact that many digital archive projects face the rampant ethos of sharing that pervades online spaces. Digital technologies have notoriously fuzzy interpretations and misinterpretations of ownership, since restrictions on digital files themselves seem immaterial to users who easily copy, download, and reuse without consideration of what copyright limitations may be in place. In essence, the law has not caught up with the technologies of content dissemination.

Some archives, like the Cormier collection, were established long before digital access was on the horizon. We were fortunate to meet directly with and receive support from an open-minded, sympathetic, designated family member about our vision for the three-year project. In preparation for the meeting, we wrote a detailed letter of intent and identified which works we would draw from, citing the archive's "finding aid" document. As a large collection housed in a publically funded, small university, the storage of the archive is quite limited and idiosyncratic. The boxes were originally organized as Robert Cormier arranged papers, resulting in an archeological layering rather than intentional ordering of materials. Because we had to get permission from the estate to share the particular items we digitized, our project illustrates how opening an archive disrupts standing archive agreements in the interest of sharing the artifacts with youth, scholars, and other interested people.

Funding and Support
Created on a shoestring budget, this project was made possible by open access and free software. Even though the archive is housed in the university's own library and centers on one of Central Massachu-

setts's literary heroes, university administrators were reluctant to offer even modest ($500 to $1500) funding for the project without a highly detailed justification that cited how the project aligned specifically with department and university strategic planning goals. We were fortunate to also receive limited financial support from the Library Director and the English Studies Department at Fitchburg State University. And monies were indirectly funneled our way when the university's archivist was granted permission to work closely with us on this project. Although we had envisioned a multi-day symposium to feature the results of our work, financial considerations required us to scale back to a half-day event. However, to gain a wider audience, we decided to open the symposium beyond the local community via teleconferencing software made available by the University of Texas at Tyler. We were then able to invite the participation of classes and one of the symposium's speakers over long distances. We, in fact, relied on an ethos of sharing to make our work possible at all its stages, from access to technology, funding, and human resources.

Building the Digital Archive Exhibit

After weeks of culling the Robert E. Cormier archive and reading artifacts that seemed most significant to our chosen theme of censorship, we selected 80 documents to digitize. We looked for documents that spoke to the collection's theme and contained articulate, representative examples of the overall archive. Further, we were interested in digitizing artifacts that had visual markers significant to a primary document, such as handwritten notes and marked drafts. We selected many more items than we could manage, all of which we photocopied for review. In order to focus and curate the exhibit, we divided the nearly 200 documents in half and rated each of our assigned documents as an A, B, or C, with an A being the most suitable to add to this exhibit and C being the least suitable. Further, we added notes about each piece. We later compiled our highest-rated artifacts and revisited each "B"-rated item to make certain we did not eliminate a document that contributed meaningfully to the curation of this exhibit. Finally, we met several times to talk through the selection of each piece in the exhibit. After scanning the originals into high-resolution JPG files, we began to upload individual files

onto an Omeka site. Omeka is an open source, Web-based platform specifically developed for digitally delivering archival material—a feature many libraries, museums, historical societies, and archives, including the National Museum of American History and the Chicago Cultural Alliance, have embraced.

While broader access to Cormier's documents removes the physical limit of their location at Fitchburg State University and the open hours of the archive reading room, digital tools allow for other significant improvements on their analogue ancestors in terms of searchability and intertextuality. Using the Exhibit Builder plugin available via Omeka, we made an "Exhibit," itself comprised of "Pages" that host 1–16 "Items." Individual documents are uploaded as items, for which we completed as many of the Dublin Core metadata fields as possible (see Fig. 2). Text included in the metadata fields is searchable, unlike the content of the archive documents, so carefully documenting key concepts covered in a document helps increase usability of the site.

