

Seeing Self in Story: Holding Space for Identity and Perspectives

English Practice

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Honouring Students as Creators, Thinkers, & Communicators (Call for Articles)

In line with the BCTELA 2020 conference theme, *English Practice* invites you to submit teaching ideas, classroom inquiries and practice-focused research, reflective and critical narratives, poems, fiction and other arts-based renderings, or book reviews for our upcoming issue.

Entitled *Honouring Students as Creators, Thinkers, & Communicators*, this issue opens a space for exploration and conversation around how we can help students discover who they are as creators, thinkers and communicators in teaching English Language Arts. Guiding questions may include: What does being a creator, thinker and communicator mean to students? How can we encourage students to show their thinking and learning in creative ways? How can we teach students to be mindful communicators? What kinds of perspectives are important to bring into our English Language Arts classrooms when fostering a safe space for students to discover their identity? How do we support our students to find their voices?

We have four sections to assist you in preparing and submitting your writing:

- Teaching Ideas (classroom lessons and strategies)
- Investigating our Practice (teacher inquiry)
- Salon (literary & arts-based pieces)
- Check this Out (book reviews)

Submissions can be emailed to:
englishpracticejournal@gmail.com

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Seeing Self in Story: Holding Space for Identity and Perspectives

Story is the mother of us all. First we wrap our lives in language and then we act on who we say we are. We proceed from the word into the world and make a world based on our stories.

Christina Baldwin

Welcome to our issue *Seeing Self in Story: Holding Space for Identity and Perspectives*. In this issue, we invited educators to give thought to the ways we support a student's developing sense of self and world view through the learning and teaching of English Language Arts. Themes include exploring story and ourselves, fostering story and engagement through examining the self, making connections, reading, and writing, considering gender and cultural identities, Indigenous perspectives, and inclusive practices that hold a space for belonging.

Guiding questions included: What does identity mean and look like for students? What role does story, language, literacy, and/or literature have in strengthening the concept of self? How do we nurture a sense of belonging with our students? With our stories? How might we use stories, texts, and/or literature to help students understand themes of identity, diversity, inclusion? How do we support students to strengthen their understanding of self, in the tapestry of perspectives?

In this issue, we are encouraged to think about how and why we teach stories in meaningful ways that help students to share their own narratives, as well as ways to use inquiry and essential questions to give students an opportunity to consider and share their identity. We are reminded about the importance of seeing self and students through Richard Wagamese's work, *Medicine Walk*, and we explore the outdoors through Indigenous perspectives. We are introduced to ways in which we can engage students in texts which involve trauma, and we are encouraged to consider texts and practices that foster a safe learning environment. We learn how to plan for and engage in meaningful writing practice for teachers and we investigate ways to ensure strong representation and seeing of self, in our resources and libraries. Finally, we explore using film as text to teach theme, character development and literary analysis.

We hope that you enjoy reading this issue of our journal. We want to thank our editing circle for their time and effort in peer reviewing the submissions that were sent to *English Practice*. We would also like to thank all the authors who took time to share their thoughts, insights and practice with us. We look forward to future contributions from more of you and hope that this journal inspires you in your own practice as an educator.



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Tim McCreesh is a Vice Principal with the Greater Victoria School District. He has a Master's in Educational Practice from Simon Fraser University. His passions are in helping his students develop a deep love for reading and writing, social and emotional learning and developing a community of learners for all.

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A Selection of Poetry

Haiku

Quality of light.
In the brisk late afternoon.
Far hillside. Delight.

inspired by class walk and sharing circle

Chinook McLean
Sicamous, BC: Dec 5 2019

Nature Cinquain

Winter Sun
glorious, elusive
melting, blinding, peeking
light of life eclipses gloom
Unexpected Radiance

composed alongside my students who had a walk and a
nature themed cinquain assigned for homework

Chinook McLean
Tappen, BC: Feb 23 2020

Bio Poem

a personal/professional introduction for my final master's course
written in solidarity with my students also writing bio poems

Chinook
Adventurous, intuitive, strong-willed, inquisitive
Daughter of Ed and Elizabeth, partner to Glen, teacher of youth in the Shuswap
Lover of transformation, restorative justice, and peripatetic learning
Who feels the need to wander her wonderings, and wonder where the wanderings wend
Who needs liminal spaces, wide open places, and fresh air every day
Who gives time for circling, mindful moments, and walking during class
Who fears home-blown fireworks, exploding champagne corks, and the perpetuation of oppression
Who would like to see herself listening better to the voices of her students, and her lover
Born in the Yukon, resident of Tappen
McLean

Chinook McLean
Tappen, BC: Jan 8 2020

Slippery

a field note composed for my master's course on Living Inquiry
considering the theme of "Time"

Sticks painstakingly piled
One

by
one

Woven wooden web

Does the architect
Remember every single limb?
The nuances

The curves
of each foraged branch?
shifting light

Each gnawing hour?

Who has the time anyway?

To watch a beaver
build his damp
decadent palace
infinity pool

Swim up entry

I wish I did

Day wears on
I portage over his dam
My fleet-mate ahead

Sliding my boat along the stack
catching myself
a hair's breadth to spare
treacherous tumble avoided

5 foot tier

Square my footing
Settle my nerves
Tug on my kayak

See-saw
over the weir
gravity ups the ante
vessel skids along

My shin its guide

I gasp

I grab the stern handle
Preventing a plunge
I look down
not at the boat

At my leg
Survey the gunwale's damage
 Breath drawn in
 some pain
 regret for my carelessness
White scrape screams at me

I curse

Its colourlessness frightening
Pause
 Wait for red to appear
 how badly have I flayed my skin?
 heart constricts
 face flushes
 vessels well up

Nostalgia washes over me

Again?

Instantaneously
I travel
 To another river
 much larger
 another boat
 downward departing

Slope of leaden rock

I save the camcorder
 Braking the fall
 gracelessly
Strip of shin skin sacrificed

Clambering into my boat
 I stow the pelican case
 stretch my deck into place
 launch into the white water
 lap the rafts

Film the next rapid

Incremental healing
Weeks pass
Daily dampness
 Immersion
 life of a professional boater
 infection sets in
 2 courses of Cipro

From the dispensary

Finally!
The gash closes
 Casual sunburn reopens it
 curse my foolishness

begin the healing process
Once again
Years pass
The scar fades
Until
one day
mud-mired
very Canadian swamp
I slip

I create
A reverberation
A shadow
of that flaw
re-open abruptly
A wound I'd forgotten I'd lost

Aching nostalgia
Lifeblood of Africa
The Nile
Memories engulf me
a white-water torrent
yearning
adventures past
And adventurers passed

I look down
I see
Tiny beads of red
Tracing the edge of my pale scar

I sigh
Subtle, slippery reminiscence
Who knew
What echoes
a scratch
would cause?

Mercurial
Resilient

I paddle

Chinook McLean
On Shuswap Lake & Granite Creek, Tappen, BC: 2 - 5 June 2019

Nicole “Chinook” McLean teaches humanities and art on unceded Secwepemc land, and is completing her teacher inquiry MA on transformative learning. Chinook creates, connects and kayaks with curiosity, compassion and fervour.

Michelle McKay

Infusing Indigenous Perspectives in Outdoor Education and Inquiry while Developing Early Literacy Skills

The words resonated with me immediately... 'start by taking the children outside to learn'. These words were spoken to me by Anishinaabe knowledge keeper Kim Wheatley during a professional development session on Indigenous education and equity. Those words instantly began the process of sparking new ideas for me and the potential learning opportunities for students. This was the beginning of a journey that some of my colleagues and I have engaged in, with deep learning occurring for both students and educators, resulting in major shifts in my pedagogy.

The Walking Curriculum - A Natural Infusion of Indigenous Perspectives in Outdoor Learning

Our focus of engaging with the Walking Curriculum is to use a place-based pedagogy as a method of infusing Indigenous perspectives and teaching naturally into our curriculum. The Walking Curriculum is a resource designed to inspire educators to take students outside to engage in place-based learning, to develop a connection to the land by utilizing student's imagination and is an example of an Imaginative Ecological approach to education (to learn more please visit: <http://ierg.ca/IEE/>) (Judson, 2018). By viewing the environment as a teacher and connecting children

to the story of the land we are working towards developing meaningful relationships with the land and conceptualizing learning from this perspective by seeing how students belong and are connected to the world (Anderson, Comay & Chiarotto, 2017). By being with the land we are grounding learning with a lens that will allow students to (hopefully more meaningfully) engage in reconciliation work. We are working from the belief that this relationship and way of knowing must be present before students can be moved to a call of action (Anderson et al., 2017).



Image 1: Anishinaabe Knowledge keeper Kim Wheatley sharing how to foster a relationship between the land and students

Utilizing various texts and stories to infuse equity into my practice is something that I have done throughout my career and an instructional method that I have come to view as a rudimentary entry point to learning about equity. Teaching Kindergarten naturally lends itself to utilize various stories and texts as an inroad into important and meaningful conversations centered around equity. This school year I wanted to push my learning in regards to entering into conversation with my students about Indigenous education and how we can begin to work towards the Calls to Action by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. This was the starting point in my work with the Walking Curriculum by Dr. Gillian Judson.

We committed to re-energizing our outdoor programming and education by engaging in a daily walk aligned with Dr. Judson's philosophies of place-based education and learning. We quickly began to see how this was shifting our practice, especially how we approached literacy and language instruction throughout the day. The students we teach attend full-day Kindergarten, where learning happens in a play-based environment and our students spend extended periods of time engaged in outdoor learning at least twice per day. Much of the literacy learning that occurs within our day is responsive to student needs and authentic to their experiences and interests within the program. Engaging in the Walking Curriculum afforded us learning opportunities that we would not have had without engaging in a walking and place-based pedagogy.

