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An Invitation to Look Deeper into the World:

Using Young Adult Fiction to Encourage Youth Civic Engagement

Foregrounding a relationship between popular culture texts—specifically, J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books (1997–2007)—and social activism in a presentation that he gave at the 2011 TEDxTransmedia conference, Andrew Slack, cofounder of the Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), confronted a long-held assumption that devalues the genre of fantasy fiction by dismissing it as escapist literature. In doing so, Slack (2011b) described how, by mapping the content world of stories onto the real world, the HPA, a grassroots activist organization, aims to harness the passion that millions of fans have for the Harry Potter novels and redirect that energy toward addressing social problems, such as poverty, class inequality, genocide, and child slavery. Slack (2011b) consequently challenged his audience to reflect on the following question: "What if we used fantasy not as an escape from our world, but an invitation to look deeper into it?"

Reflecting the theme of this issue, I begin this article with a slightly altered form of Slack's question: *What if, as educators, we were to view young adult fiction not as offering readers an escape from our world, but an invitation to look deeper into it?* In asking this question, I am not interested in young adult fiction's ability to sustain complex thematic readings, nor do I mean to call attention to its ideological dimensions, since readers of this journal are already aware that both of these topics have been well documented. Rather, in raising the above question, my objective is to better understand how, as educators, we can harness the passion that works of popular young adult fiction inspire in many young readers and redirect it toward addressing injustices that students are aware of in their local communities. In this sense, I am interested in the pedagogical possibilities that are associated with using young adult fiction to support youth civic engagement, especially as this involves their experimenting with literacy practices and dispositions that are deemed necessary in our democratic society. At a minimum, this includes an ability to read critically, to gather relevant information about a problem or issue, to engage in perspective sharing, and to use the information that one collects to take a stance on a problem or issue and advocate for a reasoned course of action.

In the remainder of this article, I examine the role that young adult fiction can play in supporting youth civic engagement. After introducing the concept of cultural acupuncture (Slack 2011a, 2011b), I describe a class assignment, the "Become a Mockingjay Project," that asked undergraduates in a young adult literature course to read a young adult dystopian novel of their choice and identify a social justice issue it addressed. Having done so, the students researched the issue to better understand it, after which they produced digital video essays in which they mapped elements of the novel's content world—defined by Jenkins and his colleagues (2016) as "the network of characters, settings, situations, and values that forms the basis for the generation of a range of stories" (p. 131)—onto the "real" world for the purpose of calling attention to how people experience the issue. Following this, I offer a close reading of one student's

video essay to demonstrate how she used the content world of *The 5th Wave* (Yancey, 2013) to examine a humanitarian crisis that was unfolding at the time she took my class. To conclude, I consider the implications of using young adult fiction as a vehicle to support youth civic engagement. In doing so, I argue that projects such as the one I describe in this article play a crucial role in supporting students' developing literacy practices and dispositions that are integral to public activism.

What Is Cultural Acupuncture?

One need not look far to find examples of how young adult fiction is being used to foster civic engagement. The Harry Potter Alliance (HPA), a nonprofit organization run primarily by fans of J. K. Rowling's novels, offers a particularly rich example of the promise this work holds (see http://www.thehpalliance.org/). As explained, the HPA aspires to tap into the enthusiasm that millions of readers have for the Harry Potter books and use it to unite fans in addressing activist causes. To this end, the organization describes itself as aspiring to "chang[e] the world by making activism accessible through the power of story" (Harry Potter Alliance), and to date, it has proven remarkably effective in doing so. Among its many accomplishments, the HPA has partnered with other activist organizations (including brothers John and Hank Green's Nerdfighters) to send $123,000 in rescue supplies to the people of Haiti in the wake of a devastating earthquake; to donate approximately 315,000 books to communities in need as part of its Accio Book Campaign; and to collect over 400,000 signatures for a petition that resulted in a commitment by Warner Bros. corporation to ensure that its Harry Potter licensed chocolate products are Fair Trade certified.