The most interesting metadata fields for crafting the exhibit as a connected set of documents were the tag and relation features. "Tag" allowed us to develop a set of keywords for common subjects discussed across documents and link them through shared tags. Some tags included titles of books, names of characters, and common subjects like "teachers" or "librarians." Each tag serves as a hyperlink, so clicking on a tag of interest from an item page will bring you to a search query that shows all items with that tag (see Fig. 3). In this way, the digital exhibit makes a base set of relationships between documents that users can build upon in their own writing, both on and off the digital exhibit website.

While the tags highlight overlaps in the subject matter of an artifact, the "relations" metadata field allowed us to directly link closely related documents, which we used to connect paired correspondence and enclosures included with letters. In some cases, we

> **The digital exhibit makes a base set of relationships between documents that users can build upon in their own writing, both on and off the digital exhibit website.**

Figure 2. "Item"-level metadata (view from admin page)

were able to link items like draft segments or public talks referenced in letters. Doing so created mini text sets. These text sets highlight communicative practices, like the dialogic exchange of letter writing and the recursive writing process through multiple drafts.

Once individual items were properly cataloged and described, we began arranging them into pages on one of five exhibits in the digital archive, titled "Objectors," "Censorship Battles," "Robert Cormier in the Classroom," "Robert Cormier as Reader and Writer," and "Self-Censorship and Outside Authority." Pages are linked on a left menu with drop-down items for most parent pages (see Fig. 4). Each exhibit contains 10–15 pages, with no more than three items per page. When multiple items appear on a page, the individual items are directly related to each other, such as being

paired letters or multiple drafts of the same essay or speech.

Once we arranged the pages into logically related sets of major texts and supporting dropdowns, we returned to item descriptions on the page level in order to add Web links to sites and documents outside of the Cormier archive. Including such links helped us reconnect these historic artifacts to the world around us. Some of these links included tips for writers, academic articles, Pew Research Center surveys, and organizations related to the subject of the archive item. In this way, we were able to capitalize on the intertextual ease of linking diverse material that the Internet affords. In contrast to the tags and relations fields of metadata that point inward, links point outward. Linking to material that is outside the archive also expands
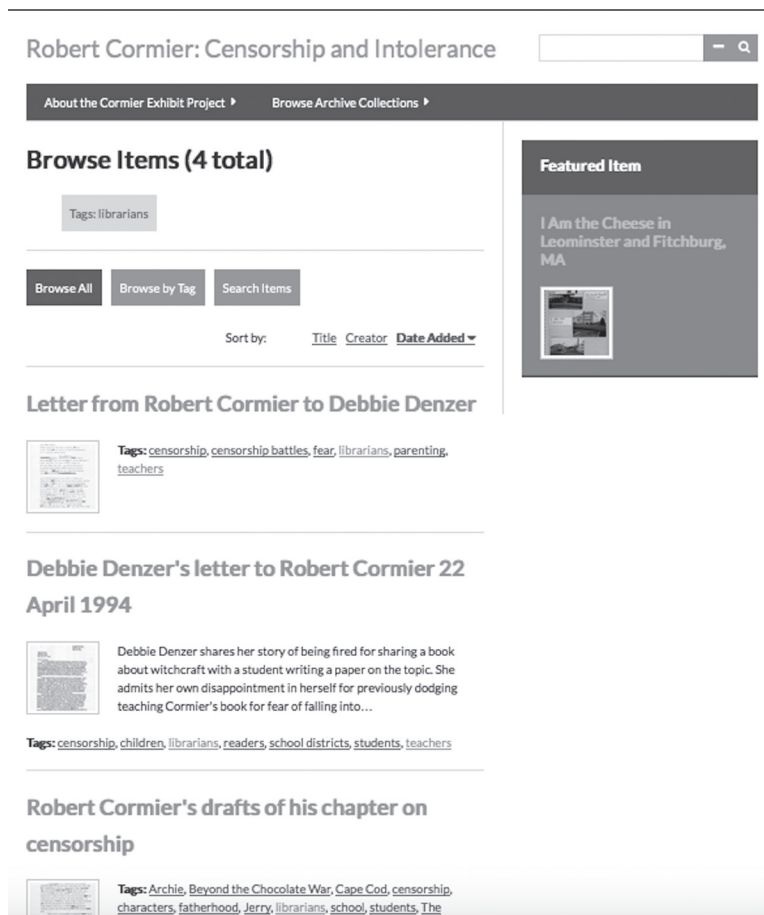
Figure 3. Results of clicking the "librarians" tag from an item page (view from public page)

the territory of an archive and reimagines its place in a larger mediascape, thus expanding contemporary and thematic connections.

