SUMMER 2016

VOLUME 43, ISSUE 3

THE ALAN REVIEW

ASSEMBLY ON LITERATURE FOR ADOLESCENTS

OF THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF TEACHERS OF ENGLISH

◆ **THE ALAN REVIEW** ◆ Volume 43 ◆ Summer 2016 ◆ Number Three

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Table of **Contents**

Volume 43

Number 3

Summer 2016

Mediating Media in a Digital Age

THE ALAN REVIEW

Instructions for **Authors**

ABOUT *THE ALAN REVIEW*. *The ALAN Review (TAR;* ISSN 0882-2840 [Print], ISSN 1547-741X [Online]) publishes articles that explore, examine, critique, and advocate for literature for young adults and the teaching of that literature. Published pieces include, but are not limited to, research studies, papers presented at professional meetings, surveys of the literature, critiques of the literature, articles about authors, comparative studies across genres and/or cultures, articles on ways to teach the literature to adolescents, and interviews with YA authors.

AUDIENCE. Many of the individual members of ALAN are classroom teachers of English in middle, junior, and senior high schools. Other readers include university faculty members in English and/or Education programs, researchers in the field of young adult literature, librarians, YA authors, publishers, reading teachers, and teachers in related content areas. ALAN has members in all 50 United States and a number of foreign countries.

PREFERRED STYLE. Manuscripts should usually be no longer than twenty double-spaced, typed pages, not including references. A manuscript submitted for consideration should deal specifically with literature for young adults and/or the teaching of that literature. It should have a clearly defined topic and be scholarly in content, as well as practical and useful to people working with and/or studying young adults and their literature. Research studies and papers should be treated as articles rather than formal reports. Stereotyping on the basis of sex, race, age, etc., should be avoided, as should gender-specific terms such as "chairman."

MANUSCRIPT FORMAT. Manuscripts should be double-spaced throughout, including quotations and bibliographies. The names of submitting authors should not appear anywhere in the manuscript. Short quotations, as permitted under "fair use" in the copyright law, must be carefully documented within the manuscript and in the bibliography. Longer quotations and complete poems or short stories must be accompanied by written permission from the copyright owner. YA author interviews should be accompanied by written permission for publication in *TAR* from the interviewed author(s). Interviewers should indicate to the author(s) that publication is subject to review of an editorial board. Original short tables and figures should be double-spaced and placed on separate sheets at the end of the manuscript. Notations should appear in the text indicating proper placement of tables and figures.

The ALAN Review uses the bibliographic style detailed in the *Publications Manual of the American Psychological Association* (APA). Please adhere to that style when including in-text citations and preparing reference lists.

SUBMITTING THE MANUSCRIPT. Authors should submit manuscripts electronically to thealanreview@gmail.com. In the subject line, please write: ALAN Manuscript Submission. All manuscripts should be written using a recent version of Microsoft Word and use APA bibliographical format. Complete submissions include, as separate attachments, the following documents: 1) An abstract of no more than 150 words; 2) A manuscript without references to the author(s) and with name(s) removed in the Properties section under the File menu to ensure the piece is blinded; 3) A title page with names, affiliations, mailing addresses, and 100- to 150-word professional biographies for each submitting author, as well as a brief statement that the article is original, has not been published previously in other journals and/or books, and is not a simultaneous submission.

REVIEW PROCESS. Each manuscript will receive a blind review by the editors and at least three members of the Editorial Review Board, unless the length, style, or content makes it inappropriate for publication. Usually, authors should expect to hear the results within eight weeks. Manuscripts are judged for the contribution made to the field of young adult literature and mission of *The ALAN Review*, scholarly rigor, and clarity of writing. Selection also depends on the manuscript's contribution to the overall balance of the journal.

PUBLICATION OF ARTICLES. *The ALAN Review* assumes that accepted manuscripts have not been published previously in any other journals and/or books, nor will they be published subsequently without permission of the editors. Should the author submit the manuscript to more than one publication, he/she should notify *The ALAN Review*. If a submitted or accepted manuscript is accepted by another publication prior to publication in *The ALAN Review*, the author should immediately withdraw the manuscript from publication in *The ALAN Review*.

Manuscripts that are accepted may be edited for clarity, accuracy, readability, and publication style. Upon publication, the author will receive two copies of *The ALAN Review* in which the article appears. Publication usually occurs within 18 months of acceptance.

DEADLINES. Please observe these deadlines if you wish to have your article considered for a particular issue of *The ALAN Review*.

FALL (October) Issue Deadline:	**MARCH 1**
WINTER (March) Issue Deadline:	**JULY 1**
SUMMER (June) Issue Deadline:	**NOVEMBER 1**

Wendy **Glenn,** Ricki **Ginsberg,** and Danielle **King**

From the Editors

Mediating Media in a Digital Age

Today's young adult readers access and generate texts in myriad forms. Through multimedia platforms, television and film adaptations, social media, and video gaming, they engage with stories in ways that extend beyond the originals. These opportunities for connection are rich in potential and complication. As we considered the theme for this issue, we contemplated whether media enrich our interactions with others and our world—or is there a falseness in this apparent linkage? Consider the perspective of Rainbow Rowell's narrator: "There are other people on the Internet. It's awesome. You get all the benefits of 'other people' without the body odor and the eye contact" (*Fangirl,* p. 147). We wonder if all readers are inspired by techie texts or if some, in fact, imagine life as "an analog girl, living in a digital world" (Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*, p. 332).

In this issue, contributors encourage us to ponder, examine, and learn from the ways in which they use young adult literature to help young people mediate media. They share how they foster innovative engagement with media in their professional settings, examine the challenges of and potential solutions for teaching and learning with digital media, explore how digital communities invite and/or exclude young people today, and ask the question *What role does/can young adult literature play in successfully navigating life in the "digital age"?*

Our opening piece, "From Novel to Film: A Collaborative Conversation," features James Dashner, Marie Lu, and Patricia McCormick, award-winning authors for young adults whose novels have been or are being translated into films. In this engaging conversation, they give us a glimpse into the intricacies involved in this process, their thoughts on the strengths and limitations of books and films as differing media, and a reaffirmation of the power of story across multiple formats.

In "Prying Open the Oyster: Creating a Digital Learning Space from the Robert Cormier Archive," Annamary L. Consalvo and Elisabet Takehana share the processes and teaching and learning implications of digitizing portions of the Robert Cormier Archive into themed, open exhibits of artifacts. They explore how re-mediating archival documents 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 and how using materials from an open archive might offer alternatives to the physical limitations of many educational spaces.

Two articles offer innovative examples of classroom practices that utilize digital media in teaching YAL. In "Backchanneling Technology: Transforming Students' Participation during Discussions of *If I Grow Up*," James S. Chisholm and Ashley L. Shelton examine how 10th-grade English language arts students and their teacher used TodaysMeet to engage in conversation around Todd Strasser's (2009) young adult novel, *If I Grow Up*. By analyzing discourse produced in both face-to-face conversation and in the TodaysMeet online forum, they offer insights into how high school students used backchanneling technology to participate during discussions of a young adult novel.

Jennifer S. Dail and Nick Thompson describe a collaboration between students in a high school English class and those in a university English Education course as they read Matt de la Peña's *Mexican Whiteboy* (2008) and *We Were Here* (2009) in their

article, "Talking Back: Remix as a Tool to Help Students Exercise Authority When Making Meaning." The authors share how they fostered a student-centered learning environment through a project in which students collaboratively created a multimodal remix that examined overarching themes across the two novels.

Three articles work to define and extend our understandings of the intersection between digital media and young adult literature. In their article, "Understanding Technology-based Young Adult Literature," Kristine E. Pytash and Richard E. Ferdig introduce a framework for examining five key intersections between YA literature and technology: technology as context, technology as a central premise, technology as style, technology as non-essential dissemination, and technology as a book in its own right. They then explore how educators might utilize these intersections to engage technology-savvy adolescents in the reading of YA texts.

In his piece, "Networked Teens and YA Literature: Gossip, Identity, and What Really #matters," Antero Garcia offers examples of how digital social networks are presented within contemporary young adult literature and how these depictions are similar to and different from uses of these networks in the real world. In his comparison of fictitious social networks and real world civic activism through the use of the hashtag #blacklivesmatter, the author suggests the limitations of social networks as depicted in YAL and offers recommendations for how educators can guide youth reading to include students' own YA texts produced in online spaces.

Jon Ostenson's "Multimodal, Interactive Storytelling: Critical Reading of Video Games" argues that video games are young adult texts in and of themselves and that these texts serve as increasingly popular and important media for storytelling, especially for teens. The author examines *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture* (Crawshaw & Pinchbeck, 2015), a critically acclaimed video game, to demonstrate the literary value of this text and to explore how the unique characteristics of video games allow for uniquely compelling narrative experiences for readers.

In her last Book in Review: A Teaching Guide column titled "It Only Takes a Spark: Almost All Changes Start with a Small, Personal Act," Barbara A. Ward explores the idea of change and how many significant changes begin with a decision or an act made by just one person. She discusses the protagonists in Julie Murphy's *Dumplin'* (2015) and Emil Sher's *Young Man with Camera* (2015), both of whom ignite change through seemingly small acts of courage. Ward provides rich, thought-provoking ideas for teachers to use while reading these texts with their students.

In their final Right to Read column, "Do No Harm," E. Sybil Durand and Jim Blasingame entreat educators and librarians not only to defend the use of challenged and challenging YA texts in the classroom but to advocate explicitly for their inclusion. With the help of YA literature veteran Gary Paulsen, they passionately advance the reality that book banning is inherently harmful.

Guest author Carolyn J. Stufft joins Sandra Schamroth Abrams and Hannah R. Gerber in the Layered Literacies column, "Critical Thinking and Layered Understandings: Book Clubs, Videogames, and Adolescent Learning." Carolyn bridges traditional and contemporary practices to describe how videogame experiences informed seven adolescent males' conversations about young adult literature.

We express heartfelt thanks to these outgoing column editors. Barb, Sybil, Jim, Sandra, and Hannah, your wisdom, care, and passion have resulted in writings that make a significant contribution to the journal and field. We appreciate you.

The world of audiobooks is opened for readers in our final piece, a collaborative article between two experts in the field. In "The Magic of Audiobooks: From Inception to Implementation," Jodie Cohen, Senior Marketing Manager at Listening Library, reveals the secrets of the industry from title acquisition to production. Teri S. Lesesne, Professor in the Department of Library Science at Sam Houston State University, offers benefits and practical applications of audiobooks.

We hope this issue both affirms and challenges our collective vision of what counts as young adult literature and how we might think beyond the page as we invite readers into story.

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Call for Manuscripts

Submitting a Manuscript:

Manuscript submission guidelines are available on p. 2 of this issue and on our website at http://www.alan-ya.org/page/alan-review-author-guidelines. All submissions may be sent to thealanreview@gmail.com.

Summer 2017: The World of Young Adult Literature
Submissions due on or before November 1, 2016

The world of young adult literature extends beyond the United States. And yet, readers in our nation are not often invited to consider stories published in or written about other lands, cultures, and communities. While the United States is rich in diversity and the field is increasingly recognizing the need to share stories for and about all readers, we are a single nation on a globe inhabited by many. We wonder what might be gained from increased exposure to a wider array of young adult literature that lies beyond our national borders. We wonder, too, what challenges exist in finding, publishing, and teaching such titles and how we might address these with care and humanity.

To that end, we invite contributors to consider the stories of adolescence that are written around the globe and to tackle questions related to international literature, both broadly and narrowly defined. What common experiences, realities, and ways of knowing, doing, and being exist across cultures? What differences might reveal our biases—and enhance our understandings? Are cultural differences ever too big to bridge? Whose stories get published—and whose remain untold to a larger community? What role do translators play in telling stories to new audiences? Can literature unite people across distant places? Is it true that "Even when you got crazy people or drunk people on buses, people that went on stupidly, and shouted rubbish or tried to tell you all about themselves, you could never really tell about them either" (David Almond, *Skellig*, p. 13)? Or can story help us know an unfamiliar somebody a bit better? Although "two mountains can never meet, . . . perhaps you and I can meet again. I am coming to your waterfall" (Edwidge Danticat, *The Farming of Bones*, p. 283).

Fall 2017: Advocacy, Activism, and Agency in Young Adult Literature
Submissions due on or before March 1, 2017

Given their age and perceived lack of power in an adult-run world, adolescents may experience helplessness, cynicism, or frustration—either from not being able to address issues that anger or frustrate them or from their inability to evoke change in the face of obstacles over which they have little to no control. As teachers, however, we recall moments of insight and passion and optimism displayed by our students in response to literature. We believe that stories can empower readers, and we wonder just how far-reaching such empowerment can extend, especially in classrooms and libraries that invite young people to question, to argue, to imagine what is possible—and what they can do to achieve it.

For this issue, we encourage you to share examples of how you promote advocacy, activism, and agency among students (and/or their teachers, families, etc.) using young adult literature. How are these efforts depicted and advanced by authors? How do readers witness and respond to such efforts? How might YAL be used to inspire action in the classroom and larger community? Can story serve to better our world and the lives of those who live here?

As we ponder, we hear the voice of Emil Sher's teen protagonist when he chooses to take responsibility for a challenging dilemma before it becomes too late for action: "I wanted to clean up the mess . . . . The mess would keep spreading like those huge oil spills that turn blue water black and leave birds so covered with oil they never fly again" (*Young Man with Camera*, p. 108). We recognize the challenges inherent in assuming agency, advocating, and acting, but we find hope in Kekla Magoon's reminder: "The river moves, but it follows a path. When it tires of one journey, it rubs through some rock to forge a new way. Hard work, but that's its nature" (*The Rock and the River*, p. 283).

As always, we also welcome submissions focused on any aspect of young adult literature not directly connected to these themes.

James **Dashner** , Marie **Lu**, and Patricia **McCormick**

From Novel to Film:

A Collaborative Conversation

From the Editors: In this article, we are honored to feature a written conversation between James Dashner, Marie Lu, and Patricia McCormick, award-winning authors whose writings for young adults have been (or are being) translated from the page to the big screen. James Dashner's first novel-turned-film, *The Maze Runner,* was released on September 19, 2014, and became a commercial success, grossing over $345 million worldwide. *Maze Runner: The Scorch Trials* was released on September 18, 2015, and *Maze Runner: The Death Cure* is set for release on February 17, 2017. Movie versions of two of Marie Lu's novels, *Legend* and *The Young Elites*, are both currently in development—and anxiously anticipated by fans. And Patricia McCormick's novel *Sold* was released in movie form in the US in April 2016. The film has already earned several accolades, having received the World Cinema Audience Award at the 2015 Sonoma International Film Festival and the Pure Heaven Audience Award at the 2014 London Indian Film Festival.

To create this article, we generated and sent a series of questions to each author independently. We compiled these initial responses into a single document and then sent the full version back and forth to solicit questions, elaborations, and revisions until all were satisfied with the end result. We appreciate the generous response of these authors (and their publishers) and hope our readers enjoy learning more about the book-to-film experience.

What was your reaction when you were first approached about your book(s) being adapted to film? Did you have any reservations, and if so, what were they? Did the process itself change your initial perceptions?

James: Having been a movie buff my entire life, this whole movie experience has definitely been the highlight of my career. I knew enough to have many reservations—wondering if it would actually happen, worry over the final product, stress over its potential for success—but mostly I just felt excitement. A *movie*? Based on something *I* wrote? It seemed too good to be true. I've been very fortunate to have such a positive experience and to be so pleased with the movies themselves. If anything, the process has taught me that you have to start with the right people—people who love storytelling and understand the differences between book and film.

Marie: For *Legend,* it was my first experience having any sort of contact at all with the film industry, so I remember being nothing but a ball of excitement and bewilderment. I didn't know enough to have any kind of reservations. I was just shocked that selling film rights was a thing that could happen to me.

For *The Young Elites,* I knew I wanted to work with someone who understood the story's cornerstones—that it was about a girl's journey to darkness, that it was a villain's story, that it was *dark*. This concerned me, because I thought it might be too dark for anyone to want, especially

since it's for a teen audience. I'm lucky to be working with genuinely good industry people (Wyck Godfrey and Isaac Klausner are my producers, and Kassie Evashevski is my agent) who said point blank how important it was that the studio and screenwriter *get* Adelina as a main character. Our screenwriter Jessica Sharzer knows dark stories well—she worked on *American Horror Story.* So I think we're in the best possible hands.

Patricia: I was thrilled, in part because it was a high school reader who brought the book home to her father, a screenwriter, and said, "Dad, you have to make this into a movie!" Soon after that, I had a long conference call with the screenwriter and the producer and instantly knew we had the same artistic vision for the film. My only worry was how they would come up with the money to fund a movie that would be such a tough sell at the box office.

They came up with a radically creative idea: they went to philanthropists who were involved in anti-trafficking efforts and asked each of them to contribute money to fund a film that would raise awareness and stimulate change instead of, say, building a new shelter. Many of those funders—mostly women from Seattle—went to India to see the brothels after they made the financial pledge. *That* is commitment.

How involved have you been in the process of making your novel(s) into film? Is this level of involvement desirable, or would you alter your participation in any way?

Marie: I know almost nothing about what it takes to write a screenplay (or make a film), so my involvement on both films' earliest stages has been strictly on a consultant level. So far, I'm pretty happy with that arrangement. Jessica (our screenwriter) texts me on and off as she's working on the screenplay, asking me questions about world-building, character details, or feedback on new scenes meant for the movie that are not in the book. It's really fascinating and fun to see something that used to exist only in my head now being interpreted by another creative person.

Patricia: The filmmakers were extremely generous in the ways they involved me; they showed me every draft of the script. I gave some character-based feedback, but I mostly just marveled at what they'd done. I have the humility to know that just because I'm a movie-goer doesn't mean I'm a movie-maker. I may not agree with some of the changes they've made, but I understand that they were necessary to transform a novel, written in a first-person interior monologue, to a more visual, more action-driven medium.

James: For me, it's been just the right amount of involvement. I consulted on the script, visited the set a few times, stayed in constant contact with the director and producers over questions that arose. But I made it clear from the outset that I completely understand who the experts are when it comes to filmmaking—them, not me. Fox and everyone involved made me feel a part of the family, while at the same time allowing me just enough say to keep me happy without getting too stressful. It was the perfect balance, and I couldn't be happier.

What is the most challenging part of seeing your work translated into film? The most rewarding?

James: Although the response to the films has been overwhelmingly positive from my readers, there are a few die-hards out there that hated the changes. That's what I see as my biggest challenge—helping them understand that some things that work in a book don't work in a movie and vice versa. Most rewarding for me has been the success of the films and all the new readers they have brought to the series, especially internationally. That has been a lot of fun to watch.

Patricia: The most challenging part is accepting the loss of control; the most rewarding is seeing how your work inspired the creativity of others—from the screenwriters to the actors.

Marie: I'm so early in the process that it's hard for me to say—but I really love seeing the screenplay, because it's like an alternative universe version of my story. It's so cool seeing another writer translate

that. The most challenging part, honestly, is the waiting! As a writer, I'm already used to waiting . . . but making a movie requires so many things to align perfectly and so many moving parts that every movie ever made is like a modern miracle. All you can do is cross your fingers and hope that luck eventually shines on you.

Are fiction and film able to convey character, theme, setting, etc. in the same ways? What would you argue are the benefits and limitations of each format?

Marie: I think that many times, they can't. And maybe they shouldn't. They are wildly different creative cousins—in a novel, you can describe a character's emotions with pages and pages of detail that take place inside the character's head; in a film, the actor has to wrap all of that detail into an expression or a gesture. Film is so immediate and visceral, while a novel can really dig deeper into the corners of a story. That's why most movies can't translate everything that happens in a novel. There's just too much.

James: I think fiction and film accomplish these elements in different ways, but the key is that both formats must *make* that accomplishment. That's what makes any type of storytelling valuable—the ability to create characters that you care about, a compelling story, settings that draw you in, etc. I feel that Wes Ball and his team did an absolutely fantastic job of taking those things from the books and figuring out the best way to translate them cinematically. Thus the changes here and there. With a book, you have all the time in the world, but you can only use words. With a movie, you only have two hours, but you can take advantage of visuals and sound. It's a challenging but fun transition.

Patricia: This film, *Sold*, set largely in the brothels of India, makes full use of the grit and the colors and chaos of that setting. As a writer, I could only describe it; by choosing to film in the red light district, the filmmakers allow us to experience it.

Has participation in this process influenced your writing process or approach to other novels? Do you imagine the scenes you create as potentially playing out on the big screen?

Patricia: I wouldn't say that I now write with a film adaptation in mind. (It's hard enough to write with a novel as my goal!) But I am aware of how scenes are shaped in film and how important dialogue is. The language in my book, *Sold* (2006), is lyrical—and that was totally appropriate for a book. But that kind of language does not make for realistic dialogue. So I do think more now about how my words sound spoken aloud.

Marie: I've always been a visual writer, partly because I used to work in the video game industry as an artist, so I have always imagined my scenes playing out as a movie. I don't think my glimpse into the film industry has changed much of my writing.

James: Participation has only solidified what has always been my process, and that is to think cinematically when I write my books. I know it seems blasphemous, but if anything, I love movies even more than books (although it's certainly a close race). And the movie format is how my mind works when it's busy generating stories. I picture scenes and characters in a cinematic way, and then I do my best to transform that onto the written page. It's worked for me, and I can only assume that's why my books have transitioned well to the big screen.

Other than your own, what would you say is your favorite film adaptation of a novel? What makes this adaptation successful for you?

James: I would say, without any hesitation, that it's the Lord of the Rings trilogy (Tolkien et al., 2001–2003), directed by Peter Jackson. I see those three movies as one film (a really, really long one!), and I think it's the perfect example of how to adapt a book into a movie. Peter Jackson says in the commentary that he knew he couldn't attempt a direct translation, literally playing things out in the film as they do in the books. He wanted to take the experience of reading the books, beloved by so

many, and transform that into a similar cinematic experience. He wanted to make you feel, as you watch his movies, the same way you felt when you read the original source. I love that attitude.

In my opinion, when someone attempts to directly adapt a book as literally as possible, it becomes a boring checklist of expectations. Oh yeah, that happens, then this is going to happen. Then that, then that, then that. There's no magic, no sense of experiencing the story for the very first time. That's what a good adaptation should do. Take a story that you love and help you relive it in a brand new way, while staying true to the spirit and tone and overall story, and especially the characters. Lord of the Rings did all of that perfectly.

Patricia: My favorite adaptation of a book to film is *The Hours* (Cunningham & Hare, 2002). The screenplay is faithful to the time-bending, overlapping narratives of the book and recreates its atmosphere of claustrophobia. The acting took what was on the page—the language with which we had become familiar—and made it bloom into something exotic, gave us an experience that enhanced and transcended the confines of the book.

Marie: My favorite film adaptation of a novel is *Contact* (Sagan, Hart, & Goldenberg, 1997). Actually, this is my favorite movie of all time. I don't even know how many times I've watched it. The scene where Ellie first hears the signals from outer space—agh, my heart! I absolutely love the novel by Carl Sagan, but I think the film version did a wonderful job of knowing what to take out and what to add in and how to make the main character as well-rounded as she could possibly be. Jodie Foster also added *so* much to bringing Ellie to life. It's all about the acting.

As an author, what are your thoughts on issues of access across these two formats? Can film viewers who haven't read your novels fully appreciate your story as presented on the screen? Does something get missed or lost in the mediation between text and image and sound? Does something get "found"?

Patricia: The intimacy of the reading experience is lost when we sit down, en masse, to watch a film. The intimacy of reading allows a reader to imagine visuals that are unique to his or her imagination. A film imposes the same set of visuals on the entire audience. And of course, much has to be edited out of a book to allow it to work in film. But . . . being plunged into a film, in the dark, with a group of strangers as a film unspools at the directors' pace (not your private reading pace) is a much more immersive experience. You get "drenched" by a film; you cannot hold it at arms' length the way you can with a book when you've decided to put it down or skip over parts.

James: Funny enough, people tell me all the time: "I'm so sorry, I haven't read your books, but I *loved* the movie!" Their face is always filled with apology. But nothing could make me happier! I created a story filled with characters that I love. It doesn't matter to me how people experience that story. I'm thrilled when people see our movies, whether or not they've read the books. And in most cases, it leads them back to the books anyway. Again, I've been very fortunate to have a fantastic team making my films, so I realize it could've been an entirely different experience. But when it comes to the Maze Runner series, I feel very strongly that there are two equally powerful and entertaining and fulfilling ways to live and relive the story: the books (Dashner, 2009–2011) and the movies (Dashner, Oppenheim, Myers, & Nowlin, 2014; Dashner & Nowlin, 2015). The differences between them just add to the magic.

Marie: I think that, ultimately, a film and a book should be viewed and judged as two separate things. A film will never be able to incorporate *everything* from a novel, and that's okay. If it did, it probably wouldn't be a good film. Something is always lost between the mediums, and something is always found. The key, I think, is to present the differences in such a way that the audience can take away the right things from each one and then go off to discover the other.

James Dashner *is the author of the #1* New York Times *bestselling Maze Runner series:* The Maze Runner, The Scorch Trials, The Death Cure, *and* The Kill Order*, as well as the bestselling Mortality Doctrine series:* The Eye

of Minds, The Rule of Thoughts, *and* The Game of Lives. *Dashner was born and raised in Georgia but now lives and writes in the Rocky Mountains. To learn more about him and his books, visit JamesDashner.com, follow @jamesdashner on Twitter, and find dashnerjames on Instagram.*

Marie Lu *(www.marielu.org) is the author of the* New York Times *bestselling Legend and The Young Elites trilogies. She graduated from the University of Southern California and jumped into the video game industry, working for Disney Interactive Studios as a Flash artist. Now a full-time writer, she spends her spare time reading, drawing, playing Assassin's Creed, and getting stuck in traffic. She lives in Los Angeles, California (see above: traffic), with one husband, one Chihuahua mix, and two Pembroke Welsh corgis.*

To research Sold, ***Patricia McCormick*** *traveled to India and Nepal, where she interviewed the women of Calcutta's red-light district and girls who have been rescued from the sex trade. Patricia is a two-time National Book Award finalist and the author of five critically acclaimed novels, among them* Never Fall Down, *the story of a boy who survived the Killing Fields of Cambodia by playing music for the Khmer Rouge. Her other books include the YA classic* Cut *and the young readers' edition of* I Am Malala, *the story of the Pakistani girl who was targeted by the Taliban for standing up for education. Her newest book,* The Plot to Kill Hitler, *will be published by HarperCollins in 2016. She lives in Manhattan.*

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Annamary L. **Consalvo** and Elisabet **Takehana**

Prying Open the Oyster:

Creating a Digital Learning Space from the Robert Cormier Archive

In 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).

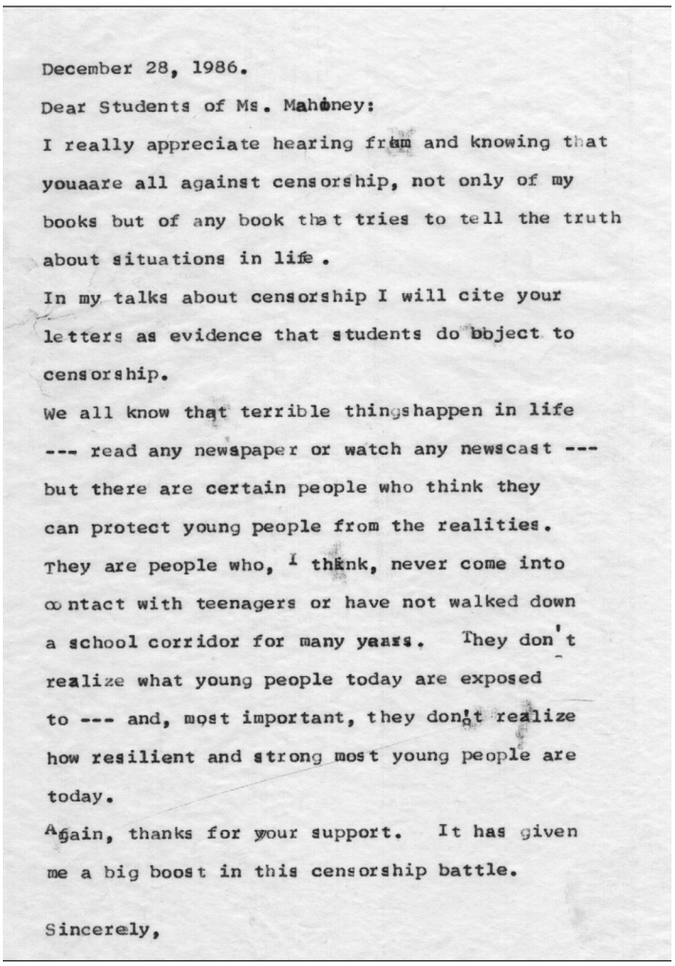
This ethos of inclusion also humanizes archival work and invites those not traditionally considered scholars to feel at home in an archive (an unfamiliar space). Cormier did this himself by habitually including student artifacts and letters in his archive and writing to students to announce that their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



December 28, 1986.

Dear Students of Ms. Mahoney:

I really appreciate hearing from and knowing that youaare all against censorship, not only of my books but of any book that tries to tell the truth about situations in life.

In my talks about censorship I will cite your letters as evidence that students do bbject to censorship.

We all know that terrible thingshappen in life --- read any newspaper or watch any newscast --- but there are certain people who think they can protect young people from the realities. They are people who, I think, never come into contact with teenagers or have not walked down a school corridor for many years. They don't realize what young people today are exposed to --- and, most important, they don't realize how resilient and strong most young people are today.

Again, thanks for your support. It has given me a big boost in this censorship battle.

Sincerely,

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.

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 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

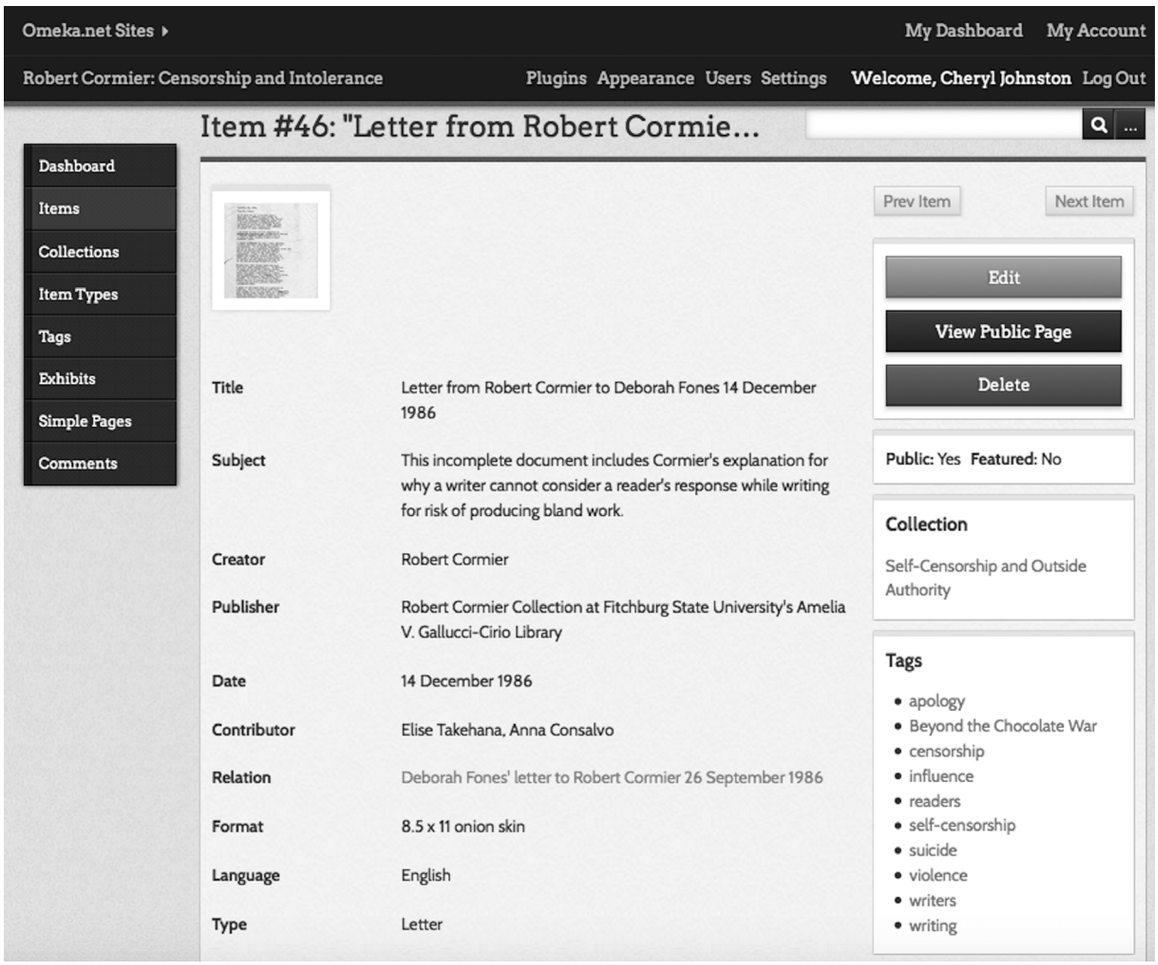


Figure 2. "Item"-level metadata (view from admin page)

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

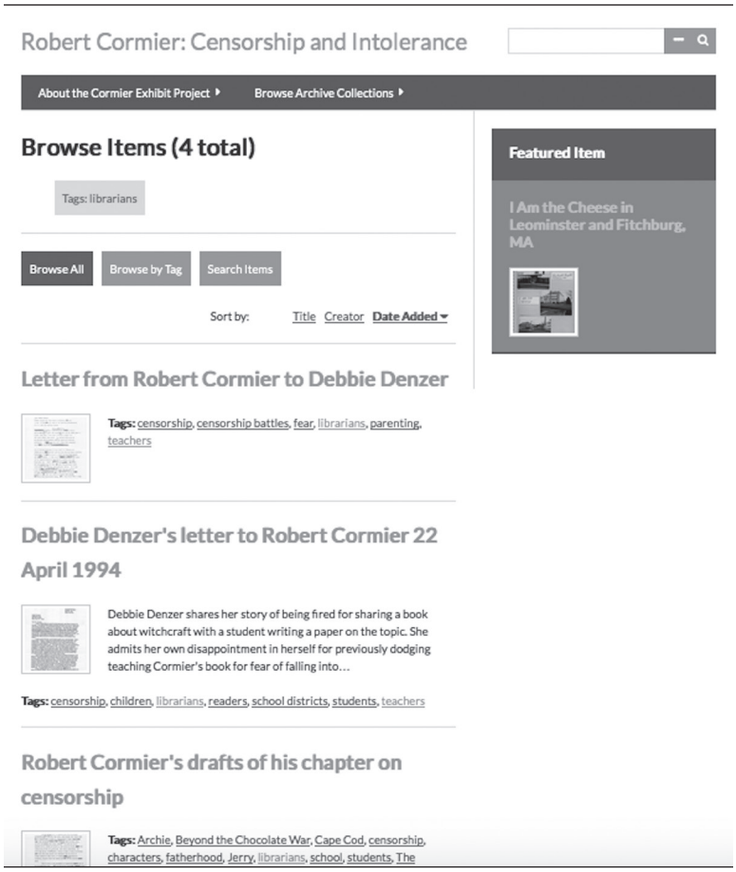


Figure 3. Results of clicking the "librarians" tag from an item page (view from public page)

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

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

← Living Through Fictional Characters

Living Through Fictional Characters
Teen Depression and Suicide

Downbeat Endings →

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

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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Backchanneling Technology:

Transforming Students' Participation during Discussions of *If I Grow Up*

The linguistic concept of backchanneling describes the myriad ways in which listeners provide feedback to speakers through short utterances or flavoring particles, like "uh-huh" or "hmmm," and extra-linguistic cues, such as furrowing one's brow after a particular word is uttered (Schegloff, 1982). Yngve (1970) introduced the term *backchanneling* in his study of turn-taking behaviors to describe a listener's communicative gestures and vocalizations (McClave, 2000). Digital backchanneling refers to real-time, online conversations that occur while others are talking. TodaysMeet is one popular and free digital backchanneling tool that makes it possible for teachers to create online "rooms" in which students can "chat" through brief posts. In the literature classroom, this technology enables students to use networked devices (e.g., Smartphones, iPads) while face-to-face discussions take place simultaneously, potentially increasing the opportunities available for students to share their ideas, pose questions about the text, or make connections among ideas being offered (Li & Greenhow, 2015; Pollard, 2014).