The HPA's method of using stories to encourage fan activism is guided by the overarching concept of cultural acupuncture. As defined by Slack (2011a), cultural acupuncture involves "finding where the psychological energy is in the culture, and moving that energy toward creating a healthier world" (para. 4). In this metaphor, "stories are our needles. Stories are what resonate. Stories are what can renew our soul as individuals and as a planet" (Slack, 2011b). One method of practicing cultural acupuncture that the HPA has cultivated involves the organization's mapping elements of a story's content world onto the real world to call attention to systems that produce and sustain inequality. For example, prior to the release of the film *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Part 2* (Yates, 2011), the HPA initiated a campaign that challenged fans to "destroy" real-world horcruxes, just as the characters in Rowling's novel must destroy a series of horcruxes before they are able to vanquish Voldemort. Among the horcruxes the HPA identified were human rights issues such as low wages, child slavery, and climate change. Just as Harry and his friends formed Dumbledore's Army to resist oppressive measures that headmaster Dolores Umbridge implemented at Hogwarts, so too does the HPA invite fans to come together as a real-life Dumbledore's Army to address social and political problems.

Slack's (2011a, 2011b) cultural acupuncture metaphor is ripe with possibility, especially for English teachers and librarians, both of whom traffic in the currency of stories and occupy a position that allows them to stay abreast of books, television shows, graphic novels, video games, and films that are popular with young people. Moreover, I argue that, from a pedagogical standpoint, the cultural acupuncture metaphor offers a user-friendly, portable conceptual model that educators can use to think about how they can deploy popular culture texts in ways that foster youth civic engagement; in other words, teachers are in an ideal position to create opportunities for young people to engage in literacy practices that are at the core of public activism. As explained, this includes the abilities to read critically, to become informed about an issue, to entertain alternative perspectives, and to use what one has learned to adopt a stance and advocate for a cause or position.

By tapping into the enthusiasm that many students have for popular young adult fiction and by creating opportunities for them to put not only this energy but also their literacies toward addressing problems in their local communities, teachers have the potential to ignite students' civic imaginations, thus encouraging them "to imagine alternatives to current social, political, or economic institutions or problems" (Jenkins et al., 2016, p. 29). In the next section, I describe a class project that was organized according to the logic of cultural acupuncture and which asked undergraduates in a young adult literature course I taught to use young adult dystopic fiction as a platform to engage in public activism.

The "Become a Mockingjay" Project

In fall 2015, I taught an undergraduate elective called "The Hunger Games Trilogy and Young Adult Dystopian Fiction." As the title suggests, the class focused specifically on the genre of young adult dystopian fiction, beginning with The Hunger Games trilogy (Collins, 2008, 2009, 2010) and moving on to examine other popular young adult dystopias, including (but not limited to) *Feed* (Anderson, 2002), *Little Brother* (Doctorow, 2010), *Divergent* (Roth, 2011), and *Legend* (Lu, 2013). Throughout the semester, students who took the course were invited to participate in ongoing conversations that literary critics and scholars have initiated about dystopic fiction. They were also asked to read the assigned young adult novels through the lens of critical theory. Given that dystopia, as a genre, is overtly interested in social and political issues, a considerable amount of class time was spent interrogating ideologies that the students identified in the young adult novels they read. Building on this work, several course assignments challenged the students to investigate identity politics in young adult dystopic fiction. (For an example of this work, see Connors, 2016).

Toward the end of the course, students were tasked with completing the "Become a Mockingjay" project, the title of which refers to the symbolic identity that Katniss Everdeen, the 16-year-old protagonist in The Hunger Games trilogy, performs. By asking students to "become Mockingjays," the final course project encouraged them to look deeper into their world with an eye toward identifying injustices they wished to bear witness to, much as Katniss does in the trilogy.