The Shift in Instructional Practices related to Literacy Learning

Four and five-year-old children are naturally curious about their world and enjoy asking questions and conversing with those around them about their experiences within the world. This is one of my favourite things about teaching Kindergarten - no question is too big to ask and no observation too small to share. By bringing students into the community daily for curriculum-focused walks, we began to see how actively engaging in learning through walking and utilizing our imagination can lead to students' developing a variety of literacy and language skills while creating shared lived experiences. Our walks have a daily focus/topic tied to our curriculum expectations which are co-selected with students (Judson, 2018). Sometimes, they are directly tied to language skills (e.g., a 'word' walk or 'alphabet walk'), but most of the time the literacy skills are a natural outcome of engaging with the Walking Curriculum. The number of skills or expectations addressed in our walks is not something that could be achieved in the same amount of time if we were engaged in 'traditional' language instruction inside the classroom.



Image 2 & 3 demonstrate a few of the walks that are directly connected to developing language skills. It also shows how we use photographs while engaged on walks to capture the learning and later share with others on Twitter.

Oral Language Skills

Throughout this process, we have observed growth and new learning in students' oral language, listening and speaking skills. Research has demonstrated the importance of developing strong oral language skills in the early years and the impact that this has on other literacy skills, such as reading and writing (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016; Pelletier, 2011). As we walk and engage students in conversation, they are developing an increasingly complex vocabulary due to the descriptive language they are using while describing their experience and what they are noticing. We have gone on walks where we encourage students to use their imaginations and tell stories about what they believe used to be on this land long ago or imagine if trees were people what they would be doing (Judson, 2018). Playing with language and engaging in narrative storytelling allows students to access a new way of knowing and making their thinking visible. We use photographs and anecdotal comments as the primary form

of documentation when we are walking. When we come back inside the classroom after the walks, we share these images with students on the projector, which also leads to additional learning through conversations as students are provided additional time for processing and sharing their thinking as it develops over time.

Reading and Writing Skills

We have furthered the learning that occurs on our walks by engaging in inquiry learning about trees as our students have formed deep connections and interests in the trees we encounter in our community on walks. Not only has this led to a plethora of reading and writing skills developed from our students, but students have also used artistic representations of their experiences to help consolidate their learning. The level of detail in their drawings of them engaged in walks and representing these experiences and understanding is outstanding. Students often incorporate labels and sentences in the pictures they draw with great interest as this is an authentic method of engaging in writing. My teaching partner and I will often direct our literacy instruction to the needs of the child based on what we observe at the moment as students draw and write about their walks, making instruction accessible for students at a range of developmental levels and responsive to student needs. We get students to read back their writing after they have written to allow us to observe many early writing behaviours, such as various concepts of print, understanding why we write, various writing conventions and letter name and sounds (Cunningham & Allington, 2011). By experiencing and being with the land for substantial amounts of time we also focus on developing the ability to 'read' the land and look at the natural cycles of nature (Anderson et al., 2017).



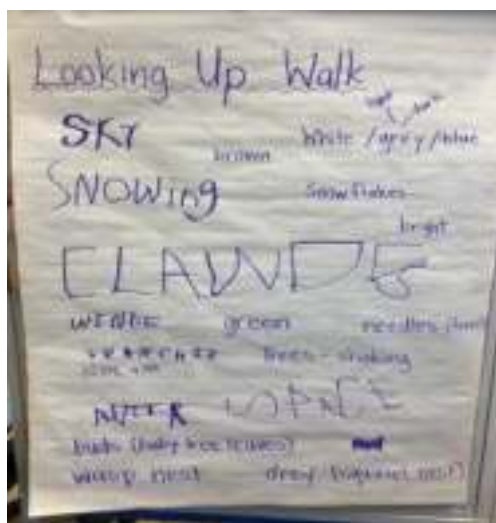
Today we went on a walk to look at trees for the [#walkingcurriculum](#). So imagined what type of animal each tree would be. We focused on justifying our thinking & explaining why we thought the tree looked like a certain animal. We 'saw' cubs, ladybugs, giraffes, octopus & turtles



Photo 4 is one example of a walk where we encouraged students to use their imaginations where a variety of oral language skills were developed and demonstrated by having students justify their thinking.



Today we went on a 'looking up' walk where we looked at our environment from a different perspective. When we came back from our walk we spoke about words that described our walk & what we saw writing down the sounds we heard in words [#walkingcurriculum](#) @FolkstonePS @perfiner



The literacy skills developed in this walk might have not been evident initially, but by having students talk and write about their experience lead to new learning and a variety of skills to be demonstrated.

“According to literacy scholar and educator Allan Luke, the challenge for today’s students is that they are being asked to read not just the text, but ‘the world’” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016, p. 65). By creating a daily experience for students to move, explore their community and the natural environment while sparking their creativity and imaginative skills we are setting the stage for several early literacy skills that students will need as they continue to become readers and writers who will use their language skills to make a difference in the world. We often look at the classroom environment as the third teacher and carefully construct it to support learning (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2012; Ontario Ministry of Education, 2016). The outdoors lends itself as a natural teacher and literacy-rich learning environment for students with a multitude of learning opportunities. Inspired to see how your language program can be reimagined by walking, but not sure where to begin? Go back to Kim Wheatley’s words and start by taking the children outside to learn.

For more information on the Walking Curriculum please visit Gillian’s website (imaginED):
<http://www.educationthatinspires.ca/walking-curriculum-imaginative-ecological-learning-activities/>

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Sheryl Lain

Why I Teach Hero Stories

Many of my students know that life is not fair, not remotely reasonable and often too hard to bear. One student wrote a personal narrative about her worst Christmas, when her dad forgot to come pick her up. It was his turn to have her for the holiday. Another wrote about being a zero, how school reduced him to a nobody. Kevin hid out in my room for an hour after school to avoid a gang of bullies. I watched out my window as Bryce's mom made him ride in the back of her pickup during a below-zero blizzard.

As a long-time teacher of junior high students, I decided a long time ago to teach hero literature to my students, stories that end well for the heroic protagonist, thus proving to my happy-one-moment-and-sad-the-next kids that life is worth the journey. Along with all kinds of other texts--self-selected and whole class nonfiction excerpts--I hand out books such as *No Language but a Cry*, by Richard D'Ambrosio, a true story of Laura, a girl who, as a baby, was burned in a frying pan by her alcoholic parents. Nevertheless, Laura finds her way, step by step, into the light of day, proving that people can overcome scalding nightmares and begin to trust others. We read *The Contender* by Robert Lipsyte, a story about Alfred who swims against the current of the ghetto's influence, turning down the lure of drugs, to become a winner in the boxing ring. We read *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*, whose hero says that in spite of everything, she believes people are really good at heart; her affirmation spoken only days before dread banged down the door of her hiding place. She died of typhus in Bergen Belsen.

We read Stephen Vincent Benet's short story, *By the Waters of Babylon*, and afterwards we discuss destruction and hope. What if the heat of a nuclear explosions erases cathedrals, the Louvre, and almost all human beings. In spite of unspeakable loss, I tell my class that I hope some people survive. Yes, we're a mixed bag, some of us so malevolent that we want to blow the place to smithereens. Yet, humans are marvelous creatures with our stereoscopic vision that perceives depth and, thus, can follow the stars and navigate unknown oceans. We have opposable thumbs that can grasp a pencil and write a poem, or hold an unsteady grandma's hand against the hurtling danger of the hostile street. We have frontal lobes that means we understand metaphor and perceive grand patterns that help us bring order out of chaos.

Nevertheless, my students live with injustice and disappointment, so I'm impelled to shore up the river banks of hope with the grammar of story, a plot's trajectory that climbs laboriously through almost impossible struggles to the curve's apex when suddenly the fog lifts and the sun momentarily shines through. From this vantage point, we turn our faces to the sun, its bright rays infusing us with optimism. I offer my students stories about heroes who, in spite of confusion and pain, jut out their stubborn chins and ask, in the words of Carl Sandburg in his poem, *The People*, Yes, "Where to now? what next?" I hope to grow my kids as readers while demonstrating that we people can push on, no matter what.

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Sheryl Lain has been a secondary English and reading teacher for decades. She wore other hats too including director of the Wyoming Writing Project and international presenter. Her book, *A Poem for Every Student*, details the zany, challenging and fulfilling teaching life.

Lynne Wiltse

Seeing Self and Students through Richard Wagamese's *Medicine Walk*

Introduction

When I came across *English Practice*'s recent call for papers, the theme, *Seeing Self in Story, Holding Space for Identity and Perspectives*, spoke to me. The invitation to explore and converse about what brings a sense of community to the learning and teaching of English language arts intrigued me. In addition, the connection made to the words of Richard Wagamese, "All we are is story," caught my attention. I first met Richard Wagamese years ago at a book launch for *Dream Wheels* (2006) in Kamloops, BC. At the time, I was teaching in the education program at Thompson Rivers University. Wagamese's novel was inspired by Maynard McRae, an Indian¹ cowboy Wagamese spent time with. Maynard had since begun his education degree and was in my language and literacy course. Both Richard and Maynard signed my copy of the novel; for me, this marked the beginning of a significant relationship with the books of Richard Wagamese. The last time I saw Richard was years later, in Edmonton, where I now teach at the University of Alberta. Richard delivered a talk on *Indian Horse* (2012), which had been nominated Book of the Year at MacEwan University. After the talk, Richard signed my copy of the novel, along with *Medicine Walk* (2014), a more recent novel. Although many of Richard's books have had a profound impact on my teaching and research, it is *Medicine Walk* that is featured in this paper. The novel will serve as a catalyst for me to examine the theme, *Seeing Self in Story* in three parts, in relation to myself, as well as some of the students I have taught over my career. In doing so, I will address select questions posed in the call for papers.