Active participation during text-based discussions is important because broad and deep responses to literature can promote equitable learning opportunities for students (White, 2011). In particular, "silent" students' voices can be amplified through dialogue (Asterhan & Eisenmann, 2011; Hunter & Caraway, 2014), a phenomenon that is too often unrealized due to a longstanding tradition of recitation and the prevalence of transmission models that guide literary analysis and the coinciding ways of talking about literature in many classrooms in the US (Juzwik, Borsheim-Black, Caughlan, & Heintz, 2013; Nystrand, 2006).

In this study, we examine the ways in which adolescents and their teacher in one 10th-grade English language arts (ELA) classroom used TodaysMeet to mediate their responses to Strasser's (2009) young adult novel, *If I Grow Up*. This novel chronicles the adolescent years of DeShawn, following his life in the Frederick Douglass Project, where gang violence, substandard housing conditions, and failing school environments narrow the decision-making options available to those who live in DeShawn's neighborhood.

We address our research question—*How did high school students use backchanneling technology to participate during discussions of a young adult novel?*—by analyzing discourse produced in both a face-to-face discussion environment as well as transcripts of discourse produced in the TodaysMeet online forum. Prior to considering the findings from this project, we review critical insights from the research literature on literary discussion in ELA classrooms in order to situate the findings from this analysis within the ongoing disciplinary conversation.

Sociocultural and Dialogic Perspectives on Discussion

Speaking, like writing, mediates thinking (Vygotsky, 1986). That is, one comes to realize what one is thinking through the act of speaking. From a sociocultural perspective, students do not necessarily go into a discussion with a series of prepackaged utterances

and merely wait for the right moment to recite them. Indeed, talk and thought are shaped by what others are saying, how they're saying it, and in which context it is being said—phenomena that Bakhtin (1981) theorizes through concepts such as dialogism and the ideological environment.

Dialogism posits the notion that every utterance responds to previous utterances and simultaneously anticipates future utterances (Bakhtin, 1981)—an understanding of classroom discourse that problematizes the premise on which recitation practices are constructed and instead situates talk in particular social, historical, and cultural contexts. Such theoretical orientations position classroom discussions as sites for exploring ideas (Mercer & Littleton, 2007), negotiating roles and risk-taking (Christoph & Nystrand, 2001), and tensioning interpretive authority (Chisholm & Loretto, 2016).

Further, Bakhtin suggests that the ideological environment, which includes others and their idea systems (Freedman & Ball, 2004), shapes the worldviews of students and teachers as each individual engages in her or his own process of ideological becoming. In other words, the environment of the literature classroom is shaped by students' and teachers' language and literacy practices, which, in turn, shape the environment of the classroom. Indeed, researchers have demonstrated the ways in which a dialogic environment supports student achievement gains even more so than individual participation during discussion (Kelly, 2005) or the dialogic form that utterances take (Boyd & Markarian, 2015). In short, Vygotsky and Bakhtin, and the researchers in education who have mobilized their theories, allow us to conceptualize literary discussions as shaped by and shaping the environment of the classroom, which may or may not provide space for the "refraction" (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 416) of voices leading to understandings rather than one authoritative voice handing down a singular truth.

Discussions of Literature in Secondary ELA Classrooms

Applebee, Langer, Nystrand, and Gamoran (2003) found that what are called "discussions" in many ELA classrooms are actually recitations—one-way modes of communication—that one might describe as oral quizzes of sorts. These "discussions" take the form of a discourse pattern commonly known in the literature as the I-R-E (Cazden, 2001) in which a teacher initiates a question, a student responds to the question, and the teacher evaluates the relative worth of the comment vis-à-vis her or his mental monologue. In his two-year study of 25 middle and high schools in eight different communities in the Midwest, Nystrand (2006) found that only 50 seconds per 8th-grade class and only 15 seconds per 9th-grade class could be characterized as "discussion." Eighty-five percent of each class day was devoted to lecture, question-and-answer-recitations, and seatwork. Although researchers have demonstrated the extent to which this discourse pattern characterizes talk in ELA classrooms, less clear are effective approaches to disrupting such discourse and the consequences of such disruptions.

In characterizing the I-R-E as a teacher monologue of sorts, it seems potentially useful to think about an alternative discourse pattern in high school ELA settings using the concept of dialogue, as Nystrand and his colleagues do in grounding their work in Bakhtin's notion of dialogic discourse. Dialogic discourse features a) authentic questions (i.e., questions posed by the teacher for which multiple "right" answers might exist), b) open discussion (talk among students without consistent teacher interjection), c) uptake (building on student responses to extend and deepen the conversation), d) high levels of evaluation from the teacher about student responses, and e) high cognitive levels in teacher-posed questions. Such dialogic interactions around text have different discourse features and patterns of interaction that lead to different learning outcomes (Nystrand, Wu, Gamoran, Zeiser, & Long, 2003).

Nystrand and his colleagues' decades of quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods research in this area offer a number of insights about the affordances of dialogue. We emphasize in this project the following two insights that derive from Nystrand's body of research: When *students* pose *questions* during discussions of literature, *the questions are usually "authentic,"* and *dialogue usually ensues* (additional questions, uptake, open discussion, high-level questions, and substantive evaluations).We privilege such dialogue in secondary literature classrooms because when dialogue happens, multiple perspectives are explored (Beach, Appleman, Hynds, & Wilhelm, 2011), alternative explanations are considered (Aukerman,

2007), ideas are reasoned through collaboratively (Chinn, Anderson, & Waggoner, 2001), and students internalize the knowledge and skills needed to engage in challenging literacy tasks (Applebee et al., 2003).

Young Adult Literature at the Center of the 21st-Century ELA Curriculum

YA novels can provide adolescent readers with the opportunity to come to know and clarify their own perspectives toward important social issues while engaging with new perspectives that might complicate their worldviews (Hayn & Burns, 2012; O'Donnell-Allen, 2011). Despite growing interest in the value of teaching YA novels in the secondary ELA classroom and the ever-expanding canon of compelling literary texts that comprise young adult literature (Beach et al., 2011), these texts continue to be marginalized in the curriculum (Groenke & Scherff, 2010; Miller, 2014).

YA novels are poised to provide students with the intellectual grist needed to engage in productive dialogue about the word and its relationship to the world (Freire, 1970).

Scholarship in the area of adolescent literacy has recognized the potential of YA novels to engage readers deeply in literary study (Cole, 2009), multimodal analysis (Parsons & Hundley, 2012), and critical approaches to literature (Connors & Shepard, 2013). Nevertheless, such narratives are often excluded altogether from the ELA curriculum. If YA texts do make their way into the hands of adolescent readers in the high school classroom, the titles are too often relegated to the margins of the curriculum—as independent reading for students, for example, but rarely as the focus for whole-class discussion (Groenke & Scherff, 2010). Recommendations that ELA teachers devote much of their reading instruction to informational texts and "complex [canonical] texts" in order to meet the goals outlined in the Common Core State Standards (CCSS; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) and to prepare students to perform at high levels on standardized assessments do not make it any easier for young adult literature to make its way into the high school English reading list (Bull, 2012; Kaplan, 2011), even though such arguments do not preclude the inclusion of young adult novels as complex texts worthy of center stage in the ELA curriculum.

The critical literacy skills listed in the above paragraphs are necessary for the critical consumption and production of texts in the 21st century. These skills are also encoded in the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010). For example, Speaking and Listening Standard 1.C for Grades 9–10 describes the college- and career-ready speaker as one who can "propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions." In some ways, the CCSS call for a reversal of roles in which students take on typical teacher moves (moving conversations along, making intertextual connections, posing questions, and calling into question answers to those questions). In such a conception of literary discussion, the teacher role transforms into that of guide, designer, and facilitator of dialogue and collaboration. YA novels are poised to provide students with the intellectual grist needed to engage in productive dialogue about the word and its relationship to the world (Freire, 1970).

The Study

Methods

On four occasions during one academic trimester, whole-class discussions of *If I Grow Up* (Strasser, 2009) were digitally video-recorded in one 10th-grade ELA class. Discussions took the form of a "fishbowl," a popular discussion strategy in which an outer circle of students in the class look in on an inner circle of students who engage each other in discussion (Smagorinsky, 2008). Fishbowls transform the physical space in which discussions typically take place, which can have the effect of shifting traditional speaking and listening roles and responsibilities for participation from the teacher to the students.

For each inner-circle conversation, the teacher posed a question to spark discussion out of which additional student-generated ideas emerged. Using

TodaysMeet, students in the outer circle managed the conversation by commenting on the inner-circle discussion or exploring topics beyond the scope of the face-to-face discussion. Upon moving to the inner circle, students who started in the outer circle picked up the conversation where the inner circle left off or elaborated on the TodaysMeet topics they were exploring online. Students who were seated on the outside of the fishbowl were able to respond to the text by typing into their mobile devices other questions, comments, intertextual connections, and textual evidence (see Figure 1). As students posted their responses outside the fishbowl, a running record of the "conversation" was automatically updated to their devices (either their personal phones or a school-supplied iPad), which the teacher monitored while taking notes, probing for elaboration, and generally facilitating the inner-circle fishbowl conversations.

To provide a depiction of the ideological environment in which this study was conducted, we describe the instructional context of the teacher, the researchers, the text, and the tool that shaped the focal classroom environment. We then identify data sources and our approaches to analysis.

Instructional Context

Thirty-four students in two 10th-grade ELA classrooms participated in this trimester-long qualitative study. In this article, we focus only on the participation of one class section of students. The high school was situated on the outer fringe of a large urban school district in the South. Identified as a "persistently low achieving" institution, approximately 1,000 students attended the high school, 68% of whom qualified for free or reduced-price lunches. The district had just approved a policy that permitted the use of cell phones for instructional purposes in approximately one out of every three high schools, including the focal high school in this study.

The Teacher

Mr. Z (a pseudonym, as are all names of persons and places identified in this study) was a second-year teacher who had just successfully completed the state's required yearlong internship program for beginning teachers. After completing his teacher education program and student teaching experience in a small rural town, Mr. Z moved to the large urban district in which this high school was situated. Mr. Z did not self-identify as a "traditional" ELA teacher, and the lack of tension between his beliefs and practices did not typify the experience of beginning ELA teachers in the US. That is, although Mr. Z lived in a world with "competing centers of gravity" (Smagorinsky, Rhym, & Moore, 2013, p. 148), he did not demonstrate a conflicted stance when it came to his teaching; in fact, Mr. Z had developed a reputation as an advocate for his students and their learning, especially if that meant speaking out against over-testing practices and the standardization of education.

The Researchers

Both James and Ashley, this article's authors, are former secondary ELA teachers who incorporated technology and young adult novels in their classrooms. James was an observer-researcher in Mr. Z's classroom once per week for two trimesters. They met when James taught a teacher education course in which Mr. Z was enrolled; it centered on teaching writing and literature in secondary schools. James was

Figure 1. A graphical representation of a digitized and dialogic fishbowl discussion format

also Mr. Z's university supervisor during his student teaching experience. James and Mr. Z both took new jobs in the same city and, given their shared interest in technology and inquiry-based ELA instruction, met to talk about potential teaching and research collaborations. For this study, James and Mr. Z selected the young adult novel, coauthored interpretive questions, and met to debrief after each session. Ashley worked as a graduate research assistant during this study and organized, transcribed, and analyzed much of the data collected in Mr. Z's classroom. Since beginning work on this project, Ashley has become a participant-observer in Mr. Z's classroom, where both Ashley and Mr. Z are examining ways in which student identities can be leveraged to inform multimodal instructional practices.

TodaysMeet, as a backchanneling tool, allows users to post responses up to 140 characters per message. These posts make it possible for students to engage in real-time online conversation or respond to ideas that are being deliberated during a face-to-face discussion.

The Text

Mr. Z and James selected Todd Strasser's *If I Grow Up* (2009) as the primary novel for Mr. Z's unit, which centered on insider and outsider perspectives across a variety of literary, multimodal, and informational texts. They chose *If I Grow Up* because they appreciated how Strasser draws on different text genres in the novel and presents issues of poverty, race, and life in a gang in ways that invited students to think critically about the circumstances in which DeShawn, the protagonist, lives. Additionally, they had recently read a compelling analysis of language conventionality in Strasser's novel in which Glaus (2014) noted the use of multiple registers of English language, the presence of multiple text genres, and knowledge demands that provide rich opportunities for students to infer meanings in transaction with the text. Drawing on different text genres (e.g., statistics, song lyrics) and presenting issues of poverty, race, and life in a gang in ways that complicate any simple explanations for how these issues shape and are shaped by society convinced them that *If I Grow Up* is as complex a text as any they teach in the ELA curriculum.

The focal text features DeShawn, a character who finds himself confronted consistently with conflicts for which no simple solution exists. Each chapter is organized by a year in DeShawn's adolescent life and details the ways in which drug- and gang-related violence, chaotic school environments, and extreme poverty lead many young people in DeShawn's community to drop out of school, go to jail, or die. Although the plot compelled students to address difficult questions about race, White privilege, poverty, equity in education, and violence, the narrative structure of the text proved equally intriguing. This element was marked as such by Mr. Z in the pre-discussion questions he asked students to consider and in the ways in which he interjected questions and comments during discussions.

Mr. Z and James constructed comprehension, interpretation, and evaluation questions to guide students' readings and encourage students to examine the events of *If I Grow Up* critically and empathetically. During their discussions of this novel, students noted how DeShawn's circumstances resonated with them, which led us to believe that the issues addressed in the novel and its reflection of the time in which the novel is set were still relevant for the participants in this study. Students shared the rewards and challenges of growing up in a single-parent household in a place like the Frederick Douglass Project, as well as first-hand experiences of homelessness, violence, and gang life.

The Tool

TodaysMeet, as a backchanneling tool, allows users to post responses up to 140 characters per message. These posts make it possible for students to engage in real-time online conversation or respond to ideas that are being deliberated during a face-to-face discussion. Additionally, TodaysMeet allows teachers to moderate and revisit ideas posted online, as it automatically archives conversations, including time stamps and user names. As such, the transcript can be used as a reflection tool for teachers and students alike as they seek to engage in productive dialogue (i.e., talk that generates meanings) around literary texts. We recog-

nize the division of attention that the use of such a device during an instructional activity might cause. In fact, we experienced difficulty as we experimented with the tool ourselves. However, it did not take long for students to develop "multimodal dexterity" (Hunter & Caraway, 2014, p. 80), wielding this tool in ways that convinced us they were able to attend to multiple conversations productively.

Data Sources

Data sources for this study included eight 20–25-minute discussion transcripts created from digital video recordings of the face-to-face inner-circle discussions and eight TodaysMeet backchanneling conversations archived online that took place in the outer circle during each fishbowl discussion. Two face-to-face discussions and two TodaysMeet backchanneling discussions occurred during each class session, since each half of the class had the opportunity to be both on the inside and outside of the fishbowl during each class meeting. Additionally, we drew on field notes written during observations in order to provide additional context about the instructional environment and to triangulate or disconfirm findings from our discourse analyses.

Data Analysis Techniques

Face-to-face discussions were digitally video-recorded and transcribed. Transcripts were segmented into turns at talk for each participant. TodaysMeet transcripts were segmented automatically into unique posts by individual users. We combined face-to-face and online transcripts and organized each transcript rhetorically (Mishler, 1991) to allow for a temporal and sequential reading across discussion environments and to foreground different speakers' voices.

A time-stamped record of the online discussions was archived and compared with the time-stamped transcript from the face-to-face discussion. To examine how students used the backchanneling tool during literary discussions, we engaged in open coding of the discussion transcripts and employed the constant comparative method (Charmaz, 2014) throughout data analysis. We relied particularly on positive discourse analysis (PDA) (Rogers, 2014), a type of critical discourse analysis that examines the positive uses of power, agency, and identity (and not only the ways in which discourse is used negatively to disempower, marginalize, and stigmatize). To that end, we marked the ways in which participants used language to empower speakers with interpretive authority, promote agency, and celebrate student identities.

In one example, Mr. Z marked explicitly in the online environment dialogic discourse moves taken up in the face-to-face fishbowl: "Did you notice how Tiny gave others a chance to provide an example first [before answering the question on the floor]?" We coded such turns as "Marking Student Participation during Discussion," a code we subsumed under the category we labeled Metacognitive Reflections on Participation Structures. Additional PDA categories included Engaging Multiple Perspectives, Supporting Interpretive Contributions, and Participating in Complex Interactions across Discourse Environments. Table 1 displays the number of dialogic discussion features per transcript that were coded within the PDA categories above: a) reflecting on participation structures, b) engaging in perspective taking about the meanings of the text, c) marking classmates' interpretations, and d) posing authentic questions (Nystrand, 1997).

Findings

Since each discussion was split in two, each student had the opportunity to respond to the text and his/her peers on TodaysMeet (TM) and in a face-to-face (FtF)

Table 1. Total dialogic discourse codes as percentage of total number of posts in TodaysMeet

Dialogic Code	Session 1 ($n = 109$) # (%)	Session 2 ($n = 152$) # %	Session 3 ($n = 138$) # %	Session 4 ($n = 146$) # %
Participation Structures	51 (47)	87 (57)	63 (46)	64 (44)
Multiple Perspectives	26 (24)	14 (9)	18 (13)	19 (13)
Marking Interpretations	14 (13)	18 (12)	28 (20)	27 (19)
Authentic Questions	8 (7)	7 (5)	11 (8)	3 (2)

Note: The n in each column refers to the total number of posts by participants in each TodaysMeet session.

format. To provide a sense of when each discussion took place during the semester, as well as during the lesson, we indicate from which of the four class sessions each excerpt comes (T1–T4), as well as the line number in TodaysMeet (L.1–L.252). To keep track of the relationships (or lack thereof) between the online and face-to-face conversations, we use arrows as transcript conventions to indicate to which conversations participants were responding. Arrows to the left indicate that the TodaysMeet post responded to a face-to-face event. Upward arrows indicate that a TodaysMeet post responded to a previous backchannel event. Finally, to distinguish between face-to-face utterances and online contributions, we refer to the individual responses during the discussion as *turns* and *posts*, respectively.

We calculated participation in both the face-to-face and online environments (see Table 2). Evidenced in both of these discourse platforms and across all four sessions were the teacher's limited interjection and students' relative ownership of the discussions in both environments. Students were responsible for between 84% (Session 1) and 89% (Session 2) of all face-to-face turns at talk. This discourse pattern reflects a clear deviation from the typical I-R-E discourse in which the teacher accounts for two out of every three turns at talk. Student participation was even more pronounced in the online mode. Between 94% (Session 1) and 99% (Session 4) of all TodaysMeet posts were made by students.

Table 2. Turns at talk and post tallies for students and the teacher during face-to-face and TodaysMeet discussions

	Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4
	(FtF: n = 204) (TM n = 109)	(FtF: n = 252) (TM n = 152)	(FtF: n = 194) (TM n = 138)	(FtF: n = 280) (TM n = 146)
Participant (Environment)	# (%)	# %	# %	# %
Student Turns (FtF)	171 (84)	224 (89)	167 (86)	247 (88)
Teacher Turns (FtF)	33 (16)	28 (11)	27 (14)	33 (12)
Student Turns (TM)	102 (94)	147 (97)	133 (96)	144 (99)
Teacher Turns (TM)	7 (6)	5 (3)	5 (4)	2 (1)

Note: FtF = Face-to-face transcript; TM = TodaysMeet transcript.

In the rest of this section, we consider the nature of those responses as we present and analyze excerpts from the face-to-face and TodaysMeet transcripts to indicate the ways in which students used TodaysMeet a) to reflect metacognitively on face-to-face and online participation structures, b) to promote multiple perspectives and mark insightful contributions, and c) to engage in complex interactions across discourse environments.

Marking Participation Structures

Students used TodaysMeet to comment on the ways in which other students participated during the face-to-face discussion. Students thought extensively about how they were or were not talking (see Table 1) as depicted in the following excerpt from the online transcript:

T2.TM.L.22 Hank: ←No body would be talking without Wheeler and dave

…

T2.TM.L.24 Abigail: ↑The same people always talk @ashley

…

T2.TM.L.27 Sarah: ←It's the same couple of people talking

T2.TM.L.28 Mr. Z: ↑Why is it that they can keep talking, but others are silent? Why is it so easy for them to talk?

…

T2.TM.L.30 Abigail: ↑I don't think it really matters who's in the circle. The second circle always does better. We have more time to think.

Hank, Abigail, and Sarah marked the participation of two classmates who either rescued or dominated the face-to-face discussion (Posts 22, 24, & 27). The teacher pushed the group to reflect on why so many were quiet during the face-to-face discussion while two classmates talked so much. These questions prompted Abigail to identify what later became a widely believed fact about these digital fishbowl discussions—specifically, Abigail's comment (Post 30) that the first

face-to-face group served as a warm-up of sorts for the second group; this sentiment was reiterated throughout the semester. After having responded for 20 minutes on the outside of the fishbowl, the second group inside the fishbowl was consistently more talkative.

We also coded comments such as, "They are respecting others' opinions" or "off topic" as metacognitive reflections on participation structures during the discussion. Such reflection could be identified in every transcript over the course of the trimester and represented students' awareness of others and their own ways of participating during discussion. As noted in Table 1, we coded across all four class sessions between 44% and 57% of all TodaysMeet posts for the marking of participation structures.

Engaging Multiple Perspectives and Supporting Interpretive Contributions

In the first discussion session, students used the TodaysMeet platform to begin to predict what might become of DeShawn as his story unfolded. As they did this, students provided multiple perspectives from which to read the narrative, as well as multiple ways to read DeShawn. In the following excerpt, Hank imagines that DeShawn will have no choice but to join a gang—a perspective that is intimated on the book jacket: "What if, sometimes, the only choice you have is no choice at all?"

T1.TM.L.74 Hank: ←I think deshawns going to almost have to join the gang like have no other choice

…

T1.TM.L.79 Nate: ↑Or something similar because he said that he liked the feeling of the gun in his hand when he pointed it at Terrell and Jules @hank

T1.TM.L.80 JT: Whoa

T1.TM.L.81 Lester: ←Parker [classmate] did a good job keeping them going

…

T1.TM.L.83 Harriet: ↑I think deshawn is going to get influenced into the gang because he know he has other options such as going to beechhill @hank

T1.TM.L.84 Hank: ↑Maybe he likes the power or will end up needing money to support his family

Hank's prediction that DeShawn would have no choice but to join a gang was supported in Post 79 by Nate, who drew on textual evidence to provide a different perspective yet still supported Hank's claim. Nate claimed that DeShawn was intrigued by the power he might have felt when he held a gun in an earlier scene in the text. JT's remark seemed to function as a commentary on Nate's post. In the subsequent turn, Lester marked Parker's participation in the face-to-face discussion and provided encouraging support to his classmate for "keeping them going."

When interesting connections, questions, or literary responses emerged during the online TodaysMeet discussion, students sometimes directed the content of their posts to those ideas generated online rather than the face-to-face conversation on the floor.

In Post 83, Harriet provided another perspective in response to Hank's original claim. She reminded the group that DeShawn's grades and test scores had put him at the top of his class in his school (but nowhere near the level of top students in other schools) and that, as a result, a high-achieving school ("Beech Hill") that might have recruited him was no longer a possible choice for him. In Post 84, Hank acknowledged Nate's insightful contribution to his original idea and provided another reason why DeShawn might end up joining the gang: "[DeShawn] will end up needing money to support his family."

Between 9% (Session 2) and 24% (Session 1) of all posts in the online environment marked *multiple perspectives* on the text, and between 12% (Session 2) and 20% (Session 3) of all posts in the online environment marked *insightful contributions* made during the face-to-face or online discussions (see Table 1).

Participating in Complex Interactions across Discourse Environments

We identified two consistent ways in which students engaged in complex dialogic interactions across dis-

course environments. First, TodaysMeet users engaged in *parallel conversations* online that connected only initially with the topic of the face-to-face discussion. Second, we identified *dialogic exchanges* that occurred across discourse platforms. In these instances, online participants "talked back" to perspectives in the face-to-face discussion.

Parallel Conversations

When interesting connections, questions, or literary responses emerged during the online TodaysMeet discussion, students sometimes directed the content of their posts to those ideas generated online rather than the face-to-face conversation on the floor. In some instances, students would begin to engage in what they perceived to be a "better" online conversation after they evaluated the quality of the face-to-face discussion. In any case, the online conversation took on a life of its own, as most dialogic discussions do.

The following excerpt illustrates the online and face-to-face discussion that occurred when a parallel conversation emerged. In the face-to-face discussion, participants considered whether or not it would be wise to help someone in need if one suspected that the money would be used to feed an addiction that would only exacerbate the problem. That conversation led students to consider hypothetical scenarios or comparable situations in their own lives and how they might act in those circumstances. Online, students considered whether or not DeShawn would be justified in joining a gang because he was responsible for taking care of his family. That authentic question, posed while the face-to-face discussion considered social policies at play in the text and in the world, became a conversation in its own right:

	T2.TM.L.154 (Elena): ↑But sometimes you have to do[what] you have to do
	T2.TM.L.155 (Nate): ↑If he dies then who can take care of the kids and grandma@adam
T2.FtF.L.219 (Nelson): I would've helped my sister. [inaudible]	…
…	
T2.FtF.L.221 (Sarah): You can't make [people on government assistance] dependent, they have to learn to be independent.	T2.TM.L.159 (Nate): ↑But what about lightbulb, he isn't affiliated with the gang and is doing Good . . . can't Deshawn do what he is doing
	T2.TM.L.160 (Nate): ↑Elena
	T2.TM.L.161 (Elena): ↑They are in different situations

The parallel conversation on TodaysMeet featured a response that supported the notion that DeShawn had viable reasons that would justify a choice to join a gang: "Sometimes you have to do [what] you have to do" (Post 154). In Nate's next post, however, he called into question that rationalization by noting the dangers involved in joining a gang, as well as the risk DeShawn would take with his life by joining a gang. If DeShawn died or became incarcerated, who would take care of his family (Post 155)? Nate provided a counter-example from his reading of another character's decisions in the novel to ask why DeShawn couldn't avoid joining a gang like Lightbulb did. Although there would later be real debate about whether or not "Lightbulb is doing good," Nate's contribution here drew on the text to push his online discussion partners to think about the meanings in the novel from a different perspective. In essence, Nate's ideas continued the stance toward dialogue that initially sparked this online conversation. Elena responded to Nate's post by noting that a comparison between Lightbulb and DeShawn was more complicated than Nate was assuming it to be—a type of discourse move that characterizes the most dialogic of discussions.

Dialogic Exchanges

Another way in which students "talked back" to the text and each other in the online forum was to respond directly to ideas that were presented in the face-to-face discussion. In the following excerpt, students in the online environment consider Harriet's face-to-face discussion response to the notion that the gang leader's (Marcus's) death will shape DeShawn's future decisions in consequential ways; that is, with

the death of Marcus, DeShawn will have to take on a new identity of sorts.

T3.FtF.L.21 (Harriet): I mean, it kind of makes sense because Marcus was his father figure and now he's gone, and his grandmother's stressed with the kids and all that and Nia can't help because she doesn't know anything about kids so it's [inaudible]

T3.TM.L8 (Hank): ←… I think Marcus's death is pushing deshawn to grow up BC now he has nobody to look up to. And with the baby being on the way

T3.TM.L9 (Abigail): ←I feel like he..
…
T3.TM.L11 (Nate): ↑Yeah because he has to step up in the gang #princess

T3.TM.L12 (Abigail): ←↑Needs Marcus now more than ever

Hank's response on the TodaysMeet feed was in conjunction with Harriet's turn during the face-to-face discussion. Hank built on Harriet's reflection that Marcus's father figure was gone by noting that Marcus's death would force DeShawn to grow up quickly without the role model he once had. Hank's post also reflected the growing up DeShawn would do with the birth of his baby—an idea that Harriet hinted at in the face-to-face discussion by remarking that Nia, DeShawn's sister, wouldn't be able to help because she is struggling to make ends meet with her own child. In Post 9, Abigail began a response to Harriet, which she then completed in Post 12: "I feel like . . . [DeShawn] needs Marcus now more than ever." This post responded to both Harriet's point, as well as Hank's post, creating at least two platforms from which TodaysMeet users could access and respond to the text. Since Harriet and the rest of the face-to-face discussion participants had access at this point to neither Abigail nor Hank's responses, the dialogue across discourse platforms only occurred in the online environment.

Discussion and Conclusion

Throughout the face-to-face and TodaysMeet transcripts can be found instances of metacognitive reflection on participation structures, engagement with multiple perspectives, the celebration of literary interpretations, and participation in parallel and dialogic conversations. These categories for use of the backchanneling tool were not mutually exclusive or used in isolation. In fact, quite often these uses were woven throughout an interaction around an authentic question. In any case, students interacted with the text, the teacher, and each other in ways that allowed them multiple, alternative modes of participation during a literacy practice that has the potential to increase student learning about literature and literacy (Applebee et al., 2003; Juzwik et al., 2013).

The TodaysMeet backchanneling tool provided students in this study multiple opportunities to respond to the text that might not have been available in a face-to-face discussion where speakers constantly negotiate for the floor and power dynamics can preclude some students from taking the risk to talk.

Evidenced throughout the face-to-face and online dialogues were the positive ways in which students used various discourse platforms to explore multiple ways of thinking about the text and to promote each other as readers and authors of ideas, while the teacher trusted his students to provide important perspectives that could push back productively against the collective reading of the novel. Instead of rejecting ideas that might seem outlandish or inappropriate to explore, Mr. Z, who interjected intentionally and infrequently during TodaysMeet and face-to-face discussions, encouraged students to elaborate on their thinking. In so doing, Mr. Z positioned himself as a fellow reader and his students as critical inquirers.

The TodaysMeet backchanneling tool provided students in this study multiple opportunities to respond to the text that might not have been available in a face-to-face discussion where speakers constantly

negotiate for the floor and power dynamics can preclude some students from taking the risk to talk. Nevertheless, a number of additional characteristics of these literary discussions compel us to think about a constellation of discursive features that created an ideal space in which to introduce this discussion tool.

In [t]his classroom, students asked the questions, noted participation structures, and evaluated responses. The teacher listened, probed, modeled, elaborated, and facilitated conversations around text.

First, as stated earlier, teachers and researchers can benefit from paying close attention the ideological (e.g., dialogic) environment in which discussions take place. Clearly, students in Mr. Z's classroom felt comfortable putting forth their perspectives about the text. Such a classroom culture wasn't created by the introduction of a digital tool or even a complex young adult novel; rather, Mr. Z cultivated relationships with each student to such an extent that mutual trust between the teacher and the students helped to establish a serious and critical approach to the text and the tool. Thus, Mr. Z can be said to have co-constructed with his students a dialogic stance toward literary discussions (Boyd & Markarian, 2015).

Second, we were struck by the role reversals evident in the data. The teaching adage, "If you're the one talking, you're the one learning," if true, bodes well for Mr. Z's students. In his classroom, students asked the questions, noted participation structures, and evaluated responses. The teacher listened, probed, modeled, elaborated, and facilitated conversations around text. Additionally, students had the opportunity to practice listening intentionally to others' thinking about meanings in a literary text. Outside of the fishbowl, students had time to process multiple perspectives explored inside the fishbowl and in the online discussion forum. These are important implications to consider for teachers and students who seek to work toward co-constructing dialogic discussions that promote generative interactions around texts.