Usage Patterns and User Participation

Omeka, like many other Web 2.0 tools, offers users options to build and share their own content. Omeka allows for social media plugins to ease the sharing of exhibit items and bookmarking of resources for later reference and use. We linked Digg, Diigo, email, Evernote, Facebook, Google+, Mendeley, Pocket, Reddit, Tumblr, and Twitter to all item pages. While the plugin does not allow site owners to track the number of shares an item receives, we can track how many users came to the site from a Facebook or Twitter referral. We did share items via Facebook and Twitter on our personal accounts as well in an effort to advertise for

our October 1, 2015, symposium, but the possibilities for broader interaction remain untapped.

The difference in the use of the Cormier Collection between pre- and post-digitizing is notable. In the three-year period since the library began to track use of individual collections, of which Cormier's is one, his collection saw "six uses during the 2013–14 school year, three during 2014–15, and four so far this year" (A. Jackson, personal communication, December 14, 2015). In the one-month period capturing the two weeks before and after our symposium to celebrate and complement the first digital exhibit (September 16, 2015, to October 16, 2015), our Google Analytics showed the potential for extended and deep interest in the content of the website. Though we had 217 users with 279 distinct sessions, users averaged 3.46 page views per session; 72.76% of sessions were new sessions, and 74.19% of sessions were from the US, with Canada following at 4.66%. Perhaps more telling is the amount of time users spent on the webpage, with 39.75% of users spending more than ten minutes and 19.77% spending more than 30 minutes on the site. With the majority of sessions extending past the ten-minute mark, we can be assured that some engagements with the pages included full reads of artifacts. While an individual user's engagement is as much as we can gather from this information, the site was built for optimal sharing and public commentary.

The Move toward Making Learning a Social Exchange

The idea of being able to share archived material directly through social media already demonstrates the move toward making learning a social exchange. Engaging an audience on the platforms already familiar to them also brings content to them that they may not even think to look for. In the same one-month period of September 16, 2015, to October 16, 2015, we shared links for several specific pages from the exhibit

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Robert Cormier: Censorship and Intolerance

About the Cormier Exhibit Project ▶   Browse Archive Collections ▶

Teen Depression and Suicide

Deborah Fones' letter to Robert Cormier 26 September 1986
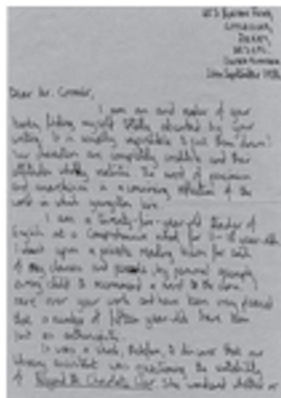
British comprehensive school teacher, Deborah Fones, describes her admiration of Robert Cormier's writing before voicing concerns about the appropriateness of including suicide in YA literature, specifically as it appears in *Beyond the Chocolate War*. After sharing her experience with depression, she is concerned with how immersive the suicide scenes are and how they may damage already depressed teen readers. She also speculates on Cormier's possible experience or vulnerability to depression. Several of Cormier's objectors or critics are much less tactful and judicious than Deborah who writes to open a dialogue.

Letter from Robert Cormier to Deborah Fones 14 December 1986

In this incomplete draft of Cormier's response to Deborah Fones, he explains why he cannot consider the potential objections to his work while he is writing, citing the range of sensitivities readers have, his commitment to realism, and the false argument that fiction would drive the real actions of a reader.