Seeing Self in Story: Part 1

Medicine Walk tells the story of Frank Starlight, the kid, raised by "the old man" on a farm in the interior of British Columbia. In the novel, Wagamese makes it clear that Frank "never did take to school"...where "they'd be made to sit in silent rows, with their feet tucked together under the desk and their hands loosely folded on top. The teachers talked too fast and they never repeated things like the old man did until he could cotton on to them and he got lost easily" (p. 30). The novel, at least this part of it, is set approximately in the time and vicinity of my first teaching position, in the remote interior of British Columbia. I wanted to be a teacher since I was 7 years old; I completed my education degree at the University of Victoria. I had no idea that I would arrive so ill-equipped to teach the students who sat in front of me in the small First Nations community. I learned quickly that my program had not done justice to preparing me to work in non-mainstream contexts. In the following passage, Wagamese provided me with possible insight into my former students, learners perhaps like Frank:

He knew his numbers and his letters. The old man had taught him that. He knew bushels, pecks, pounds, and ounces from harvesting, sacking grain, and feeling stock. He knew to write lists of food and chores that needed doing...He could count and figure and write better than the others, but the lessons made no sense to him. Nothing seemed built to help him plow five acres with a mule, help deliver a breeched calf, or harvest late fall spy apples, so he mostly let the words fall around him. (Wagamese, 2014, pp. 30-31).

In one paragraph, Wagamese sums up the irrelevancy of school literacy and learning for Frank. For someone who

¹ Terminology has been problematic in this chapter, in part because language usage has shifted over the close to four decades encompassed in the paper. I use the term Indigenous, which is inclusive in Canada of the Inuit, First Nations (formerly Indian), and Métis peoples, in a general sense. At other times, I use the term that is most appropriate for the particular context that I am addressing (i.e. First Nations), or the term in the published literature to which I am referring (i.e. Indian or Native).

has devoted their career to formal schooling, reading this passage took my breath away. I questioned whether the lives of my first students felt as disconnected from school. But, I had to attribute my strong reaction, at least in part, to seeing myself in the story. While I was all too aware of what my students did not seem to know (in particular, curriculum expectations), in contrast, I knew all too little about my students' out-of-school lives to answer my question. I did not know what they did know. Moreover, it pains me to admit that my students did not see themselves in story, at least not in positive ways. The school, part of the Williams Lake School District, but 200 miles away on a mostly gravel road, was well-equipped, but the resources were not culturally relevant nor locally developed. In that first year, I did not successfully answer the question posed in *English Practice's* call: How might we use stories to help students understand themes of identity, diversity, and inclusion? Although I had taken, and loved, a children's literature course, questions of this nature were not well addressed 40 years ago, particularly regarding minority students. For example, I was required to teach a required novel, *Boss of the Namko Drive: A Story from Cariboo Country* (St. Pierre, 1965), to my Grade 7/8 students. I was initially excited to learn that the story was set in the local area and featured two "Indian cowboys" who took part in an annual cattle drive. However, the book portrayed stereotypic negative images of Indigenous people, as can be seen in the following excerpt, when one of the ranch hands warns the young boss: "I tell you, kid, never trust the Indians with liquor. It don't act on them like a white man. Remember that. One ounce...and they're away. They can't handle their liquor" (p. 66). It did not seem to matter to me that the text had redeeming features (the main character tried to defend the Indian cowboys, and these characters helped to save the cattle drive in the end), at least not in my inexperienced view. With that depiction, the damage was done. As a beginning teacher, I did not know how to address the generalizations and racism inherent in the text, nor how to bring my discomfort into the open with my students. That some of my students' families struggled with alcohol abuse aggravated my unease. Accompanying the reading of the dreaded words were awkward silences. Many years later, the memory still fills me with shame.

At the time, I was not yet familiar with the mirrors/window metaphor, commonly used in children's literature (see Bishop, 1990). I can apply it in retrospect, though. For example, in her speech, *Books that are Windows. Books that are Mirrors. How We Can Make Sure that Children See Themselves in Their Books*, Patsy Aldana (2008) explained that children need books that are mirrors in which they can see and learn about themselves, and books that are windows open to the rest of the world. I understood this concept experientially. My childhood was enriched by reading books as windows that allowed me "to imagine beyond the boundaries" of my own environment...to broaden my "vision of self and world" (Napoli, 2007, p. 55). And, as much of the children's literature I read as a child reflected my white, middle class background, I was able to take the mirror aspect of the metaphor for granted, unlike my first students. It is for this reason that Aldana's emphasis is on children who have not experienced books as mirrors. Ingrid Johnston (2000) explains that it is "important to be able to recognize ourselves in a book, particularly if we, as readers, are from a culture that has been marginalized or previously unrecognized in literary texts in the west" (p. 135). This comment describes well my first students, and is why Aldana's question, "What is the long-term effect on a child of a steady diet of books from which he is totally absent or present but falsely depicted?" (para. 28) resonates so strongly. The students in front of me were examples; in this regard, I had not done them justice. I did not start my teaching career from a position of strength, but I learned much, and the experience confirmed for me my desire to continue to work with First Nations students.

My next teaching positions were in band-operated community schools, in Alert Bay with the Nimpkish Band and near Port Alberni with the Nuw-Chah-Nulth Tribal Council. Due to funding issues, ironically both of these schools were housed in former residential schools (new schools have long since been built in both locations). The grim stories I heard about residential school from family members gave me a glimpse into the legacy of residential schooling that had been absent in my own schooling. The schools, which provided an alternative to public schools, had neither gym nor library. But, they were in the students' community, and where the Indigenous languages and cultures were taught. For me, the involvement of family and community members was the most dramatic difference, in striking contrast to my first position. Participation at parent-teacher interviews was close to 100%, family members showed up to school functions, volunteered for field trips, and so forth. The expectation that teachers be involved in the community was another shift. We attended beginner dance and language classes, and

were invited to potlatches and other ceremonies. While I cannot begin to describe the positive influence of these changes here, the difference was that, as a non-Indigenous teacher, I felt I was providing an education worth caring about (Oskineegish, 2015). At the time, there was still a shortage of children's literature authored by Indigenous Canadians. However, there were locally developed, culturally appropriate reading materials, some written in the local Indigenous languages. Unlike my first students, these children had some opportunity, albeit limited, to see themselves positively in story. I saw myself favourably, as well.

Seeing Self in Story: Part 2

My story carried on through a dozen years of teaching in First Nations communities in BC, graduate school at the University of Alberta, and into my first post-secondary teaching position at Thompson Rivers University in the interior of BC, before it intersected once more with *Medicine Walk*. I found a connection in Wagamese's description of how the old man taught Frank to shoot a gun:

When he could shoot as dependably with the carbine as with the .22 the old man let him start to hunt. They'd take the horses and cross the field and plod up the ridge and by the time they were down the other side the land became what the old man called "real." To the kid, real meant quiet, open, and free before he learned to call it predictable and knowable. To him, it meant losing school and rules and distractions and being able to focus and learn and see. To say he loved it was a word beyond him then but he came to know the feeling (p. 32).

Unlike the author's account of Frank's school experiences, which filled me with regret, the portrayal of Frank as a learner outside of school had a much more positive association for me. Remarkably, this passage called to mind another boy who loved hunting—Darius, a student participant in one of my research projects. Here, I will describe the study details in brief, to provide the reader with just enough context to follow this part of my story.

The first major research grant I applied for as a professor had roots in my first teaching position, when I taught students whose lives were not closely connected to school. I applied key learnings from my teaching and graduate student experiences when I wrote the grant proposal for the research project. The three-year school-university collaborative research study investigated which out-of-school practices and knowledges of Indigenous students may provide them with access to school literacy practices. Within a broad sociocultural framework, the research was grounded in a "funds of knowledge" (Moll, Amanti, Neff & Gonzales, 1992) perspective, which encourages educators to make connections between children's out-of-school lives and school learning. This approach, which views diversity as a resource rather than a deficit (Cummins, Chow & Schecter, 2006), opens up literacy pedagogy to a wider range of learning and teaching. Despite the promise of these approaches, the argument has been made that many schools and educators know so little about the out-of-school lives of their students, particularly for minority language learners, that they find it difficult to build on "funds of knowledge" from children's homes and communities (Marshall & Toohey, 2010). Given my first teaching experience, the appeal of this research approach should come as no surprise. In terms of methodology, I drew on the work of educational researchers who have used ethnographic studies to understand children's language and literacy practices, both in school (Maybin, 2006; Toohey, 2000; Wallace, 2005) and out of school (Schultz & Hull, 2002). This qualitative study included three interconnected groups of research participants: (a) a teacher researcher study group (b) Indigenous students from the participating teachers' classes who were in Grades 4–7; (c) pre-service teachers from my language and literacy classes who were partnered with the students in literacy collaborations. The partnerships between the students and pre-service teachers centered on the Heritage Fair Program (also known as Historica), a multi-media educational program developed to increase awareness and interest in Canadian history, unique community events and/or family culture. Students undertake research in developing their projects and present their completed displays at school, regional and/or provincial fairs.

The students who participated in the research study attended Wolfwood School (all names of people and places from the study are pseudonyms), operated by the local First Nations band. The school followed the provincial

Ministry of Education curriculum, in addition to offering programming in the local Indigenous language, history and culture. Situated next to the former residential school, which now houses band offices and a museum on the history of residential schooling, Wolfwood School was just a few years old at the time of the study. Many of the students had relatives who had attended the residential school. Due to space constraints, I cannot elaborate, but for a more detailed description of the study, please see Wiltse (2015).

At the time of the study, 10-year-old Darius was in his first year at Wolfwood School, having recently moved from a small and isolated Indigenous community in the northern BC. The following text was prominently showcased on the poster board for his project, alongside photos of a gun and a hunter displaying his mule deer.