For organizational purposes, the "Become a Mockingjay" project consisted of three phases. In the first phase, students were asked to self-select an additional young adult dystopian novel; they could choose either a novel they wanted to read or one they had read previously, rereading it with an eye toward identifying social justice issues it addressed. After choosing a focus issue, the students began the second phase—conducting research to better understand how people experience that issue in the world beyond the text. In the third phase of the project, the students designed and produced a digital video essay in which they used audio, music, still images, video footage, and print to call attention to the issue. In doing so, they practiced cultural acupuncture (Slack, 2011a, 2011b), mapping aspects of the novel's content world onto the real world to demonstrate how the social justice issue impacts people. To conclude their video essays, the students invited members of their audience to become real-life Mockingjays by highlighting specific, concrete actions they could take to combat whatever issue they addressed. This required them to exercise their civic imaginations (Jenkins et al., 2016) insofar as it challenged them to imagine other possible social arrangements and relationships.

Each video essay's closing shot depicted an image of a hand with three fingers raised, a gesture that, in the context of The Hunger Games trilogy, is understood to signify resistance to oppression. Beneath the image, which graduate student Logan Hilliard designed and painted, was an appeal encouraging readers to "Become a Mockingjay" (see Fig. 1). This image was accompanied by the now familiar refrain of the Mockingjay whistle made famous by The Hunger Games film franchise.

The video essays that students ultimately produced examined an array of social justice issues, including gender-based discrimination, income disparity, body shaming, homelessness, discrimination based on one's sexual orientation, and unequal

Figure 1. "Become a Mockingjay" graphic

access to education. In the next section, I offer a close reading of one student's video essay for the purpose of demonstrating how she mapped elements of author Rick Yancey's young adult novel *The 5th Wave* (2013) onto the real world to call attention to what was at the time a developing humanitarian crisis: namely, the mass migration of thousands of Syrian refugees caught in the throes of a violent civil war. I conclude the article by examining the implications of the "Become a Mockingjay" Project for educators, paying special attention to how, through its conceptual design, the project supported students' participation in literacy practices that are associated with public activism and with democratic citizenship.

Calling Attention to the Syrian Refugee Crisis with *The 5th Wave*

Defining the Context and Analysis

A first-generation college student, Rebecca, was a senior majoring in English literature when she took my dystopian fiction course. Presented with the "Become a Mockingjay" project, she chose to read *The 5th Wave* (Yancey, 2013), the first novel in a trilogy of the same name. Rebecca's decision to read this particular book was motivated in part by the fact that a film adaptation was scheduled for release not long after the course ended. In the weeks that led up to the project, a brutal civil war in Syria had displaced thousands of refugees, causing them to flee their war-torn country in search of sanctuary in Europe. This wave of mass migration was accompanied by a spike in Islamophobic and nationalist sentiments, both in European nations and in the United States, as evidenced by the inflammatory discourse that then presidential candidate Donald Trump used during the course of his campaign in the Republican Party's primaries, including his promise to ban Muslims from entering the country. In November 2015, tensions escalated still further after a series of terrorist attacks on Paris were wrongly blamed on Syrian refugees. It was in this context that Rebecca read *The 5th Wave* (Yancey, 2013), a work of apocalyptic fiction that imagines an alien invasion of Earth.

I chose to examine Rebecca's video essay, which readers can view online at https://youtu.be/eYRWhxaa1qY, in part because of the powerful response it has elicited from audiences who have seen it, beginning from the time she screened it in class. At just over three minutes long, Rebecca's video essay interweaves music and spoken narration with a visual narrative track that splices together television news footage and still images to call attention to the Syrian refugee crisis. To examine her video in a way that would allow me to attend to the different semiotic resources that Rebecca used to make meaning, I created a table that consisted of two columns (see Fig. 2). In the right-hand column, I inserted 37 screenshots, each of which represented a single image that Rebecca incorporated in her video essay's visual narrative track. In the left-hand column, I described any music, spoken narration, or animated effects that accompanied these images, the result of which allowed me to attend to the text's multimodal design. Having prepared my data in this way, I next analyzed them to understand how Rebecca used *The 5th Wave* (Yancey, 2013) to practice cultural acupuncture (Slack, 2011a) and to call attention to the plight of Syrian refugees. With this in mind, I offer a close reading of her video essay in the next section.