Related Links:

An editor's review of several YA novels that could help depressed young adults readers
http://www.yalsa.ala.org/thehub/2015/01/23/dealing-with-suicide-depression-in-teen-literature/

An argument for including mental disease in YA literature
http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2015/jun/26/ya-fiction-mental-illness-ocd-bipolar-depression

Christina Hsu's article reporting on how readers become their favorite characters
http://www.medicaldaily.com/psychologists-discover-how-people-subconsciously-become-their-favorite-fictional-characters-240435

Self-Censorship and Outside Authority

Self-Censorship and Parenting

Living Through Fictional Characters

Teen Depression and Suicide

Downbeat Endings

Everyday Evils

Shaping a Novel Through Revision

←– Living Through Fictional Characters   Living Through Fictional Characters
Teen Depression and Suicide   Downbeat Endings –→

Figure 4. Exhibit "page" (view from public site)

via personal Facebook accounts, bringing 48 users to the site. Of those users, 28% continued to other pages beyond the page shared via Facebook. In this way, the digital exhibit did not just serve to bring people into the archive, at least virtually, but it also encouraged site users to share the archive materials with others. The ease of sharing could be improved, however, as the share links are on the item page and thus buried three clicks down. Share links on the page level of an exhibit would be ideal, but would need to be customized for later exhibits.

Further, the ability to comment directly on exhibit pages, though currently underused, would make the thoughts of users (including students) who are frequently excluded from scholarly spaces a part of the digital archive experience. Our goal for subsequent exhibits is to not only bring archival material to the world, but also to actively include student and user thoughts as an integral part of the archive. Not only would including such material as Web comments reimagine the archive user, it would morph the desired role of that user from a consumer or reader to a participant. Making the exchange of information and the thought process of the user a part of that archive steps away from privileging the product to caring about the process of building knowledge.

We recognize that offering the functions of social media and user comments alone may not be enough to make students comfortable with commenting on archival material; they may consider such input as the realm of experts only. In other words, the ethos of the cloistered archive may still be stronger than that of digital sharing. Thus, students may need an invitation from someone they consider an authority, like a teacher, to legitimize their presence.

For Potential Archive Exhibit Makers
Building a digital archive exhibit proved much more labor intensive than we initially anticipated, particularly since we worked with a limited budget and basic technological tools. While gaining access and permissions from the executor of the archive is the crucial first step to a digital archive project, the work of selecting, digitizing, uploading, organizing, and cataloging the digital files demands hundreds of hours. The sheer number of files requires researchers to hyper-organize content and its metadata to maintain a cohesive digital product. We recommend that

anyone endeavoring to build an archive exhibit record in a spreadsheet the following items: the file name, location in the physical archive, item number of the Omeka page, digital location of the file (exhibit name), keywords used as tags, and item numbers of related files. Having a high-speed, large format scanner significantly reduces scanning time and accommodates larger documents with ease. As we are now compiling materials for our second exhibit on bullying and terrorism, we continue to work on optimizing and cataloging our process of arranging and linking artifacts.

Because it is possible to complete such a project with minimal costs, institutions are disinclined to fund the more expensive technological equipment that would accelerate the somewhat tedious stages of the project. Many of the expenses are initially invisible—like website subscriptions, cloud and server storage, and document scanning and editing software and hardware, not to mention the human labor absorbed into the work of salaried employees. In retrospect, we started with a widely covered subject in Cormier's archive, censorship, and it may have been better to start with an exhibit topic that was smaller in scope. Doing so would have allowed us to hone a stronger working process before endeavoring to cover a larger subject. Also, starting with a smaller-scale project could help one negotiate for budgetary support for larger projects.

While this may sound like a series of disincentives, the searching, seeing, and selection of artifacts allowed us an intimate view into the Cormier Collection. And for us, there was a great deal of satisfaction in creating a narrative out of primary documents. Arranging and putting into conversations such a range of artifacts and voices showcases the richness and life in an archive. Moreover, the story of an archive is not "done" when one person or team makes an exhibit; there is plenty of room for new narratives by students, scholars, and interested others. In our eyes, one of the chief beauties in such a project is that our digital archive offers only one story, and that one story could (we hope!) spur on many more.