I am from Fort Wilson, and our traditional hunting places are located at Seven Mile Lake Creek and Waskat Lake. Fort Wilson is located north of Jackpines. My people are from the Klinchuk Nation. I am the third generation of hunters. When I hunt with my Grandpa and Uncle It makes me feel really cool. They teach me how to kill a beaver and elk, they show me how to skin the animals. These two places are where we do most of our hunting. We hunt so we can feed our family with the meat. We make dried meat with the moose we kill. We also hunt black bear for the hide, fat and claws; the elders like to eat them. There are a lot of hunters in the Klinchuk Nation. Men do the hunting while women do the cleaning and cut up the meat.

In the following interview excerpt, Darius explains his reasons for choice of topic, clearly of personal interest, but also of family and community tradition:

I picked my project on hunting Fort Wilson because it's part of my tradition. It's one of the things I mostly love to do. You can hunt moose, elk, black bear and white tailed deer. I love it 'cause, like, you learn how to aim and shoot and when you're older you could teach your kids. My grandfather and my uncle taught me. And, you can make coats and gloves with their hide. My great-grandma likes to do it. She makes jackets.

Both Wagamese's description of what Frank knows about farm life and Darius's explanation of hunting brought Moll and Greenberg's funds of knowledge – “the essential cultural practices and bodies of knowledge that households use to survive, to get ahead, or to thrive (1990, p. 321)” – to life for me. At the time of the study, my interest was in the ways funds of knowledge could represent a “positive...view of households as containing ample cultural and cognitive resources with great, potential utility for classroom instruction” (Moll et al., 1992, p. 134). Darius had never before completed a large project that required him to do research as well as writing in expository, narrative, expressive and poetic forms. He described the work as “very hard to do all the details” but that he “liked it very much, 'cause I got to do it in my own traditional way.” For a boy who, according to his teacher, was rarely engaged in school literacies during the first year at his new school, this was significant. Kandy, his university partner, agreed:

Darius definitely said that he usually doesn't like writing or reading very much in school but that he was excited about his heritage fair project because he could find out about hunting and he got to call and talk to his uncle for the interview. So, it does help that he actually got to explore this aspect of his life in school, and see that there are ways for him to write and read and enjoy it.

I considered the case of Darius to be a positive school story, especially when compared to the school stories of Frank and my first students. In large part, this was because it incorporated Darius' out-of-school life and cultural practices. Recognizing my first students in Frank's school narrative unsettled me; seeing Darius' reassured me. Darius was one of many students able to make connections between their out-of-school lives/cultural traditions and school learning through the heritage fair projects. For example, Karina, completed her project on jingle dress dancing. In the following interview excerpt, she explains the significance of her topic choice.

I picked this topic because I myself am a jingle dress dancer. I'm a junior princess. My responsibility is I have to go to as much powwows as I can and when I put my crown on I have to be all proud. When I dance it makes me feel good since I know I'm gonna dance for the people. So, that's why I picked this dress... It is a healing dress because there's a story about a man who was very ill, and he had his sickness broken because he had a vision about this dress. It's called the jingle dress because of the tobacco lids and whenever you hear that it's like a ring going on a tin thing.

Although children's literature was not the focus of this research project (unlike other studies in which I have been involved), there were now stories that could serve as mirrors for students like Karina. A case in point is *Jingle Dancer* (Smith, 2000), a picture book about a girl who dreams of jingle-dancing like her grandma. Clare Bradford (2007) explains that "what distinguishes *Jingle Dancer* from the vast majority of settler society texts is that it treats as normal and natural Jenna's aspirations and the values of her culture" (pp. 45-46). *Jingle Dancer* could be used to help students like Karina understand themes of identity, diversity, and inclusion in ways that I could not envision with *Boss of the Namko Drive*.

Seeing Self in Story: Part 3

The feeling of assurance which accompanied the connection I was able to make between Darius and *Medicine Walk* was short-lived. Not long after reading *Medicine Walk*, I came across an article—*Creepy White Gaze: Rethinking the Diorama as a Pedagogical Activity* (Sterzuk & Mulholland, 2011). In their paper, the authors critique a heritage fair entry, "Great Plains Indians;" their analysis centers on a photograph which appeared in a Saskatchewan provincial teachers' newsletter of a "White settler child and two White settler educators gathered around the student's heritage fair entry" (p. 16). In their introduction, the authors note that while the photograph could be seen as innocuous and inclusive, it was "actually a snapshot of the educational community's role in the discursive production of the colonized and the colonizer" (p. 17). One of the authors described her initial response to the actions of the three people in the photo as a "creepy White gaze." As a White settler educator whose recent research related to Indigenous students' heritage projects, the article certainly provoked a strong measure of discomfort. Once again, I was seeing self in story, but the reflection in the mirror was not affirmative. What Sterzuk and Mulholland had to say about museums, in particular, caused me to query the projects: "(M)ost heritage fair displays mimic traditional forms of representation developed and practiced in Western museums from the 18th century forward" (p. 22). Reading this critique made me question the appropriateness of this form of representation, in particular for Indigenous students. I could see that, in some respects, the projects of the research participants are typical of what Archibald (2008) refers to as the 'museum and history' approach in elementary classrooms. However, given that my study involved Indigenous students examining the cultural and linguistic practices that were part of their lives in their homes and communities, I felt that, for the participants in my study, these projects constituted more than a creepy white gaze. But, I had been unsettled in a way that I could not seem to shake. In his book, *Indigenous Community: Rekindling the Teaching of the Seventh Fire*, Indigenous scholar, Gregory Cajete (2015) explains: "For Indigenous Peoples, modern education continues to reflect the deeply wounding processes of colonization. Traditional forms of knowing and educating have never been given credence in the objectified world of modern 'scientifically' administered education. (p. 8). Cajete's words helped me to understand that, while the projects drew on students' cultural traditions, they were grounded in Western traditions of education, and not reflective of Indigenous world views. Rather, accomplishing change necessitates a project that will "interrupt the dominant discourse and offer teachers and students alternative ways of knowing" (Cajete, p. 8). I recognized that what I had considered culturally appropriate education—the heritage projects, but also my years of teaching in band-operated schools—were grounded in a mainstream philosophy of education. With the publication of the Calls to Action of The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), these misgivings were magnified, provoking considerable internal struggle. The glimpses of self in this part of my story were less than positive.

It was at this point that I read a review of *Medicine Walk* in the *Globe and Mail* (Fischer Guy, 2014). Drawing on a conversation between Richard Wagamese, Shelagh Rogers and Joseph Boyden, Fischer Guy notes that through his writing career as both a journalist and as a novelist, Wagamese "said he'd sought clarity and connection between

native people and settlers” (R12). In his words:

The story of Canada is the story of her relationship with native people. If we lean over the back fence and share part of that story with the person on the other side of the fence, we bring each other closer.

Richard’s words helped me to story myself in a more constructive manner. I was able to see that, as a settler teacher and researcher, my teaching of and research with Indigenous students, however flawed, is part of the Canadian story. In this paper, I have leaned over the back fence to share a piece of my story with the readers on the other side of the fence, so to speak. I expect that some of the readers of this paper will be educators who, like me, are committed to improving their teaching practice through a desire keep learning, an openness to listen, and a willingness to change. If any readers happen to see themselves reflected in my story, I would refer them to the oft-quoted words of Thomas King (2003) for direction: “Just don’t say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You’ve heard it now” (p. 167).

Closing Thoughts

In the close to four decades since my first teaching position, much has changed. Personally, as well as professionally, my story has evolved. It is an amalgam of anecdotes, a mix of negative and positive. But, rather than feeling shame for the undesirable stories, like novelist Chimamanda Adichie (2009), I have come to accept that “(a)ll of these stories make me who I am. But to insist on only these negative stories is to flatten my experience, and to overlook the many other stories that formed me (para. 24).”

I am no longer that inexperienced teacher afraid to speak up for my students. Over the years, I have become comfortable with discomfort. I have learned to embrace a ‘pedagogy of discomfort’ (Boler & Zembylas, 2002) in my teaching. I use stories and literature to help students understand themes of identity, diversity, and inclusion. In this, I am aided by the upsurge in publication of children’s literature by authors of Indigenous heritage, in the years since I was required to teach *Boss of the Namko Drive*. The students who sit before me now are elementary pre-service and in-service teachers, and for the most part, non-Indigenous. Children’s literature plays a significant role in bringing a sense of community to the learning and teaching of English language arts in my classes. For many of these students, much of the literature we read serves as windows. I draw on Adichie’s (2009) TED talk, *The Danger of a Single Story*, to extend the windows and mirrors metaphor, and support students to disrupt single stories of Indigenous peoples (and other groups, for example, LGBTQ, refugees, ELLs). Adichie’s speech problematizes single stories as they create stereotypes. She notes that “the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story become the only story” (para. 24). As Tschida, Ryan and Ticknor (2014) explain: “It is only by disrupting single stories with narratives told from other perspectives that we form a more nuanced picture of the people, issues, or ideas at hand” (p. 31). To foster multiple perspectives in reading, I use text sets, a collection of texts that are assembled around a similar group of people, issue, cultural theme, and so forth. According to Botelho, Lewis-Bernstein Young and Nappi (2014), the analysis of text sets “generates intertextual ties, connections, disconnections, and questions, while allowing the reader to take notice beyond what is taken for granted and attend to multiple perspectives and the exercise of power” (p. 43).

In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Daniel Heath Justice (2018) writes about the importance of stories, and how and why they matter. Justice explains that, the stories others tell about Indigenous people have too often been the wounding kind. For me, *Boss of the Namko Drive* comes to mind. As a settler educator and scholar, I have qualms as to the kind of story I tell. Once again, Richard Wagamese’s words encourage me to let go of my doubts:

What comes to matter then is the creation of the best possible story we can while we’re here; you, me, us, together. When we can do that and we take the time to share those stories with each other, we get bigger inside, we see each other, we recognize our kinship—we change the world, one story at a time...