The video essays that students ultimately produced examined an array of social justice issues, including gender-based discrimination, income disparity, body shaming, homelessness, discrimination based on one's sexual orientation, and unequal access to education.

Mapping the Content World of *The 5th Wave* onto a Geopolitical Crisis

From the beginning of her video essay to the end, Rebecca's spoken narration is accompanied by a somber (and somewhat repetitive) musical score that is performed on a keyboard and that serves to establish the tempo of her film. At times, the musical selection also functions to produce feelings of tension in the viewer, an effect that is exacerbated by Rebecca's use of seven jump cuts in the first 15 seconds of her video essay. When the video first begins playing, white letters drop against a black background, ultimately communicating the following excerpt from *The 5th Wave*: "The minute

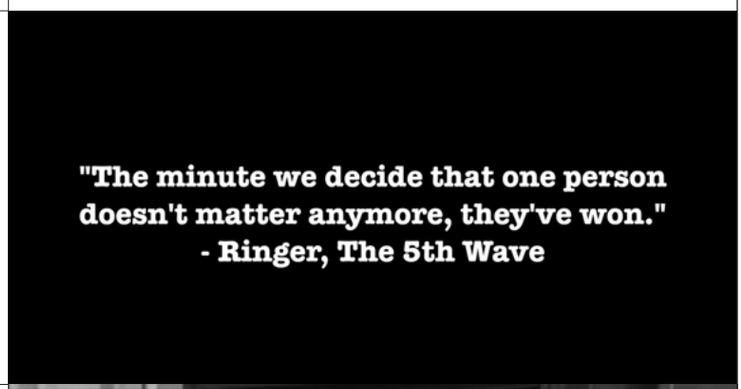
Verbal Track	Visual Track
00:00 – 00:04 *(keyboard music)*	
00:04 – 00:06 *"…immigration crisis in Europe…"*	
00:06 – 00:07 *"…three children drowned…"* *(the words "Desperate Journeys" are projected onto an image of rescue vessels in the background)*	

Figure 2. Excerpt from the breakdown of Rebecca's "Become a Mockingjay" video essay

we decide that one person doesn't matter anymore, they've won" (Yancey, 2013, p. 455).

In the montage that follows, Rebecca marks her first attempt to practice cultural acupuncture (Slack, 2011a) by mapping the latter theme from the novel's content world onto the world beyond the text. To do so, she intersperses dramatic television footage of Syrian refugees fleeing violence with images of a rescue worker retrieving the lifeless body of a drowned child. These images appear and disappear on the screen and are accompanied by bursts of static, the result of which creates the impression of television channels being changed in rapid succession. This effect is further enhanced by Rebecca's decision to overlay fragmented voices of news journalists on top of these images, the result of which creates a cacophony of sound—"*immigration crisis in Europe*"; "*Syrian refugees*"; "*three children drowned*"; "*Syrian refugees*";

"*It's become a symbol of the desperation*"; "*a surge of refugees*"; "*among the dead, several children, including a baby*"—and calls the viewer's attention to the humanitarian crisis the author intends to address. When Rebecca's voice is finally heard for the first time, she prompts her audience: "*Now* are you paying attention?"

At this juncture in the video, images of refugees fleeing violence give way to a quieter, calmer picture of Earth as it is seen from space. Rebecca takes advantage of this lull in the text's previously frenetic pace to refocus her audience's attention on *The 5th Wave* (Yancey, 2013), explaining that in the novel, "Earth is under attack and in danger of being completely taken over by aliens. In the final wave of the invasion, humans are trained to kill each other based on lies and misconceptions told to them by people of power." Having offered this brief plot summary, Rebecca asks, "So who are these aliens?" Answering her own question, she again practices cultural acupuncture, this time mapping the content world of Yancey's (2013) novel onto our world by speculating that the aliens may serve as a metaphor for the Other—that is, anyone who is perceived as different from members of the dominant culture.