Finally, students' conversations about *If I Grow Up* were not unproblematic; however, being unproblematic is not a goal of dialogue. In fact, problematic perspectives often opened up the possibility for the discursive disruption of oppressive ideologies in this secondary ELA classroom (O'Donnell-Allen, 2011). For example, aspects of the face-to-face conversations represented in some of the above transcript excerpts featured extractions from the novel into societal structures in which students talked in stereotypes and generalizations that seemed to lead to marginalizing positions that reproduced and perpetuated deficit perspectives about urban youth, gang culture, African American fathers, people who receive government assistance, and other groups. Nevertheless, these perspectives, if not directly confronted by participants in the face-to-face discussion, were considered (often critically) by the participants on the outside of the fishbowl as they witnessed the reaction (or lack thereof) to the ideological stances of their classmates. The interrogation of multiple perspectives and counter-perspectives about complex topics that impacted the daily lives of many of these high school readers led to student ownership over the interpretations that were generated about the novel and its relationship to contemporary society.

Future studies of the instructional affordances of young adult literature, digital technologies, and innovative pedagogical practices should take into account the ideological environment in which such texts, tools, and teachers are situated. The importance of quality teacher-student interactions should not be overlooked. These interactions are improved when, to echo Nystrand's (1997) assertion, teachers trust students to take on challenging roles, texts, and tasks and to position themselves as critical inquirers, designers, and creators of new knowledge.

Acknowledgements

This project was funded by an ALAN Foundation grant in 2014 and a Nystrand-Offutt Scholar award by the Nystrand Center of Excellence in Education at the University of Louisville. Both funding sources were awarded to James Chisholm.

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Jennifer S. **Dail** and Nick **Thompson**

Talking Back:

Remix as a Tool to Help Students Exercise Authority when Making Meaning

"Looking back over all of my reflections, I see a trend of my ideas that this project is very different from others I have done before. . . . we were fully able to show our thoughts without the tight directions that are usually placed on assignments in high school."

—12th-Grade Student Reflection

In November 2013, I (Jennifer), a university professor in teacher education, sat in the keynote session at the National Writing Project's Annual Meeting listening to Henry Jenkins talk via Skype about participatory culture and remixing *Moby Dick*. The concept excited me. A remix deconstructs and dismantles others' creative expressions and reforms them into a new creative expression. I had already been thinking about interactions in the classroom and how to make them more student-centered and less reliant on the teacher's mediation (and thus more authentic). Jenkins's ideas offered a means to facilitate students' multimodal composing processes coupled with a response to literature that moves them beyond summative, plot-driven discussion of a novel and into interpretive analysis across overarching themes.

As Jenkins talked specifically about remixing, I realized we all do it, especially students. A year after this meeting, I introduced the concept of remix to my students. As we worked through definitions and examples of remix in class, one student tweeted: "Remix—More than just new song beats! Taking something known and making it new and relatable." As writers and producers of various texts, especially multimodal texts, we draw from material we know to make a point about some other material and, in the process, create something new. For me, this recognition was not about the technology; it was a paradigm shift about how students interact with texts, the authority they take when responding to texts, and how we as teachers conceptualize ownership to invite students to use their own creativity as a tool for reading and for writing/producing. Technology simply offered a medium through which we might accomplish that.

During the fall of 2014, I (Nick), a doctoral candidate, was also exploring ideas about participatory culture and remix in my high school setting. After seven years of teaching, I was accepted into an Ed.D. program at a nearby university where Jennifer was my professor. My concept of learning before starting a doctoral degree assumed that teachers were supposed to direct novices' thinking. My experience as an Ed.D. student problematized my beliefs about how we should be teaching and learning because the faculty spoke about learning as a conversation, not as dictation. In my role as a doctoral student, I was asked to join the conversation, add to it, and push back when I disagreed. In other words, to employ a critical lens and act upon it.

A critical lens seeks to create a more democratic society by analyzing the systems that support inequity based on people's membership in a specific group

(e.g., race, gender, language). Janks (2014) argues, "Critical literacy gives us potent ways of reading, seeing and acting in the world," and once students practice with critical literacy, they will understand the importance of language in "the workings of power, producing our identity positions, and affecting who gets access to opportunities for a better life" (p. 1). I was considering how all levels of students can benefit from being expected to exercise a critical lens and greater authority over their learning while planning to read Matt de la Peña's *Mexican Whiteboy* (2008) or *We Were Here* (2009). Remix seemed like a good tool to help my students join the conversation.

[The remix project] shifted authority of the traditional classroom from the teacher to the students by giving students structure and space to exercise their own will as readers and be the architects of their assessments.

Jennifer was teaching an undergraduate course with preservice teachers on digital media and technology in English education. We saw an opportunity to collaborate around our shared interest in remixing and have our students come together to remix the de la Peña novel they chose to read. This project offered a way to ask students to read more critically, deeply, and intentionally because it gave them a purpose for reading. It shifted authority of the traditional classroom from the teacher to the students by giving students structure and space to exercise their own will as readers and be the architects of their assessments. The conversation shifted from a traditional classroom scenario in which the teacher says, "This is what you should take from the text" to one in which the teacher and students ask, "What do I need to take from the text and other sources to produce an original, meaningful, multimodal product?"

What follows is an overview of the unit we taught. We discuss the project in the same order that we followed in our classes. First, we discuss the novels the students read. Next, we explain how we introduced the concept of remix to the students. After that, we lay out the five stages of the remix project: Intent, Plan, Product, Reaction, Reflection. Next, we put our project into conversation with the five characteristics of participatory culture as defined by Jenkins and Kelly (2013, p. 8):

1. Relatively low barriers to artistic expression and civic engagement;
2. Strong support for creating and sharing creations with others;
3. Some type of informal mentorship whereby what is known by the most experienced is passed along to novices;
4. Members who believe that their contributions matter; and
5. Members who feel some degree of social connection with one another (they care what other people think about what they have created).

Finally, we discuss the core themes that emerged in performing this unit with our students.

The Novels and Framing Questions

Before we began the remix assignment, each student chose between two books by Matt de la Peña: *We Were Here* (2009) and *Mexican Whiteboy* (2008). We chose two books by the same author because we wanted to give students choice over their reading assignments, but we also wanted students to be able to engage in whole-class discussions regardless of the book they read. Most students chose to read *We Were Here*, but enough students chose *Mexican Whiteboy* to create a whole group for the eventual remix project. Without shared characters and plot line from a single novel, students were led to discuss characterization and theme. Additionally, using multiple books by the same author allowed students to identify authorial elements, such as tone and style, across both books. Where there was not agreement on such stylistic elements, there emerged potential for discussing authorial intent. Discussing these differences across the two books helped students illuminate small pieces of each other's books. The process was messy, of course, because students did not always understand the context of their classmates' comments and did not have personal connections to both texts; however, with facilitation from us, the advantages overshadowed the limitations.

Mexican Whiteboy is about a teenager named Danny who goes to live with his father's family for the summer. As the title suggests, he is of mixed race;

his father is Mexican, and his mother is White. Danny lives with his mother, attends a private school, and only speaks English. Moving to San Diego with his Mexican aunts, uncles, and cousins in a neighborhood largely made up of Latinos is a daunting experience for him. The one bit of cultural capital that Danny brings with him is his impressive talent as a baseball player.

We Were Here follows Miguel from the moment he begins his punishment for an unrevealed crime. He finds himself in a group home for juvenile offenders. In addition to his confinement, the judge who presided over Miguel's case has ordered him to keep a journal. Part of the unique quality of this narrative is that it is told entirely through Miguel's journal writing. Predictably, his beginning at the group home is contentious, but enemies turn into allies, and Miguel eventually turns those allies into friends.

We chose these books because they are accessible to a wide range of teenage audiences. Both protagonists deal with issues common to adolescents: independence, morality, identity, and social acceptance. In addition, de la Peña artfully presents both individual and institutional issues of race, including episodes featuring racial epithets, society treating non-White people as criminals, and the anxiety many feel when holding conversations about how race informs identity. de la Peña accomplishes the difficult task of presenting racial tensions in ways that are realistic, representative of contemporary America, and engaging. We wanted to frame our class conversation with a critical literacies lens. Bronner (2011) wrote, "Critical theory refuses to identify freedom with any institutional arrangement or fixed system of thought" (p. 1). These novels are good anchors for asking students to grapple with making meaning of inequities in society and to consider their role when they face these inequities throughout their lives.

Based on these goals, we broke each book into four sections of relatively equal length. We gave the students reading due dates for each section and asked them to take notes in the margins of their books. To give them focus, we asked them to address the following questions in their notes:

> Section 1: What does the protagonist want? What is getting in his way? What should he do to get over these obstacles?
>
> Section 2: What is the protagonist worried about? What is causing the worry? What is he doing to make his stress worse or better? What are others doing to make his stress worse or better?
>
> Section 3: Who has power in the story? Who lacks power in the story? What/who decides who has power?
>
> Section 4: How do the conflicts for the character conclude? Has the power shifted in the book? How? Why?

The questions associated with each section were meant to lead the students through a progression from small, tangible concepts toward large, abstract concepts. For Section 1, we wanted the students to get to know the characters and their struggles from an individual standpoint because both Danny and Miguel experience loneliness and have trouble fitting in. By the time the students finished the book and participated in the Section 4 discussion, we were asking them to understand the underlying systems of power that are present in American society as depicted by the novels. Both characters have experiences that reveal the real consequences of systemic inequalities, and in the end, students recognized these systems.

These novels are good anchors for asking students to grapple with making meaning of inequities in society and to consider their role when they face these inequities throughout their lives.

As illustration, consider the thinking that took place in each group. In *Mexican Whiteboy,* students recognized that parents have power—something they can relate to their own lives. Moving beyond that, some students noted that Manny lacks power, explaining, "Because you see him speaking freely at the start of the novel, but he is put into a mental half[way]-house throughout the rest of the novel. This strips Manny of all voice and power throughout the rest of time." In *We Were Here,* students recognized that Mong gains and maintains power through "outrageously violent behavior" toward other boys in the

group home. They pointed out that this behavior creates fear in his housemates and robs them of power, as seen in the passage where Tommy says, "But if they knew how he was really like he wouldn't even be here. They'd put him in solitary confinement. Or they'd try him as an adult" (de la Peña, 2009, p. 30). Students also noted that Miguel has power because "he is able to manipulate and deceive Rondell very easily. He shows this power when he lies to Rondell about getting the money stolen from Flaca." Students recognized how the positioning of characters and the use of language and actions work to demonstrate power dynamics in the novels.

We, the teachers, shared the role of discussion facilitator, while students were held responsible for the content that they mined while reading. Regarding their discussions of the novels, the students were individually assessed for their contributions. We only awarded credit for contributions that added a new perspective or piece of information to the discussion. Some of the systems that they unearthed from the novels were as personal and familiar as a family connection, but some were as abstract as universal moral truths. Remixing the novels was meant to be a means of further developing and expressing those understandings. One student wrote, "I learned a lot about the book from this project which I didn't get from just reading through it. I learned the truth about Mong and Rondell [from *We Were Here*], and that what may seem horrible to one person may seem like heaven to another." After reading and discussing the novels, we introduced the concept of remix to the students.

Unpacking Remix with Students

While remix is all around us and something we do regularly, although usually unconsciously, we knew that distinguishing between what constitutes remix and what does not would pose challenges for students, just as it did for us when conceptualizing the project. We imagined possible submissions where students might change one or two things in another work and submit it as a remix, so we wanted to take time to really tease out what we were asking students to do and to engage them in some purposeful discussion about that. We wanted to move students toward creating remixes that offered comprehensive views of the novels' themes by putting them into intentional conversation with other elements from a variety of other texts. When we conceptualized remix, we thought about it on a continuum that moved from original content to new content and that considered recognizability of the original content, value of the remix, and transformation of the original content (see Fig. 1).

In discussing the continuum with students, we offered different examples of remix in popular culture, starting with remixes of the Norman Rockwell's image *Freedom from Want* (1943). We analyzed elements of the original work, just as we would a text, and then applied those elements to discussing remixes of the art (see W. [only last initial supplied], 2010). One remix parody we discussed depicts a modern family where the mother, cigarette dangling from her mouth, carrying the turkey platter, presents the family with a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken. Cans of Budweiser are spread around the table alongside open bags of Ruffles potato chips. The set up is clearly identifiable with Rockwell's original work, but as the students noted, the piece offers criticism about fast-food culture and a consumeristic, product-driven society. In the discussions of remix, we asked students to use the three questions about recognizability, value, and transformation to place each remix somewhere on the remix continuum (see Fig. 1). We then looked at where we had placed various works and talked about which were too close to the original (e.g., one element changed and no added value) or too far from the original (e.g., original no longer recognizable in the content) to be considered valuable remixes.

Because we did not want students to think that remix only applied to static images, we included other examples that demonstrated a breadth of remix possibilities. These examples included sampling in music, remixed movie trailers, and Danger Mouse's "The Grey Video" (peaches97062, 2006) that remixes various Beatles songs from the *White Album* (1963) with "Encore" from Jay-Z's *Black Album* (2003) over video from various Beatles performances on the *Ed Sullivan*

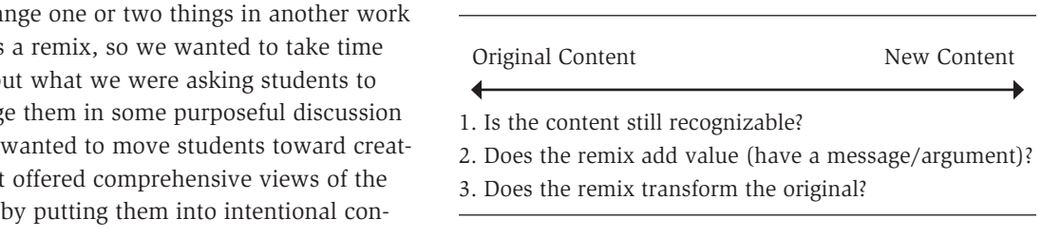

Figure 1. The remix continuum

Show. The final example of "The Grey Video" offered students a multimodal example drawing from multiple sources.

At this point, we focused the discussion on recognizability of all source material and on putting these materials into conversation with each other in new, unexpected ways to create something original. As part of this discussion, we created a class T-chart where students indicated in Column A traits that do *not* make a good remix (too little of the original content so that a viewer does not recognize the source, choppy mixing of source materials, and unclear message) and in Column B traits that make a good remix (takes an older message and puts it into a modern context, transforms the content to add something new and different while maintaining balance with the source content, and concise and clean presentation). These responses demonstrated to us that the students were taking away the key point from our work with the remix continuum: remix is not just using other people's work, but it is also creating new content to further transform the meaning. Now that they were able to recognize the form and purpose of remix that others had created, it was time to start leading them through creating their own.

Addressing Project Logistics

We are arguing, in part, that teachers should structure activities that give students a chance to build the skills needed to employ a critical lens and that remix can be such an activity. A critical lens seeks to break down societal structures and demonstrates that people who are not members of privileged groups are subject to both tacit and active discrimination. Remix is about combining the meaning-making activities of analysis, deconstruction, and reformation. First, we must analyze a piece of the world for what it says. Next, we must deconstruct how it accomplishes its message. Last, we must reform it to say something new. In addition to deconstruction, remix is an exercise in talking back to societal structures.

The claim that a critical lens should be brought into schools is not new to education or the English curriculum; Giroux (1988) wrote, "In the current political climate, there is little talk about schools and democracy and a great deal of debate about how schools might become more successful in meeting industrial needs and contributing to economic productivity" (p. 1). Janks (2012) asserts, "The move from knowledge consumption to knowledge production evident on Web 2.0 has removed previous forms of authorship and ownership. Authorship is further challenged by new forms of text making: mixing, mashing, cutting, pasting, and re-contextualising are taken-for-granted practices of the net-generation" (pp. 151–152). Such textual transformations require teachers and students to take a critical stance in examining text production and consumption.

These responses demonstrated to us that the students were taking away the key point from our work with the remix continuum: remix is not just using other people's work, but it is also creating new content to further transform the meaning.

What is new is the way that these critical issues are manifested in a world where new modes and means of communication fall in and out of fashion at a seemingly exponential rate. Jenkins and Kelley (2013) coined the phrase "participation gap" to describe the divide between adolescents who lack access to the tools, skills, and cultural knowledge necessary to engage in a culture that is mediated by new forms of communication that are largely housed in technology. The participation gap occurs when people do not have access to technological tools or are not given the opportunity to build skills associated with making meaning using these tools. We attempted to minimize the participation gap by first implementing activities designed to teach our students, located across two physical contexts, about Google Drive.

Scaffolding Google Drive

People engaging in projects of all sorts are using shared online work spaces to collaborate, and we wanted this remix unit to give students that social experience. Both of our classrooms used Google Drive as the main communication tool for many core elements of the class (syllabus, make-up assignments, class calendar, etc.). We also constructed scaffolding assignments that required students to use shared folders and documents, so they would all be familiar and proficient in doing so. Last, we required many assign-

ments to be turned in via Google Drive before beginning the project. By requiring students to use Google Drive many times and in many ways before beginning the project, we had very few issues with the tool once we began the remix project.

Google Drive is also where we published all assignments, examples, and rubrics. We used Google Drive to create a folder for the entire class. Within the class folder, we made a folder for each of the eight groups. We assembled teacher-designated groups of three to four high school students and at least two university students. Groups were made up of students who all read the same book because we required each group to use their chosen de la Peña book as the "original source text" for their remix. We then broke the project into five parts: Statement of Intent, Plan, Product, Impact, Reflection. Attached to each part were a group assessment and an individual reflection assessment (one to three paragraphs).

We wanted students to be metacognitive about their process, but individual reflections also provided a good way for us to hold students individually accountable for their work.

In keeping with Jenkins and Kelley's (2013) suggestion that participatory cultures encourage sharing with others and have a social connection, we had the groups publish their work to the rest of the class. Since we were promoting remix as a valid creative interpretation and expression, we encouraged students to look at other groups' work and feel free to appropriate others' ideas. The individual assessments were kept private between each student and the teachers so that students could be honest.

The Individual Reflections

We wanted students to be metacognitive about their process, but individual reflections also provided a good way for us to hold students individually accountable for their work. We asked students to answer the following questions in their reflection:

- What was the writing/creating process like?
- How do you feel about the direction of the project?
- What were your contributions to the intent statement? What were the contributions of each of your group members?
- What strengths did you bring to working collaboratively in the group?
- What areas might you improve upon from working collaboratively in this group?

Using the "comment" function on Google Drive, we were able to give students feedback about their project and their writing and address any issues that arose. We found ourselves surfing the folders while watching TV at night and noticed that assessment became something that we were both drawn to rather than having to carve out time to drudge through. The difference was that we were having a dialogue with the students. When we first started this practice, we did not expect the students to respond to our comments directly, and most of them didn't. However, there were a few who did, sometimes at night and on weekends. We were drawn into these conversations by the alerts that came when students left comments or responded to our comments. This may appear to impede upon teachers' personal time; however, we had given the students no expectations of immediate replies, so we could guiltlessly leave no comment on them if we chose. It was all voluntary, so these interactions more closely resembled communication practices that we all use on a daily basis through social media, and it felt natural. It virtually extended the parameters of school, allowing class time to focus on producing the remix rather than dealing with misunderstandings or redirection.

The Remix Project Assignment

The assignment was broken down into stages with benchmark dates to help students manage its scope and to help us support them in developing their ideas in process. At the beginning of the discussion for each stage below, we include a reflection excerpt from a high school student, Lucy (pseudonyms used for students throughout). The introduction to her final reflection explains, "My group read *Mexican Whiteboy.* The teacher gave directions on what needed to be turned in on what day, but the product itself was left up to us on what to design."

The Statement of Intent

The statement of intent was very difficult to complete. The project is too vague and that adds a whole new level of difficulty. . . . But coordinating time [for both high school and college students] to work on this assignment at the same time . . . is nearly impossible. (Lucy)

The first part of the project, the statement of intent, seemed like a simple task at first, but it ended up taking most groups more than a single class period to complete. We asked each group to brainstorm ideas and generate a 1–2 paragraph explanation of what they intended to create. We gave them the following questions to consider while writing:

- Who is your audience?
- What do you want your audience to learn from your piece?
- What do you want your audience to feel from your piece?
- What is the overall message of your piece?
- What message, tone, information do you want to avoid in your piece?
- Into what genre(s) does your piece fit? How does it fit into that genre?
- What mode of storytelling will you use to accomplish your intent? Why is that mode the best way to accomplish your intent?
- Is there any other important information about your group's intent?

As Lucy discussed, difficulty resulted from the open nature of the assignment. We asked students to make a remix based on themes within a book. The only rules were that it be multimodal and publishable on Google Drive, even if via a link to an external source such as YouTube. This is a task more easily accomplished by an individual than by a group because an individual needs only to bring a single creative concept into focus. As another student wrote, "I can see now that the purpose of making these instructions so broad was to convey different ideas of the book that we read. Different groups will have very different products, and it will be interesting to see the different perspectives." A creative collaborative project requires each student to produce a creative concept, communicate that concept to others, comprehend the concept of others, and synthesize all of those concepts into a shared vision. That complexity is why we next gave students detailed help in planning to turn their intent into a product.

The Plan

Writing down the plan for the remix project was not as complicated as the letter of intent. Since my group already had an idea of what the remix would be, it became much more simplistic. All that was needed was to write down what steps we needed to take in order to create our remix. The college students have been much more helpful in this process but myself and Madison have had to continually keep Lee and Peter on task. (Lucy)

Since the above excerpt was shared via Google Drive with the teachers only, we were able to see that the initial fogginess of the assignment had come into focus for Lucy's group. Also, Lucy had a safe space where she could quietly alert us to her perspective that the two high school boys in the group were dragging their feet. This was a much more comfortable interaction than her having to surreptitiously give this report face-to-face during or after class. Since each student submitted these reflections, we could compare Lucy's account to Lee's and Peter's before deciding on an intervention. We made a note and checked on the situation during the next class.

For this second stage of the project, we gave the students three planning tools. The first tool was a calendar. It showed due dates for each part of the larger project, class days that would be committed to working in groups with computer access, class days that would be committed to the project without computer access, and class days during which we would do work not related to the project.

The second tool was the "Task Matrix" (see Fig. 2), a table that asked the students to break the project into smaller parts and name the tasks that needed to be accomplished to realize the vision outlined in the letter of intent. It also asked students to define which people would be responsible for each task. Since students created the definition of their product, each project was different. This part of the progression was designed to encourage students to anticipate the process of creating their unique remix and to break up the project amongst themselves according to their strengths.

The third planning tool was the "Asset Map" (see

	Individual	2–3 people	Whole group	Outside person	Asset
1. Gather Images		Jeb & Bernie			• Bernie's laptop • Camera from Don's mom
2. Find Music	Hillary				Free music archive (http://freemusicarchive.org/curator/video)
3. Write Story			Everyone		

Figure 2. Example group task matrix

Fig. 3). It asked the students to define what resources, knowledge, and skills each of them possessed that might prove useful in completing their remix. It was inspired by Kretzmann and McKnight's (1996) work reframing community activism in an asset model rather than a deficit model. We wished to frame our remix project in an asset model, as well.

To every group's asset map, we added ourselves and a few of our basic assets (e.g., language expertise, access to YouTube on a school computer). We did this to model how to fill out the map and to encourage each group to see us as productive assets, not just as task masters. Collective intelligence, a term coined by Levy (as cited in Jenkins & Kelley, 2013), defines communities in which "nobody knows everything, everybody knows something, and what is known by any member is available to the group as a whole on demand" (p. 86). Utilizing the collective intelligence construct coined by Pierre Lévy and explained by Frey and Walsh (as cited by Jenkins, 2006b) and seeking to expand the learning ecology are two key characteristics of the remixing program created by Jenkins and Kelley (2013). This includes sharing ideas amongst the students but also moving into the larger communities to which the students belong.

All of these tools were published in a folder designated for each group, but they were shared with the entire class. We encouraged students to look at other groups' planning tools to inspire them to recognize assets that they might have ignored, see people outside their group as assets, and possibly integrate more effective planning strategies into their own plan for executing their product.

The Product

Now if we had used a website instead of iMovie then [having to all work on one machine] wouldn't have been the problem. It was just the technology we decided

Name	Expert knowledge	Moderate knowledge	Novice knowledge	Friend/ family outside of class	Possessions/ access	Helpful links I found
Mr. T	• grammar • narrative language • organization	• Google Drive • design principles • photography	• Photoshop		• access to multiple DSLR cameras • access to multiple computers with Photoshop	• iMovie tutorial
Dr. D	• narrative structure • grammar • Google Drive	• Movie Maker • iMovie	• design principles • Audacity		• access to video recorders • access to audio recorders	

Figure 3. Asset map

to use on the project that made it difficult. Besides that fact, the final product was easy to make and was done in a timely manner. (Lucy)

The third and central part of the project was the product. It became clear over time that the affordances and constraints inherent in the schools would impact the products. The groups were initially given two weeks and multiple class periods to construct their products. We pushed the due dates back a couple of times, as it became obvious that multiple groups were not going to meet the deadline. During this phase, many of the college students visited the high school campus to work with their high school partners. Groups that were able to work together under these circumstances made greater strides than the ones who did not, and camaraderie grew more easily. It was clear that collaborative work was hindered when co-participants did not share a time and place while working or, as in Lucy's case, when they chose tools that could only be worked on by one person at a time.

The groups also began to influence each other. Many voices in literacy education argue that meaning is made through social interaction and that classrooms should facilitate learning in this way (Jenkins, 2009; Jenkins & Kelley, 2013; Beach, Thein, & Webb, 2012). The intertextuality between the groups' products, modes, and processes suggests that students were moving fluidly in and out of mentorship roles and viewing each other as assets. Multiple examples of this arose. One group found an animation application that was relatively easy to use and had a free trial. Another group saw this and adopted the same tool. The makeup of each group also affected the products. For example, both of the groups that used the animation tool found that the free trial was limited to a 60-second product. One group worked within that limitation; the other group had financial assets and purchased the full version to make their product longer.

In addition, since students designed their products, they found themselves faced with the challenges that came with their visions. As Lucy's reflection shows, the individual reflections that they submitted after publishing their remix gave them space to think about how they could have done it better. Here is how another student put it when she realized her group had taken on a more difficult task than intended: "Though it was a challenge and took more than one s[i]tting to complete, my group and I pulled through the trenches and made it to the glory land." Feeling like you made it to the "glory land" is nice, but the true test is how your creation is taken up by a real audience, so we next had the students view and respond to each other's remixes.

The Impact

The reaction our final product received was not what I expected . . . . Our original intent was to make the audience feel more assured of who Sofia was and feel more confident than awkward. The audience saw the more casual aspect of the remix and how people were supporting Danny and that was one of the main points that our group was trying to make. I believe they felt the casual aspect more than our group thought because of the pictures we chose to use. Majority of the pictures used were from The Sandlot *and since that was a more humorous movie, the more playful side appeared in the remix.* (Lucy)

The intertextuality between the groups' products, modes, and processes suggests that students were moving fluidly in and out of mentorship roles and viewing each other as assets.

Since every group's product was published to the shared Google Drive folder, we asked all students to comment on each other's work. In this half-paragraph from Lucy's reflection about the comments her group received, we can see her commenting on and enacting a number of positive literacy behaviors. She clearly did a close character study of Sofia, a minor character in the book, and her group decided to use the remix as an opportunity to creatively add depth to the character. It isn't a stretch to call this perspective an unintended criticism of the novel for having too little female depth, though Lucy's group never directly voiced such a concern. The excerpt also shows Lucy finding success through her audience's commentary and drawing conclusions about the cause of miscommunication related to multiple modes. Last, she talks about using the movie *The Sandlot* (1993) in their remix. Using others' creative work is often at the heart

of remixing, and Lucy shows an understanding that people may have transferred their previous experience with her reference material onto her remix, thus muddying her original intent. Many of the students' reflections that were connected to their products' impact showed a mix of success and failure, but like Lucy's, they tended to have a positive tone.

We assigned each student to view two other remixes and give the groups feedback using the following questions as prompts:

- What comment/argument does the remix make?
- What does the piece make you feel?
- In what genres does the remix fit?
- What aspects of the de la Peña books do you see in the remix?
- What new elements do you see in the remix?

We then used the same prompts to give our feedback to every group. This served both as a model for students' feedback to one another and as another viewpoint for those who created the product. Students also engaged in self-assessment, considering what they communicated well to their audience, what disconnects occurred, what caused the disconnects, and how they might have improved on the product to correct any miscommunication. The answers to these questions, and all of the reflections they had done throughout the project, were collected into a larger, single reflective piece to culminate the unit.

One of the most positive behaviors that we saw reported in the reflections was students taking personal responsibility. By not controlling the mode, message, or tools that students used to create their remix, we, as teachers, were less culpable for many of the difficulties that the students faced.

Final Reflection

Overall, this remix project was a challenge. Looking back at my reflections through this project, I notice how challenging my group personally made this project for ourselves. The technology that we used combined with finding time to work with the college students proved to be the biggest struggle. (Lucy)

The fifth part of the project was a final reflection that asked students to synthesize their previous reflections into a single document. This is the prompt we gave them: "You will individually produce a polished essay in which you discuss your experiences with each component of this assignment." We expected the essay to address all of the guiding questions posed in each of the students' individual reflections, and we added this set of questions to help them see and address connections across all of their reflections:

- What trends do you see in your reflections?
- What ideas or feelings do you seem to express consistently?
- Was the reflection process helpful to completing the project?
- What did you learn about working in a group?
- Did you like being in a group, or would you have rather done this alone? Why?
- Was it a good idea to work with the high school/college students? Why or why not?
- What did the project teach you about the de la Peña book that you didn't understand as you read it?
- What did viewing others' projects teach you about the de la Peña book?

This final reflection was a major assessment, and the students were given class time to construct the essay.

One of the most positive behaviors that we saw reported in the reflections was students taking personal responsibility. By not controlling the mode, message, or tools that students used to create their remix, we, as teachers, were less culpable for many of the difficulties that the students faced. They complained that making a video was hard or that writing song lyrics took a long time or that finding an animation tool caused discord in their group, etc. Each time such frustrations arose, we told students that they were free to change the nature of the project. Seeing that starting a new project at any point past the beginning was a much higher hurdle than finding a solution, they usually pushed on and solved problems for themselves in ways that we could never have done for them.

Not all of the frustrations were created by the students, however. As we stated before, some of our deadlines were too ambitious, so we pushed a few back as the troubles inherent in the project emerged. Also, we were responsible for how the groups were

constructed and how they communicated, so we had to do our own reflection regarding how we could have made the project more successful as well. In addition to plugging holes, we believe there is room for extending the unit.

What We Would Do Differently

Mining the reflections to inspire further projects could be a valuable extension activity. Looking back at her reflection about part four, Lucy and her group may have had concerns about the lack of female voice in the novel, but they may not have recognized it for themselves. It would be valuable to mine other reflections for revelations about the novels that the students hinted at but may have needed teacher guidance to fully form. A culminating discussion centered on these issues might be a nice way to bring the students back to a traditional literary analysis perspective, and it would provide a conclusion to the discussions in which they participated while reading the novels before completing the remix. However, this was a long project, and the thought of extending it does feel a bit daunting.

The letter of intent stage was also the first time that the two classes (college and high school) were asked to work together, so there were a few misunderstandings. Though we did some preliminary online introductions between the two groups, that wasn't quite adequate. In the future, we would have them work together during some of the scaffolding assignments that were meant to teach them how to use Google Drive, thus allowing the two classes to work through communication issues. Also, some of the college students (preservice teachers) assumed their role was that of mentor rather than creative team member, so we could have dispelled those assumptions with earlier collaboration as well.

As an alternative, Nick also delivered this project to a separate section of high school students who were not grouped with college students. Since all of the students were a part of the same class, these cross-classroom obstacles were not present. Students were still required to publish in Google Drive, so they still had the experience of working with a shared, digital space. Ultimately, since part of our goal included giving students experience in working collaboratively and in viewing each other as assets, we would not turn this into an individual project. However, reflecting on miscommunications inherent in group work became part of how we started to answer the question, "How might a classroom inspired by participatory culture look?"

Participatory Culture

We conceptualized this remix project based on the work of Jenkins and Kelley (2013), who linked remix to the theory of a participatory culture. This theory is not necessarily tied to the classroom, and it is at odds with schools in some ways. The questions that are inherent when participatory culture is refracted through a classroom lens are tied to the five essential features of participatory culture that Jenkins and Kelley (2013) posited. This connection becomes clear when we put our students' reflections in conversation with these features.

Students appreciated the opportunity to choose how they expressed themselves, to incorporate their creativity, and to pull from their own knowledge and pop culture interests.

Low Barriers to Artistic Expression

While the open-ended nature of the project proved daunting and problematic to students initially, as they grappled with it, they discovered that it really did offer low barriers to artistic expression. Students shared the following in their reflections: "You get to express creativity *and* follow your own interests," and "It's fun to be creative, and at the same time, you are learning more about the book." Students appreciated the opportunity to choose how they expressed themselves, to incorporate their creativity, and to pull from their own knowledge and pop culture interests.

Not surprisingly, some students experienced issues with technology, but what was interesting was how some of them took up those issues and positioned them not as challenges, but as opportunities to press forward with their work: "We had to keep going back and 'reimagine' our remix statement of intent after experiencing these limitations with tech tools." Rather than letting the challenges with technology hinder their creative vision, they persisted in making their creative vision come to fruition by finding other ways to implement it.

Creating and Sharing with Others

Students naturally felt nervous about sharing their ideas and work with others, especially when the high school students were sharing with the university students; however, in the end, that experience proved to be a confidence booster. As one student noted, "Overall, the reactions caused me to feel more confident in our product." Another group inquired, "We want to see everyone's remixes. Can you put them in a Google Classroom?" (We think this question grew from students not realizing they could explore other groups' folders.) This level of excitement demonstrated support and trust across the participatory community of the two classes. The ability to be creative helped grow students' confidence in their own composing of remix: "I liked *stepping out* and doing something creative and trusting my instincts."