The story I have told in this paper is dedicated in memory of Richard Wagamese, in humble gratitude for helping me see more clearly.

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Jessica R Gallo and Bailey Herrmann

In the Company of Writers: Planning a Writing Retreat for Teachers

As teachers of writing, we know what it takes to be successful writers. We know that writing teachers should be writers themselves (Hicks, Whitney, Fredricksen, Zuidema, & Edwards, 2017, p. 27), and we need to develop a daily writing practice (Silvia, 2007). We know that we need to work through drafts and build in time for revision. We know that we need to talk with other writers and read writing that we admire. We know that “meaning is not thought up and then written down” and understand that “the act of writing is an act of thought” (Murray, 2004, p. 3). We know that we should “write to think” and ask our students to do the same (Murray, 2004, p. 3). Although many writing teachers understand the need to be writers themselves, it can be difficult to find the time to commit to improving our own writing.

We earn our credibility as teachers of writing by working through our own writing process and sharing that work with our students. There is something very powerful about exposing the struggle and the triumph of a writing process for students to examine. Writing teachers need to write, and they need to do that writing in front of students often. Opening our minds for our students so that they can see our thinking processes, and demystifying the nature of struggling with our writing, shows students how to tackle similar challenges in their own writing. Too often, students see their writing teachers as experts who never experience the challenges of a blank page, or they think that brilliance springs fully formed from their writing teachers’ pens onto the paper. Writing teachers who write with their students know that this is not the case. And their students do, too.

Furthermore, as writing teachers, we understand the social nature of writing. Yagelski (2009) explains that “the experience of writing is an experience of our being as inherently social; it is the experience of the interconnectedness of being” (p. 14). Knowing this, we find ways to support our students so that they work through their writing processes together. We help them understand good practices for holding writing conferences with one another, and we show them how to give feedback that will sustain and encourage other writers. And yet, many writing teachers experience their own writing as a solitary activity. We know the value of supported writing for our students, but we often do not have the same kind of support ourselves.

Even with this deep knowledge of how to be a productive writer, we also know that none of these things is easy and that the other parts of our lives and work can get in the way of our best laid plans. Sometimes, even with many good writing habits in place, we need to set aside a larger chunk of time to kickstart our writing, make significant progress on a stalled project, or work through those revisions that have been hanging over our heads. In cases like these, a writing retreat might be just what writing teachers need to reignite their writing.

A writing retreat can provide the dedicated time and supportive community that a writer needs to develop a project or to push through a difficult piece. While the concept is simple, a writing retreat requires some organization and planning in order to create a productive environment. Here we share some of the lessons we have learned from our own writing retreat experiences.

A Shared Purpose

In our last year of graduate school, we were five women finishing up our dissertations. Our writing tasks felt huge and overwhelming, and deadlines were looming. Like all writers and teachers, we had many responsibilities inside and outside of work, and we collectively felt as though our writing was pushed to the back burner. Feeling our spring deadlines looming, we agreed that we needed to get away from the distractions and demands of our daily lives and just dedicate ourselves to our writing. We needed to have the time and space to work through our writing processes and commit words to paper. Beyond our need to complete our writing tasks, the five of us also needed to work in the company of other writers. We wanted a space to support each other. The shared purpose and focus of the writing retreat allowed us to connect with each other socially and professionally. The retreat was a chance to grow together in our writing so that we could help each other through the process. Yes, we wanted to have some dedicated writing time away from distractions, but we also needed the advice and support of other writers who were asking the same kinds of questions and tackling the same kinds of hurdles.

With our shared goals of productivity and support for one another, the five of us planned a winter writing retreat in central Wisconsin. We were able to get away for a long weekend, about three and a half days, but any amount of time away from our normal routines and environments would have been helpful. Even one day would have been enough to make some progress in the presence of supportive writers who shared the same urgency and purpose.

Establish Interest

The writing demands of graduate school certainly created a sense of urgency and need for us and many of our peers. We knew that there was a good chance that we could find enough participants to hold a writing retreat. Our first step in developing our retreat was establishing interest. We started with the two of us and one other woman because we knew with at least three people, we could make the retreat happen.

With our core group established, we began to invite more people to the group. We asked colleagues who wanted to participate so that we had a rough estimate of our group size and dynamic. An important consideration in planning the retreat was how the participants would work together and contribute to the shared success. Because our writing retreat would have to be fully funded out of our own pockets, having more writers would decrease the cost for everyone. But we also knew that having too many writers increased the chances of distraction, or that some would see the retreat as a fun weekend getaway rather than a dedicated time to work and write. We wanted a mix of personalities that would be harmonious but focused. In the end, we had five women who were interested, and we needed to figure out how much time we could all spare and what we could accomplish in the time that we had. We chose a weekend during our winter break after the holidays because that was a time that was most likely to be available for everyone.

Choose a Location

Choosing a location for the writing retreat required more planning than we expected. The location needed to strike the perfect balance in a couple of ways. We wanted to choose a place that was away from our usual environment. Though we could have secured a room on the university campus where we usually met, we knew that being in our same work spaces might not be that conducive to a very productive writing environment. Being in close proximity to our usual routines made us worry that we would be prone to taking care of a few errands before we got started or that we would be subject to the same interruptions that got in the way of our writing on a regular basis. On the other hand, we didn't want to be too far away, so we spent a lot of time driving to the location. We needed to find a place that would be distinctly different from our usual routines so that we wouldn't be tempted by competing schedules or obligations without committing too much time or money to the travel.

The ideal retreat space would be one that felt conducive to sustained writing and that would minimize outside distractions. We looked for rentals that were serene and tranquil and that had enough space to allow all participants to spread out and work in whatever way was most productive for them. Logistically, we knew that we needed lots of beds, tables, and outlets and reliable internet access. Finding a rental with a full kitchen that included cookware,

cutlery, and dishes would eliminate the need to bring all of the materials required to make the meals. We also hoped for a space that had some fun activities but not too many distractions. Though we knew that we would need to take some breaks in our writing to let the ideas marinate or to get away from the computer screens for awhile, we didn't want to be tempted by a location with lots of fun amenities nearby.

We also knew that we didn't want to hold our writing retreat at a hotel. The purpose of the writing retreat was that we could work together when we needed the support of other writers, so we wanted to be able to work independently in the company of others who were writing. We wanted a group atmosphere. To us, a hotel felt too impersonal and too confining.

With these search criteria in mind, we found a four-bedroom house near a river, in the woods of central Wisconsin. It was about an hour and a half away from our homes--far enough to feel like a getaway and close enough that we didn't spend a substantial amount of time driving. The house was located near a small town, but our writing space was a few miles away from the town so that we felt a bit secluded.

In choosing a location, we were also conscious of the cost of the rental. As graduate students, we were all on tight budgets, and we didn't want cost to be the deciding factor for the writers to be able to participate or not. In the end, we were able to negotiate the cost of the Airbnb rental so that the total cost was manageable whether we had three people or seven. It was winter with little demand for rentals in this small town, and we promised that we were a low-key writing retreat and not a big party coming to stay. These factors certainly played a role in our ability to negotiate the price.

Collecting Money

We began discussing the costs of the writing retreat very early on in the planning process. Collecting money for the retreat ensured commitment from the writers. We didn't want to be in the position of having some writers say that they would come and then back out at the last minute, causing the costs to go up for everyone who did attend. Instead, we set a target cost range early in the planning process with a core group of three committed writers. The three of us decided on a range that we could afford, even if only the three of us attended. We figured that additional writers would only lower the costs for everyone beyond that point. Using that cost range, we scouted locations. In determining the cost and inviting others, we factored in the cost of the rental unit and gas money to and from the location so that we could reimburse the brave drivers willing to drive on the back roads of Wisconsin in January. We divided the total cost by the number of people who would attend and collected the money a couple of months in advance so that we could secure the rental. We did not factor in the cost of food. Instead, we all signed up to provide and prepare three meals (breakfast, lunch, dinner, or snack). In addition to the benefit of securing commitment from interested writers, we also knew that we couldn't book the location until we had the money from everyone.

Logistics

With our location secured, the money paid, and writers ready to go, we began to focus on the logistics that would allow our retreat to run smoothly and optimize the amount of writing time. Throughout our planning process, we used Google Docs shared with everyone that contained important information. Our Google Doc included the dates of the trip, costs, meals and preferences, and the rental address and photos so that people could see the space we'd be staying in.

We decided that it would be most efficient to divide the responsibility of providing and preparing meals that we would all share. Preparing and sharing meals together also gave us communal time to gather and discuss our progress or just to chat and unwind. Supplying our own food also eliminated the travel time and the cost of eating at restaurants in the nearby town. To facilitate the meal planning and preparation process, we used our shared Google Doc to create a meal plan. Each writer signed up to provide and prepare three meals; with all five of us contributing food, we were in no danger of being hungry. We also chose our last evening together to dine together

at a restaurant in the nearby town as a sort of celebration of our efforts.

We also used the shared Google Doc to develop a schedule for our three days together. It was important to us that this retreat be as productive as possible. Because we are friends, it is tempting to spend a good chunk of time catching up or hanging out. We knew that we needed a schedule to keep ourselves on track. We included time for a significant amount of writing; daily goal setting; frequent conversations about our writing; and meal preparation, eating, and cleaning. We also scheduled some fun and free time. We knew that eight straight hours of writing wasn't sustainable and that breaks are necessary. Having the schedule helped us plan our time, but it was not a schedule that was rigidly enforced or required of anyone. There were plenty of separate spaces in the rental property so that those who wanted to talk could do so without breaking others' concentration. Overall, the schedule simply reinforced the idea that we were there to write and to make progress toward our writing goals (see fig. 1).