In raising this possibility, Rebecca extends her own critical reading of *The 5th Wave* (Yancey, 2013) by building on arguments that contemporary literary critics and scholars have made about the functions that apocalyptic fiction serves. In examining zombie films, for example, Orpana (2014) uses the term "zombie imaginary" to refer to a process wherein "problems that are properly structural, political, and economic are personalized and projected onto the devalued, often racialized, and gendered bodies of people" (p. 298). In this context, the "aliens" in novels and films that feature apocalyptic invasions by alien hordes could be interpreted as signifying dominant culture's fear of the Other, or what Trimble (2010) calls the "'thirdworldification' of the 'First World'" (p. 295). Building on this argument, Rebecca attempts to make a similar interpretive move when, in her video essay, she proposes that in *The 5th Wave* (Yancey, 2013), aliens may serve as a proxy for "migrants and refugees coming into the U.S. from Syria."

Mapping a third element of *The 5th Wave*'s (Yancey, 2013) content world onto the Syrian refugee crisis, Rebecca speculates that in the novel, the final wave of the alien invasion may serve as a cautionary "metaphor for society's overtrust of people of power." In a moment that is fraught with political implications, she cuts to footage of Donald Trump, who at the time was seeking to become the Republican Party's nominee for President. Standing at a podium set against the backdrop of a large American flag, Trump emphatically asserts, "I don't want the people from Syria coming in because we don't know who they are." To clarify "who these people are," Rebecca juxtaposes Trump's words with video footage of Syrian men, women, and children wandering against the backdrop of a city ravaged by war. In doing so, she draws on the research she conducted and informs her audience that despite the United States' long history of accepting immigrants, the country had, since 2011, accepted only 1,500 Syrian refugees "compared to the almost 1.9 million [Syrian refugees] in Turkey."

In the final portion of her video essay, Rebecca engages in public activism, positioning both herself and her audience as agentive people capable of advocating for those in need of help.

Citing an article from *The Guardian* that described the Obama administration's plan to admit 10,000 refugees in 2016, Rebecca notes that, in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on Paris, which were falsely attributed to Syrian refugees, the governors of nearly 30 states announced their refusal to accept refugees, a decision that she attributes to discrimination based on "nationality and religion." Foregrounding this parallel between the content world of *The 5th Wave* (Yancey, 2013) and the social and political realities of our own world, Rebecca explains, "Just as in the novel, these people of power seem to have quite a knack for influence." She then seizes on an opportunity to speak to the racism and xenophobia that underscored (and continues to underscore) political debates about refugees and immigrants, explaining that to date, those charged with committing the terrorist attacks on Paris have all been European Nationals. This consequently leads her to wonder: "So what's holding us back? Why are we refusing to help people who are in desperate need of it?" Why, indeed?

In the final portion of her video essay, Rebecca engages in public activism, positioning both herself and her audience as agentive people capable of advocating for those in need of help. In doing so, she argues that, like Cassie, the protagonist in *The 5th Wave* (Yancey, 2013), "we can all take a stand and place our trust in the unknown." Her use of the word "we" here is important, as it signifies assumed solidarity between author and audience. Rebecca exploits this rhetorical move still further a few moments later when she positions the viewer as wondering, "How can I possibly help?" Answering this question, she proposes a specific course of action, identifying a series of concrete steps that viewers could conceivably take to support Syrian refugees, beginning with their volunteering time at organizations that exist to help these people. Recognizing that this option might not be available to all viewers, Rebecca recommends that her audience also consider donating money and resources to organizations such as InterAction and Twitter, both of which had set up accounts for this very purpose. Additional pathways to advocacy that Rebecca identifies include using the website Instacart "to donate groceries to people that have been displaced by the conflicts in Syria" and sponsoring clothes and canned food drives in one's local community.