Informal Mentorship

In conceptualizing participatory culture between a high school and college classroom, we had hoped to build bridges that help preservice teachers who have no field placement experience see what working with adolescents is like and, conversely, help high school seniors interact at the college level to glimpse what expectations and experiences are associated with that. Predictably, aspects of that failed. One high school student bluntly shared: "I feel that the college students need to put forth more of an effort; it seems they tell us something to do and we have to do it rather than they bring up the idea and include it into what we are doing." This sharing offered opportunity to talk with students about dynamics in collaborative groups as well as individual roles and responsibilities.

The informal mentorship also yielded benefits where students were able to position themselves as experts on something and teach others in their group. One comment read, "I could show others how to do something they didn't know how to do." This reminded us that students need opportunities to share their knowledge with others and embodied the student-centered learning we were aiming for, where not all knowledge has to be generated by the teacher.

Belief that Contributions Matter

We recognize that building students' confidence in creativity and skill does not carry weight in the end if students do not perceive that their contributions to the process and work matter. While there were glitches with group dynamics, such as how some of the college students positioned themselves, students overall indicated that they felt they had value in a collaborative group. One reflective statement nicely captures this: "The direction of our project is on a straight road to being finished, and we are all working hard to make sure it is completed by its due date. . . . This is one of the only group projects I have done in which I feel that everyone has done their fair share." Equity of contributions and workload carries a lot of weight with students.

Social Connection

Not surprisingly, social connection also matters to students, which is one of the high appeals of allowing our classrooms to be inspired by participatory cultures. Students were frustrated when a social connection was not present with other students, as evidenced by one student's complaint: "Mr. Nowheretobefound was certainly no where [sic]to be found and had absolutely no input of his opinion for the ideas that were proposed." Contributions to the group and social connection overlap; in addition to feeling that their own contributions to the group mattered, students valued others' contributions and grew frustrated when team members were not there. Jenkins notes, "Not every member must contribute, but all must believe they are free to contribute when ready and that what they contribute will be appropriately valued" (Jenkins, 2006a). As teachers, we want to consider articulating to future students a point at which they are expected to enter as individual contributors to the collaborative work.

Social connection helped students do more than they felt they could have done alone. Not all students bring the technological skills with them to accomplish what they envision, but by mapping their assets as a group and as a class, students were able to see resources beyond themselves and minimize the urge to give up due to their individual frustrations with process and/or technology. One student noted, "I liked how we all just helped each other—even if we weren't in groups." Students recognized they had a wider array of resources available to them than they would have perceived if they were working alone. Another student noted, "I like this project, and I'm glad we did this project in a group at school. I do not believe that I would have been able to execute this project alone."

Themes that Emerged

"That's Not Fair"

One of the issues that came up in this project was fairness. The different assets that each group possessed made it seem like some had an unfair advantage. We challenge the usefulness of "fairness" in school. One aim of our project was to have students make meaning about how belonging to different groups in society creates different experiences and how such differences are unavoidable. Fairness implies equality in which all people are treated the same and given the same assets. Instead, we attempted to achieve equitability, in which all are given the same opportunity but are affected by the affordances and constraints created by their individuality. Equitability offers a much more useful environment in which to educate students because it gives teachers the opportunity to guide students to look at the assets available to them rather than focusing on the deficits they possess relative to those around them. In this model, students solve problems and create differently because they have different tools, and they are challenged to recognize and manipulate those tools in useful ways.

"More Power to You"

Power is a theme at the core of both de la Peña's books and Jenkins's theory of participatory culture. Who has power in this world is often decided by factors outside an individual's control and steeped in inherited value systems. Race, associations, and age are all reasons that different parts of society have for oppressing the protagonists of de la Peña's books. In a society that increasingly relies on technological tools to participate, those who don't have the tools or skills required to operate those tools are left behind. This project did not create a more democratic society, but it did give students one experience in making original meaning through a socio-techno-cultural activity. One student wrote, "I would probably not want to do something like this again but since [I]'ve done it once it would probably be easier the second time."

The project also gave students the opportunity to examine power structures through the novels and through their own group dynamics. Gaining power in this world requires knowledge of the systems that dictate power as well as experience in navigating tools that can problematize those systems. Another student reflected, "I learned that working in a team gives you power because everyone in the team depends on each other to get the project done." Some of our students gained their first experience with some of these ideas, skills, and tools—a first experience on which they can build. In fact, for many, it was the first time they had been asked to step back from complex issues in their world and to think about them critically. In the process, students experienced the conversation and compromises that inform collaborative, social construction of knowledge as they worked to express their ideas, have them accepted by others, and problem-solve through creative and technical obstacles.

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Kristine E. **Pytash** and Richard E. **Ferdig**

Understanding Technology-based Young Adult Literature

Jerome Bruner (1990) describes human beings as storytelling creatures. We tell stories because they are "both a fundamental structure of the mind and a primary activity used by humans for meaning-making and organizing experience" (Ferdig, 2004, p. 475). Stories are also used as an important way for humans—and particularly adolescents—to construct and reconstruct their identities (MacAdams, 2004). Given these factors, it is not surprising that Young Adult (YA) literature plays a powerful role in the lives of many young adults. Researchers and educators have noted that young adults engage in reading literature as a way to make sense of life experiences, cope with emotions, imagine new possibilities, live vicariously through others, and escape to new worlds (Pytash, 2012, 2013; Ivey & Johnston, 2011).

The importance and the ubiquity of YA literature is not new; however, the role of technology, specifically Web 2.0/3.0 tools and digital media (e.g., the Internet, social media, video games, mobile devices, etc.), in young adults' lives is changing what stories are being told, how stories are being told, and how stories are being read. In fiction, technology now appears in characters' lives, often as an important plot setting or twist. In the real world, stories are being read through iPads, eReaders, and smartphones. Story content combines print text with image, video, sound, and even virtual reality. Given these shifts, we set out to further examine: a) how technology is represented in contemporary YA literature and b) how technology is influencing YA literature. We suggest five key intersections exist between YA literature and technology:

1. Technology as context in the book
2. Technology as a central premise of the book
3. Technology as the style of the book
4. Technology as dissemination of nonessential information
5. Technology is the book

The purpose of this article is to further explore and explain these five constructs. We begin with an overview of the theoretical perspectives that guide our understandings of technology and literacy. We then provide sections that include an overview of the framework construct (Definition and Description), immediately followed by examples of young adult literature that highlight the role of technology and a brief discussion of the impact of such literature. We follow this with implications for engaging technology-savvy young adults in the reading of YA literature.

Theoretical Perspectives

As technology shapes and influences young adults' literacy practices, new theories emerge to explain young adults' engagement with literacy in digital worlds (i.e., New London Group's [1996] "Pedagogy of Multiliteracies"; Lankshear and Knobel's [2003] conception of new literacies; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek, & Henry's [2013] new "dual level theory" of new literacies/New literacies). These theoretical perspectives provide understandings of the ways literacies are social practices, grounded in specific experiences and contexts and occurring through a variety of modes, including audio, visual, spatial, and other forms of representation.

The research supporting these theoretical lenses have documented the ways youth consume and produce digital media and technology (Black, 2008; boyd, 2014; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Curwood, 2013; Pytash, Hicks, & Ferdig, in press). Youth's frequent and regular engagement with technology influences the ways they communicate with others, learn about their worlds and others' worlds, and represent their identities and lived experiences. Most YA literature, particularly realistic fiction, is intended to be an accurate depiction of young adults' lives, experiences, and feelings. Therefore, one might expect YA literature to portray youth and their engagement with technology in a manner similar to the ways research has documented youths' technology use.

Youth's frequent and regular engagement with technology influences the ways they communicate with others, learn about their worlds and others' worlds, and represent their identities and lived experiences.

Given this assumption, we set out to examine the ways technology and digital media are represented in YA literature. Our goal was to investigate whether YA literature includes stories about youth using technology and digital media and how authors are using digital media and technology to tell or enhance their stories. Our process for developing a framework employed a constant comparison analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). First, we examined research documenting the ways young adults engage in literacy practices and focusing on young adults' literacy practices through technology. This exploration produced an initial framework.

Next, we examined award-winning YA titles, including books on the Young Adult Library Services Best Fiction for Young Adults lists and books that could be considered popular titles (e.g., bestseller lists from 2005 to the present). This included an exploration of novels that featured audio, video, images, and companion websites and digital media additions. We attempted to place these titles into the related categories, changing our categories as books fit or failed to fit into the developing schema. With each change in the framework, we returned to our previous titles to ensure framework consistency.

Finally, once satisfied that our framework was representative of the existing young adult literature that addressed technology or was delivered through technology, we returned to the research to triangulate our findings in a larger context. This entire process resulted in the identification of five key intersections between YA literature and technology, as listed above. It should be noted that there are many books integrating technology and digital media; the ones provided exemplify the constructs presented but are not meant to be exhaustive.

Technology as Context

Definition

Given the ubiquity of technology in the lives of adolescents, contemporary YA literature often includes the Internet, social media, smartphones, and other digital devices or tools within the content of the story. This can be passive (e.g., the character watched a video on YouTube), or it can be an active part of the plot (e.g., the characters hacked into the school computers). In this first framework component, technology is not the central theme, but including it is as timely and normal as having the characters eat or go to school.

Description

Over the course of 2015, the Pew Research Center released two reports providing findings focused on the role of technology and social media in adolescents' lives [Teens, Technology and Friendships (Lenhart, 2015b) and Teens, Social Media and Technology (Lenhart, 2015a)]. According to these reports, 92% of adolescents ages 13–17 go online daily, with 24% reporting they are online "almost constantly" (n.p). And when they are online, a majority of teens (71%) are using more than one social networking site. Again according to the Pew's findings, "[S]ocial media helps teens feel more connected to their friends' feelings and daily lives, and also offers teens a place to receive support from others during challenging times" (n.p). In addition, 64% of youth report meeting new friends online.

Social media is not the only space where young adults are developing friendships; video games are also providing a new avenue for relationship building. Of the adolescents surveyed, 84% of boys and 59% of girls play video games online or on their phone,

and 36% of adolescents report developing friendships through networked video games. These findings suggest that young adults' relationships are developed and maintained through multiple channels of communication. With an increase in access to cellphones and smartphones, adolescents are using text messaging and other messaging apps (e.g., *Kik* and *WhatsApp*), as well as email, instant messaging, and video chat as popular means for conversations.

The findings from the Pew reports are triangulated by other researchers who are interested in the role of technology in young adults' personal lives. According to boyd (2014), social media and other networked spaces provide adolescents ways to connect and maintain relationships with people in their communities, more specifically their friends. For young adults, new technologies provide "new social possibilities" (p. 10). Just as technology is ubiquitous in adolescents' lives, so is it ubiquitous in fictional characters' lives.

The Vigilante Poets of Selwyn Academy

Kate Hattemer's (2014) *The Vigilante Poets of Selwyn Academy* centers around the character of Ethan and his three best friends who attend Selwyn Arts Academy. The school is hosting a reality television show, *For Art's Sake*, and in protest of the show, Ethan and his friends secretly write and distribute a long poem in the tradition of Ezra Pound. Technology is present throughout the book, even when the characters are explaining why they shouldn't use technology to distribute the poem. Ethan asks the group, "Why can't we just post it online?" But his friends counter, "That would be far too easy," said Jackson scathingly . . . . Luke was nodding along. "Only cowards post it anonymously to the Internet. And then nobody would talk about it at school. We'd never hear reactions" (p. 97).

While they decide not to use technology to post their poem, they rely on the technological expertise of Jackson to hack into the school's computer system in order to expose files that reveal that the principal is accepting money from the television program. Jackson, in a language that hackers and coders would know, explains to his friends, "I found the external drive that stores the RAM terabits of the X-Pro Lotus footage, but unfortunately, given their inaccessible plaintext software, it'd be difficult for an adversary to access the data even from the room itself much less from a cold-boot non-authenticated elsewhere locale" (p. 209).

Technology is present throughout the book, not just as a tool, but also as contextual information. In the book, Luke betrays the group and joins the reality show. After sneaking into the school, Luke is supposed to text the members of the group to let them know that the coast is clear. While at first the group thinks Luke simply forgot, they quickly realize he is cornered by the reality show producer and ultimately learn that he has decided to join the show.

Fake ID

Nick Pearson, the protagonist in Gail Giles's (2014) *Fake ID*, may seem like your average teenager, but over the last four years, Nick has obtained multiple identities. Four years prior, Nick, then named Tony, was living in Philadelphia. His father worked for a gangster, but when his father snitched, his family entered the Witness Protection program. Nick communicates with the Witness Protection program via cell phone: "My new cell vibrated in my back pocket. I grabbed it, checked the caller ID even though I knew it could be only one of two people" (p. 36).

With an increase in access to cellphones and smartphones, adolescents are using text messaging and other messaging apps (e.g., Kik and WhatsApp), as well as email, instant messaging, and video chat as popular means for conversations.

Nick becomes friends with Eli, an editor and lead investigator for the school newspaper. The boys bond during a two-hour video game binge, and Eli convinces Nick to write for the school paper. The mystery begins when Nick finds out that Eli has come upon a political conspiracy, Whispertown, and soon Eli is found dead. Nick and Eli's sister, Reya, decide to take a risk and investigate to find out who is responsible for Eli's death, which they think is linked to Whispertown. Nick and Reya exchange text messages as they work to unravel the conspiracy surrounding Whispertown, which they soon realize includes the mayor and Nick's dad. Also referenced in the book is social

media, including Twitter and Facebook. The book is a fast-paced thriller, and technology is mainly referenced through Nick's use of his cell phone and other forms of technology to communicate with others.

Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass

In Meg Medina's (2014) *Yaqui Delgado Wants to Kick Your Ass,* Piddy's life undergoes a series of disruptions a few months into her sophomore year in high school. It was bad enough when her best friend moved to Long Island, but what is worse is that her mother has decided they need to move into a new place in the city, which means Piddy must change schools. Worse yet, a girl from her new school tells her, "Yaqui Delgado wants to kick your ass," with no explanation of who Yaqui is or what Piddy has done to infuriate her. Piddy eventually learns that Yaqui thinks her boyfriend is interested in Piddy, and Piddy finds herself bullied by Yaqui and her friends. Feeling like she has no one to tell, Piddy isolates herself from her best friend, her mother, and her mother's best friend (who also cares for Piddy). The bullying escalates one afternoon when Yaqui and her friends follow Piddy home and beat her, leaving her body bruised, swollen, and half-naked. The fight is taped by one of the girls, and they attempt to further humiliate Piddy by posting the video on YouTube. Eventually a classmate tells the school administration about the horrendous bullying, and the YouTube video becomes the evidence Piddy needs to obtain a transfer back to her old school.

It is important for young adults to see themselves represented in young adult literature. . . . As many young adults are users of technology and social media, it is imperative that those experiences are highlighted in the books they read.

While the YouTube video is an example of how technology directly influences her life, throughout the novel, Piddy uses her cell phone to send texts, answer phone calls, and take pictures. And although the novel very much centers on Piddy's survival of Yaqui's bullying, it could also be described as a coming-of-age novel in that Piddy finds love and has to re-develop her relationships with her mom and best friend. In the end, she realizes she is stronger than she could ever imagine and that the relationships she has with her mom, Lila, and Mitza are bonds that cannot be broken.

Implications

Literature has been described as a mirror that can provide readers with an opportunity to reflect on their lives, recognize themselves, and consider their experiences. It is important for young adults to see themselves represented in young adult literature—who they are, the events they've experienced, and the ways they engage in the world. As many young adults are users of technology and social media, it is imperative that those experiences are highlighted in the books they read. To ignore this important contextual information would be a disservice to many adolescent readers who might wonder why a lead character wouldn't just pick up his or her cell phone, text someone, or send an email. The challenge for authors, of course, is that any technology written into the book immediately dates the book, which can have negative results on reader interest.

Technology as a Central Premise

Definition

YA literature is often praised for its ability to help adolescent readers handle angst (Ivey & Johnston, 2011). Topics for books include everything from teen pregnancy to cancer, from bullying to racism. Authors of books in this section use YA literature to help adolescents understand the role of technology in their lives. In these books, technology goes beyond mere contextual information to be the central focus or topic of the story.

Description

As technology continues to change and evolve, it influences our social practices, changing the ways we communicate, engage, and interact with each other (Leu et al., 2013). For example, adolescents use digital tools like Instagram to visually represent themselves and the activities in which they are engaged. These social practices, mediated by technology, are not only featured in YA literature, but can be central to the adolescents' identities and to what happens to them

in the story. The adolescent characters in these books define themselves by the technology they are using; the activities they engage in while using technology shape their perceptions of themselves and how they identify with the world. The technology also influences the problems they sometimes face and how they resolve conflict.

These books raise interesting questions about the role of technology in our lives and how technology influences the ways we interact with the world. These books also raise questions about how technology influences how we define ourselves and how others define us. The YA literature featured in this category prompts the question: *Who are we?*

Mr. Penumbra's 24-hour Bookstore

At the start of Robin Sloan's (2013) *Mr. Penumbra's 24-hour Bookstore*, readers learn that economic woes took Clay Jannon from work as a Web designer to employment as a clerk at Mr. Penumbra's 24-hour bookstore. After spending time working the graveyard shift, Clay becomes more curious about the store. Customers don't buy anything, but instead check out large, obscure volumes. Following the instructions of Mr. Penumbra, Clay catalogues each transaction, noting the appearance, behaviors, and mannerisms of the patrons. Clay eventually reads the books only to discover they are written in code. He initiates help from several people in his life to decipher the code—his roommate, a special effects artist, his best friend, a creator of "boob-simulation software," and his love interest, Kat, who works for Google in data visualization. Their efforts propel them on an adventure to unlock the mystery of the book and the larger secret society at the heart of the mystery. Technology is so central to the book that Clay and his friends use Google resources to help decipher the code.

Technology is continually referenced throughout the story. For example, Clay creates a Google Ad to attract customers and uses blogs, Wikipedia, and Twitter. He also chats with Kat online and vicariously attends her party on a night he is working at the bookstore. This book also hints at how technology impacts our everyday lives, as seen when Clay uses social media to catch up on the events he missed during the day. And when Clay and Kat end up in New York City, Clay explains that Kat plays with her phone because she is unable to figure out the *New York Times* newspaper. These depictions subtly raise questions about the role of technology in our lives.

Fangirl

The role of technology in shaping identity is evident in Rainbow Rowell's (2013) *Fangirl*. Cath is a fan of the Simon Snow series, a fictional series she and her twin sister, Wren, read while they were growing up. The girls credit the books with helping them cope with the pain of their mom leaving. They loved the books so much that together they wrote fan fiction, *Carry On, Simon*, based on the series.

These books raise interesting questions about the role of technology in our lives and how technology influences the ways we interact with the world.

Fangirl focuses on Cath's difficult transition to college. Her twin sister decides she needs space and becomes immersed in college life, and Cath must deal with a roommate who is not always friendly. Cath also ends up in a sometimes confusing romantic relationship. In addition to these life-changing events, her dedication to her Simon Snow fan fiction writing becomes central to the storyline. Wren is no longer interested in writing with Cath, even though *Carry On, Simon* is one of the most popular fan fiction series available online. For Cath, writing fan fiction brings her comfort and helps her deal with her anxiety, so she continues to write *Carry On, Simon* without Wren. In addition, Cath, who self-identifies as a writer, enrolls in an advanced creative writing course. For a project, she submits one of her fan fiction pieces, and the professor fails her for plagiarism. Central to the *Fangirl* plot, then, are questions about authorship in the 21st century and how fan fiction and self-publishing blur the lines. Cath must consider these questions as she struggles with the constant changes in her life and the fact that writing *Carry On, Simon* has become both how she copes and how she identifies herself. Although this is a story about family, sisterhood, romantic love, and friendship, *Fangirl* also advances the conversations about what it means to be an author in the age of the Internet.

Guy in Real World

Questions about identity in the world of the Internet are also raised in *Guy in Real World* by Steve Brezenoff (2015). Lesh, a self-proclaimed metal-head, and Svetlana, an artist and Dungeons & Dragons master, collide one night while she is biking home. They later bond in their high school cafeteria and enter into a semi-flirtatious and romantic relationship. Meanwhile, Lesh, who is grounded by his parents, plays an online role-playing game to pass time. He creates the character, Svvetlala, resembling the real-life Svetlana. Lesh realizes that this might seem disturbing, but he can't seem to stop engaging in this fantasy world.

Because identity is not a stable construct, but rather is constantly changing and shifting depending on context, technology allows young adults to engage in constant identity construction and representation.

One night a person from the game tracks down and assaults the real-life Svetlana. Lesh must come to terms with what he did and work to help Svetlana understand his actions. The book raises important questions about who we are online versus who we are in "the real world" and how our online personas can complicate our "real world" lives. It also requires the reader to consider how our identities shift and change across the various online and in-person places that we occupy. In so doing, it helps readers consider how these spaces interact and sometimes collide.

Implications

The rapid advancements of technology transform the ways people communicate and interact with one another. In addition, technology opens new possibilities and transforms our existing notions of what it means to be literate. The books in this section highlight the complex ways adolescents use technology to read, write, and communicate with others. Literacy practices, like writing fan fiction or engaging in video games, are social practices that allow youth to enact and maintain their identities. This is complicated work, as these literate practices are tied to how adolescents position themselves and represent their identities. Because identity is not a stable construct, but rather is constantly changing and shifting depending on context, technology allows young adults to engage in constant identity construction and representation.

This complicated form of identity construction and positioning is recognizable in YA literature as characters engage with technology and use digital media in ways that "position themselves as certain types of people" (Koss & Tucker-Raymond, 2014, p. 41). As YA literature continues to explore the important role of technology in both the lives of teens and the lives of fictional teens, one must ask *How does technology help or hinder young adults as they negotiate their worlds?* Furthermore, *does YA literature accurately portray the complicated ways that technology influences adolescents' social practices and resulting identities?* These books can also prompt readers to consider how young adults use technology in their everyday lives and why.

Technology as Style

Definition

Authors of YA literature make intentional decisions throughout the writing process. Some of these decisions revolve around plot, characterization, sentence structure, and word choice. Authors in this "Technology as Style" category have also made important stylistic choices in that these titles are formatted to include print versions of digital media within the books. Because technology has allowed for additional considerations of visual elements in YA literature, many authors are responding by not only writing about young adults' technology and social media use, but by embedding technology and media into the print form itself.

Description

Given the predominant presence of technology in young adults' lives, authors have considered how to incorporate print versions of technology in books. For example, *TTYL* (Myracle, 2004) was one of the first novels printed entirely as an instant message (IM) conversation, meaning readers were reading a conversation in IM form, yet it was printed in a traditional book. This trend has extended to YA novels incorporating multiple formats, such as social media feeds (e.g., Twitter and Facebook), blogs, and text messages. It is important to note that although the books in

this section include visual representations of technology and social media, they are still published as conventional printed books, prompting an important question: *What are the affordances and constraints of using physical representations of technology in YA literature?*

Vanishing Girls

An example of social media embedded into a YA novel is Lauren Oliver's (2015) *Vanishing Girls*. The novel tells the story of Dara and Nick, sisters who used to be inseparable; however, a terrible accident has left the sisters estranged. Dara vanishes on her birthday. Coincidently, a nine-year old girl, Madeline Snow, has also disappeared. Madeleine's disappearance begins as a sub-plot to Dara and Nick's story, and it is told through postings from an online newspaper and through online comments. There are advantages to this format. Readers are caught up in the story of Dara and Nick and not reading about Madeline's disappearance as a key element in the narrative. However, the consistent breaks in chapters to include online newspaper articles and comments let the reader know that Madeline's disappearance will be important to Dara and Nick's storyline. Madeline's disappearance becomes more and more intertwined with Dara and Nick as the story progresses. The online newspaper and comments reveal a subplot without detracting from the main storyline.

#16thingsithoughtweretrue

16 Things I Thought Were True by Janet Gurtler (2014) features Morgan, a Twitter addict, who is trying to regain her life after an embarrassing video went viral. Her mom has a near-death experience and ends up revealing the identity of Morgan's birth father. This sends Morgan on a road trip with two acquaintances who quickly become close friends. Each chapter opens with a statement Morgan thought was true and the hashtag #16thingsithoughtweretrue. Morgan is constantly on her phone and wants to reach 5,000 followers on Twitter before the end of the summer. Throughout the book, Morgan shares a few of her tweets. Although the much larger storyline is Morgan's attempt to locate her father, as well as the life events of her two new friends, Morgan's reliance on Twitter to regain her confidence is important to the story.

Implications

It should be noted that while various representations of media (e.g., Twitter, text messages, online discussion boards) are embedded into these books and are, therefore, part of the reading experience, this third category highlights books that are still in print form. It is important for readers to ask why authors would intentionally decide to include print versions of digital media and how they inform the story. For example, in *Vanishing Girls*, the online newspaper and online comments reveal a subplot to the book, which becomes central to the conclusion of Dara and Nick's story. Therefore, readers cannot just read the digital media that is included, but must ask, *what is the purpose of including the digital form within a print version of the book?*

Technology as Dissemination of Nonessential Information

Definition

YA literature authors have begun to explore the role of technology for disseminating content that is nonessential to the main storyline. Dissemination does not refer to a print format that is delivered statically in an electronic format (e.g., a book that is delivered via an e-reader in static, PDF-like format). Rather, in this category, the author has found a way to incorporate technology as part of the dissemination of the traditionally printed book; however, a reader can consume the traditional book without consulting these extra technological inclusions.

Description

Many books are now accompanied by websites with online discussion forums, games, digital badges, and trading cards. These resources tend to be somewhat extraneous in that they are not critical to the main storyline. But while readers do not have to engage with these materials in order to read the book, these additional resources may provide deeper engagement with and understanding of the book.

In addition to websites with resources related to the books, adolescents who are interested in taking a more participatory role can do so by becoming co-creators of texts based on the story. Fan fiction is gaining popularity as readers take on the role and voice of characters to remix and retell stories from varying

perspectives. The Pew Research Center reports that 21% of young adults remix works inspired by others (Lenhart, Ling, Campbell, & Purcell, 2010). These findings are supported by other researchers who have found that online spaces provide opportunities for fans to write and create personal responses to literature (Black, 2008; Chandler-Olcott & Mahar, 2003; Curwood, 2013).

The 39 Clues

The 39 Clues is a series of books written by popular YA authors, such as Rick Riordan (2008) and Margaret Peterson Haddix (2010). The books chronicle the adventures of Amy and Dan, siblings who learn that their family has included some of the most influential people in history, including Thomas Edison, Amelia Earhart, and Shakespeare. After their grandmother dies, Amy and Dan are on a quest to find 39 clues, the ingredients to a serum that can create the most powerful person on Earth. Many of the chapters include images of clues or handwritten details. In addition, books come with game cards that readers can collect and use to unlock missions online. The website also features forums, book puzzles, and games.

Integrated into stories, YA literature can include multiple forms, including video, image, audio, hyperlinks, video games, and animations.

Infinity Ring

Similar to The 39 Clues, Infinity Ring is also written by multiple authors, including James Dashner (2012). This science fiction adventure series follows Sera, Dak, and Riq as they attempt to save civilization. SQ, a mysterious group, has been altering major events, causing "Breaks" in history that result in a dramatically different 21st century. Dak and Sera are genius fifth graders, and Dak's scientist parents have created a time machine, the Infinity Ring. Dak, Sera, and Riq must work together as they go back in time, identify the "Breaks" in time, and fix them. Readers can go to the website to earn medals, play games, and discuss the books in forums.

Implications

The books in this section are traditional print books; however, they are accompanied by websites providing readers with a multiplatform experience. Jenkins (2007) uses the term "extension" to define additional media that "may provide insight into the characters and their motivations . . . flesh out aspects of the fictional world . . . or may bridge between events depicted in a series of sequels" (n.p.). There are many questions to be asked when exploring readers' experiences across traditional print books and online materials. For example, *what do readers learn about books when they have opportunities to follow characters and plot across media? How does engagement with websites that act as extensions sustain readers in the books?* In addition, Jenkins (2013) asks *how does the range of extensions "further [extend] the story work in new directions[?]"* (n.p). These not only raise questions about readers' experiences, but begin to have implications for authorship.

Technology Is the Book

Definition

Many books are now delivered electronically; however, their main format is still a traditional print form. A fifth category pushes beyond this traditional dissemination to include books whose stories cannot be told without the technology. The technology in these cases *is* the book. This can take a traditional form, like e-storybooks, or it can be more avant-garde and include the reader as author (Ferdig, 2004).

Description

Leu et al. (2013) theorize that "the Internet has become this generation's defining technology for literacy in our global community" (p. 1159). Researchers note that children and adolescents (ages 8–18) report reading 48 minutes per day online; this is more than the 43 minutes per day they read offline (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2005). While this is not a significant difference, as technology access continues to grow and more platforms become readily available, one could expect the online number to increase.

The role of technology has significantly influenced reading and writing, as new forms of texts combined with new media resources have created new ways of

communicating. Reading in an online context is a rich, complex, and often interactive experience. Integrated into stories, YA literature can include multiple forms, including video, image, audio, hyperlinks, video games, and animations. Jenkins (2007) popularized the term *transmedia storytelling,* which "represents a process where integral elements of a fiction get dispersed systematically across multiple delivery channels for the purpose of creating a unified and coordinated entertainment experience. Ideally, each medium makes its own unique contribution to the unfolding of the story" (n.p.). Transmedia storytelling creates a reading experience that is "multiple, multimodal, and multifaceted" (Leu et al., 2013).

Skeleton Creek

Skeleton Creek by Patrick Carman (2009) is a transmedia or multiplatform book, with part of the book written as journal entries and the other half as videos. Ryan and Sarah are the main characters, and the plot centers around their adventures investigating The Dredge, an abandoned gold dredge located in their town, Skeleton Creek. Ryan broke his leg at The Dredge, and now he and Sarah are no longer allowed to see each other or attempt to go to The Dredge. However, this doesn't stop them from exploring and trying to understand what happened to Old Joe Bush, a man who died in an accident and now haunts The Dredge. The story alternates between Ryan's journal and the videos that Sarah makes featuring trips to the Dredge and sightings of ghosts. The nontraditional print version of the story makes the book an accessible read, and Sarah's creepy videos not only move the storyline, but add a layer of suspense and mystery.

Inanimate Alice

While *Skeleton Creek* has a print component of the book, *Inanimate Alice*, written and directed by Kate Pullinger (2005–2015), is a completely online, interactive transmedia story. Using still images, moving images, text, and audio, the stories revolve around the experiences of Alice and the digital "friend" (Brad) she created. There are currently five episodes. The first episode begins when Alice is eight and living in China. Her dad does not return from searching for oil, and Alice and her mother go to find him. The last episode (to date) focuses on Alice as an older teenager who has traveled the world with her parents and is trying to find her place in the world.

The complete multimodal approach creates an interactive experience for readers. For example, in the first episode, as Alice's mother is driving, Alice distracts herself by taking pictures of flowers. When readers click on the flowers, they appear larger and then are saved on the screen. This is not limited to images; at one point Alice describes the night sky as humming and in response, readers hear a humming noise. In later episodes, Alice becomes a video-game animator, and readers play a game in order to progress through the story. This highly participatory story unfolds over the duration of Alice's life and across multiple platforms. *Inanimate Alice* has been recognized by the American Association of School Librarians as the 2012 Best Website of Teaching and Learning.

The intersection of technology and young adult literature ignites important questions about how readers engage with literature, particularly with books considered transmedia.

Implications

Although some YA books provide websites, video games, and online resources as appendices, the books in this particular category are considered transmedia or multiplatform books, meaning they incorporate various modes or media directly into the storyline.

The intersection of technology and young adult literature ignites important questions about how readers engage with literature, particularly with books considered transmedia. Rosenblatt's transactional theory of literature (1938) suggests that reading is an active process rather than solely a "reaction" to the text or even an "interaction." Rosenblatt characterizes this as a "transaction," a continual "to and fro" process (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, p. 26). This transaction is dependent upon the reader's stance: efferent reading or aesthetic reading. While efferent reading is focused on "the information to be required" (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 23), aesthetic reading "is centered directly on what he or she is living through during

his relationship with that particular text" (Rosenblatt, 1978/1994, p. 25). Rosenblatt (1938/1995) noted these stances are not exclusive, but readers are continually making choices about how they think about the text.

[D]o the ways adolescents in YA literature engage with technology reinforce society's perceptions of adolescence, or does the portrayal in YA literature offer a diverse perspective on the importance and relevance of technology and digital media in young adults' lives?

There are a number of questions one can ask, since transmedia stories include multiple modes that require young adults to interpret visual, auditory, and linguistic representations of literature, all during the same reading experience. For example, *how do readers transact with text when moving back and forth between modes, especially if the modes require different stances (e.g., efferent reading or aesthetic reading)?* In addition, *how do the modes work together to tell a cohesive story?* And furthermore, *how does each mode give the reader a unique experience that contributes to his/her transaction and overall enjoyment or understanding of the novel?*

Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this article was to explore the ways technology and digital media are represented in young adult literature. As researchers and educators continue to explore books with this emphasis, there are important questions that must be considered. With all YA literature, one must consider how young adults are represented in the literature; are their lives represented in an authentic and realistic manner? In addition, does YA literature teach readers about youth's social and literate practices as these practices relate to technology? This deeper probing requires readers to explore not only the ways adolescents use technology, but how they engage in their worlds. In addition, do the ways adolescents in YA literature engage with technology reinforce society's perceptions of adolescence, or does the portrayal in YA literature offer a diverse perspective on the importance and relevance of technology and digital media in young adults' lives? Furthermore, it is important to remember that the ways adolescents use technology and digital media are culturally ingrained, embedded in social contexts, and personally relevant. Therefore, one must ask how YA literature can reinforce or challenge societal ideas about adolescents and their technology use.

As critical readers of YA literature, it is also important to ask *who* the teenagers are who are using technology in YA literature. Are there groups of adolescents not being represented in the literature? For example, there is an ongoing conversation in social media (#diversekidlit) and in educator- and librarian-led initiatives about the importance of diversity in YA literature (*School Library Journal*, 2015). One can also ask if there are certain technology practices *not* being represented in the literature. If not, why? Analyzing YA literature with these questions in mind can provide a reading experience that challenges our stereotypes about youth and their technology use.