Time	Activity
8:15-8:30	prepare breakfast
8:30-9:30	breakfast / goal setting / clean up
9:30-11:15	individual writing time
11:15-11:30	prepare lunch
11:30-12:30	lunch / clean up
12:30-1:00	free time
1:00-2:30	individual writing time
2:30-4:30	free time
4:30-5:30	individual writing time
5:30-5:45	check-in on goals
5:45-6:00	prepare dinner
6:00-7:30	dinner /clean up
7:30-	free time

Fig. 1. A sample day from our writing retreat schedule.

Our Retreat Experience

The writing retreat was a great success in many ways. The five writers in attendance each made significant progress on their writing. The shared goal-setting and planning times increased our individual accountability for the scheduled writing sessions, and when we checked in at the end of each day, we were able to share the progress we had made. We used the scheduled breaks and free time to talk about other shared concerns such as our experiences on the academic job market, upcoming conferences, and plans for future research. Sometimes we used the breaks simply to unwind. During one of our breaks, we went snowshoeing, which was a nice way to spend some time outside, get a bit of good exercise, and let our ideas ruminate before returning to our writing. We deemed the rental location to be perfect. It had a lot of windows to allow for lovely natural light, and it overlooked a frozen lake that encouraged peaceful reflection.

From our experience, we learned that at a writing retreat, it is helpful to work on a project in process. We each prepared personally for the retreat by printing, saving, and preparing all documents or research articles we would need to be successful. We found that the people who accomplished the most writing during the retreat chose to work on drafts in progress rather than developing new ideas. An idea-generation writing retreat may be very helpful too, but we found that having several people in similar stages of revision provided more content for focused

discussion and minimized the hesitation that can sometimes come with a blank page. People who were starting projects had a harder time diving into the work and felt less productive at the retreat.

As a whole, we got a lot of writing done. We had stimulating conversations that provided new directions for our writing. We enjoyed our time together, bonded, and helped each other with our writing. Overall, we found our writing retreat to be peaceful and rejuvenating. Our time together was productive but relaxed, and we came back to our jobs and home lives feeling accomplished and refreshed. We plan to use this same model to plan our next writing retreat. Beyond the direct benefits of the writing retreat, we also renewed our understanding of the social nature of writing. Because we were in the company of writers, we were able to talk about the writing process directly, just as we would with our students. We shared our struggles and provided suggestions to work through those difficult spots, and we celebrated our successes together. We made our writing processes visible to one another so that we could collectively work to become better writers.

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Anja Zulic


The Gift of Belonging

When I first received the invitation to submit a piece about my classroom practice, the first thought that came to mind was: what can I, a new English Language Arts teacher of only 6 years, contribute that would be of any significance to those who have way more experience than I do? After thinking about it for a day, I realized that my desire to submit an entry has nothing to do with trying to teach, but simply wanting to share my experiences and what I have learned in my practice so far.

The topic of inclusion is one that is very near and dear to my heart. Coming to Canada as a refugee 25 years ago, living first in Newfoundland and then moving to British Columbia, I experienced firsthand what the power of being inclusive can mean to a child, and how that acceptance can shape a person's identity for the rest of their lives. I was completely terrified to leave my home, my family, my friends, and come to such a foreign environment, unable to speak a word in the country's language. However, my fears soon turned into curiosity, my lack of knowledge into a desire to learn, and my nerves into a calm that set in as I quickly felt that Canada could truly be my home. This is simply thanks to the incredible gift that I received when I moved here: the gift of inclusion. I was fortunate enough to have some amazing teachers, who were so patient with me as I learned English and instilled within me a passion for writing. Soon after, they encouraged me to volunteer as a peer tutor, and it was then, at 9 years old, that I realized I wanted to be a teacher.

I truly believe that we are all the sum of our experiences. Mine have guided my classroom practice into one with the goal of trying to make every student feel welcomed. From my observations, inclusion for students starts off with making them feel like your classroom is a space where they can truly be themselves. I realized early on, that this must begin with me. I noticed that the more relaxed and comfortable that I was with myself, my mistakes (whether it was more personal or knocking over my coffee and having it spill all over the classroom floor), and the openness with which I shared my own stories and struggles with them, the more that my students opened up with theirs. For example, since the school I teach at is largely comprised of students who have moved to Canada from another country as I have, and since it is also where I personally went to high school, we bond and connect through these shared experiences. When we model acceptance of our own journeys, the students look at us and feel that they can be comfortable with theirs.

My favourite classroom moments are the ones surrounding open discussion. I have seen students voice their anger at injustices in "Night" by Elie Wiesel and feel inspired to express their own journeys with war and trauma. I have seen them journal their empathy for the students in The Freedom Writers and I have seen them feel moved by a poem or a song, truly appreciating a complete stranger's experience. I think that the power of sharing our own stories and hearing those of others, is that it gives the stories of our students a platform and a voice to be heard. This sharing, in turn, makes us a family in the classroom, a family where every person is accepted and celebrated. In the past two years of my practice, thanks to the sharing of ideas with my wonderful colleagues, I have incorporated inquiry projects and the exploration of essential questions with every assignment in all my classes. At the beginning of the schoolyear, my students and I reflect on what makes for powerful questions and why asking questions is



important. I model what these kinds of questions look like, and then the students select one that they personally connect with. Some of these in the past have been, “how do our struggles shape our identity”, “how can power change people”, and “how can forgiveness give us inner peace”? Afterwards, throughout the year, the students write down six different works that we’ve looked at in class that they feel would connect with their question, and one of their own personal choosing. At the end of the schoolyear, they work on their inquiry projects and look deeper into the connections with their questions, writing down how they feel each work answers their chosen question. Their final products for submission are in whatever format they feel most comfortable in sharing their ideas, whether it is an essay, an art piece, a video, a song, or even a PowerPoint presentation. Although every format still requires written pieces, I want to give students choice and opportunity to showcase their learning in a style that they feel does their talents justice. I believe that allowing choices such as these with projects and assignments is a great way to be inclusive to all learning styles.

This project has been a great success. Since students usually pick an essential question that is important to them and something that they have wondered before, I have found that their reflections mirror a real personal connection to the works that they have analyzed, and often they include examples and experiences from their own lives in their written pieces. Reading these has been a gift to me as an educator. I have been brought to tears and a few times learned something completely surprising about a student who has usually been too shy to share their story before. I have really learned that many of our students will open up about their own experiences and identities if we just give them the opportunity to. I have seen how this release of story is an incredible tool in healing, laughing, strengthening relationships with others and self, and bringing communities together.

I am constantly adding to my teaching toolbox and figuring out what my identity is as an educator. I’m not sure if we can ever truly fit into one style, nor do I think that we should. Educators are some of the most adaptable and resilient human beings that I have ever met, and I am constantly being inspired by them with new ideas and fresh perspectives that I try and imitate in my own practice. The ones that teach me the most, though, are my students. By being their teacher, they have helped me gain a deeper sense of who I am, and I am forever grateful for this gift! They push me to be better, to work harder, and even on the tough days, make me feel like I am exactly where I need to be, and give me fulfilling purpose. I only hope that through my classroom practice and through the connections that I make with them, that I can guide them onto the path of finding theirs.

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Celia Brogan

Joining the D. A.: The Diversity Audit

(although it definitely feels like Dumbledore's Army)

You are probably familiar with Chimamanda Adichie's TED talk "The Danger of a Single Story"¹, if not I recommend you find a moment to watch it. It is a compelling statement of the need to advocate for a variety of narratives. It is important that our students have opportunities to see themselves and their classmates reflected in books and other media, as well as the authentic stories of other members of our society. I believe in the adage "if you can see it, you can be it" and this includes the telling of stories. We need to be conscious of endorsing diverse stories as reading material so that our students feel empowered to write their own and add their voices to the world.

In 2002 the Cooperative Children's Book Centre started an annual survey from American publishers, assessing the cultural representation of current children's literature². While it has gotten better, there is still a heavy bias towards white, neurotypical, able-bodied, straight cis-male protagonists. Understandably, this bias extends from the publishing world, all the way to the bookshelves in our classrooms and school libraries.

In an effort to critique the classroom and school libraries we curate for our students, some educators have started a practice of performing diversity audits on the resources we have in our collections. A true diversity audit assesses every title and author in a collection, but many folks choose to assess a sample and extrapolate. A diversity audit can be an extremely valuable exercise: regardless of good intentions, our privilege can blind us to how good a job we are actually doing in providing authentic representation for our students.

I have had a personal interest in the concept of diversity audits for a number of years now. I have collected and read articles when I came across them and carried the idea with me, always on that list of "projects to do when I have time to tackle them." Finally, in September 2019 a colleague wrote an email to our group of Vancouver Teacher-Librarians expressing interest in exploring diversity audits and asked if anyone else had thought about doing one. I jumped on it, suggesting how great it would be if there were a small group of folks who were all interested in delving into an audit and could support each other in the process. Within the next 48 hours fifteen other teacher-librarians had responded that they were very interested in participating in a collaborative group!

And so it began: we moved our email conversation out of the whole-group chat and started sharing introductory resources and planning how to proceed. I created a spreadsheet to compile titles that I planned to buy to remediate the (likely negative) results of my audit and shared it with the rest of the group so they could add to it too. As we identified the gargantuan size of a full diversity audit on a book collection the size of an elementary library, we decided to focus just on our fiction collections for this first experience.

The following was written in January 2020, half-way through the first year of the project:

What is going well:

While the actual act of auditing titles goes slowly, due to schedules and workload, the fact of being an active participant in the group means that we more easily keep the lens of diverse representation ready in our practice.