Noting that "every little bit helps," Rebecca brings her video essay to a close by asking a question that is meant to provoke introspection as well as action: "Are we willing to let innocent people that are looking to us for safe haven die because we believe the misconceptions that we've been told about them?" Rejecting this possibility, she once again signifies her solidarity with her audience, reaching out to them with the following invitation: "Let's help these refugees together." In doing so, Rebecca once again positions her audience as like-minded people willing to combat social injustice. Through both her emotional investment in the plight of Syrian refugees and her willingness to advocate for them, it is possible to understand Rebecca's video essay as a form of social activism.

Implications and Conclusion

Anecdotal evidence that students shared when we screened their video essays in class suggested that participating in the "Become a Mockingjay" project led them to experience a number of positive outcomes. For example, several students indicated that their experience designing a video essay had in some ways proved more challenging than writing a traditional essay, and they described having lost themselves in the composing process. They also shared their excitement about the fact that their work had the potential to be viewed online; for the majority of these students, the project marked their first experience in school writing for an audience beyond a teacher. Indeed, several students recommended that in future iterations of the project, I consider adding a comment box on our class website that would allow viewers to respond to different authors' work. Although these outcomes are valuable to me, they do not reflect my primary purpose for the "Become a Mockingjay" project, which was to encourage student civic engagement.

With this in mind, I wish to examine two questions that readers may ask. First, is young adult fiction, which is associated with the domain of popular culture, and hence with entertainment, an appropriate site for encouraging students' participation in democratic politics, a domain that is traditionally treated with seriousness and reverence? Second, is it possible to understand the act of producing a digital video—a medium that uses a work of young adult fiction as a foundation to address social and political problems—to be a legitimate form of civic engagement? As will be seen, I argue that the answer to both of these questions is an emphatic, "Yes!"

Conceptualizing YAL as a Site for Democratic Politics

In *Entertaining the Citizen: When Politics and Popular Culture Converge* (2005), van Zoonen critiques arguments that conceptualize politics and popular culture as wholly distinct categories of human life. Problematizing this view, she argues, "Politics has to be connected to the everyday culture of its citizens; otherwise it becomes an alien sphere, occupied by strangers no one cares and bothers about" (p. 3). For many contemporary young people, young adult fiction does exist comfortably as part of their everyday lives and culture. Popular series such as The Hunger Games (Collins, 2008, 2009, 2010), The Lunar Chronicles (Meyer, 2012, 2013, 2014, 2015), and The Mortal Instruments (Clare, 2007–2014) constitute sites where adolescents are able to participate in debates about beloved characters and storylines, produce fan fiction

and fan art, and design websites and blogs that allow them to represent their knowledge to other fans who share their affinities.

Beyond this, there is reason to believe that teenagers and college students are already interacting with young adult fiction in ways that reflect Jenkins et al.'s (2016) assertion that "popular culture, rather than leading to a disengagement from public life, is being used as a resource around which young people are making connections to civic and political worlds" (p. 107). Consider, for example, Garcia and Haddix's (2014) fascinating discussion of the racially infused debates that erupted among fans of The Hunger Games books and movies as they argued over which character—Katniss or Rue—inspired the rebellion against the Capitol and thus deserved the title of Mockingjay. Similar arguments took place over Stephenie Meyer's Twilight series (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008), as both fans and critics engaged in heated debates about whether the series' protagonist, Bella Swan, could be interpreted as a strong female character. In some cases, these discussions led to arguments about the meaning of feminism. Alternatively, one could consider the success that the HPA has experienced uniting fans in pursuing activist causes in the name of a fictional boy wizard. As these and a host of other examples suggest, politics and young adult fiction *already* exist comfortably alongside each other. Moreover, they indicate that "[t]he quality of civic participation is not inherently compromised by a critical engagement with commercial pop culture" (Brough & Shresthova, 2012, p. 9), thus clearing the way for educators to use these texts to support youth civic engagement.