In addition, it is critical to consider how digital media and technology are shaping and changing the landscape of literature. Young adult literature told across multiple forms of media invites readers into the story in powerful ways. Interactive and participatory experiences are created as youth become participants in the storyline. Rather than an audience consuming the text, youth are co-creators of text and its meaning.

Transmedia Play is defined as "a way of thinking about children's experimentation with, expression through, and participation in media" (Alper & Herr Stephenson, 2013, p. 367). One of the elements of Transmedia Play is that it "promotes new approaches to reading, as children must learn to read both written and multimedia texts (across multiple media) and deeply (digging into the details of the narrative)" (Rodrigues & Bidarra, 2014, p. 43). This requires students to have a broad spectrum of literacy skills related to media and technology. Jenkins (2006) argues that students must engage in "Transmedia Navigation—the ability to follow the flow of stories and information across multiple modalities" (Jenkins, 2006, p. 56). Students must also engage in sophisticated thinking as they become metacognitive—for example, as they consider how they understand characters across media or how certain media convey elements of the story effectively. Jenkins continues to explain, "New media literacies involve the ability to think across media,

whether understood at the level of simple recognition (identifying the same content as it is translated across different modes of representation), or at the level of narrative logic (understanding the connections between story communicated through different media), or at the level of rhetoric (learning to express an idea within a single medium or across the media spectrum)" (p. 48).

Conclusion

While we organized our analysis around the five constructs listed at the opening of this article, it is important to recognize that YA literature can span multiple categories. In other words, there are books, such as *Inanimate Alice*, that include tech as a storyline (#2) and are delivered online (#5). The intention of this work is not to fit each YA title into separate, exclusive categories, but rather to develop factors helpful in exploring the complicated and exciting intersection of YA literature and technology. This analysis highlights how the importance and ubiquity of technology in young adults' lives calls for a greater examination of the portrayal of the relationship between young adults and their technology use in YA literature. In addition, we recognize that our research questions are interrelated and interconnected, as technologies included in a book can simultaneously be considered an influence on YA literature; however, it is also important to note that technology is shaping the modes used in YA literature and that authors are including image, video, and audio in their novels, thus shaping young adults' reading processes.

End Note

It is worth noting that this article focuses on the consumption of YA literature and how technology is changing what and how adolescents are consuming. However, it would be shortsighted to overlook that these questions drive not only the reading of YA literature, but also student writing of stories. We believe future research should also examine how these five areas are changing how young adults participate as writers or coauthors of young adult literature.

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Antero **Garcia**

Networked Teens and YA Literature:

Gossip, Identity, and What Really #matters

When we consider how youth interact, socialize, and learn in the 21st century, the important role of digital social networks cannot be overstated. Myriad researchers in information and communications technology (ICT) describe the shifting nature of social interactions in today's "network societies" (Castells, 1996, 2005; Papacharissi, 2010) or "networked publics" as "publics that are restructured by networked technologies" (boyd, 2014, p. 8). "Updates," "likes," and "shares" transpire in our classrooms on a daily basis, as the vast majority of teens, regardless of socioeconomic background, engage with social media on their own devices regularly (Lenhart, 2012; Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010; Perrin & Duggan, 2015). And while there are larger concerns about teen privacy and cyber bullying as a result of the ubiquity of social networks, such networks have ultimately become an inescapable part of youth culture over the past decade and a half.

In this manuscript, I explore three research questions related to the intersection of young adult literature (YAL) and teen uses of social networks:

1. What social network practices are demonstrated in contemporary YAL?
2. How do these practices mirror real-world contexts of social network use in youth "networked publics" (boyd, 2014)?
3. What is the responsibility of educators in considering the discrepancies between uses of social networks in YAL and in the real world?

By looking at the differences between YAL depictions of social networks and *real-world* contexts of youth participation in virtual texts like #blacklivesmatter, educators can guide critical, civically engaged uses of these tools from within their classrooms. To investigate these questions, I analyzed the depictions of social network use by teens in popular YAL. I limited the YA texts I selected for this analysis to include novels published since 2002. This date is noteworthy as the year of release for the first widely used social network in the US, Friendster. I further narrowed my search by looking selectively across the books published since 2002. This provided me with a range of genres and textual themes that kept abreast of advances in digital technologies. I then looked at the books that focused on social networks by authors who were included in the syllabus for the "Adolescents' Literature" course I frequently teach to preservice, secondary English students at Colorado State University. The course readings for this class are not selected by me; they are, instead, crowd-sourced by the students in the previous semester based on the novels they feel are most important for their peers to read.

This comprehensive approach to text selection yielded novels by widely recognized YA authors in which social networks played prominent roles in the plots of the books. Although this article does not offer a comprehensive meta-analysis of all YAL depictions of social networks, by selectively focusing on the books that have received popular attention by future educators, I emphasize key authors and texts that teens are likely to encounter within classrooms and teen libraries. Further, this approach allowed me to

better explore here the textual nuances of four titles: *Gossip Girl* (Von Ziegesar, 2002), *Little Brother* (Doctorow, 2008), *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013), and *Goodbye Stranger* (Stead, 2015), each of which reflects a different epoch through which digital social networking is seen in contemporary, realistic YAL.

Defining Social Networks

Acknowledging variations from one platform to another, boyd & Ellison (2007) define social networks "as web-based services that allow individuals to 1) construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, 2) articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and 3) view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system" (p. 211). For students, these social networks can be understood more conventionally as digital platforms, like Friendster, MySpace, and Facebook, and more mobile-mediated apps, like Instagram, Vine, and Snapchat. Similarly, in her comprehensive look at teen socialization and "networked publics," *It's Complicated: The Social Lives of Networked Teens*, boyd (2014) identifies a set of "core activities" teens engage in when using social networks; these include "chatting and socializing, engaging in self-expression, grappling with privacy, and sharing media and information" (p. 8). Extrapolating from both of these definitions, the three key social network characteristics I explore in this article follow:

In particular, I look at the pedagogical implications of elevating discussions of social networks beyond merely facilitating gossip, emphasizing instead the civic potential of critically engaging youth in discussion about social networks and YAL.

1. *Social networks allow for public dissemination of text attributed to an identifiable individual.* A character like the anonymous Gossip Girl in *Gossip Girl* (von Ziegesar, 2002) or the fan fiction author Cath in *Fangirl* (Rowell, 2013) can post information under his or her actual name or a pseudonym that others can easily locate and read.
2. *Social networks include the opportunity for archived, asynchronous commenting.* Because information is posted publicly, others can respond to this information and review comments others have made at their leisure.
3. *Social networks promote multimodal forms of textual production***.** Individuals often post photos, videos, and links alongside traditional text.

In looking at these characteristics derived from preexisting ICT research, it is worth stating that plenty of YA books deal with uses of technology that are beyond this article's scope of analysis. Although chat rooms (*ttyl,* Myracle, 2002), email (*Attachments,* Rowell, 2012), Wikipedia pages (*Paper Towns*, Green, 2008), and online video games (*For the Win*, Doctorow, 2010) all entangle and highlight youth interactions in online spaces, these digital tools are different from how social networks function. Further, although the ad-driven social networking platforms like Facebook and Twitter are the most obvious forms of social networks that youth interact with today, I have built this analysis on the *processes* of networking that occur in digital contexts. In doing so, public comments on a blog, such as in von Ziegesar's *Gossip Girl* (2002) and comments posted publicly in fan fiction communities (Rowell, 2013) still function as spaces for social networking.

In the remainder of this article, I highlight the previously listed three key findings about how social networks are represented in YAL and explore how they are utilized in the real world as well as what educators should take away from these parallels and discrepancies. In particular, I look at the pedagogical implications of elevating discussions of social networks beyond merely facilitating gossip, emphasizing instead the civic potential of critically engaging youth in discussion about social networks and YAL.

Findings

There are three general uses of social networks by teens that are demonstrated consistently across the YA texts I examined:

1. Social networks function as hubs for the rumor mill in teens' lives and amplify gossip.
2. Social networks allow for alternate identities of characters to manifest.

3. Social networks infrequently illustrate models of organizing and political action.

By looking at the affordances of social networks as demonstrated in YAL, I explore first how these texts corroborate real-life uses of these tools for gossip sharing and for identity performance. However, I ultimately suggest that YAL does not often engage in the same kinds of civic and activist opportunities that these networks invite in the world outside of books. Contrasting YAL examples of social network use with the real-world example of #blacklivesmatter, I suggest that educators can actively guide students through powerful literacy development that sustains the use of social networks for the betterment of society.

Social Networks as Amplifiers of Gossip

The role of social networks in distributing the chattel of teenage hearsay is clearly articulated in *Gossip Girl*. Though published in 2002, just as the social network Friendster was forming, von Ziegesar's novel illustrates that social networks are not about specific platforms; the titular Gossip Girl (aka GG) relies on publishing and responding to comments on her blog to distribute gossip. For example, midway through the novel, GG responds to the email of one of her readers (now posted to her blog, this becomes a public comment her audience can read and engage with):

> Hey gossip girl,
> i saw **S** go upstairs with some dude at the Tribeca Star. she was wasted. i was kind of tempted to knock on the door and see if there was a party going on or s/t, but i chickened out. i just wanted your advice. Do you think she'd do me? I mean, she looks pretty easy.
>
> —Coop (p. 144)

Explaining that "**S** may be a ho, but she has excellent taste" (p. 145), Gossip Girl's response helps set the novel's lurid look at sexuality as just a part of the expected social milieu of teenage life. Instead of simply teaching her readers about the inner workings of Constance Billard School, GG's writing serves as a larger meta-text that illustrates, even in the early days of social networks, how teen gossip travels, expands, and amplifies in online environments.

Expanding upon and updating this representation of online contexts as amplifiers of gossip in teenage life is Rebecca Stead's recent novel, *Goodbye Stranger* (2015). Written for a middle grade audience, *Goodbye Stranger* explores how social networks function in teenage networked publics for an even younger audience than that of *Gossip Girl*. Bridge, the seventh-grade protagonist, checks in on her social network after a recent party:

> She [Bridge] pulled her phone out and looked again at the picture Em had posted—the one Celeste took of the three of them before they'd left for the party. Bridge stared at herself: at her long hair bundled on top of her head with strands escaping, at her penciled eyes looking dark and huge, at her arms inside the tangles of thin bracelets. She has never seen herself like this before. (p. 114)

The description allows Bridge to see the social changes around her and how different she has grown in this new adolescent context. Moments later, Bridge understands that this photo is no longer a private one that allows her—and her alone—to reflect on herself and her relationship with her friends, but is instead a text on which public gossip, commenting, and performance are inscribed:

> She paged down and read the comments again.
>
> *Gorgeous.*
>
> *Prettiest girls in the seventh grade.*
>
> *OMG. HOT!*
>
> There were twenty-six comments. And Em had taken the time to respond to every one of them: *Thanks!* Or *Aw, UR Nice.*
>
> Julie Hopper had written *SO BOOTYFUL!! LOL.*
>
> And Em had written back *ILYSM*.
>
> The last comment on Em's page was from Patrick.
>
> *Your turn*.
>
> Beneath it was Em's response:
>
> *Soon.* (p. 115)

This initial string of comments is an example of public engagement with the ephemera of socialization. Taken during a party and posted later, the photo projects the three girls' performed identities at the teen function; the comments on the photo are both reflections of this performance and additional performative gestures themselves. Further, we can see that Julie Hopper, a student older than Bridge and her friends, is making a gesture to include Bridge's friend in a new, more elite social circle. This move is responded to by Em with the affirming and clique-ish response: *ILYSM* (I love you so much).

These shared comments (out of a total of 26) are telling: they function as lessons and reflections on how social networks function for youth within adolescent social spaces. In fact, as a public performance that elevates social status, references developing sexual interest, and includes common forms of praise, this short snippet of networked dialogue acts as a pedagogical demonstration for readers of *how* to interact on online social networks like Facebook. What is important to remember here and in all social network exchanges is that these are public performances. *ILYSM* is not a message that Em is sending to Julie alone; it is a public message through which Em is traversing the school social spaces and interacting with more popular students. Patrick's interest in seeing explicit photos of Em is made public, a fact that she is largely oblivious to and which will engulf her in scandal later in the story. These performances, by being accessible to all students with means of looking online, amplify the kinds of gossip and relationship news that spread across a school.

What is important to remember here and in all social network exchanges is that these are public performances.

The ways that digital networks exacerbate gossip in online contexts in these YA titles is most clearly illustrated in the nondigital context of a game of "telephone" played during an intruder drill later in *Goodbye Stranger*. Recounting to Bridge the moment that she realizes that the photo she sent to Patrick was shared with a large portion of the school's boys, Em explains:

> So David Marcel is next to me, he's practically standing on my feet in the stupid closet, breathing all over me, and the "secret message" is coming down the line, and everyone is giggling and going "Shhh!" really loudly. If we'd been hiding from a real gunman, we'd all be toast right now. Anyway, David leans away so Sara J. can whisper in his ear, and then he leans toward me and whispers, "You're a slut." And then he cracks up laughing, and stupid Eliza is on my other side going "What is it? Come on!'" She's practically shoved her ear into my mouth because she's so desperate to know. (p. 151)

Like a line of spreading gossip shared by many but occasionally withheld or ignored in the digital flotsam and jetsam of newsfeeds, Em's sudden awareness that her private information had been "networked" (boyd, 2014) is a shock. Amplified gossip is not just a consequence of social networks but a natural product of them; teen readers take away from these contemporary depictions of social networks that their lives both in and out of schools are surveyed by their classmates. It is no wonder that social networks can also function as spaces where teens can take on identities that are not tied to those that they publicly perform in schools (Marwick & boyd, 2011).

For educators, these implications mean that classroom discussions must focus on the holistic, social, and emotional *causes* of gossip. Looking more broadly at the sexual rights of adolescents in online contexts, Livingstone and Mason (2015) suggest that "curricula should cover emotions, consent, sexual identity, dynamics of healthy (and unhealthy) relationships, sources of trustworthy information, critical media analysis tools, and critical analysis of pornography" (p. 7). If gossip is portrayed within the YA reading choices in our classrooms and persists in the real-world school contexts in which we teach, our responsibilities as educators include being critically literate and socially and emotionally savvy in contending with online spaces and the student identities within them.

Social Networks as Spaces for Alternate Identities

From the anonymous Gossip Girl (von Ziegesar, 2002) to M1k3y in Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother* (2008) to Cath's fan fiction author persona in Rainbow Rowell's *Fangirl* (2013), YAL regularly points to teens that perform identities that differ from their "real-life" identities. As educators, it is important to recognize that such identities in virtual settings are just as real as the identities of teens sitting in classrooms daily. While the fictional adventures of YAL characters see them make catty snipes about the dating lives of other teenagers, lead grassroots revolutions on the streets of San Francisco, or write hugely popular fan fiction, the ways our own students are taking on new identities have powerful civic potential in the world they access on their digital screens today.

For example, Cath, the protagonist of *Fangirl*, reflects on her sense of agency and power when writing "mushy gay stuff" (p. 372) within the fictitious world created by Gemma T. Leslie within the novel's conceit:

> . . . when I'm writing Gemma T. Leslie's characters, sometimes, in some ways, I *am* better than her. I know how crazy that sounds—but I also know that it's true. I'm not a god. I could never create the World of Mages; but *I'm really, really good at manipulating that world*. (emphasis added, p. 262)

Working within the confines of someone else's fictional creation and performing in a space shielded from the real world, Cath is able to write confidently and inhabit the identity of a confident writer. Even while Cath writes fiction and maintains a well-received identity in her online fan fiction community, the amount of time this identity demands, coupled with her busy life as a first-year college student, means that she often relies on her sister to aid in *being* this other online person:

> Cath was trying not to pay attention to her hit counts—that just added more pressure—but she knew they were off the chart. In the tens of thousands. She was getting so many comments that Wren had taken to handling them for her, using Cath's profile to thank people and answer basic questions. (p. 414)

If we are to understand our role as educators as one in which we want youth to civically manipulate the world around them, then the lessons that Cath demonstrates here offer powerful guidelines for our students: the safety of Cath's performance in online spaces, the real-world feedback she gets, and the scaffolded pieces of world-building on which she constructs her narratives are all examples of how students can create and perform in online networks and have real-world impact. Building from this point, one of the most salient lessons of YAL that teachers can guide youth readers to understand is that the identities in social networks—those ideas, quips, and questions that are circulated as ones and zeroes from one device to another—have the potential to fundamentally transform the physical world.

Social Networks as Sites of Political Action

Unlike the first two elements of social networks discussed thus far, the role of social networks for deliberate civic engagement is significantly underdeveloped throughout the YA titles examined here. Though many of the books discussed thus far offer social networks as places for students to overcome moral quandaries and ethical dilemmas (Bridge's friend, Sherm, for example, decides to notify school authorities of the sexually explicit image of Em being circulated among boys in *Goodbye Stranger*), there are relatively few incidents of students entangled in the politics that exist beyond gossip.

Perhaps the most striking example of youth involved in social-networked political action is Marcus Yallow's dialogue with other youth through the Xnet in Doctorow's *Little Brother*. However, while Marcus posts on his Xnet blog, Open Revolt, and makes digital speeches that organize his allies, the Xnet is not described clearly as a social network. Instead, Doctorow focuses on describing the Xnet (aka Paranoid Xbox) as a means for secure, private access to the Internet:

> The best part of all this [using the Xnet] is how it made me feel: in control. My technology was working for me, serving me, protecting me. It wasn't spying on me. This is why I loved technology: if you used it right, it could give you power and privacy. (p. 33)

Building from this point, one of the most salient lessons of YAL that teachers can guide youth readers to understand is that the identities in social networks [. . .] have the potential to fundamentally transform the physical world.

Embedded within this affirmation of technology as a source of power and privacy is the opportunity to communicate openly with those who are also able to access the same, secure network. In distributing the Xnet to other teenagers, Marcus constructs a social network that excludes much of the public and is instead attuned to the needs and interests of youth civic life in a post-terrorist-attack San Francisco landscape. Through this network, Marcus organizes, surveys, and undermines adult authority. When a depiction of excessive police force is caught on tape, Marcus's girlfriend Ange enthusiastically demands: "Post that post that post that post that!" (p. 82). Though youth posting on social networks may be seen as socializing—or worse, as time-wasting drivel—Marcus and Ange's strategic use of the Xnet illustrates how social networks can function as civic action and incite civic dialogue. Via the power of social networks, *Little Brother* concludes with Marcus leading a massive demonstration that resists adult authority.

Of course, this is fiction, and such youth organizing through digital tools is a bit too inflated, right? This could never happen in the *real* world, could it?

Why Social Networks #matter for Teens in the Real World

Aside from examples like that described in *Little Brother*, much of the YAL examined here portrays young people as only superficially recreating online the same power structures and gossip historically found in schools; social networks in books like *Goodbye Stranger* and *Gossip Girl* simply extend the space and time of campus interactions. However, contrary to these depictions, social networks are being used by teens today in transformative and civically charged ways. Young people right now are leading global social movements and strategically organizing thousands of activists through digital tools in the real world.

However, as hashtags link thoughts and build solidarity across time and space, it is important to consider the hashtag as a means for unlocking socially conscious understandings of youth identity within classrooms.

During the summer of 2014, less than a year after *Fangirl*'s depiction of online, anonymous celebrity and a full year before *Goodbye Stranger*'s tussle with teen social quandaries around sexts, Black and brown youth across the country were organizing real-world protests and demonstrations. Their grassroots efforts were spurred on by a hashtag. Apparently, the possibilities in *Little Brother* are not so far off.

The hashtag #blacklivesmatter was a "trending" phrase on the social network Twitter throughout the second half of 2014, signaling that it was one of the most mentioned phrases on this busy social space. During the days it was trending, #blacklivesmatter sparked a powerful debate about the role of marginalized youth and their seen identity in mainstream America. Though understood today as a key feature of how Twitter functions for organizing conversations, the use of a hashtag (#) was actually a user-created "hack" of the initial, rudimentary online network. Tech-savvy developer Chris Messina suggested the use of the "#" symbol in a tweet in 2007 as a means of organizing dialogue (Parker, 2011; see Messina, 2007, for the original tweet).

From these inauspicious beginnings, the hashtag has been used in several key ways:

- It is an organizing mechanism. A search for a specific hashtag brings users into dialogue with people in the same virtual space and allows individuals to discuss key events happening around the world, from following #oscars to discuss the awards show as it airs to participating in #nctechat, a live conversation with English teachers around the world.
- It is a linguistic shift in written conversation. Including hashtags like #sorrynotsorry, #firstworldproblems, or #summervacation allows writers in digital environments like Facebook to label and signal places, feelings, and experiences with less direct exposition.
- It is a source of civic solidarity and activism. Though some have criticized the tepid nature of online "clicktivism" (Gladwell, 2010; Morozov, 2011), hashtags have been used for clear organizing and civic action. From allowing Twitter users to follow on-the-street action related to protests of a non-indictment in #ferguson to signaling connection with the #blacklivesmatter movement, hashtags help amplify individual voices through aggregation and dialogue. These last two contemporary examples parallel uses of hashtags on Twitter for civic action across the globe, from Greece to the Arab Spring.

These uses of hashtags may seem obvious for frequent participants within social media spaces. However, as hashtags link thoughts and build solidarity across time and space, it is important to consider the hashtag as a means for unlocking socially conscious understandings of youth identity within classrooms.

In reviewing how teens, in particular, have engaged in online activism through the use of hashtags, it is worth looking at the trajectory of a single teenage tweeter. Mary-Pat Hector, a 17-year-old activist at the time that #blacklivesmatter rose to national prominence, has been noted as a key organizer in the contemporary civil rights movement (Abber, 2014). Reviewing her public tweets over several months in 2014, it is striking to see a narrative of civic identity and participation in #blacklivesmatter that begins

with individual reflection and quickly moves toward collective solidarity. For instance, on November 28, 2014, Hector tweeted: "I hurt with the hurt of my people. I mourn and am overcome with grief. #BlackLivesMatter" (Hector, 2014a). Hector shared this tweet (only her third ever to include the #blacklivesmatter hashtag) four days after the grand jury decided not to indict the officer involved in the shooting in Ferguson, Missouri. Though only one other person retweeted the content, we see Hector ruminating publicly about her own positionality and feelings.

Likewise, on December 4, Hector writes, "I can protest 4 animal, LGBT, women & environmental rights but when I fight 4 black life or say #BlackLivesMatter Im a racist? #alivewhileback" (Hector, 2014b). Moving toward tweeting about larger social action, such as her personal experiences protesting, Hector's online reach expands exponentially; this content was retweeted nine times and favorited eight. Further, by addressing her own tacit experiences as a teen activist, Hector's tweet reflects the pedagogical potential of #blacklivesmatter as a text to be read.

Like Marcus slowly finding his voice in *Little Brother,* the #blacklivesmatter tweets of teens develop in clarity and solidarity, leading to IRL ("in real-life") demonstrations. This was particularly apparent when the #blacklivesmatter movement confronted holiday season consumerism. Continuing to follow Hector's tweets, we can see her documenting, supporting, and advocating for the national movement. Tweeting a picture of a public die-in on December 7, 2014, she writes, "Thank you everyone who showed up to Lenox mall! #BlackLivesMatter #ICantBreathe #Shutitdownatl" (Hector, 2014c). This tweet reached even more online participants, receiving 33 retweets and 14 favorites. Hector's savvy as a participant within the hashtag and her use of the hashtag to reflect solidarity and local action illustrate how she changed her presence online and publicly.

While not all teens may feel as civically engaged as Hector, consuming a text like #blacklivesmatter constitutes an empowering literacy act that must be taken up alongside the reading of YA fiction. When a hashtag is treated as literature and, particularly, as young adult literature, it extends youth understanding of social networks as more than simple, digital gossip. Further, a hashtag creates active reading practices; retweeting and favoriting content may be an initial step for teen participants in the robust and continually growing text of important conversations such as #blacklivesmatter. Such narratives, constructed in short 140-character blips and woven together in conversation via hashtags, become a new YAL text.

To be clear, this is an argument for teachers to have students read, analyze, and produce additional text within a civically engaged hashtag like #blacklivesmatter. The images, words, and conversations developed across this hashtag represent a polyphonic text that mirrors dissonant, visceral humanity. Though young people are afforded the chance to read books about social networking in our classrooms, we must also provide them with opportunities to read (and contribute to) the texts created in real-world contexts. What conclusions will young people have when they compare #blacklivesmatter as a text with the YA books on our shelves? This hashtag has just as much "action" as adrenaline-fueled YA texts, but it also demonstrates these actions as "real" and in the service of an ongoing struggle for civil rights in the 21st century. Sure, real-time digital formats include spammed advertisements and adversarial, racist attacks. However, sift through this noise and what will be found is an amalgam of anger, solidarity, and action.

Though young people are afforded the chance to read books about social networking in our classrooms, we must also provide them with opportunities to read (and contribute to) the texts created in real-world contexts.

In an interview with MTV, Hector shared her enthusiasm for the #blacklivesmatter movement, noting, "I believe this is a very exciting time where young people are being invited to the table. We are now being seen as assets not liabilities on a larger level" (Abber, 2014). While it is useful to explore how youth are actively engaged in the construction of YA texts, it is equally important to consider the fact that educators must be proactive in understanding these texts and their role in participating in them. Prominent leaders in virtual and physical spaces of activism surrounding #blacklivesmatter have been educators (McDonald & Woo, 2015), and classroom teachers can spearhead

the demonstration of active engagement with topics of representation and justice.

Within the purview of English language arts, consider a tweet from former NCTE President Ernest Morrell, tweeting from his graduate course at Teachers College in New York. Sent on November 24th, 2014, the day the grand jury announced it would not indict the Ferguson, Missouri, officer that killed Black teenager Michael Brown, Morrell tweeted: "Break the Internet #Ferguson #BlackLivesMatter" (Morrell, 2014). The tweet reflects a powerful instance of an educator pushing civic action into various spaces. Consider the landscape of what was happening that week in cities across the country: youth and adults alike were shutting down traffic, holding die-ins (Levenson, 2014), and generally forcing their lives to be reflected in those of an otherwise White hegemony. Civic action is meant to disrupt and challenge the lives of those privileged to overlook the experiences of the oppressed. Shutting down traffic, as protestors did in Los Angeles, New York, and many other large cities, is *supposed* to be an inconvenience. In this context, Morrell's call, read by his thousands of Twitter followers (and retweeted 30 times), asks us to consider how such physical action can be taken into digital spaces.

Civic action is meant to disrupt and challenge the lives of those privileged to overlook the experiences of the oppressed.

When feelings of injustice, rage, and indignation emerge in the lives of urban youth of color, digitally constructed, collective texts, such as those found in Twitter hashtags, can allow educators to find and share critically necessary reflections written by young people today. Readers may encounter fictional uses of social networks that allow characters like Gossip Girl or Bridge or Cath or Marcus to use online spaces for action and indignation. The same tools that youth have seen as means of gossip-spreading can also serve as founts of truth-telling. At the same time, however, we must recognize what these popular YA texts lack: authentic opportunities for real-world engagement. Reading a text that tells readers that #blacklivesmatter is one that, even in its title, spouts a truth so often ignored in YAL; it is a text that is generative and participatory. In reading online and civic-oriented hashtags, youth identify as both audience and author of such narratives. The sharing of racial experiences of youth through hashtags allows pain, anger, and solidarity to be interpreted in ways that corporately published books do not.

When looking at hashtags as texts in their own right, it is necessary to recognize that they are evolving narratives; a struggle for racial equity is an ongoing one. To treat a hashtagged text like #blacklivesmatter as anything but a continuous, serialized conversation would be disingenuous. While it does not read in the same ways as linear novels and memoirs, the constantly evolving narratives found within #blacklivesmatter reflect the definitions of adolescence that have been lacking in traditional, print-based YAL. This is the *meaning* of social networks for adolescent readers. Social networks do not simply offer civic opportunities; they create a pedagogical mandate that educators entangle in the politicized lives of youth.

If we are to see YA literature and educators' roles in teaching it as a way of not simply provoking a delight in reading but in highlighting pathways for engagement and participation in the world after K–12 schooling, extending means of social network engagement is imperative. Youth must know they are doing more than simply spreading gossip when they utilize social networks. Comparing a text like *Gossip Girl*, a text like *Fangirl*, and a text like #blacklivesmatter creates powerful opportunities for reflective writing and discussion in classrooms; by fostering these comparisons, teachers create spaces to discuss differences, uncertainties, and pathways toward personally and socially responsible uses of these digital tools.

Conclusion: Reflecting Networked Publics

To conclude, I want to draw upon "The Mirror of Erised" from the Harry Potter series (Rowling, 1997–2007) to point to the idealized discrepancies between what YAL suggests social networks are for and the revolutionary potential that we see for how these tools are and can be utilized in the real world. In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (Rowling, 1997), a young Harry Potter gazes at his reunited family posing on the other side of a magical mirror. When Harry finds it difficult to break his gaze away from the affirming

and sustaining image, Dumbledore informs young Harry of the mirror's true purpose. Called "The Mirror of Erised," the artifact is said to show the "deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts" (p. 213). Dumbledore explains to Harry that the "happiest man on earth would be able to use the Mirror of Erised like a normal mirror, that is, he would look into it and see himself exactly as he is" (p. 213).

Though no such magical device exists in the real world, perhaps the basic principles of the mirror thrive in our teaching of YAL and social networks today. This notion of YAL functioning as both "mirrors" and "windows" is not a new one, and this scholarship is continually challenged and expanded (Bishop, 1990; Brooks, 2006; Larrick, 1965; Sciurba, 2015). However, while contemporary YAL may offer an ordinary, perhaps even mundane, mirror image of youth use of social networks, the entanglement of these texts alongside actual hashtags and exchanges in online networks can create even more enchanted projections of what youth civic life *could* be like. ICT researcher Manuel Castells (2005) notes, "[S]ociety shapes technology according to the needs, values, and interests of people who use the technology" (p. 3). As such, educators must remember that the social networks our students use are culturally grounded; these tools act as reflections of the needs, interests, and milieu of the societies that created them. In replicating only some affordances of social networks, YAL reflects back certain kinds of uses of social networks to teens, reinforcing limited applications of these platforms. In contrast with real-world contexts of #blacklivesmatter, depictions of social network use in YAL has historically (over the past decade and a half) been extremely limited; these texts do not mirror the possibilities and experiences of students today. We must contrast these differences and emphasize how to read hashtags and networked narratives for lessons of civic engagement.

In taking on this work, it is important that we heed the warning that Dumbledore offers Harry about the Mirror of Erised after explaining its purpose: "Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible" (p. 213). Looking at the world of activism and digital networks through which we interact today, we know that social change can be amplified through social networks. We know that such reflections in YAL, as infrequent as they may be, are real, are possible. As educators, we must demand more of the social networks through which students engage and learn, and we must challenge the gimcrack depictions of social networks acting as little more than digital rumor mills.

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Jon **Ostenson**

Multimodal, Interactive Storytelling:

Critical Reading of Video Games

I walk slowly toward the large observatory, following the glowing traces of light illuminating the stone path. Entering the building, I find myself in a dark, vast space with stars glittering where I would expect walls to be. I see a figure before a reel-to-reel tape player; she is composed of glowing particles, surrounded by ribbons of twisting light. The figure bends over the machine, presses a button, and I hear the voice of Dr. Katherine (Kate) Collins begin her final message as a bright, brilliant rectangle gradually opens in the field of stars above me. The particles and ribbons, which I now understand to be an "echo" of Kate's once-physical form, flow gently and purposefully into the light. When the recording ends, I am bathed in a brilliant white glow before I hear the click of the tape machine turning off and see the credits roll up the screen. I lean back and relax my hands, surprised to find that they had been clenched tightly around the controller. I am puzzled, trying to make sense of what I've just experienced, but I am also exhilarated at the opportunity I have now to finally put together the pieces of the complex narrative I have spent the last few hours immersed in.

I have just finished "playing" the game *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture* (The Chinese Room, 2015), and I am as awash in emotion and wonder as I have been so many times before when I have closed the cover of a powerful book. I know that the story I have just experienced will haunt me for days to come, and I expect to scour the Internet for discussions that interpret the game's ending and examine how the scattered pieces of the story spread across the game fit into a cohesive narrative.

I have played video games since the days of mall arcades and the Atari 2600. While their entertainment value has kept me interested into adulthood, my favorites are those that focus on delivering a compelling story. Just as I have been attracted to the finely drawn characters and thoughtful themes explored in print, so have I been drawn to stories told through the multimodal medium of the video game.

This experience is particularly important for me as an English teacher, someone who advocates for story and the important role it plays in our lives and who also recognizes that new media and technologies are changing the way we share stories. Video games are indisputably popular with teenagers and an important part of their culture; as we consider the ways in which new forms of media shape the landscape of stories written for young adults, we should include video games. In this article, I make the case for classroom study of video games as bridges to multimodal textual study. Video games draw on traditions of storytelling at the heart of our discipline, and in doing so, they employ multiple modes (visual, auditory, gestural) that can significantly shift the nature of stories told via this medium. I suggest that by bringing story-driven video games into our classrooms and to our adolescent readers, we can not only reinforce our objectives for teaching narrative, but also initiate students into meaningful discussions about how visual, auditory, and other modes work to convey meaning.

Video Games as a Storytelling Medium

The first widely available video games date to the early 1970s, with games like the now-classic *Pong* (Atari, 1972), which even in its simplicity (two rectangular, white "paddles" hitting a square "ball" across a black background), stretched the technological limitations of the time. These early games featured little in the sense of a narrative, aside from the drama that might play out between competitors engaged in the game. But the storytelling potential of these interactive games was quickly explored by companies like Infocom, who brought the genre of interactive fiction into commercial success. The resulting products, inspired by games written by programmers working on mainframe computers at institutions like MIT, allow the player to interact with virtual worlds by inputting text as they attempt to solve puzzles (see Fig. 1), with players' input meaningfully altering the state of the game world (Montfort, 2003).