¹https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story. Accessed January 24, 2020.

² <https://ccbc.education.wisc.edu/books/pcstats.asp>. Accessed January 24, 2020.

We ended up moving our group chat to a Teams chat in Microsoft OneDrive as our district has adopted it as its primary online space, and we made sure to continue the conversation there by sharing notes from our in-person meetings for those who couldn't attend. Folks commented regularly that they felt connected through that chat even though they hadn't the capacity to participate more deeply as the year got busier. We decided to create a list of common titles in our collections and divide that list among us, thereby not performing a full audit (I have 2600 titles in my fiction collection) but rather a representative sample. Because we were doing this work off the sides of our desks, we did the work when we could carve out some time. The digital chat space was really helpful to maintain energy and drive to keep prioritizing the project.

Before we started the active audit, I weeded my fiction collection with a sharper eye to representation. This process was interesting for me because, although I regularly consider diversity and representation when curating my collection, it cut through some noise that I wasn't always aware of; my privilege allows me to get distracted and relax my vigilance more often than I'd like. By keeping the diversity audit forefront in my mind, I had a tool to practice being more consistently attentive to what I choose to keep on my shelves.

In order to share the work of the audit, we developed a tracking tool on a shared spreadsheet to note details about each title. We choose to assess stories in the following categories for the protagonist, author, and secondary character: racial identity; sexual orientation; gender identity; body differences; and brain differences. We created a notes field for any additional information.

I created a challenge that was uncomfortable but necessary: by featuring the diversity audit publicly in my practice I found I was unveiling existing biases and forcing myself to live with them while I worked to address them. I was inspired to I used the reading challenges I was creating for my school community to promote diverse reading practices (similar to BookRiot's Read Harder challenge, which I use to guide my own reading.) This created a more immediate need as I then struggled to find as many titles as I could to help my students who wanted to complete the reading challenge. For instance, the first task on my January challenge was to read a book about a character from the same culture [as you]. This resulted in my last-minute borrowing of an Armenian story from another school, and showcasing most of my stories with Chinese characters (and how many of those were contemporary stories rather than the stereotypical historical narratives? Not that many.)

What's next

At the time of writing, we are scheduled to present our experiences with our diversity audits at Winter Tonic, the annual winter conference presented by the Vancouver Teacher-Librarian's Association. I suspect that more of my colleagues will undertake this process in the near future in some format or another and I believe that we need to support each other in building resource collections where our students can see themselves and their classmates reflected. Everyone in the group will continue to direct funds to purchase titles that improve representation in their libraries. This year I devoted the majority of my funds to fiction that did not have a white protagonist. I will do something similar next year. It's a long road but I believe we are making a good start.

Should you embark on this journey? Yes. You don't have to complete a full audit of your classroom library but I do think that we need to do more than give cursory attention to what we present to our students. For sure, things are starting to shift; schools are starting to recalibrate the high school cannon, and there is a more diverse selection of titles available in stores, but we have to examine all the places and ways we communicate to students who's stories we think are important³. You are effectively endorsing every title you choose to put on your shelves for students to access. You are sending them a message about what you deem an appropriate collection, and they will notice what is and isn't there. There is a growing list of resources online to facilitate performing a diversity audit, and to help find more diverse titles when the results of your audit are compiled. Reach out: I guarantee that you have colleagues who will join the D.A. with you.

³<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/ottawa/ottawa-indigenous-books-curriculum-ocdsb-1.5035177>. Accessed January 24, 2020

Some resources and further reading:

I Dream Library

<https://www.idreamlibrary.com/>

We Need Diverse Books

<https://diversebooks.org/>

Canadian Children's Book Centre's Social Justice and Diversity Book Bank

<http://sjad.bookcentre.ca/>

School Library Journal's Diverse Books resources

<https://www.slj.com/?page=slj-diverse-books-survey-2018>

Bingo Card challenge for your reading diversity

<https://www.edutopia.org/article/how-audit-your-classroom-library-diversity>

Tips on performing a diversity audit

<https://www.teenservicesunderground.com/diversity-audit-assessing-your-collection/>

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Sara Sjerven

What's Your Issue? Poetry Unit of Inquiry

Rationale

I believe we need poets, philosophers, and story-tellers because we need our cultures reflected back to us and we need a moral compass in troubling times. Stories and poems can reflect these two needs in non-pedantic ways. This was my response to students asking the questions: Why should we study poetry? And why would we possibly need to write poetry? Poems, stories, and ideas help students to define their identities, both by agreeing and disagreeing with the ideas and views of others; from this place of knowing themselves, students can take action based on an understanding of where the needle of their moral compass points.

In response to these student questions, I developed this unit, “What’s Your Issue,” and it came to life in my Grade 11 classroom. I wondered what 16-year olds might consider interesting material to write about, and I wondered which poets might present strong examples of such interests. I teach (mostly) privileged students in a resource rich environment, and one of my goals is to unsettle and disrupt the bubble in which we sometimes find ourselves. To affect this disruption, I selected “Three Miles,” a This American Life podcast episode about the short physical distance of three miles, but the long actual distance between equality and opportunity, and the poems written by two Indigenous women, Leanne Simpson and Lee Maracle, about connections to ancestors and land; our final poet, Sumeir Hammad, uses her voice and presence to take on violence with her spoken word poetry.

The BC Curriculum asks us to address the notion that “the exploration of text and story deepens our understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others, and the world.” The “What’s Your Issue?” unit places the onus on students to look into themselves to consider an issue they care deeply about and to write from that place. When we connect and listen to ourselves and give voice to the ideas we care about—whether deeply personal, such as body image or racial identity, or more external, such as plastics in the ocean or clean water—we are laying the foundation for interpersonal connection because our own humanity and concerns will be shared by others.

And that is what we found. When students read their poems at our poetry evening, both parents and staff were startled by the power of the poetry and the conviction of our students as they read their own words about issues that struck at the heart of their beliefs. This unit was also a call to action. In answering the question, “What’s poetry good for?”, we eventually came to realize that the act of writing poetry is both a deeply political and a deeply personal act. For teenagers, it is important to not just be handed the (huge, complex, disturbing) problems of the world, but to be empowered with ways to speak out and address the problems. This unit suggests that writing poetry is one such way.



Figure 1. Title page of final poetry book published by Grade 11 classes.

Here is a breakdown of the unit:

Part	Class
Part 1: Listen and Practice: Found Poetry	2 classes
Part 2: Analyze the Models: Read Closely and Mimic	4 classes
Part 3: Write Our Own Poetry: Diverge and Converge	3 classes
Part 4: Write Artist's Statements: Analyze and Synthesize	2 classes
Part 5: Feedback: Assess and Revise	2 classes
Part 6: Perform: Publish, Prepare, and Recite	2 classes

Part 1: Listen and Practice: Found Poetry

In order to give students a smooth and simple entry into poetry writing and to expose them to an issue that I hoped would unsettle them, we listened to the podcast, "Three Miles." In this podcast, a teacher working at an inner-city school in the Bronx takes her mostly Latin-American students "three miles" up the road to an elite private school. Her goal was to expose them to other worlds and to open up doors for them. It had an entirely opposite effect on one student from the Bronx, Melanie. She was appalled at the privilege and clearly saw the inequality and racism that was at the heart of the different educational experiences that she and the students of the elite school were having; Melanie's voice is strong, her observations are visceral, and her words resonate with 16-year olds.

Writing poetry can be intimidating, so I decided to start students' poetry writing journey with a found poem. While listening to the podcast, I asked students to write down every word they heard that they felt had an impact on them.

One student came away with this list:

relentlessly	pen-pals
generously	dramatic reaction
progressive school	school's mission etched into the stone arches
blood drained from her face	blue-green eyes
bridge the divide	she was very, very, very smart. 3 verys
soft spot	powerful
nervous	ghetto
organized	a sea of white and blonde
cherry-red	we'll be wearing the uniform, serving them
I envisioned the future	division

And here is the found poem that emerged out of that student's selection:

children of the elite, see the divide
- Isabella S
they showed us their school
generously?
no, something altogether different—
it seemed malicious
that we were forced to wade into

a sea of white and blonde,
blue-green eyes
they looked through us
around us

yes.

we are the ghetto kids
and we say screw your caviar,
marble floors,
school mission etched
into the stone arches.

look at us, you “progressive” school,
look at the division–

a school devoid of colour
so you are forced to see
our cherry-red hair and jordans.

we’re nervous, yes

we’ve seen that our pen-pals
are lacking the authenticity, the awareness
that we mistakenly implanted in their words.

we envisioned the future
and here it is
but
we’re on the outside–looking in–
and your empty eyes
gloss over the ghetto
and push us into
black and white uniforms

we didn’t manage to bridge the divide that day.
but we scared the privileged on the other side.

Part 2: Analyze the Models: Read Closely and Mimic

Teenagers often experience outrage and indignation, so I wanted to find an author whose voice could help them access that power. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson has a powerful book of essays and poetry titled: *This Accident of Being Lost*. I took one essay and one poem from the collection to share with students because of Simpson’s ironic tone and because she also speaks about “white people” in a way that perhaps these students have not been exposed to. I wanted my students to register and understand both the anger and the dismissiveness. After reading the essay, “Plight,” and then Simpson’s poem, “the oldest tree in the world,” students responded to the questions below and the class had a Harkness discussion. (Any kind of discussion model would work for these questions.) The questions were designed to progress from comprehension to analysis to synthesis.