Digital Mediation: Opening an Archive to Find Your Own Oysters

Digital technologies help shift educational spaces and purposes further from the control of the physical classroom, library, and archive. As we bring

educational texts out of the school building and ask students to participate with and share their thinking through those texts, we validate their contributions to knowledge making. Often students feel unqualified to enter the archive space and work with primary texts (Vetter, 2014, p. 38). Bringing archives to the World Wide Web democratizes knowledge and empowers students as they claim and recognize their authority to speak up about what they are learning and thinking as they are reading online. Creating open access (Omeka) exhibits out of a restrictive archive could help university students better understand the public role of researchers, while secondary students could work with primary texts in their own study of Cormier's work and of the themes of our exhibits.

Curating material can reinforce the rhetorical skill inherent in strong contextualized research. Sheridan, Ridolfo, and Michel (2012), for instance, argue for the importance of regarding a rhetorical effort as a composing process not only of a text but of a social reality; for them, successful public debate is rational and critical, but it also occurs in a *social* setting. Seeing research as a private endeavor of one individual in the Academy is a misconception many students carry and a disservice to their development as citizens and public rhetors.

Turning research into the heuristic and collaborative process of building exhibits can shift research past procedure and into a state of mind. Equally, seeing the evidence of an author at work can help students resist essentialist notions that some people are born with "talent," a corrosive notion that may absolve would-be writers from making the very real efforts it takes to pursue this work. According to Hood (2010), ". . . modern teachers viewed students as reporters of what was known; contemporary teachers acknowledge them as knowledge producers. The traditional research paper assignment asks students with the latter identity construct to act as the former" (par. 6). Giving students more power over their work and thought, especially while considering the theme of authoritarian control, helps them recognize their role as knowledge *producers,* not just consumers.

Other scholars and educators have included archival work and digital dissemination of knowledge to produce public knowledge from closed or cloistered archives. Matthew Vetter's (2014) Fall 2011 Writing and Rhetoric II students conducted research in Ohio University's archives that would later be used to edit Wikipedia pages. Such a project encouraged students to conduct primary research and share that research with a large audience. Their efforts also brought attention to Ohio University's archives through links students included on Wikipedia pages. Vetter concluded that the value of such an assignment could be found in its power to

. . . reimagine the notion of the archive in light of recent and rapid technological change. Etymologically speaking, *archive* connotes the collection and storage of public records, yet the word is also linked to definitions of authority and power. *Archive* shares a morpheme with cognates *monarchy* and *oligarchy* and is, in its most basic form, evocative of the power of the state to regulate public knowledge. (p. 50)

Digital technologies offer one path toward opening archives and democratizing the knowledge they contain by sharing them more broadly. However, digital technologies themselves are effect-neutral. While they could democratize knowledge, they could just as easily support institutional control, which is why we must remain vigilant in our demands for transparency and access.

Today's youth will soon be called upon to step into roles as citizens who question assumptions of power—of all kinds. They will be asked to dive into inquiries for their own purposes and engage in real-world actions to enrich and empower themselves, their families, and their near and far communities. Access to and guidance in using an exhibit such as the Robert Cormier Archive hold potential as parts of a thoughtfully designed educative experience for young people. Our vision is that exhibits such as this can sponsor independent consideration and deep and persistent questioning of who has the ability to change history, hold power, and control access to resources. Opening access to a wider audience of those who carry less authority or agency poses risk for any collective. Similarly, digitizing an archive opens the cocooned to the sunlight and may change the object of attention in unintended ways. Whether from philosophy, religion, or mythology—of Plato's allegorical cave, Eve's apple, or Pandora's box—our own cultural myths warn us of the power of releasing knowledge. Once that oyster is cracked open, it cannot be closed again. Digital mediation asks us each day which pieces of knowledge we ought to crack open into the digital information sphere that is the Internet.

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