Like early movies, which were basically filmed plays with a static set and limited camera work, these early works of interactive fiction borrowed much from print, relying heavily on the alphabetic medium to convey their story. As technology has advanced, however, video games have become more sophisticated. Just as Orson Welles's work demonstrated how film could leverage its unique affordances to tell stories in new ways, today's video game designers are leveraging the multimodal affordances of the medium to tell stories uniquely and innovatively (Murray, 1998, pp. 66–68).

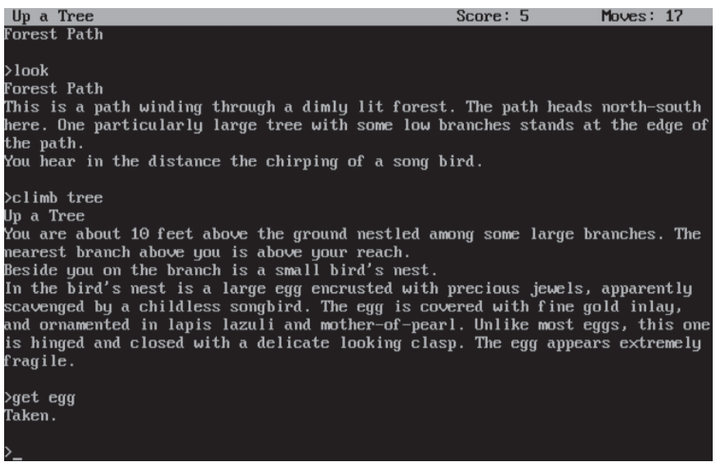

Figure 1. Screen capture of story path influenced by the player's decisions

As they have become more sophisticated, video games have become more popular. In a recent survey, 97% of teens report that they play video games (Lenhart et al., 2008), and consumer spending on games in 2014 topped $21 billion (Entertainment Software Association, 2015). This popularity has perhaps contributed to a perception of video games as merely popular entertainment not worthy of legitimate study in an academic setting. However, video games can more accurately be seen as part of a larger societal and cultural shift in communication from words on the page to images on the screen—a shift that has been accompanied by evolving ideas about literacy (Kress, 2003). Linguist and video game researcher James Paul Gee (2008) argues for video games as an art form, given that they connect the abstract rules systems typical of games with elements (characters, settings, actions) of stories (p. 84). Janet Murray (2004) has suggested that these digital games embody "a new kind of storytelling emerging to match the need for expressing our life" today, as we are "outgrowing" some of the restrictions of traditional storytelling modes (p. 4).

Video games have been implemented before in classrooms. Lancy and Hayes (1988) used interactive fiction games as recreational reading materials with reluctant readers, and Newman (1988) documents how students used game-creation software to write their own adventure stories. Adams (2009) utilized video games in her classroom to help enhance reading comprehension skills, and Jolley (2008) drew on interest in video-game-based books as a way to bridge to other kinds of reading. In addition, specifically designed games have been used to help teach students about social issues (Sardone & Devlin-Scherer, 2010). However, here I am arguing for something unique: using video games with their multimodal character to study traditional narrative elements and develop literacies in non-alphabetic modes.

A Theoretical Frame for Examining Video Games

Video games deserve a place in our traditional study of narratives because they provide an important opportunity to experience and interpret multimodal narrative texts. Additionally, given the unique fea-

tures of this medium, the close study of video games can encourage young readers to think more critically about narrative elements across media. The theoretical framework for this argument includes ideas about both the positioning of these games as multimodal texts and also a framework for examining the unique affordances of these games.

Video games represent multimodal texts in the sense that their designers avail themselves of multiple modes (visual, auditory, alphabetic, gestural, and spatial) in designing the game that players experience. The action of playing video games, Gee (2007) asserts, "is a multimodal literacy *par excellence*" (p. 18, emphasis in original). In his work, Gee explores how players in video games learn to navigate each game's rules and engage in problem-solving behaviors that teach them to be literate in new domains. Gee suggests that video games are complex texts because they represent interrelated semiotic domains (or constructed spaces where people are encouraged to think or act or feel a certain way) that must be "read" by the player if he or she is to successfully experience the game.

The unique and complex ways in which games utilize different modes represent a potentially rich experience for literacy teachers and their students. As one (very popular) exemplar of the "burgeoning variety of text forms associated with information and multimedia technologies," video games provide a means to encourage literacy skills in "understanding and controlling representational forms," as advocated for by the scholars of the New London Group (1996, p. 61). In advocating for a pedagogical focus on multiliteracies, this group suggests that the content of a multiliteracies curriculum should center around design (both as the choices that inform the final product and as the process of creation) and its related elements: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, and spatial. These modes are core elements used in the design of video games and thus offer students of the genre an opportunity to explore how they work in creating and communicating meaning.

The foundation laid by the New London Group has led to formalized expectations that instruction in multimodal literacy be included as part of literacy education in schools (International Reading Association, 2012; National Council of Teachers of English, 2005), and many researchers have explored the value of incorporating students' out-of-school digital literacy practices and encounters with multimodal texts into classrooms in meaningful, critical ways (Alvermann, Moon, & Hagood, 2002; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Jewitt, 2008). However, as O'Brien and Bauer (2005) have illuminated, integrating multiliteracies and multimodal texts into schools and classrooms is problematic given the emphasis in schools on traditional notions of literacy that favor print modes almost exclusively. In this context, I suggest that video games offer a connection between the traditional practices of school (especially narrative analysis) and the development of multiliteracies that scholars have suggested are so important.

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Building on work in multiliteracies and in game studies, researchers in Australia have developed a model for exploring this intersection of multimodal literacies and video games (Apperly & Beavis, 2013; Beavis, 2014; Beavis, Apperly, Bradford, O'Mara, & Walsh, 2009). In this article, I draw upon this model to describe how video games can be used in meaningful ways with adolescent readers, focusing particularly on *games as text* and *games as action*. When we analyze games as texts, we explore "the role of the multi-modal meaning-making taking place in the digital game text" and also situate these games in broader contexts of the medium of the video game (Apperly & Beavis, 2013, p. 5). When we analyze games as action, we focus on the way a game is played—players' interactions with the game world and their avatar within that world, the design of the game that invites and facilitates action, and the broader contexts in which these actions take place.

In studying games through these lenses, we invite students to consider carefully the nature of narrative as well as to engage in critical thinking about the influence that the multimodal medium of the video game has on the storytelling experience—in other

words, to examine its design and design elements (as defined by the New London Group). To demonstrate how we might accomplish this, I present a case-based analysis of a video game and share ideas for inviting students to examine it as a narrative, as an example of the multimodal video game medium, and as an experience in gameplay.

Case Study: *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture*

The richly imagined *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture* (The Chinese Room, 2015; gameplay viewable at https://youtu.be/T2yJL59FWxg) opens with a tantalizing sound bite from a Dr. Kate Collins, who tells us that she is "the only one left." As reader-players, we find ourselves on the side of a road outside the quaint English village of Youghton, Shropshire; the town has been quarantined for reasons that are not immediately clear. As we begin to explore, we find the first of many radios we will encounter in the game that provide audio recordings left by the same Kate Collins. Her first recording alludes to "The Event" and to "markers" left behind and suggests that answers will be found "in the light." Other characters' voices and experiences are brought into the game through recorded messages left on phones around the town. It soon becomes apparent that the inhabitants of the village have vanished as a result of The Event, and our first impulse as players is to discover what really happened here.

This discovery is aided by several encounters with twisting spirals of glowing particles, light sculptures that are "echoes" of the vanished inhabitants of the area and that give glimpses of conversations between those inhabitants (the "markers" that Dr. Collins refers to in the very beginning of the game; see Fig. 2). These vignettes are "triggered" as a glowing ball of light leads the reader-player through the countryside, into homes and shops and churches and farms. Reader-players uncover clues and insights not only into the mystery of what happened to the inhabitants of Shropshire, but also into the lives of the missing residents—their hopes and disappointments, their relationships, their conflicts—in the days immediately before and after The Event.

Everybody's Gone to the Rapture as Narrative

Examining the narrative that unfolds in *Everybody's Gone to the Rapture* (hereafter referred to as *Rapture*) provides rich opportunities for a traditional narrative analysis. First and foremost, the game presents a unique setting that plays an important role in the conflicts experienced by characters and the themes that eventually emerge. Shropshire is a rural English village with small, quaint homes and neatly manicured lawns and gardens nestled among green, fertile farms, with an idyllic vacation resort by the local lake (see Fig. 3). This warm and welcoming physical setting is in very real tension with the reader-player's growing understanding of the frightening events that befell the unsuspecting residents of Shropshire as part of The Event and which have seemingly resulted in the disappearance and supposed death of every resident. Careful study of this game can help students analyze how the choice of this setting shapes our response to the story. We might ask them to consider how setting the story in small-town America or in an industrial or post-industrial area might result in a different reader response. Such analyses help our students see how choices about setting are essential to the way we perceive the story.

Figure 2. "Echoes" of vanished inhabitants give clues to The Event that left the town of Shropshire deserted.

Figure 3. Detailed map of the fictional village of Shropshire

As with any narrative, characters also play an important role in the story. *Rapture* is organized into five "chapters," with each chapter focusing on a single area of the countryside and a single character. For example, reader-players become familiar with the village priest (Jeremy Wheeler) who has generated no small controversy by aiding a terminally ill parishioner in her desire to end her own life and who, in the face of the mysterious disappearances of local residents, begins to question the faith he has in a benevolent, all-powerful God. In their glimpses of Jeremy, reader-players see his humane efforts to comfort parishioners as they try to understand the disappearances of friends and neighbors and the broader tragedy that arrives with The Event. In his earnest efforts, he recaptures the trust and respect of some who had previously criticized him. As he watches those in his parish gradually fall ill and vanish, though, he himself struggles with anger against a God whose actions seem arbitrary and difficult to understand.

Reader-players also become acquainted with Kate Collins, a newly married American scientist who feels like an outsider, scrutinized and found wanting by the provincial residents of Shropshire. Throughout the game, reader-players witness her gradual retreat into the study of a mysterious pattern of signals that travel from deep space and are first detected at the observatory. Reader-players also come to know her husband, Stephen, a fellow scientist who, in returning with his new wife to Shropshire (where he was raised), also returns to a woman, Lizzie Graves, with whom he previously had a serious romantic relationship. Lizzie, who is also married, suffers from feelings of insecurity that seem to be assuaged by her reconnection with Stephen.

While reader-players learn about these people solely through dozens of light-sculpture vignettes, most characters are, nevertheless, complex. For example, while Kate does seem ambitious and aloof, evidence suggests that the villagers have perhaps judged her too harshly. Similarly, Lizzie is cheating on her husband, but she also runs a tidy summer camp for families and youth and puts on a play to help take residents' minds off the growing number of disappearances. A close reading of *Rapture* suggests rich possibilities for character study and for drawing inferences about the relationships between the inhabitants of the village as a backdrop against which the catastrophic event and consequent fallout occur. Students could choose one of the characters and compile evidence from what that character says and what others say about him or her to create a character profile and to explore how each character is connected emotionally in the context of the game's setting.

In examining the characters, their conflicts, and the story's setting, students can also explore some of the themes that *Rapture*'s developers have so carefully and thoughtfully threaded into the game. To consider one example, Kate's status as an outsider, her fragile marriage to Shropshire's golden child, and her increasing obsession with finding the meaning behind these alien signals dominate much of the game. In analyzing her experiences and reactions, reader-players see the developers exploring the themes of isolation and Kate's growing desire for control. Her quest for knowledge and answers mirrors a broader human endeavor that does not always end well. And as reader-players' understanding of The Event unfolds, they are invited to ask deeper questions about Dr. Collins and her role in the tragedy. Her growing desire to "make a mark"

by solving the mystery of the strange signals takes on increased importance as the new life she is starting with her husband becomes increasingly threatened.

In discussing themes like this one, educators can also encourage students to explore light as a central metaphor in the game. Many of Kate's final words (explored in the last "chapter" of the game, which takes place in the observatory) allude to the complex nature of light—its power to illuminate, to give warmth and life, but also the ghostly traces it leaves behind that are mere suggestions of what has been. Light is a powerful motif used throughout the game to evoke the experiences of the characters and the themes of connection. The game's use of light helps reader-players to explore the impact that characters' choices and actions have on others in this tight-knit community that is "invaded" by a mysterious outside force in the form of alien signals.

While focusing on the narrative elements in a video game allows us to reinforce and explore techniques of traditional literary analysis, examining the multimodal elements of the game can initiate students into important discussions about how different modes express meaning.

Rapture as an Example of the Video Game Medium

While focusing on the narrative elements in a video game allows us to reinforce and explore techniques of traditional literary analysis, examining the multimodal elements of the game can initiate students into important discussions about how different modes express meaning. We should help students apply their understanding of and experiences with video games to recognize how the affordances of the video game medium are leveraged to convey significant meaning.

One significant mode or design element used in video games is the spatial element—the physical space laid out and navigated virtually by the player. *Rapture* fits into the genre of games that present a mysterious situation and then encourage the player to uncover the truth by exploring his or her surroundings. These games rely heavily on creating a compelling and immersive atmosphere and often eschew traditional elements of gameplay, such as combat, in favor of a more leisurely gathering of clues and insights into a central mystery. Noted cultural scholar Henry Judkins (2004) asserts that these games are an example of "environmental storytelling" that "[privilege] spatial exploration" (p. 125).

This is very true for *Rapture*, as the goal of exploring the game's physical space becomes inextricably linked with exploring the events that led to the catastrophe alluded to in the game's beginning. This physical exploration parallels the psychic exploration players become immersed in as they gain glimpses into the complex lives of the Shropshire residents. The spatial mode provides an easy way to start discussions with students about how the opportunity to physically explore the in-game locations shapes the way players perceive the story; for instance, much more information and sensory stimulation are provided through this exploration than one would normally encounter in print, and this changes the immediate impact that the setting might have on players. This is especially interesting in the case of *Rapture*, as the game's developers limit the player's in-game speed to a pace that encourages (almost requires) carefully observing and taking in the setting.

The game's developers leverage other modes to convey a distinct mood in the game, drawing upon the soundtrack music (haunting, airy strings with a melancholy flavor or warm piano tones), the lighting (the game is set in the late afternoon, so long shadows and warm colors dominate), and audio cues (the reader-player is immersed in bird-song and occasional animal sounds, even though the area is conspicuously devoid of any visible life, human or animal). Educators can help students analyze how these modes shape their experience by encouraging them to reflect upon their responses as they play.

By way of example, consider one specific scene in which players witness an encounter between the local priest and a woman he finds in a home that does not belong to her. She tells the priest, tearfully and with rising anxiety, that her husband and two children were trying to escape Shropshire but were blocked by the quarantine. She recounts how first her sons and then she and her husband began to suffer from headaches and nosebleeds (which we understand by this

point to be a precursor to death or vanishing); they decide to wait out the quarantine in this unfamiliar house whose owners, we infer, have vanished and left the home abandoned. Her husband has taken the boys upstairs to rest, and she has remained alone in the downstairs living room. When the priest encounters her, he learns that she has been waiting for six hours, paralyzed by fear at what might await her upstairs. As the conversation ends, players follow the swirling lights that represent the priest into the upstairs bedroom, only to find an empty bed, sheets slightly disturbed, and tiny, brilliant light particles drifting in the air. As players observe the conspicuously empty bed, the music shifts to a soft chorus of angelic voices.

The pathos evoked in scenes like this one rivals what we might experience when reading well-crafted stories in traditional print forms. But in the video game medium, many of our senses are engaged in the process, thanks to the different modes employed. When I analyze such scenes with my students, we first explore the multimodal dimension by considering how experiencing the game is different from reading a print story. To explore the impact of the visual mode, for example, I ask students how it might be different to read this scene in print compared to seeing it. We then look at specific images from this scene and talk about how elements like color choices influence our response or how the creation of contrasts between light and dark might encourage us to feel a certain way. I ask students to consider the audio and how it shapes their response to the scene, especially the angelic choir that comes in at the end. Is this supposed to reassure us? Or does it add to the mystery of what is happening? Finally, I ask students to consider a mode that is very unique to video games, the gestural or physical mode. I encourage them to evaluate how their physical involvement in the scene (the fact that their actions with a controller move the scene forward) changes the way they experience the moment.

In these discussions, I am always careful to avoid the conclusion that print is better than video games (or vice versa); rather, I guide the discussion in ways that help students see how each mode has unique strengths. The notion of interactivity (a term I use to connect to the gestural mode) often dominates these discussions, as the agency that games offer players to control the direction of the story and its outcomes is one of the most unique features of this medium. In these discussions, my students and I often decide that interactivity deepens immersion and investment in the storyline in unique ways, echoing the ideas of Espen Aarseth (1997), a prominent figure in video game and literary theory studies, who has argued that this interaction "[raises] the stakes of interpretation to those of intervention" (p. 4). Since this distinction between games and print texts is so clear, it is an easy entry point to discussions about individual modes and how each shapes our responses to and understandings of the story we experience.

In these discussions, I am always careful to avoid the conclusion that print is better than video games (or vice versa); rather, I guide the discussion in ways that help students see how each mode has unique strengths.

This exploration of different modes allows us to help students think more critically about the elements of storytelling; again, I have found that having them compare storytelling games and print stories is effective. To suggest one instance, my students and I might discuss the metaphor of light used throughout the *Rapture* and how its use is different in a game where we *see* instances of that light throughout our play (the visual mode) but also are *led* through the darkness (gestural mode) and physically *surrounded* by that light (the spatial mode) in the final moments of the game when we explore the observatory after sunset. Students can analyze how the effect of these intersecting modes encourages them to consider this motif (and even experience it) in ways that are different from how they might perceive the motif in print texts. Some might find the experience more limiting, since the game's portrayals present only one vision, whereas print encourages individual readers to create their own mental imagery. Others may argue for the power of having the senses immediately stimulated by the game. In whatever way the discussion proceeds, students are engaged in deeper reflection on the use of motifs and their effects across different media. Similar discussions could explore how we apprehend characters in the game versus a print story or how audio dialogue influences characterization in a video game.

Rapture and Games as Action

Discussions of the video game medium invite us to consider the game as an experience and to analyze the design of the game itself—another major thrust in multiliteracies instruction. The developers of *Rapture*, for instance, grant players the freedom to encounter vignettes and locations in the order of their choosing. While a humming, glowing ball of light suggests a path the player can take to uncover all the clues about a particular character's life, players do not have to take the suggested path and may instead choose to encounter the vignettes of past conversations in whatever order they want. However, even following the ball of light does not present the vignettes in a strictly chronological order. Thus, players are guaranteed a fragmented picture of the overall narrative of The Event and its ensuing tragedy. Even after uncovering every vignette and experiencing the game's final moments, players are left with much residual uncertainty about the events and characters portrayed.

This design choice gives educators an opportunity to explore the nature and consequences of fragmented narratives with students.

This design choice gives educators an opportunity to explore the nature and consequences of fragmented narratives with students. We can talk about how we as readers rely on clues and inferences to make sense of a narrative that is presented to us in fragments. Or we can explore the way our understanding of events and characters evolves and changes when we experience a fragmented narrative and how this experience might seek to mirror the way we make meaning out of events and interactions in real life. This discussion should also lead students to consider how much freedom we have come to expect in video games—freedom to explore or to solve problems or discover the "rules" of the game on our own—and how the developers of the game allow us that freedom. This connection between player freedom and fragmented narratives in the video game genre can be contrasted fruitfully with postmodern narratives that explore fragmented storytelling (like Walter Dean Myers's *Monster* [2004] or Karen Hesse's *Witness* [2003]) and the different purposes that authors might have in each case.

With students who are familiar with other genres of video games (like first-person shooters or even some role-playing games), we can contrast this free-form presentation style with games that are much more linear. We can ask students to consider why developers might choose a more free-form approach rather than a more linear path that would ensure a more uniform experience. In critical reviews, games are often derided for being linear, and yet many popular games feature linear storylines. In light of this juxtaposition, students could share their thoughts about how a linear experience is different and why it might be preferable in some situations for some players. This discussion could also lead to a more general discussion about the emerging genre of games that favor exploration as a mechanic for uncovering a mystery rather than solving puzzles or completing mini-games within the game.

In a similar vein, the developers of *Rapture* deliberately make no effort to establish who the player is in the context of the virtual Shropshire. Players are given no backstory, no identity. When they find themselves outside the gates of the observatory at the beginning of the game, they don't even know what they are supposed to accomplish in the game. This is a significant deviation from the strong tradition in video games of establishing an alternate persona for the reader-player, whether that be the heartbroken plumber of the Mario franchise or the elite soldiers of the popular Call of Duty series. Students could be encouraged to speculate about why the designers of *Rapture* chose to reject this convention and how this decision affects the experience they have while playing the game. Might this be a commentary on the role of narrators in general, who often provide the alternative persona or "eyes" through which we see the story? How does not knowing who we are or the role that our in-game persona plays in these events complicate our efforts to make sense of the game's story and characters? How is the experience of playing *Rapture* different than the experience of playing a game where we adopt a more specific, but imposed, persona? If I bring this classroom discussion back to traditional narratives, I find that students are better equipped to explore how the role of a narrator can be more complicated than we might initially think. (I often use Almond's [2013] short piece on narrators to supplement discussions like this.)

In looking at the gameplay experience, some students are sure to suggest that *Rapture* may not even be a game in the traditional sense of the word, as it involves no hand-eye coordination challenges or puzzles that must be solved in order for the narrative to progress. In fact, it could be argued that in *Rapture,* players really have little control over how the story unfolds, especially compared to other games where they are asked to make crucial decisions about how their in-game persona will act or what he or she will say. The only real control players have in *Rapture* is in how they experience that story, determined by the order in which they encounter the vignettes and make connections about the characters and their experiences. This can lead educators and students to analyze genre expectations and how authors might deliberately violate our expectations for a specific purpose. They should, in analyzing the experience of playing *Rapture*, be able to explore both the costs and benefits of these design choices and how they shape the way reader-players think about and respond to the game's story.

However, other students are likely to point out that the game itself represents one large and complex puzzle: What happened to the residents of Shropshire, and what are we supposed to understand from uncovering this tragedy? Although the player's role in the game largely consists of exploration and uncovering the interactions glimpsed in the light-sculpture vignettes, the effort of puzzling out the answer to this mystery provides a unique, compelling challenge that, in the best postmodern tradition, invites the player into an active role as meaning-maker in the story. Again, students could be encouraged to venture some guesses as to why the developers have chosen to exclude traditional gameplay elements. How is the player's experience changed by this choice, and how does the experience of playing this game compare to playing other, more traditional video games? Does *Rapture* provide the same kind of compelling experience in gameplay as other games that have more concrete goals and rewards for completing levels?

Bringing Video Games into the Classroom

My experiences bringing games like *Rapture* into the classroom have highlighted both the potential and some of the challenges of using these texts for this kind of critical study (see Table 1 for suggestions of other games that have similar potential). These games take time to finish, and it may not be practical to play them together in their entirety during class time. To address this, I have engaged my students in group play of games, where I or another student controls the action of the game while soliciting input about what to do in the game world from the students in the class. This has been helpful to orient students toward a certain kind of game or to experience different levels of immersion by spending a short time with games that use different perspectives or make interesting choices in terms of design. These group experiences allow us to engage as a class in the analyses of narrative, modes, and design described in this article. Once students have this experience, they are equipped to work independently with other more familiar games.

As much as I (and my students) enjoy discussing the narratives in these stories (and as much as this helps reinforce traditional disciplinary knowledge), equally fruitful work comes when we shift the discussion and analysis to the way game developers use different modes to convey meaning (the game as text) and to how we experience the game itself (the game as action). This analysis helps students develop much-needed familiarity with other modes and broadens their understanding about the unique strengths of these modes and how they work together to convey meaning.

In describing the connections that he sees between literacy learning and playing video games, Gee (2007) notes that "knowledge of a given domain can be a good precursor for learning another one" (p. 39). The experiences that my students and I have had as we have explored narrative in multimodal video games bear out Gee's statement. My students have learned to think more deeply about narrative at the same time as they have developed skills in identifying how images, sounds, and other modes are used to communicate. Video games are an important medium for many of the young people with whom we work in schools and universities, and many games, through their narrative elements, enlighten us about the human condition just as the best traditional literature does. In a time when changes in media and technology are altering our public and private lives, video games offer an important chance to explore the new and compelling ways these media share stories that matter.

Table 1. Annotated list of story-driven video games

Life Is Strange (Dontnod Entertainment, 2014)
An example of an episodic video game (a game released in serial installments), this game puts the player in the role of Maxine Caufield, a high school senior who discovers a special ability to manipulate time. Max has visions of a catastrophic storm that will destroy her home town and uses her newfound abilities to try to prevent the destruction. The narrative arc of the game is determined by numerous choices made by the player and explores themes of memory and identity and the way choices have ripple effects. (Other episodic games like this that rely heavily on player choice include *The Walking Dead* and *Game of Thrones*, both based in the worlds of these popular franchises.)

Shade (Andrew Plotkin, 2000)
In this short work of interactive fiction, the player assumes the role of a nameless protagonist who is getting ready for a trip to Death Valley. As the player completes mundane tasks like finding plane tickets and shutting down a computer, it gradually becomes clear that the reality presented by the game may not be, in fact, the reality in which the protagonist finds himself. Light and heat play important roles in the gradual uncovering of the protagonist's real state; the gradual recognition of what has really happened to the protagonist creates a compelling sense of tension. The game is an interesting commentary on the way game design establishes a sense of place and requires significant inference-making on the part of the reader-player.

Her Story (Sam Barlow, 2015)
This game puts the player in the role of police detective using a 1990s-era computer interface through which the player can search through several videotaped interviews of a woman who is suspected of murdering her husband. The player cannot access the videos in their entirety, but instead must conduct keyword searches of interview transcripts, which then pull up short clips from the videotaped interviews. In this way, the game subverts some of the genre expectations of crime fiction and requires heavy inferential work on the part of the reader-player who must not only put clues together, but deduce the context of the video clips and the interviewee's responses.

Zork (Infocom, 1980)
This is one of the earliest interactive fiction games. It was critically acclaimed for its elaborate story world and (at the time) sophisticated parser, allowing lengthier and more complex player input. While dated by today's standards, it is still a compelling experience and a great introduction to video games and their storytelling potential. The game opens outside a generic white house that holds the entrance to a fantasy-themed underground kingdom. The player-reader is tasked with solving puzzles and navigating tricky mazes in the service of finding treasure. This game is available in multiple places on the Internet, including versions that can be played from within a Web browser.

Device 6 (Simogo, 2013)
Players assume the persona of Anna, a girl who wakes up in a mysterious castle with only the memory of a strange-looking (and creepy) doll. This is a text-heavy game (almost more of an interactive novel) that plays on iOS devices, with the narrative progressing through touches and swipes. The text layout changes and branches to match player choices, and the game presents the text of the story in novel ways that take advantage of the mobile device's interface. The game features interactive puzzles that must be solved to move the narrative along as Anna tries to escape the castle and figure out why she is there.

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Barbara A. **Ward**

It Only Takes a Spark:

Almost All Changes Start with a Small, Personal Act

This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access it on the ALAN website at http://www.alan-ya.org/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

Those of us who have lived more than three or four decades have seen vast changes in the landscape around us. Some of these changes have been a long time coming, while others are not so welcome. Water and other natural resources are not as abundant as they once were thought to be, and many communities must now choose between watering their green lawns, thus depleting the water supply, or preserving the water for human and animal consumption. Several catastrophic oil spills and the looming threats of global warming are forcing us to think about our reliance on fossil fuels as energy sources and to support continued work on automobiles that run on different fuels. Our nation finally elected an African American president, its first in the country's long history. A woman is currently a legitimate contender for the nation's most important office. And gay men and women have the legal right to marry their life partners.

Snail mail has almost ceased to exist since Smartphones now allow us to contact our friends and family almost instantaneously—and get a response in lightning-quick fashion. Gone is any need for a long-distance telephone calling plan or collect calls, since most cellphones allow us to talk to anyone in the world for one small monthly fee. Long an undiscussed problem in the nation's schools, bullying is finally being addressed through various summit meetings in the White House, and many school administrations no longer dismiss violent acts as "boys being boys" or "girls being catty." Many readers now prefer to read their printed material through e-readers and not in the traditional book format with paper and binding. Even this column, thanks to today's wonders of technology, can be saved and edited multiple times or have its format, font size, and style tweaked numerous times—all without the use of Wite-Out or correcting tape. The world has changed a great deal from the time many of us were born to what it is presently. Arguably, it will continue to change, whether for better or worse, but just as being able to fly from one city to another quickly has its merits, it also has its environmental costs.

It's interesting to think about what sparks certain change or innovation. Most likely someone is discontent with the way things are or the way things are done. Perhaps this someone wants something more . . . more cheaply, quickly, efficiently, ecologically—the list goes on. I recently read Andrea Davis Pinkney's (2015) *Rhythm Ride: A Road Trip through the Motown Sound* in which she describes how Berry Gordy drew inspiration from the assembly lines of Motor City for his own musical dreams of creating stars from ordinary men and women in his neighborhood. He made changes in America's musical tastes through his nurturing of various African American musicians. And interestingly, though not surprisingly, these tastes

changed further as the nation became preoccupied with the Vietnam War, civil rights, social justice, and other matters. Almost always, changes that swept a school, a community, a nation, or even the world started small, with one man or woman or even teen, as in the case of Malala Yousafzai, a young Pakistani social activist who was shot because she insisted on attending school and spoke out for the rights of females to have an education. But what provides the impetus for that one person to stand up or to speak out for what's right? That's the focus of this issue's column.

Mahatma Gandhi has been credited with sharing these inspiring words with others: "Be the change that you wish to see in the world." Teens could do a lot worse than to pay attention to his suggestions and use those words to light their paths as they navigate treacherous waters. In the two books featured in this issue's column, two different teens face dilemmas that are in some ways unique to them and in other ways relatable to most teens. There have been countless books and articles written about the causes of bullying and how to deal with bullies. Some of that advice is useless, while some of it is helpful or at least reassuring, but each bully has his/her own unique way of reacting to others, and sometimes, it isn't an individual that is the bully, but society as a whole, or even our own internalization of what we see as society's expectations. This may have something to do with how we feel about ourselves, often thinking we are too small or too large or not pretty or handsome enough. Sometimes it has to do with thinking that we just don't measure up in some way.

The protagonist in Emil Sher's *Young Man with Camera* (2015), T—, doesn't seek out attention or necessarily want to bring attention to the subjects that he photographs, and yet, the very act of taking certain photos could be seen as an act of bravery—bravery that in some respects is just as courageous as the actions of those being photographed. In T—'s case, he takes pictures of something that his antagonist doesn't want anyone else to have seen—an act of cruelty toward a homeless woman that escalates beyond mere unkindness.

Willowdean, the protagonist of Julie Murphy's *Dumplin'* (2015), decides to start her campaign for change on a small level by embracing her size and entering the local beauty pageant. After all, she assures herself, who says a beauty queen has to be small? Although she has no expectation of winning the contest, she inspires others to stand up and be counted—or perhaps no longer to hide their identities in shame. But along the way down that oh-so-long and lonely runway, she realizes that she also has her own nest of insecurities about her body and what others may think.

About the Authors

Emil Sher

An eclectic Toronto author who has written for several different age groups, Emil Sher adapted Karen Levine's (2003) *Hana's Suitcase* for the stage. He founded the Breadbox Theatre in 2005 to introduce early-grade schoolchildren to the joys of live theater and has written poems that were published in *Chirp* magazine. With two board books to his credit—*A Button Story* (2014a) and *A Pebble Story* (2014b)—Emil has also written for older readers. *Young Man with Camera* is his debut young adult novel. Born and raised in Montreal, Emil received the 2014 K. M. Hunter Artist Award in Literature, a Canadian Screenwriting Award, and a gold medal at the New York International Festival. Learn more about Emil at his website: http://emilsher.com/.

Julie Murphy

A transplanted Southern belle who was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut, this author considers her true home to be Fort Worth, Texas, where she found her niche. She has written two books: *Side Effects May Vary* (2014) and *Dumplin',* and is hard at work on a third and a fourth one. A former reference librarian, Julie now writes full time. Fans can check out some of her short fiction at the @hanginggardenstories or learn more about her at http://andimjulie.tumblr.com/ or http://juliemurphywrites.com/.

About the Books

Young Man with Camera: A Novel with Photographs

While it's true that pictures often speak louder than words, sometimes those pictures need explication, and often the pictures spell trouble for the person who took them. In the same vein, photography can be a wonderful means of self-expression for some, but it

can also lead to controversy, trouble, and unwanted attention when the wrong picture is snapped at the wrong time. So it is for T—, the book's narrator. Ever since first grade, T— has been bullied by a group of classmates he secretly calls "Joined at the Hip," for obvious reasons. The leader is a cruel young man named Ryan, who hides his ever-growing anger and violence beneath a veneer of politeness. T— finds solace in photography as well as in his friendship with both Sean and a homeless woman named Lucy, whose wry cardboard statements provide amusing social commentary. As might be expected, Ryan's harassment of T— intensifies, especially when he realizes that T—has seen and photographed something Ryan would want no one to see. Ryan elevates his campaign against T—, and when his threats seem to have little effect on the boy, he threatens others who are important to him.

T—'s ability to see the beauty in what others might dismiss, as well as his courage in confronting evil in its most basic form, will inspire readers to their own acts of bravery.

The book contains black-and-white photos taken by the protagonist, all of which provide insight into unseen beauty. With support from Ms. Karamath, a teacher at his school, and inspiration from Diane Arbus, whose work celebrates marginalized individuals, T— finds the courage to let his images speak for him as a way to right the wrongs he sees around him. T—'s ability to see the beauty in what others might dismiss, as well as his courage in confronting evil in its most basic form, will inspire readers to their own acts of bravery. One by one, each act makes a difference in the world. As T— comes to realize, photos can also change the world by bringing attention to an issue or putting a face to a social problem.