Cultivating Literacy Practices and Dispositions Associated with Civic Engagement

Critics of my argument might understandably ask, "But can the act of producing a video essay that uses a work of young adult fiction to address complex social and political problems realistically be understood as a legitimate form of civic engagement?" The answer to this question is complicated. As Hentges (2015/2016) argues, projects like the one that I have examined in this article, or which Simmons (2012) recounts having undertaken with high school students whose passion for The Hunger Games trilogy inspired them to pursue activist causes in their local community, may raise students' awareness of problems such as poverty, gender inequality, racism, and religious intolerance, but they do not address the underlying social, political, and economic systems that are responsible for producing and sustaining these problems (p. 50). This is a valid criticism, and it warrants careful consideration. It should not, however, deter educators from designing instruction that positions students to use their literacy to call attention to injustices they recognize in their local communities. Indeed, as Simmons (2012) argues, English and language arts teachers in particular have a responsibility "to provide a venue in which students can use their language skills to promote change and contend with social responsibility and justice" (p. 31). Class projects like the "Become a Mockingjay" project, as well as those Simmons describes, may not change systems that perpetuate inequality, but they can and do support students' coming to understand themselves as agentive people capable of critiquing unjust systems—that is, as potential Mockingjays.

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It is also worth considering the different literacy practices that students had to participate in as they worked to complete the "Become a Mockingjay" project. To begin, Rebecca and her classmates had to read a young adult novel from a critical perspective, attending to whether it promulgated progressive or conservative ideologies and determining how it did so. Having identified a social justice issue in the book, they next had to conduct research on that issue to become more informed about it and to understand how people experience it in the world beyond the text. This necessitated their searching for relevant articles in online databases, reading with an eye toward critiquing the validity and reliability of their sources, taking notes, and so on. Throughout the course of the

project, the students regularly shared what they were learning with their classmates, which inspired discussion, and hence, a sharing of perspectives. Beyond this, the project asked the students to adopt a stance on a social justice issue, advocate for it, and propose a reasoned course of action their audience could realistically take to address it. This necessitated their participating in literacy practices that are associated with "old" literacy, such as writing a script or taking notes, as well as practices that are associated with "new" literacies—for example, composing with sound, video, images, and music. Finally, the students circulated their work by publishing it online and sharing it with members of their social networks via platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (a whole other set of literacy practices).

From beginning to end, then, participating successfully in the "Become a Mockingjay" project necessitated the students' engaging in practices that van Zoonen (2004) argues are at the core of democratic politics: gathering information; discussing that information with others; and using the information to advocate for a cause or position (p. 46). Significantly, while these practices were not explicitly taught in class, it is reasonable to believe that students would "acquire" them—in Gee's (2012) sense of the term, this is a process wherein one comes to know something "subconsciously by exposure to models and by trial and error" (p. 259)—provided they were given regular opportunities to participate in these practices over an extended period of time.

In addition to the aforementioned literacy practices, the students also had to experiment with a range of dispositions that are associated with democratic politics. To begin, they had to perceive themselves as people with both a vested interest in social and political issues and a responsibility to become more knowledgeable about them. They had to demonstrate a willingness to entertain other perspectives in order to understand how different people understood and experienced these issues, and in sharing their own perspectives in class, the students had to engage in reasoned discourse with people who didn't always share their beliefs and opinions. Most important, the students had to perceive themselves, if only momentarily, as people with not only a right, but also a responsibility to engage with and argue for social and political issues.

Finally, it is worth noting that in asking students to conceive of social arrangements and relationships beyond those that structure our contemporary society, the "Become a Mockingjay" project created space for them to exercise their civic imaginations (Jenkins et al., 2016). The importance of this point cannot be overstated, especially at a time when political discourse in the United States is infected by unabashed nationalism, xenophobia, racism, and intolerance. As Jenkins and his colleagues (2016) argue, "[O]ne cannot change the world unless one can imagine what a better world might look like" (p. 29). Their assertion echoes another made by author J. K. Rowling who, in delivering a 2011 commencement address at Harvard University, instructed her audience, "We do not need magic to change the world, we carry all the power we need inside ourselves already: we have the power to imagine better" (para. 9).

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