Dumplin'

To some, country singer Dolly Parton might stand for everything artificial in the world, and yet, when she sings, her beautiful voice needs no instrument to accompany it, as her lyrics and voice tear listeners' hearts right out of their chests. Dolly matters a great deal to Willowdean Dickson, partly because Willowdean appreciates her music, but also because she shares that appreciation with her recently deceased Aunt Lucy. Sixteen-year-old Willowdean makes no bones about the matter: she is unapologetically fat. Each year she watches as her mother, a former beauty pageant winner who now runs the local Clover City event, prepares the next possible candidates for the crown. Perhaps against the odds, Willowdean is funny and filled with confidence. For the most part, she owns her size and isn't concerned about what others may think. But some of that self-confidence crumbles when she and Bo Larson, an employee at the diner where she works, begin a secret romance. She becomes anxious about his touching her fat. She's also dealing with the loss of her aunt, who died at the age of 36 weighing 498 pounds, and her mother's determination to get rid of all of Lucy's stuff.

As she feels her self-confidence undercut by her own mother, who affectionately calls her Dumplin', she decides to enter the beauty pageant—not to win, but to prove to herself and all the folks out there that beauty comes in all sorts of sizes, forms, and packages. Along with several classmates who see her as their leader in self-empowerment, Willowdean makes her way to the pageant stage but does so on her own terms. The authorial voice is particularly strong here, and it may change some minds about body size, beauty, and those silly beauty pageants. Willowdean's changes start with truly embracing herself and opening her heart to the possibility of love, friendship, and acceptance. While she teaches her mother a thing or two along the way, she has much to learn herself. It all makes me wonder, *Since beauty varies so widely from culture to culture or decade to decade, what is the point of those so-called beauty pageants? Why not an intelligence pageant?*

The Covers

Anyone who spends more than five minutes with me knows that I am crazy about book covers and love discussing them with my students, since covers often determine whether someone decides to pick up a book and read it or simply leave it on the shelf. The covers of these two books are creative and enticing, playing with perspective and shading. *Young Man with Camera*'s cover never lets us see its main character, since his face is covered by a camera lens, perhaps a symbol for the very device that allows him to give voice to his fears and what he has seen. It allows him

to hide from the viewer. Relying on blues and shading that bring to mind a darkroom, the cover allows readers to think about what is being seen, but also about who is behind that camera and who chooses the shot and how to set it up. It may be that he is not quite as hidden as he might like to think.

Dumplin' showcases a voluptuous woman—a full-figured gal, as some might say—dressed in a vivid red gown with her arms lifted to the sky, head thrown back, as if opening herself up to what might be waiting in the wings. A tiara is seen against the book's black backdrop, and the quote to "go big or go home" is a great reminder to seize life rather than wait for that right moment or that right size or that right person to be dropped in your lap. Because readers cannot see the face of this young woman—only her chin, nose, golden locks, and her transcendent joy—she could be anyone. While she is clearly not hiding—that red dress makes that impossible—at the same time, she isn't revealing everything to us, either.

Using the Books in the Classroom

Prereading Activities

Examine the covers of both books before beginning to read them. Have the class discuss what possible elements have been included and which ones have been omitted and how students feel about those artistic decisions.

Using video clips and photos showing standards of beauty over the decades as well as the documentary and news notes from "The Ideal Woman through the Ages" at http://news.discovery.com/history/art-history/history-beauty-120412.htm, discuss how standards of beauty have evolved and why there is such a focus on beauty for females and, less often, for males. Who decides what those standards for perfection are? Also, share with the class the promotion for a campaign called "Changing the Face of Beauty: Capturing Grace One Face at a Time," which is working to include individuals with disabilities in the media and in advertising campaigns at http://changingthefaceofbeauty.org/. There are many related YouTube clips supporting this campaign that can be found simply by Googling the phrase "changing the face of beauty." Share and discuss with the class these Dove Real Beauty Sketches at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=litXW91UauE, as well as the Dove Campaign for Real Beauty (Male Version) at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_I17cK1ltY.

When discussion turns to bullying, have the class make a list of what comprises bullying and then rank order the class's list from 1 to 10, with one being the worst kind of bullying and ten being the least intimidating type of bullying. Encourage discussion about perceptions of levels of bullying. For instance, what might seem to be at first a fairly harmless type of bullying, such as teasing or name calling, can escalate into something more dangerous. Then read aloud the international picturebook *Red* by Jan de Kinder (2015), in which the narrator teases her young classmate Tommy because of his tendency to blush easily. Discuss how her teasing the boy for something that commonly happens to everyone escalates and how the narrator must find the courage to stand up to the bully Paul, even though he may turn on her. After all, she describes him in this way: "His tongue is as sharp as a knife. And his fist is as hard as a brick. He's twice as strong as me" (unpaged). Ask the class if those words are effective in describing the bullies they or others have encountered. Why or why not?

Because readers cannot see the face of this young woman . . . she could be anyone. While she is clearly not hiding—that red dress makes that impossible—at the same time, she isn't revealing everything to us, either.

Interdisciplinary Connections

The impact of art through music or photography is felt throughout both books. Spend a few hours browsing the covers of popular magazines at your local newsstand or online. What do the images found on those covers tell you about what our society or the readers of the magazines may value? Spend a couple of hours or a day, if you have the time to spare, listening to a local radio station that plays top 40 or country songs. Record your observations about what songs are played, who sings them, what their topics and themes are and any subliminal or overt messages that you can

detect from them. Often, when I spend a lot of time in my car or jump into it at the start of the day and then again at the end of the day, I am dumbfounded that the very same song that was playing at 6 a.m. can be heard again at 3:30 p.m. Why is that?

For a deeper understanding of the impact of music in *Dumplin'*, check out these clips featuring Dolly Parton singing "I Will Always Love You" at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v = XHw62eZpHk4 and "Jolene" at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v = 1plvBR02wDs.

As for the power of photography, students will enjoy seeing the images described in *Young Man with Camera* in these clips of "Diane Arbus—Secrets—Photography":

- "Masters of Photography" at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v = E5BmKx5KeCE
- "The Terror of War" at https://www.flickr.com/photos/nostri-imago/4427918225/ and http://abcnews.go.com/blogs/headlines/2012/06/the-historic-napalm-girl-pulitzer-image-marks-its-40th-anniversary/
- "Tank Man vs. Chinese Tank in Tiananmen Square" at http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q = tank + man&view = detail&mid = 343D625BBDF2F5A1AC6F343D625BBDF2F5A1AC6F&FORM = VIRE2
- "Tank Man: The Amazing Story of THAT Photo" at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v = SACHK-W4o1E

Group Discussion Questions

- Willowdean Dickson in *Dumplin'* and T— in *Young Man with Camera* deal with life in very different ways. Willowdean is more assertive, almost courting controversy or daring someone to make comments about her, while T— prefers to stay below the radar and avoid trouble. With which protagonist do you identify most? Why? If you were telling their story from another point of view, say, Ellen, Willowdean's best friend, or Sean, T—'s only friend, how might the story be different? What do Ellen and Sean notice about their friends that others may not?
- Names matter, and so do nicknames. In Willowdean's case, her mother's affectionate use of the moniker "Dumplin'" shows her fondness for her daughter but also an utter disregard for Willowdean's feelings. In T—'s case, he prefers an initial letter rather than a name since that helps him remain hidden and unknown. Why do you think this is the case for the two of them? Talk to your parent(s) or guardian(s) and other family members to learn more about the origin or significance of your name and/or nickname. Then write a brief piece introducing yourself to a stranger through telling the story of your name.
- Many sports teams have mascots and names that some groups find culturally offensive because they attribute certain acts of violence or warlike behavior to certain ethnic groups. What do you think?
- Why is it so difficult to speak up for what is right? Is it harder to speak up for *ourselves* or for *others*? Why do you think as you do? Is it possible to speak up for both at the same time? Does speaking up necessarily mean using one's voice, or can it occur through art, music, or even a refusal to speak?
- Both protagonists face bullying of different sorts. At her high school, athlete Patrick Thomas delights in ridiculing Dumplin' for her size and teasing her would-be boyfriend Mitch for dating a large woman. T— has faced constant teasing and escalating harassment from Ryan and the crew he has dubbed "Joined at the Hip" ever since first grade. What prompts these characters to belittle Willowdean and T—? If you could respond to them, what would you say to make them stop? What are some reasons that others pick on classmates? Discuss a time when you yourself experienced bullying or bullied someone or watched bullying happen and then did nothing. How would you react now?
- Although both protagonists have loving parents, their parents are also clueless in many respects. T— knows that his parents will buy Ryan's good boy act and dismiss T—'s fears about his attacker, while Willowdean lives with a mother whose values and ways of behaving are very different from hers. Why do you think T—'s parents are so quick to believe the best of Ryan and the worst of their son? Why does Willowdean's mother fail to understand the strong connection her daughter had with her Aunt Lucy?
- Creative expression matters in both of the books. In *Dumplin',* Willowdean fashions a hat representing a part of Texas and is moved by the songs of country singer Dolly Parton; in *Young Man with*

Camera, T— uses his camera to record the world as he sees it. Suppose the two characters traded their creative connections. What do you think Willowdean would photograph? What music would make sense to T—? Why?

- What were your favorite scenes or passages in each book? Why? Were you drawn to the humor or the pathos in each book? After all, there is plenty of both threaded through the narratives.
- Both protagonists find inspiration in the actions of others, some famous and others not so famous. How would you define the word "courage"? Make a list of courageous acts, and then rank them according to how much courage you think each one takes to commit.
- Although songs and photographs capture moments or experiences in time, they also immortalize those moments in a sense. What song or photograph would best represent you or your generation? Why?
- What do you think: Is a picture worth a thousand words? Or is one word worth a thousand pictures?
- Trying on bathing suits or appearing in public in a bathing suit is difficult for many reasons, according to Willowdean in *Dumplin'*. At beauty pageants, contestants often need to show their poise, their talent, but also their beauty through the wearing of a bathing suit. What do you think about this practice? Why is there no equivalent of the Miss America or Miss Universe pageants for men other than those related to body building? What does this say about how we define or identify beauty?
- Lucy, the homeless woman that T— spends a lot of time photographing, is a complex character. The author never tells readers her backstory, but he does make it clear that she is content with her life choices. What might some of the reasons be for someone becoming homeless? What are some of the advantages and disadvantages or dangers that the homeless face?
- Because many of those who are homeless are marginalized by society, their stories surely matter. What are some possible solutions to the widespread homeless problem in our nation?
- Learn some startling facts about homelessness in the United States from the National Alliance to End Homelessness at http://www.endhomelessness.org/library/entry/the-state-of-homelessness-in-america-2015. Based on the group's records and conjectures, on a single night in January 2014, 578,424 people were either sleeping outside or in an emergency shelter or transitional housing program. The report contains a map showing areas where homelessness is more prevalent.
- Check out information about reasons behind homelessness on PBS's Facts and Figures: The Homeless at http://www.pbs.org/now/shows/526/homeless-facts.html.
- Read about how one state is working to solve its homeless problem in this article, "Utah Found a Brilliantly Effective Solution for Homelessness," at http://www.businessinsider.com/this-state-may-be-the-first-to-end-homelessness-for-good-2015-2. What do you think? Could this work? What other possible solutions might end the problem of homelessness?
- Investigate the issue of homelessness in your own community and state. What are some of the challenges raised by this problem? What pros and cons do you see to solving the problem? You might also enjoy reading Elliott Liebow's (1993) *Tell Them Who I Am: Lives of Homeless Women*, which relates the stories of women who have spent a considerable amount of time living on the street.
- What sort of photographs might T— from *Young Man with Camera* have taken of the denizens at the Hideaway in *Dumplin'*? What do you think he might have found worth photographing about them? Do the right clothing and makeup make someone into an attractive woman? Or is it something else entirely? Explain your comments.
- Which character has the most impact on his/her world? Why do you think as you do? What possible long-range changes might their actions have on those around them? Which character would you most likely emulate when it comes to taking some kind of action? Why?

Wonderful Words Worth Noting

With the words they choose and the way they place those words, good writers help readers become familiar with their characters. Find a partner and discuss these quotes. Be sure to explain what each passage reveals about the character or how the quote makes you feel. What makes the passage particularly memorable? Or if you don't like the lines, tell why they don't appeal to you or why they seem inauthentic.

From *Young Man with Camera*

- "The truth is like our kitchen wall. It looks yellow. It is yellow. But there's more than one yellow. Truth, like yellow, comes in a thousand different shades." (p. 6)
- "After that I took a whole bunch of pictures of doorknobs. They're not something anyone ever thinks about but you would miss them as soon as they were gone." (p. 22)
- "That's another reason why I love photographs. They can say things you didn't hear the first time you looked at them." (p. 23)
- "This laughter was thick gravy you pour over platefuls of grief to disguise the taste." (p. 37)
- "When someone goes, they take all the missing parts with them. Maybe that's one reason why we miss them so much." (p. 92)
- "I wanted to clean up the mess. I wasn't sure how I knew Sean was right. The mess would keep spreading like those huge oil spills that turn blue water black and leave birds so covered with oil they never fly again." (p. 108)
- "If disappointment was a perfume, my mother would have bottles of the stuff." (p. 110)
- "There's another reason why we need photographs. To remember what was there before it disappears." (p. 122)
- "I thought of the photographs I had seen of people who survived natural disasters. Earthquakes and monsoons and tsunamis. They all look the same, dazed and dented and out of batteries." (p. 127)
- "The truth is as easy to crop as a photograph." (p. 155)
- "A ton of words were bumper-cars colliding in my head but only one made it to my mouth." (p. 183)
- "Some days I think there's this river between parents and their kids and you don't know if you'll ever find the bridge that connects them. Some days I think the river is bridgeless." (p. 184)

From *Dumplin'*

- "But that's me. I'm fat. It's not a cuss word. It's not an insult. At least not when I say it. So I always figure why not get it out of the way?" (p. 9)
- "I get what he means, because I think I've played pretend my whole life. I don't know when, but a really long time ago, I decided who I wanted to be. And I've been acting like her—whoever she is—since. But I think the act is fading, and I don't know if I like the person I am beneath it all." (p. 240)
- "I guess it could be that she was trying to be intuitive to whatever privacy needs she figured I might have. But the thought tickling in the back of my mind says that she's not interested in being reminded of this body I wear." (p. 257)
- "Because I can't bear to tell him no. Not yet. I want to live with the possibility of what could be. If only for a couple days." (p. 291)
- "I don't even want to win, but I think there's this survival instinct inside all of us that clicks on when we see other people failing. It makes me feel gross and incredibly human." (p. 329)
- "There's some kind of peace that comes with knowing that for every person who is waiting to be found, there's someone out there searching." (p. 345)
- "I guess sometimes the perfection we perceive in others is made up of a whole bunch of tiny imperfections, because some days the damn dress just won't zip." (p. 369)

Post-Reading Activities

- Peruse both books. Pick out some of your favorite words or phrases, copy those down on paper or print them out in different sizes, sort them out so that they form a word collage, and then add splashes of color to your creation. Be sure to share your creative product with a classmate, or post it in the classroom or school hall along with a pen and paper asking others to record their comments.
- Take a camera or Smartphone with you all day and record 10 things that seem important to you. Print out the images, arrange them however you like, and ask your classmates to create captions for each of them.
- Imagine that you are Lucy or Sean in *Young Man with a Camera* or Aunt Lucy or Bo in *Dumplin'* and that you keep a diary or a journal of your daily life. Write a series of five entries that provide insight into your character and your motivation.
- Ms. Karamath works hard to provide support and guidance to T—, and yet he never tells her the full story of his situation. T— reads part of her letter from the blue binder in which she attempts to make sense of what has happened. Write the rest

of the letter that she would have written, and then, channeling T—, create a photographic response back to her in which you tell your story.
- Selfies are ubiquitous these days. While sometimes selfies can do harm, at other times they can be empowering. In order to feel empowered and good about yourself, gather some of your friends and classmates and make a collection of selfies that celebrate what is best about each other. You may choose to do a self-portrait or a group portrait or even ask one another to take selfies of what each of you considers the best aspect of you and then gather all of those images together.
- Design and then sew Willowdean's pageant dress. If you are feeling particularly bold, why not model it for your classmates?
- Draw a mind portrait of what you think T— looks like. Be sure to use illustrations as well as descriptive words to highlight physical characteristics and personality traits.

These Remind Me of You

Although they choose to cope in different ways, the protagonists in both books deal with tough issues. Their small changes on a personal level may inspire others to make changes in their own approaches to life or heighten others' awareness of issues that need solutions. For instance, bullying and body shaming exist in every school and in every classroom, even though they may be hidden, and often acts of bullying occur on the way to and from school. See cj Bott's excellent resources *The Bully in the Book and in the Classroom* (2004) and *More Bullies in More Books* (2009) for more titles that might have a place in the classroom. The ones listed below provide great starting points for exploring bullying and body image issues. Not surprisingly, one of the changes prompted by the digital age is the feeling of anonymity that can lead to posting provocative texts or photos.

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James Blasingame E. Sybil Durand

Right to Read

E. Sybil **Durand** and
James **Blasingame**
with
Gary **Paulsen**

Do No Harm

This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access it on the ALAN website at http://www.alan-ya.org/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

"Read because it illuminates and frees us."
(G. Paulsen, personal communication, April 14, 2015)

A loosely translated phrase from the Hippocratic Oath, often glamorized in movies and on television, admonishes physicians in treating their patients to "First, do no harm." For our third and final column, we are entreating teachers and librarians to take that same ancient oath, to do no harm. We are taking a stand, not only for the right of young people to have access to and to read the books that some factions of society find objectionable, but more important, we are taking a stand for the responsibility of teachers and librarians to advocate for and even champion the reading and teaching of these very books. Failure to do so perpetrates a form of harm on young people and the world.

We recruited Gary Paulsen to provide some insight from the perspective of an author who suffered more than his share of abuse and adversity as a child and one who believes that we do neither kids nor society any favors when we promote only literature that avoids life's important, sometimes ugly, issues. We start with an examination of who gets hurt when we fail to provide our young people with meaningful reading, and we end with Gary's admonition to do what is best for young people by choosing books that will prepare them for life—not storybook life, but real life.

Who Is Harmed by Book Banning?

Most of us, at one time or another, have probably heard a colleague say, "Why choose books with potentially controversial content when there are so many good books out there that don't have any material that might offend people? Why take the chance of riling up parents, or going against the agenda of local political groups, or placing teachers' jobs in jeopardy with conservative school board members if you don't have to?" These are honest questions, and they deserve honest answers.

Is there a good reason to promote the reading and study of books that are likely to make some people uncomfortable or to offend some people? Yes. Yes, there absolutely is. The reason is that someone gets hurt when we do not. When we choose to abandon books that deal with issues of race, sex, abuse, gender identity, discrimination, disenfranchisement, or similar topics, we hurt the people who live with these issues every day by implying that their life experiences are not worth talking about, or are an embarrassment, or are simply wrong. When these stories are absent from the curriculum or libraries, when these experiences are not reflected in the books and stories that are available, accessible, and taught, then we risk telling the young people who face these issues that their lives must not matter.

As Atticus Finch once said about our nation's courtrooms, our schools and public libraries should be places where all people are equal, places where all

lives matter, equally (Lee, 1960). These are places to learn a great variety of things, such as why one life is just as valuable as any other and how to make the world a better place for all people, not just some. We are morally obligated to read and study literature that exposes our students to the realities of lives lived with difficulty, realities known only too well by the person in the next seat or the next classroom or the next county. We are obligated to provide our students with literature that may show how some of us, teachers as well as students, consciously or unconsciously, are the perpetrators of injustice against our fellow human beings, hurting people by the hundreds, thousands, maybe even millions. Books provide a powerful means for exposing truths, highlighting social contradictions, and mobilizing people to work for change.

What Books Are Banned and Why?

When access to the power of books is denied, people get hurt, especially young people who are often the same people who are already victimized in life. It's not too hard to figure out who these young people are; it's almost a matter of record. The American Library Association's Office for Intellectual Freedom keeps an annual list of the "most frequently challenged books" and the accompanying reasons given by those who attempt to keep these books away from young readers. As expected, the 2014 list reads like both an all-star honor roll and a lineup of the usual suspects. The four most frequently challenged books include *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007), an illustrated novel by Sherman Alexie; *Persepolis: The Story of a Childhood* (2003), a graphic memoir by Marjane Satrapi; *And Tango Makes Three* (2005), a children's picturebook by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell; and *The Bluest Eye* (1970), a novel by Toni Morrison. It seems both obvious and alarming that the most challenged books are also multicultural stories representing experiences related to race and sexuality. Let's look at three of them and examine who is most likely to get hurt when these books are withheld.

Censoring Bullying, Race, and Disability

In first place is Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2007). Although this novel won the National Book Award and was highly acclaimed for its depiction of the hardships faced by a Native American young man navigating two different worlds—Native American and White—challengers were offended by, among other things, its "depictions of bullying" (Office for Intellectual Freedom). Born with multiple disabilities, Alexie's protagonist, Junior, is bullied relentlessly for his differences. Nevertheless, he finds ways to cope with both his disabilities and the horrible treatment by his peers. In the end, he is a victor in sports, academics, and high school society.

We are morally obligated to read and study literature that exposes our students to the realities of lives lived with difficulty, realities known only too well by the person in the next seat or the next classroom or the next county.

According to the National Education Association (2011), 32 million kids are bullied at school; each day, 160,000 of those kids stay home from school to avoid being bullied. And the results of bullying can be drastic: "Five studies reported that bullying victims were two to nine times more likely to report suicidal thoughts than other children," according to a meta study done at Yale University (Peart, 2008). Even more concerning are the statistics on suicide for Native American and Native Alaskan youth. According to the National Congress of American Indians, there are 2.9 million self-identifying Native American/Native Alaskans in the United States, and 32% of those, about 928,000, are under the age of 18. According to the National Education Association (2011), Native American and Native Alaskan youth are three times as likely to commit suicide as their non-Native peers, often because of bullying:

> NEA thinks it's important that educators know about the link between bullying and suicide. The vast majority of American Indian and Alaska Native students attend our K–12 public schools. And as educators committed to the proposition that every student has the right to learn, grow, and develop his or her full potential, we think it is critical that we address the bullying issue.

Taken together, these statistics support our assertion that educators have a moral obligation to address social issues that youth face, especially when considering the intersections of bullying and Native

American/Native Alaskan youth suicide. A book like *Absolutely True Diary* has the potential to validate the experiences of youth located at these intersections and to expose all young people to these issues. Inversely, censoring this story and others like it contributes to a harmful silence about these experiences.

Censoring Sexuality

And Tango Makes Three (2005), by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell, comes in at number three among challenged or censored books, primarily because it "promotes the homosexual agenda" (Office for Intellectual Freedom). This book, based on a true story about two male penguins in the New York Central Park Zoo who raised a chick from an egg, is most often the target of religious conservatives who believe that same-sex marriage is wrong and harmful to children brought up in same-sex families. According to Justin Richardson, "We wrote the book to help parents teach children about same-sex parent families. It's no more an argument in favor of human gay relationships than it is a call for children to swallow their fish whole or sleep on rocks" (Miller, 2005).

Who gets hurt when we fail to use books like *The Bluest Eye*, when we sweep so-called "controversial issues" under the rug and pretend they don't happen? The victims. Maybe even some of the perpetrators.

Should children learn about homosexuality and same-sex parent families? The facts are overwhelmingly in favor of this. Four major population surveys conducted between 2006 and 2014 reveal that between 2.2% and 4% of US adults age 18 or older self-reported as gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (LGBT) (Gates, 2014, p. 1). Note the "self-reported" qualifier. No one really knows how many people fit into these categories, how many categories there really are, or whether such categories even work for human sexuality. Nevertheless, there are significant numbers of people in the US and the world who identify as LGBT. Surely they deserve more than one little picturebook about penguins!

Censoring Sexual Assault

Number four on the list is *The Bluest Eye* (1970), by Nobel Prize winner Toni Morrison, challenged most often for being sexually explicit and because it "contains controversial issues" (Office for Intellectual Freedom). These issues are almost certainly incest, pedophilia, and rape. The title of the novel and its premise—that White standards for feminine beauty trump all others—focus on deeply ingrained racism, but the most commonly criticized scene depicts the novel's main character, 11-year-old Pecola Breedlove, being raped by her father. Detractors often call this scene pornographic, incorrectly interpreting a literary depiction of an act as approval of that act.

Nevertheless, many people believe they are doing young people a favor by keeping this book out of their hands. As a complainant said in Wake County, North Carolina, after challenging the use of *The Bluest Eye* in one teacher's Advanced Placement classes at East Wake County High School, "We're giving these images to our kids, and I think that's wrong when these kids are at an influential phase in their life" (Hankerson, 2014). The sexually abused protagonist is 11. The students reading the book, with guidance from a professional educator, are between 16 and 18.

What is the reality of our students' world during this "influential phase"? Does knowing the facts of this "controversial issue" help prevent it from happening? According to the US Department of Justice:

> Providing facts about sexual abuse is one of the ways to raise awareness about sexual abuse. Awareness of the facts is one of several preventive measures that can be taken to assist you in making better decisions to keep you and someone you know safe.

So what *are* the facts according to the Department of Justice website?

- Approximately 30% of sexual assault cases are reported to authorities.
- 62,939 cases of child sexual abuse were reported in 2012.
- According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics' National Criminal Victimization Survey, in 2012, there were 346,830 reported rapes or sexual assaults of persons 12 years or older.
- About 30% of perpetrators of child sexual abuse are family members.

- Approximately 1.8 million adolescents in the United States have been the victims of sexual assault.
- Research conducted by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) estimates that approximately 1 in 6 boys and 1 in 4 girls are sexually abused before the age of 18.
- 69% of the teen sexual assaults reported to law enforcement occurred in the residence of the victim, the offender, or another individual.
- Approximately 1 in 5 female high school students reports being physically and/or sexually abused by a dating partner.
- Not all sexually abused children exhibit symptoms—some estimate that up to 40% of sexually abused children are asymptomatic; however, others experience serious and long-standing consequences.
- Disclosure of sexual abuse is often delayed; children often avoid telling because they are either afraid of a negative reaction from their parents or of being harmed by the abuser. As such, they often delay disclosure until adulthood. (US Department of Justice)

Who gets hurt when we fail to use books like *The Bluest Eye*, when we sweep so-called "controversial issues" under the rug and pretend they don't happen? The victims. Maybe even some of the perpetrators. And both might have sought help if they realized they were not alone.

Rather than steering clear of books like *The Bluest Eye* or any book that tackles sexual abuse head on, we need to steer right at them by facilitating their reading, researching the issues they represent, and discussing them in our classrooms and libraries. We need look no further than the impact of Laurie Halse Anderson's *Speak* (1999), a frequently challenged book that depicts the experience of a ninth-grade girl who is raped by a senior boy at a high school beer party, to find evidence of what can happen when we do. For example, researcher Malo-Juvera (2014) conducted a survey of students who read *Speak* in their eighth-grade English classes. The study revealed that reading and discussing the novel effectively decreased students' acceptance of rape myths, including blaming the victim, compared to students who had not read the book.

Macmillan, the publisher of *Speak*, also takes the impact of the book seriously. On the 15-year anniversary of *Speak*'s release, Macmillan agreed to match up to $15,000 in private donations to the Rape, Abuse, and Incest National Network (RAINN), a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization whose mission is to provide help to victims of sexual assault of all kinds. As the largest anti-sexual assault organization in the United States, RAINN "operates the National Sexual Assault Hotline . . . in partnership with more than 1,100 local sexual assault service providers across the country and operates the DoD Safe Helpline for the Department of Defense," including services in Spanish.

Books affect, change, even save, lives. We are called to share the best of them, not the most sanitized, not the least disturbing, not the most disinfected of society's ills, but the best of them.

By its 14th anniversary in 2014, *Speak* had sold over 3 million copies. Who knows how many friends passed on a dog-eared copy to the next friend in line to read it? The book inspired a movie with Kristen Stewart as Melinda and Steve Zahn as the art teacher. Suffice it to say that most teenage young women in the US know this book, but let's hear it right from the source, a teenage young woman's blog:

> Chances are, if you went to middle school, are in middle school, or know someone in middle school, you've read *Speak*. And, chances are, it meant everything to you. Anderson's most famous novel was (and still is) a staple in the classrooms and bookshelves of teenage girls everywhere, and I've yet to meet a woman my age whose formative years weren't at least partly shaped by Melinda Sordino and her horrible freshman year. (Simon, 2015)

Books affect, change, even save, lives. We are called to share the best of them, not the most sanitized, not the least disturbing, not the most disinfected of society's ills, but the best of them. We may think we do no one ill when we shy away from the most challenged titles, but we actually do great harm. We fail to provide the means to heal and understand life to our world's most marginalized.

Reading to Arm Oneself: An Author's Perspective

Gary Paulsen has never shirked away from telling the unvarnished truth, especially when kids are involved and lying to them about the world is such a disservice. We end with wisdom he was kind enough to share with us for the purpose of this final column. Many thanks to his agent, Jennifer Flannery, for her help.

> I always say my writing comes from personal inspection at zero altitude. That's true, but I've left some serious skin in the game along the way: abusive parents, lousy grades and no friends in school, alcoholism, dead-end career paths, the illnesses and deaths of friends and loved ones, being cheated and stolen from, bad choices that led to aches and pains from broken bones and other injuries in the wilderness and on the sea.
>
> If there's anything to be gained from all those nightmares, I hope it's that I've shared my experiences, and the fact that I've survived them all, with young readers. So that the kids who read my books don't have to feel alone, so they can pick up, maybe, a few pointers about dealing with, as my hero Shakespeare puts it, "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune."
>
> Life is not always pretty, and it's very seldom fair. Turn on the news—murder, rape, drugs, terrorism, theft, violence—they're some of the notes that make up the dance of life. And I've always thought that giving kids a safe place to explore these horrific concepts—in the pages of a book, with teachers and librarians and parents to help lend perspective—is one of the best ways to arm our young people with the information they need, not only to survive, but to thrive; not only to cope with the horrors, but to become the force that helps stop them.
>
> From prehistoric time, when cavemen danced around the fire telling what the hunt was like, it's been human nature to share our stories. We write about what happened to us so that others might learn, might grow, might not suffer so much in the future.
>
> Read.
>
> Read everything you can get your hands on.
>
> Read because it illuminates and frees us.
>
> Read like a wolf eats. (G. Paulsen, personal communication, April 14, 2015)

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Sandra Schamroth Abrams


Hannah R. Gerber

Layered Literacies

Carolyn J. **Stufft**
with
Sandra Schamroth **Abrams**
and Hannah R. **Gerber**

Critical Thinking and Layered Understandings:

Book Clubs, Videogames, and Adolescent Learning

This article is also available in an online format that allows direct access to all links included. We encourage you to access it on the ALAN website at http://www.alan-ya.org/publications/the-alan-review/the-alan-review-columns/.

Layering literacies in the classroom involves educators and students thinking expansively about the integration and application of digital and nondigital resources, including experiences and perspectives (Abrams, 2015). In this column, Carolyn Stufft examines how seven adolescent males integrated their videogame experiences into their YAL book club discussions, building upon Gerber's (2009) research that compared videogame and young adult literature (YAL) genres. More specifically, in "Videogames and YA Literature: Using Book Groups to Layer Literacies," Stufft suggests that traditional book clubs can become contemporary learning spaces when they hinge on interest-driven content. Further, adolescents can engage in critical evaluations of texts when they build upon their videogame experiences to interpret young adult literature.

As Stufft's work reveals, the adolescents in the after-school book club juxtaposed a range of literate experiences, from their reading of YAL to their videogame playing to their movie watching. The adolescents' conversations revealed a layering of literacies that supported expansive and critical understandings of YAL and their own learning experiences. Stufft's findings suggest that bridging traditional and contemporary practices may not be as onerous as some may think; in fact, many students already draw parallels between their experiences, and educators can use these rich conversations to help scaffold students' discussions and hone their critical thinking skills, all the while respecting and honoring students' literate experiences that extend beyond the book.

Videogames and YA Literature: Using Book Groups to Layer Literacies

by Carolyn J. Stufft

Seven male high school students sat around a table in the corner of their inner-city school's library to discuss the book *Game Slaves* by Gard Skinner (2014). These 10th- and 11th-grade students were members of an after-school videogame club, which included a book group that met every other week during the Spring 2014 semester; the students read two books, *Assassin's Creed: Renaissance* (Bowden, 2009) and *Game Slaves*, and asked each other questions about the text. As a researcher, my role was to listen to and facilitate the book group's discussions when appropriate.

What emerged from the book group's discussion on that particular day was a conversation in which the students seamlessly moved between the YA book *Game Slaves* and their experiences with videogames and movies. The following is a direct transcript (all names are student-selected pseudonyms) that provides insight into the seven adolescents' literacy practices and meaning-making experiences:

Aditya: So, let's say if it was a game, if there was a game called *Game Slaves* and it was based on this book . . .

Mateo: No, I would not play it.

Diego: I would give it a chance, you know.

Mateo: No, it's one of those things that . . . it was poorly structured. The story was lacking details.

Deshi: I don't think it'd be bad. I just don't think it has the game play elements it would need.

Aditya: So, what is missing that would help turn the book into a game?

Mateo: Um, a better structure in the story because there's things still missing. One, we don't know what in the world all of those . . . those monsters that they're facing. We don't know the backstory about it.

Diego: Oh, yeah!

Mateo: It wasn't giving much detail other than everything looks like a basic barren desert inside the city.

Deshi: I feel like there was a lot of detail, in my opinion. Yeah, details of the outside world. I guess that's what I'm trying to say.

Mateo: I'd give it a four. Everything is in it, it's good, but it's still missing those parts we were talking about.

Aditya: Like story-wise?

Mateo: Yeah.

Deshi: Mm, I'd give it a three out of five. I think it has too many flaws for me to rate any higher. Just lack of details of the outside world, you know.

Aditya: Well, my rating would be uh, four because, uh, the story, I like the idea of how it has that detailed narration of action. Like, that tells me, okay, if it was made into a movie or a game, it'd be a pretty good one. But the bad thing is, that story of human, it's confusing, it's missing.

Deshi: Yeah, uh, it explains how the game world works but not the real-life world.

Book clubs and videogames? Indeed, the high school students analyzed two books, including story structure, details, and craft.

The Relevance of Book Clubs

The book club is not a new phenomenon. Following an established practice, teachers have employed book groups as an approach to teaching reading (Raphael & McMahon, 1994) and have used book groups within English language arts classes and across content areas to both engage students and support content learning (e.g., Long & Roessing, 2015). As students respond to texts within book groups, they have the ability not only to discuss books, but also to share their own interpretations of and reactions to each text. According to Louise Rosenblatt's (1978/1994) transactional theory, aesthetic reading involves attention being "centered directly on what he [the reader] is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (p. 25); engaging with a text, "the reader finds it necessary to construct the speaker, the author . . . as part of what he decodes from the text" (p. 20).

Rosenblatt's theory applies to other texts, including digital texts (Evans & Po, 2007) and videogames (e.g., Sanders, 2013), as readers actively construct meaning. When "a reader is successful in applying . . . genre-related strategies, the text will generally provide a satisfying aesthetic experience" (McEneaney, 2006, p. 362). For students who are gamers, the relationship with a given text may be influenced by personal experiences with videogames, as evidenced through the discussions with these seven high school gamers. When the students drew upon their gaming knowledge to interpret *Game Slaves*, they experienced personally relevant learning, as the "text comes alive for an actively engaged reader" and the student has "something worth discussing" above and beyond the content of a particular book (Galda, 2013, p. 12). Researchers and educators have showcased intersections between videogames and traditional literature (Abrams, 2009; Brinckerhoff, 2007; Gerber, 2009; Gerber & Price, 2011; Hidey, 2006; Steinkuehler & Squire, 2014); book groups provide another avenue for layering students' literacies.

Videogame book groups provide a space for students to layer literacies as part of their discussions, which may, in turn, provide a setting to share learning, such as students linking content from a history course to the historical setting of a videogame (Abrams, 2009), exploring science concepts through videogame play (Annetta et al., 2013), and using a videogame like *Portal 2* as part of English language arts, math, and technology education (Abrams & Russo, 2015). By offering a setting within which students can explore and discuss their gaming experiences, teachers may be able to help students develop a deeper understanding of more traditional texts (Beavis, 2012). In this sense, book groups provide a space for students to share gaming experiences and to refer to other media of interest as they interpret a YA text; the book group can act as a springboard for students to continue to learn both within and beyond school.

Layered literacies involve interest-driven movement between online and offline spaces as youth engage in multimodal meaning making within and between in-school and out-of-school spaces.

The transcript also suggests that the students related ideas from the YA book to their experiences with other forms of media, including movies and videogames. In fact, they engaged in the type of plot analysis that may be part of a traditional English classroom discussion. However, the students also extended such an analysis to include a range of literary elements, turning to other forms of media, including videogames, to explain their points. When they discussed *Game Slaves*, the adolescents' critiques varied as they mentioned backstory, action, setting, and videogame mechanics (i.e., the rules and/or design within a videogame that allow for interactivity between the player and the game; see Sicart [2008] for additional information). Mateo, for instance, focused on narrative details and a lack of backstory, while Deshi referred both to videogame interactivity and to setting. Aditya considered story elements related to action for movies, videogames, and books. As they analyzed *Game Slaves*, these high school students examined the text in relation to a variety of literary and videogame elements.

Layered literacies involve interest-driven movement between online and offline spaces as youth engage in multimodal meaning making within and between in-school and out-of-school spaces; layering literacies also involves iterative learning and practices that inform one another regardless of where they take place (Abrams, 2015). In other words, students' interests (such as videogames) help students discuss, connect, consider, and layer a variety of media as part of the meaning-making process. The students may perceive how a particular videogame setting relates to a passage in a book; students may then advance that analysis and compare both to a movie with a similar plot. What we see, then, is students moving seamlessly among in-school, out-of-school, online, and offline experiences. This type of learning and layering continues and cycles between and among the different forms of media. In the case of the seven youth in the after-school, teacher-sponsored videogame club, the learners engaged with various experiences, texts, and modalities as they understood YA literature through their videogaming experiences.

YA Literature and Videogames in Book Groups

As noted earlier, for the book group the students read *Assassin's Creed: Renaissance* and *Game Slaves.* The former directly corresponds with the *Assassin's Creed* videogame series (Ubisoft Entertainment, 2007), whereas the latter includes gaming terminology and characteristics but is not itself related to an existing videogame. The *Assassin's Creed* videogame series centers around the conflict between two opposing factions, the Knights Templar and the Assassin Order, with characters from the Assassin Order completing missions in adherence to the Assassin's Creed that guides their actions.

The YA text *Game Slaves* follows the lives of Team Phoenix, a group of in-game avatars consisting of Dakota, Mi, Reno, York, Jevo, and their leader Phoenix. The team faces battles together within their virtual world while observing the rules they are expected to follow. Dakota, however, does not accept the rules at face value and instead questions the *status quo*, leading to a seismic shift in perception for the other characters as they navigate and explore whether they are inside or outside a videogame. As one of the high school students described it, *Game Slaves* is about "taking real people and putting them in the Internet, basically."

Students began book-group discussions by comparing characters within the book and analyzing the setting; they also were quick to layer literacies and draw parallels between the book and other media, such as movies and videogames that had plots and actions similar to that of *Game Slaves*. Students even extended game-based understandings to critique the book. One teen suggested that the character Dakota could be considered part of a DLC (i.e., downloadable content) package, thereby applying videogame background knowledge to his interpretation of YA literature.

For these students, videogames served as texts in their own right, yet differed from traditional books. When discussing the characters and setting of *Game Slaves*, for instance, Mateo compared and contrasted the YA book to a videogame: "And it reminds me of [the] TimeSplitters [series] because in *TimeSplitters: Future Perfect*, it turns out all of the TimeSplitters are genetic [sic] mutated people and clones. They were. And see, they're all . . . they're all being made . . . for world conquering. And so, even though it's not the similar story, it's still the genetic mutation thing."

Mateo critiqued *Game Slaves* by saying that more description is needed for the portions of the plot that take place outside of a videogame setting: "Whenever they're in the game, they're fully detailed. I mean, I could even see all the skeletons and dogs. But when they're out of the game, they're, it's like, it lacks the rest of the details." Through comments like these, the students provided insight into ways they were able to visualize the parts of *Game Slaves* that are set within a videogame but needed additional details to better envision action that takes place in other settings within the book.

As they reflected on *Game Slaves*, the group members noticed similarities between the book and videogames such as *Fallout 3* (Bethesda Game Studios, 2008), *Borderlands* (Gearbox Software, 2009), *TimeSplitters* (Free Radical Design, 2000), *Left for Dead 2* (Valve Corporation, 2009), and *Call of Duty* (Infinity Ward, 2003). In each instance, students provided examples of characters, setting, or plot from *Games Slaves* that related to a videogame; that is, they were able to tie YA literature to videogames as part of a dialogue that flowed from experiences with traditional text to experiences with multimodal representations in other forms of media. In most cases, the students centered discussion of videogames on the literary elements within games that related to the YA text, rather than focusing discussion on an examination of game mechanics, which encompass tools and/or elements of a videogame "designed for interaction with the game state" (Sicart, 2008, par. 6).

Discussions of videogame narratives were more common than those of game mechanics that often addressed actions a player was able to execute within a game. However, understanding the relationship between traditional texts and the inner workings of a game that control what a player can do (e.g., game mechanics) reveals an application of deep thinking related to different forms of media. The following discussion provides an example of this type of critical analysis.

Deshi: Man, this [*Game Slaves*] is like *Fallout 3*.

Diego: Yeah, like *Borderlands* and *Call of Duty* somehow.

Deshi: They had the post-apocalyptic feel.

Jonas: It reminds me of a game called *Left for Dead 2*.

Carlos: Why?

Jonas: 'Cause they explained the zombie part, and that made me think that this is similar.

Diego: Yeah, okay, and well like in *Borderlands,* the characters you fight, the enemies are kinda like they're . . . they're smart because they're like you, like they have really good aim and stuff. These characters [in *Game Slaves*] remind me of those, 'cause you know how they acted and like they're there; you know how in *Borderlands 2* like the enemies they can like speak to you. Like talking to them, it's cool. They had a lot of things to say.

Deshi: I would say *Fallout*, in terms of setting, of people surviving.

Diego: The setting is like this story setting.

In Diego's above remarks, game mechanics, such as the abilities ascribed to characters within a videogame

(e.g., intelligence and good aim with weapons) were central to his discussion of the book *Game Slaves*. While Diego considered the setting and characters in *Game Slaves,* his comparison was based on an analysis of the game mechanics, specifically those related to characters' qualities and behaviors inherent in *Borderlands*; in the same way that the videogame *Borderlands* is designed with characters who are smart and skilled with weapons, so too do the characters in the YA text *Game Slaves* have these attributes. Diego's comment is noteworthy because his comparison moves beyond consideration of literary features, such as plot, to instead compare the YA text and a videogame based on the rules of interactivity within the game. This type of comparison shows how layering goes beyond a focus on plot, setting, or characters; it can include game elements within traditional English language arts discussions. In fact, students prompted one another to expand their thinking and provide evidence to support their thoughts. Additionally, the way students moved between videogames and *Game Slaves*, using videogames as a guide to critique literary elements within a text, suggests that the students were not only accustomed to critiquing videogames, but also were reading and thinking critically about the YA book.

By validating students' experiences and expertise with videogame play, teachers are able to create spaces within the classroom for students to share these experiences and to hook background knowledge from videogames with content from literature being read and discussed in school.

Mateo continued his critique of *Game Slaves* and its perceived lack of details by stating, "Well, they, there's always a backstory [in videogames]." Deshi responded, "In *Fallout*, cause in *Fallout* you can make your own character and make your own story." Diego emphasized the way that videogames as texts differ from books by adding, "I was thinking in the videogames, it's more visualized, you know. And this one's [*Game Slaves*], like, you know, you gotta write it down." The students continued to compare *Game Slaves* to videogames, based on their experiences with both types of text, through observations that highlighted the critical connections they made across content areas. Additionally, students' conversation showcased the ways in which they were literate beyond the traditional text of *Game Slaves*, such as their consideration of the rule systems of videogames and the ways they relate to a YA text. For the book group students, experiences with and expectations of videogames clearly impacted their reactions to and interpretation of the YA text.

Classroom Applications

One way that teachers can incorporate videogames as an entryway for students to layer literacies as part of their learning is through the inclusion of videogame-related books as options for literature circles or book groups. The adolescents in my book group reported that they enjoyed both books but preferred the videogame book. By validating students' experiences and expertise with videogame play, teachers are able to create spaces within the classroom for students to share these experiences and to hook background knowledge from videogames with content from literature being read and discussed in school. In this way, videogames serve as an entryway for students' participation in literature discussions.

Teachers should recognize that student-led book groups can serve as a catalyst for teens to layer literacies as they combine discussions of various media—from books to videogames—using different modes to mediate their understandings of diverse texts. As Gerber (2009) contended, within the classroom, students can examine how iconography (e.g., symbols, game art, and icons) exists across videogames and YAL. Thus, teachers can structure book groups in ways that allow students to naturally layer literacies. For example, each book group could have access to an Internet-enabled device to participate in a weekly classroom TweetChat conversation with other book groups. Teachers could also consider using prompts, such as the ones included in Figure 1, to support book club discussions.

When videogames and other media have a place within book groups, discussion extends beyond the book to include students' experiences and interests with other forms of media. In book groups, students "learn not just from the characters but also from each

- Can you think of a videogame or movie that has a setting similar to the one in this book?
- Which of the characters in your book is similar to a videogame character? What do they share in common? What dissimilarities do they have?
- Choose a character from your book—what would this character Tweet if he/she had a Twitter account?
- What changes would you make to the text if you were going to turn this book into a videogame? Into a movie?
- In what ways would you extend the backstory of this book?
- Create a character profile, including strengths or special skills, for one of the characters from your book. How would you describe this character's abilities?
- What would an in-game map include or represent at this point in the book? How would the mechanics of the game allow a character to move around and throughout this map?

Figure 1. Examples of book group prompts to support students in layering literacies

other" (Polleck, 2010, pp. 65–66). By incorporating videogames as part of YAL discussions, teachers can transform book groups into spaces within which students layer literacies and consider relevant combinations and interpretations of meaning when they incorporate different forms of media and analyze, critique, and respond to books. Students can draw from this knowledge when reading books and considering narrative elements within their reading. They can use their videogame experience both to connect with books and to critique characters, setting, and plot within books. In these ways, students may engage in critical thinking, such as when they compare the setting from a book with that of a videogame; however, they may need additional guidance from teachers to help them expand their insights and understandings when considering game mechanics/rule systems for videogame interactivity.

The previous conversation in which Jonas linked the setting of *Games Slaves* with that of *Left for Dead 2* provides an example of a student drawing from videogame knowledge to discuss a literary element within a book. In that same conversation, Diego related characters in the book to those in *Borderlands 2,* noting the qualities of the characters, such as having good aim; however, Diego did not pursue this comparison further. Instead, the conversation moved back to comparing the setting between videogames and the YAL book, indicating that the students may have benefitted from a teacher or peer to help them develop their understanding of the book in light of their videogames (and vice versa).

The teacher's role in this case would be to scaffold students' awareness of the ways in which a variety of features of different media, such as the rules of interactivity of videogames, can be used as part of a critical analysis of text. More broadly, with educators' encouragement, students can consider aspects of literacy beyond traditional printed text. Teachers are able to facilitate students' creative and critical thinking and to encourage myriad connections as students layer literacies in the classroom. In terms of adolescent literacies, the inclusion of videogames is a powerful way not only to engage students in media of interest to them but to promote literacy development by fostering connections between videogames and books and by supporting students' critical analysis of the different forms of media that are present in their lives.

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Jodie **Cohen** and Teri S. **Lesesne**

The Magic of Audiobooks:

From Inception to Implementation

Many of us learned to read while resting on the laps of our parents or sitting on carpet squares in front of our preschool teachers. We listened as someone read to us. Sometimes we followed along with our fingers tracking the words on the pages as they were read aloud, and sometimes the reader tracked the words as he or she read to us. Hearing the sounds of the words and listening as someone read with enthusiasm and excitement made us fall into the story. In many ways, listening to someone read aloud or listening to an audiobook are quite similar. We can still follow along with the printed text, should we wish to do so, or we can close our eyes and enjoy the story as a skilled narrator reads it. As we enter a tale woven by a storyteller, or "read with our ears," we are centered on story.

Developing strong listening skills is critical; 85% of learning is done through listening, and 45% of an individual's average day is spent listening (Hoskisson & Tompkins, 1991). Audiobooks have proven to be a valuable tool for improving student learning, and they benefit the literary and listening skills of students. In this article, we offer an inside look into how audiobooks are created, how they offer key benefits, and how they might be used effectively.

Both of us, Jodie and Teri, have background experiences in the creation and implementation of audiobooks. Jodie is a senior marketing manager at Listening Library and has been working in the audiobook industry for more than seven years. She has witnessed every step in the process of creating an audiobook, from helping read manuscript submissions to attending recording sessions. Teri is a professor in the Department of Library Science at Sam Houston State University where she teaches courses in literature for children and young adults. She served on the American Library Association's inaugural Odyssey Award Committee for Excellence in Audiobook Production and chaired the committee in 2013. She has also written about audiobooks and reviewed audio for VOYA.

An Inside Look at Audiobook Creation

by Jodie Cohen

Choosing the Best Titles

Listening Library casts a wide net to create a broad and diverse list of available titles. Many titles are taken from in-house imprints at Penguin Random House, while others are acquired from outside publishers. Each season, the Editorial and Marketing teams attend the in-house launch, where editors describe the coming year's titles. At this stage of the process, we consider which titles will have strong potential to become great audiobooks. Often, when an editor is excited about a newly discovered author or a text with an engaging backstory, this information helps us consider unique elements we might incorporate into the audiobook. For example, when Phoebe Yeh, Vice President and Publisher of Crown, presented *Breakout* (2015) by Kevin Emerson, she mentioned that he was a musician. When we created this particular audiobook, we asked Kevin to record some original songs; he agreed, and we included them on the recording. In another example, we learned that author Lance Rubin is also an actor and sketch comedy writer. Lance's

humorous YA novel is written in a witty first-person voice, and because of his training as a comedic actor, we asked him to narrate his text. He brought the right balance of humor, energy, and emotion to *Denton Little's Deathdate* (2015), which received an audio starred review from *School Library Journal*.

We also look for titles that will appeal to younger listeners and help support the development of their listening and language skills.

For out-of-house acquisitions, outside agents and publishers send Listening Library submissions from their lists, often a year in advance of publication. Their pitch provides background about the author and the manuscript. Editorial Director Rebecca Waugh says that one of her favorite parts of the job is getting an early look at new books, even before reviewers. She says, "It's fun to spread the news about a great, new discovery" (personal communication, August 14, 2015).

When a title has strong commercial potential or is published by a well-established author, Listening Library may participate in an auction for audio rights. This past year, for instance, we learned that Disney was going to publish a series of middle grade novels retelling the Star Wars saga. Rebecca Waugh recognized that because the new Star Wars movie (Abrams, Burk, & Kennedy, 2015) would be released in December, this would be a popular subject. She also knew that three bestselling authors, Alexandra Bracken, Adam Gidwitz, and Tom Angleberger, had the talent and experience to write great books. Since our adult audio imprint, Penguin Random House Audio, is the longtime publisher of the Star Wars franchise, our team was already very familiar with the Star Wars mythology. Because of this, we participated in a heated bidding war and won the audio rights for the series (Angleberger, 2015; Bracken, 2015, Gidwitz, 2015).

Movie tie-ins provide an effective way to draw students' attention to fiction, particularly for reluctant readers, but we also value literary gems. Our philosophy is to publish great titles for all children, and our Marketing team plays an integral part in that process. Last year, we acquired two notable titles, *When I Was the Greatest* (2014) by Jason Reynolds and *Gabi, A Girl in Pieces* (2014) by Isabel Quintero. Both caught our attention through rave reviews, and after reading the texts, we felt each had a wonderful voice and narrative quality that would work particularly well as an audio recording.

We often develop relationships with authors that continue long after the audiobooks are published. For example, Coretta Scott King/John Steptoe Award Winner Jason Reynolds is very involved in the We Need Diverse Books movement, and he partnered with us on our companion campaign, Hear Diversity. We encourage you to visit www.heardiversity.com for powerful videos and interviews about the critical role audiobooks play in our shared commitment to diverse literature.

We also look for titles that will appeal to younger listeners and help support the development of their listening and language skills. We are the longtime publisher of series that have strong educator support, such as The Magic Tree House® (2001–2015) by Mary Pope Osborne, Junie B. Jones (2003–2007) by Barbara Park, and more recently, the Three-Ring Rascals (2015) by Kate Klise and M. Sarah Klise. The latter's illustrated-chapter-book format presented a challenge in its adaptation to the audio form, but we felt that the core story was so engaging and funny that it would resonate with kids—and their parents or guardians. This is a perfect example of a collaborative acquisition; we discussed the challenges with the producer and the authors and decided to implement a full-cast production with light sound effects. You can learn more about this audio on our website, which includes interviews with the producer and authors, at: http://www.booksontape.com/three-ring-rascals-peek-behind-tent-part-1-meet-ringmaster-producer-julianna-wilson/.

Divvying Up the List

After our Editorial Team has acquired titles, we have our own launch meeting; this gives the producers and marketing and sales teams an opportunity to become familiar with the texts. The producers then meet and divide up the list based on two main criteria: a strong connection to a particular title and/or a legacy with an author they have previous experience with. Building longstanding relationships with authors is part of our core philosophy. Our staff of ten producers has a combined 125 years of experience producing and directing

audio productions, and some producers have worked with the same authors for over 15 years.

Once the list is divided among the team members, the producers read their assigned manuscripts and collaborate with the authors on casting. As stated previously, some titles present special format challenges when it comes to creating an audiobook. In order to ensure that the listener does not miss out on any part of the experience, the producers work closely with the authors to translate elements, such as the drawings in *The Book Thief* (2013) by Markus Zusak or the puzzles in *Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library* (2013) by Chris Grabenstein. In such cases, the author may write additional text that can be recorded to translate drawings, so a comparable experience is maintained. While producing *Countdown* (2011) and *Revolution* (2014) by Deborah Wiles, both of which include many photographs, Vice President of Content Production Dan Zitt worked closely with Deborah not only to find the right voices but also to assemble a soundscape team who could reimagine the images in the book into audio soundscapes. These soundscapes are similar to background music, but they also contain sounds such as typewriters, crowds, and sirens to transport the listener. Dan says, "This is one of the most complex audiobooks on the market, and without Deb's help, it would have been even more challenging" (personal communication, August 11, 2015).

Casting: Finding the Right Voice

Listening Library's philosophy is that there is one great voice for each and every book. Dan Zitt says, "Each of our producers consults with our authors about their books, whether we are talking about casting, pronunciations, or performance. Casting usually involves the producer discussing the type of voice that they hear while reading the book, and then listening to the author's thoughts on what type of voice might be best" (personal communication, August 11, 2015). The casting process may involve calling talent agents, holding auditions, or suggesting someone who has read before.

For example, when casting Libba Bray's (2012) *The Diviners*, Dan spent two days auditioning over 20 actors. Each actor was given four of the most challenging passages to read. Dan says, "After we listened through the hours of auditions, the director, the author, and I all agreed that January LaVoy was the best voice for the role" (personal communication, August 11, 2015). Readers can watch a special video about the creation of *The Diviners* audiobook online at http://www.booksontape.com/the-voice-january-lavoys-divine-diviners-audition/. Producers also hire directors who help guide the narrator's performance and offer suggestions during the recording in order to match the tone the author intended. Staff producers direct sessions when time allows or when a project needs to be kept confidential.

Listening Library's philosophy is that there is one great voice for each and every book.

Producing an Audiobook

Ensuring Everything Is Pronounced Correctly

Pronunciations are very important to the integrity of a program. If there are mispronounced locations, words, or names, it will distract listeners. If there are inconsistencies in pronunciations, it creates a confusing experience. Before we enter the studio, our director reviews the text, culls a pronunciation list, and calls the author to verify pronunciations. If the author does not have a definitive answer, we research via the Internet or make phone calls to native speakers or local businesses. The director often starts by contacting the local public library. Sometimes, the narrator is involved; January LaVoy says, "I spend anywhere from a few hours to days doing research on dialects, regionalisms, any diseases or conditions the characters might have and how those can affect speech. It's important to locate what we call 'primary source material' when doing dialect work, finding a recording of or talking to a person who is from somewhere" (personal communication, August 18, 2015).

In the Studio

Once the narrator(s) are selected, they are sent the manuscript to read. Two-time Odyssey Award-winning narrator Kirby Heyborne prepares by reading and taking extensive notes to get a sense of tone and characters. While developing characters' voices, Kirby says he "looks for clues from what the author has written. . . . Some characters have different postures and body positioning" (personal communication, August 18, 2015).

The microphones in studio are some of the most sensitive on the market; we ask our narrators to wear soft clothing, forego jewelry, and eat a light breakfast. The microphone will pick up a gurgling stomach, so narrators must skip their morning coffees. Actors and directors have to be aware of mouth noises like popping p's, dry mouth, lip smacks, and mouth clicks. There are lots of tricks to eliminate these kinds of mouth noises. Dan Zitt shares, "If someone's mouth gets a little too wet or a little too dry, we might ask them to take a bite of a green apple to help return a mouth to the proper PH balance, or ask them to gargle with olive oil" (personal communication, August 11, 2015). Actors also need to control their breathing, maintain a consistent rhythm, and keep the characters consistent. Some actors color-code their scripts according to mood or character. Maintaining continuity for over 200 character voices spanning the seven books in the Harry Potter series (1999–2007) was especially tricky. Senior Executive Producer Orli Moscowitz says, "As Jim Dale prepared, he created unique voices for each character and recorded brief samples to play back in the studio. Those lists and reference CDs were invaluable!" (personal communication, August 3, 2015). It helped tremendously—and Jim Dale achieved a Guinness World Record for having created 134 unique character voices for one audiobook: *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*. Another challenge that narrators face is making sure characters sound different, so listeners can easily distinguish them. January LaVoy says, "That's often where my directors come in—and I use everything in my arsenal by the end of a long book. Nasal quality, register, range, musicality, pace, accent" (personal communication, August 18, 2015).

Actors also need to control their breathing, maintain a consistent rhythm, and keep the characters consistent.

While recording, an engineer, a director, and sometimes a producer are in the studio to oversee the production. The recording can be influenced by everything from the position of the microphone to the chair the actor is sitting on. While the narrator is reading, the director and engineer follow along, marking up the text for any retakes to fix missed or mispronounced words. Sometimes, the narrator goes back to the beginning of the sentence or paragraph to get the tone and pacing correct. Typically it takes 2–2.5 hours in the studio to get one finished hour of edited audio. A day's session usually results in three edited hours, depending on the reader's efficiency and endurance.

Putting All the Pieces Together

The files from the recording session, along with the marked script, are sent to the post-production team. The sound editor listens to the raw audio and cuts out unwanted takes, mistakes, and stray sounds. The editor also paces the recording to make the audio flow naturally. The editor then proofs the entire recording while following along with the script to find and correct any mistakes.

The Final Safety Net: Quality Control

The quality control team identifies anything in the audio that differs from the text and comments on inconsistent pacing, sound levels, or pronunciation. If there are none, the master recording goes to replication. Otherwise, the editor recuts the audio; occasionally, the actor may even be called back into the studio for pickups.

Getting the Word Out

At each step of the process, the Marketing and Publicity teams see if there are any opportunities to help promote the titles. For instance, we recently recorded a special message with the narrators of *Illuminae* (2015) by Amie Kaufman and Jay Kristoff for Random House Children's Book's video trailers; readers can watch the finished product at www.IlluminaeFiles.com. Sometimes we create videos, as we did with Jon Scieszka who talked about why Audiobooks are Seriously FUN Reading: http://www.booksontape.com/audiobooks-seriously-fun-reading-jon-scieszka-explains/.

We also strive to provide useful resources and have created a number of campaigns, including www.ReadProudListenProud.com, a website dedicated to sharing powerful LGBTQ stories to encourage understanding. We partnered with Jon Scieszka to create www.GuysListen.com to motivate boys to find the right literature for them. And our anti-bullying website, www.TheBullyConversation.com, features titles that concern the topic of bullying because we hope to open a dialogue that will put an end to it.

Benefits and Practical Applications of Audiobooks

by Teri S. Lesesne

Colleagues remark from time to time that listening to an audiobook is some sort of shortcut, some way of cheating "real" reading. Reading with our ears is decidedly not a shortcut, nor is it somehow cheating. While the research on audiobooks is still relatively nascent, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that the benefits of audiobooks tie directly to the classroom and to achievement. Readers can find research about the benefits of audiobooks at the Audio Publishers Association's website (www.audiopub.org; direct link to the research in references). Some of the research on the benefits of reading aloud can be applied to listening to audiobooks as well. The following is not an exhaustive list, but it does provide some rationale for using audiobooks in addition to or alongside traditional text.

Benefits of Audiobooks

Why are audiobooks of value in the classroom? Why offer readers the option of reading "with their ears"? Listening Books and their website, The Sound Learning, (http://www.soundlearning.org.uk/benefits-of-audiobooks.aspx and http://soundlearningapa.org) gather resources, including research, so that educators can understand the benefit and value of listening:

1. Listening improves visualization. Readers create scenes in their mind as they read. They see places and faces; they watch action unfold as if it were a movie. For many, that movie never begins; the world of the story remains static. Audiobooks, with their pacing, sound effects, voicing, and other aspects, can help those scenes from the book come to life inside the reader's mind.
2. Listening assists those for whom decoding and vocabulary deficits might be a stumbling block to reading. Whether they are second language learners or students who have comprehension problems, audiobooks can support readers. Correct pronunciation of words can aid in vocabulary development. Moreover, research indicates that listening comprehension can be as high as two years above reading comprehension. Students can gain confidence in comprehension with the addition of audiobooks.
3. Listening aids in the development of fluency and prosody. Readers who find text challenging need models who read fluently. Anyone who has spent time with beginning readers who attempt to sound out words unfamiliar to them understands issues with fluency. The same is true for some older readers. Audiobooks are good models for how fluent readers sound when reading aloud. Prosody, the patterns of stress and intonation in reading, is also something we learn with practice. Prosody improves with the use of audiobooks. Readers hear the inflection of language; they learn how to breathe life into text.

Reading with our ears is decidedly not a shortcut, nor is it somehow cheating.

4. Finally, listening to audiobooks can increase the amount of time spent engaged in reading. So many students are overscheduled beyond the confines of the school day. Time spent commuting, riding to and from school on the bus, or traveling to practices and lessons can be filled with audiobooks. Adding audiobooks as a part of reading can actually increase the number of books students can listen to over the course of a year.

Practical Applications of Audiobooks: Some Tips

1. Provide students with choices for accessing texts: audio, e-books, traditional texts. Sometimes the curriculum does not offer much choice in terms of specific texts. However, the mode in which students access that text can provide choice. Research has already confirmed that choice plays an important role in student success (Allington, 2012), so offering audiobooks as one alternative is important.
2. Create a policy for developing the audiobook collection. Adding audiobooks to the classroom and school libraries should be deliberate. Develop a policy about how funds will be obtained and expended. A discussion of how to shelve audiobooks is also necessary. Are they better shelved within the audiobook collection or side by side with the traditional text? Would a separate audiobook collection be more efficient?
3. An addendum to collection development for audiobooks is necessary to develop familiarity with some of the tools of the trade. *AudioFile, Booklist,*

The Horn Book, School Library Journal, and *VOYA* all review audiobooks. Plus, awards and lists that select titles based on the quality of the audiobook recordings are excellent resources for picking high-quality recordings. Some prestigious awards and lists include: the American Library Association's Odyssey Award (www.ala.org/yalsa/odyssey), Young Adult Library Services Association's Amazing Audiobooks (www.ala.org/yalsa/amazing-audiobooks), Association of Library Services for Children's (ALSC) "Notable Children's Recordings" (www.ala.org/alsc/awardsgrants/notalists/ncr), The Audie® Awards from the Audio Publishers of America (www.audiopub.org/audies-gala.asp), and the Capital Choices Audiobook List (www.capitolchoices.org/all_lists). Publishers have clips of the audiobooks on their websites, so you can hear a clip of the narrator in advance of making a purchase. Audible and Amazon often offer short clips to preview audiobooks as well.

4. Provide the tools students will need to listen to audiobooks: mp3 players, CD players, headphones, etc. Do not assume that all students will have players and accessories for listening to audiobooks. If the school has 1:1 devices, perhaps audiobooks could be loaded onto those and checked out for home use.
5. Encourage BYOD (Bring Your Own Device). Students with smart phones might be able to download audiobooks for out-of-school listening, and public libraries are often a more-than-willing partner for audio access.
6. Last, model your own listening. It is always important for students to see educators listening to audiobooks and talking about their favorite audios or narrators. Talk about how to develop those listening skills to develop stamina when it comes to listening to longer works (the same stamina needed for reading lengthier texts). If educators listen, students are more likely to read with their ears as well.

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New from NCTE

Digital Reading

What's Essential in Grades 3–8

William L. Bass II and Franki Sibberson

Principles in Practice imprint
122 pp. 2015. Grades 3–8
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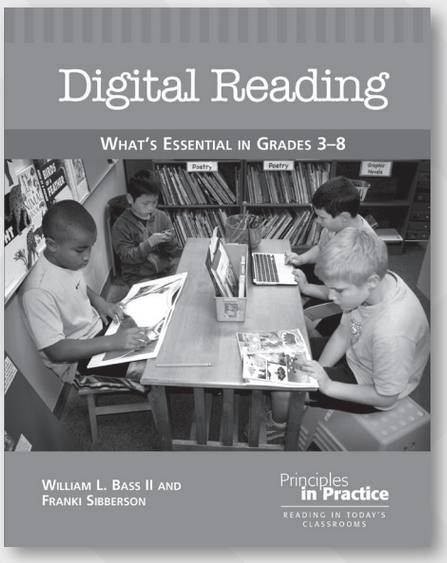

Many of our young students come to school with vast experience in the digital world but too often use digital tools in limited ways because they view technology as merely another form of entertainment. Educators William L. Bass II and Franki Sibberson believe that teachers can help students recognize their expertise in out-of-school digital reading and extend it into the world of school. For this to happen, we need to redefine reading to include digital reading and texts, learn how to support digital reading in the classroom, and embed digital tools throughout the elementary and middle school curriculum.

Bass, a technology coordinator, and Sibberson, a third-grade teacher, invite us to consider what is essential in integrating technology into the classroom, focusing especially on authenticity, intentionality, and connectedness. They explore the experiences readers must have in order to navigate the digital texts they will encounter, as well as the kinds of lessons we must develop to enhance those experiences. Always advocating for sound literacy practice and drawing on the NCTE Policy Research Brief *Reading Instruction for* All *Students*, they lead from experience—both theirs and that of other classroom teachers, grades 3–8.

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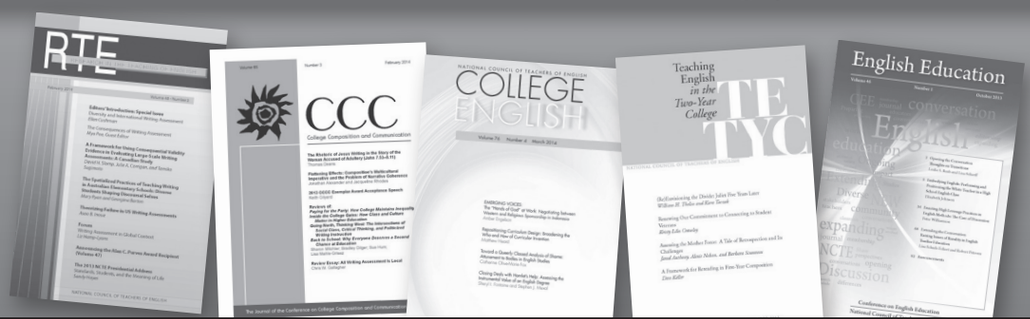

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