Questions:

1. What is it exactly that Simpson and her friends are doing?
2. Who is Sabe and what does he represent?
3. What is her attitude towards white people? How do you know? Why do you think this is?
4. What do you think about the paragraph that begins with “I mumble some Anishinaabemowin and put my offering in the fire”?
5. What’s the purpose of this essay? Why has she written it?
6. Who is the “you” in the first stanza of “to the oldest tree in the world”?
7. What do you think about the stanza breaks and the line lengths in this poem? Why has she done what she’s done?
8. What is the effect of “I breathe it in/you breathe it out”? What is “it”?
9. Where is the shift? What does she do at the end of the poem that we could borrow/mimic?
10. How do her essay and poem work together?



Figure 2: Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. (n.d.).
Leanne Betasamosake Simpson. <https://www.leannesimpson.ca/about/>

We then turned to Lee Maracle’s poem, “The Call: Breath is Wind,” to understand form and structure and to consider why poets might make the choices they make. Her poem was printed in *The Puritan*, which is a Canadian online literary magazine. At the end of the poem, it says: “The above is the teaching we adhere to when we speak” (my italics). We broke down the poem into its parts and tried to mimic what Maracle does based on a teaching or saying the students had heard and brought from their families. I gave students the following prompts:

We are going to write a poem which mimics Lee Maracle’s “The Call: Breath as Wind.” Our first step is to find a saying or belief that we have grown up with.

1. Put your saying here:
2. Now take the first significant word and brainstorm all of the connotations and meanings. Think about the positive and negative meanings of the word. When you are done, keep going. Come back to it an hour later or the next morning.
3. Write images (see, hear, feel) that come to mind from this word:
4. Create a list of similes and metaphors for this word:
5. Repeat steps 2-4 for significant words.
6. Think about times when you may have heard a family member say it. Write a bit about how you felt in that moment:
7. What’s your attitude towards the saying?
8. Take these pieces in any order that feels right. Create a poem (think about line lengths, stanzas, etc. as you go).

As well, I asked students questions, so they could unpack the structure of Maracle’s poem, such as “What’s happening in the stanza beginning, ‘the sweet mountain breath of wind?’” and “Why is there a shift there? What does it do?” These questions help students reflect on Maracle’s techniques and structure as the poem evolves.

At this point, students attempted a poem based on the saying they brought, following Maracle’s sophisticated structure. We had a number of poetry mini-lessons along the way, many of them taken from Nancie Atwell’s *Lessons That Change Writers* (an excellent middle-school writing teacher) and adapted for an older audience. This book is a mainstay in my classroom. I particularly like the lesson, “Cut to the Bone,” as the “cutting” is vital for students to understand. I return to it many times in my classes as they become very attached to their work and are often unwilling to delete what they consider to be precious and hard-won words.

Our final model poems, “What I Will” and “break (clustered),” came from Suheir Hammad’s performance at TEDWomen 2010. She is breathtaking. While listening, students took sketchnotes, which helped those viewers who may be distracted when solely listening. There’s an excellent lesson for this type of note-taking on the website JETpens.com. It’s called: “Sketchnotes: A Guide to Visual Note-Taking.” Sketchnotes is a technique in which rather than taking traditional notes, students use symbols, simple drawings, and various fonts to establish what’s important; the technique is creative and engaging, and it helps with memory.



Figure 3. Suheir Hammad. (2010). Poems of war, peace, women, power. TedWomen 2010.

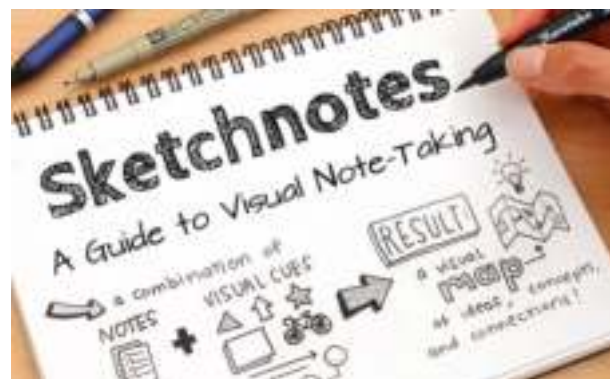
Once we listened to Hammad read three times, students had time to share their ideas and their sketchnotes at tables. I collected these notes for formative assessment: Are they getting the main points? What can they focus on for their poems? What language have they pulled out? As well, Hammad’s poems are perfect examples for enjambment and caesura, so this was the spot to teach those technical terms, as well as to examine Hammad’s word play.

Part 3: Write Our Own Poetry: Diverge and Converge

I then asked students to complete this assignment:

What’s your issue?

What is your issue? Take a bit of time to think about something you care about. Is it mental health issues? Is it something about education that you think should change? Is it injuries in sports because of overtraining? What is



your issue? What do you care about? What could you write a rant about? If you were going to have a serious disagreement about something with your friends, what would it be? What makes you angry? Racism? Sexism? Micro-aggression? War? Displaced Syrian refugees? What is your top frustration?

My issue:

What I think about it and why it makes me angry/passionate/“ranty.” Free-write about it for 15 minutes. When you think you are done, try to keep going.

My attitude and position:

Now, one of the things that Hammad does incredibly is play with language like “diss” followed on the next line with “placed.” She is playing with the idea of being “dissed,” or disrespected, and displaced which is what happens to refugees. We may not be able to do this as well as she does, but we want to try. Can you pull out some of your keywords and see if there is some word play you could try?

Key words:

Word play:

Take out some other key words or sounds that are in your free write. Try to come up with as many words that have similar sounds (internal rhyme) as you can.

Key words:	Words that have similar sounds:
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What do you want your poem to say? How do you feel about it? Do you want to describe a feeling, shine a spotlight on a moment, or describe an experience?

Feeling, moment, experience? Write about it:

What images go with your poem? What imagery can you include in your poem? What can you see, hear, feel? Don't you love how Hammad uses smoke? She has evoked rubble, and gunpowder, and fog, and the smoke of a fire, and smoke from smudging. All of these connotations came from this one word. Do you have something that you can include in your poem - some kind of imagery that has multiple connotations?

Imagery:

Can you turn these brainstorm into the first draft of a poem?

First draft of your issue::

By this point, students had written 3 poems. We continued our work on editing and revising - adding imagery, metaphors, using enjambment and caesura, playing with line lengths and stanza lengths, and ultimately, "cutting to the bone."

Part 4: Write Artist's Statements: Analyze and Synthesize

Students were now ready to discuss the choices they made and to compare their work to the models we studied in an artist's statement. The purpose is twofold. On the one hand, I wanted students to reflect on their choices and compare their own poetry to the published poets' poems. My hope was that they would feel strong and confident about their own work. The second purpose is for me to understand and note what the students intended, even if they were unable to completely pull it off. I read through their statements and gave credit to students for risks and attempts they made in their poems which I might have missed if they had not written about them.

We took students' artist's statements and cut them down to a blurb to be used alongside the poem in a final published poetry book, and then I asked students to cut even further and have two to three sentences to take to their performance. This is another opportunity to practice being succinct and decide on what's important.

Rubric for Artist's Statement

	Expert	Apprentice	Novice
Content for "model" poem	TAG* seamlessly included for poem. Analysis of poem shows excellent ability to address connotations, figurative language, imagery, and form in order to understand their effect on tone and theme.	TAG included for poem. Analysis of poem shows strong ability to address connotations, figurative language, imagery, and form in order to understand their effect on tone and theme.	TAG for poem has errors. Analysis of poem does not sufficiently address connotations, figurative language, imagery, and form in order to understand their effect on tone and theme.

	Expert	Apprentice	Novice
Content for own original poem and connections	Makes strong connections and parallels between both poems. TAG introduced seamlessly. Shows how meaning is conveyed through form and poetic devices. Poetically explains tone, shifts, and theme.	Makes some connections and parallels between both poems. TAG introduced. Shows how meaning is conveyed through form and poetic devices. Adequately explains tone, shifts, and theme.	Makes weak connections and parallels between both poems. TAG introduced with errors. Tries, but does not entirely show how meaning is conveyed through form and poetic devices. Attempts to explain tone, shifts, and theme.
Grammar, Style, Syntax, Diction	Uses parallel structure seamlessly - creating parallelism in clauses and/or phrases. Style is fluent, syntax is varied, diction is sophisticated, and grammar is without significant error.	Uses parallel structure with some ease - creating parallelism in phrases and/or words. Style is mostly fluent, syntax may have errors, diction is accurate, and grammar contains occasional errors.	Uses parallel structure with some difficulty - creating faulty parallelism in phrases or words. Style is lacking fluency, syntax contains consistent errors, diction is simplistic, and grammar contains significant errors.

*TAG refers to Title, Author, Genre

Part 5: Feedback: Assess and Revise

I used the Grade 10 poetry rubric from the BC Performance Standards. Students may not have written poetry in Grades 9 and 10, so this seemed like a fair target to reach. I wanted to encourage risk-taking and to reward students for what they did well—their attempts at using form to impact meaning and to use the models to scaffold and bridge their creative process. Another big idea from the BC Curriculum states that, “Creative writers take risks and persevere.” I wanted the learners in my classroom to feel that they would not be criticized for taking risks and I also wanted to reward my students for their persistence in writing poetry when many, at the start of the unit, were ambivalent at best, and hostile at worst to the idea.

Student work:

Here is an example of a student’s poem based on Hammad’s poem, along with the blurb we used as a write-up in the student’s final published poetry book.

#MeToo

-Paris S

The news hits the press.
I am shocked. Mocked.
Stop -
talking, talking in my head.
My brain yearns to forget,
to right the past.

The door is closed.
Slammed shut-
up in my face.
Don’t complain.
I got what I deserved, isn’t it true?

No ability to speak out.
I deserve this.
Maybe I brought this on myself?

The hairy men,
the married men,
no respect. Sigh-
lends itself to criticism.

Everyone knew but said nothing.
There was no cushion when I fell
in line with my peers.
Don't push it or I will suffer.

I will not stop talking.
Don't tell me to shut up
or be quiet.
Silence is the enemy.
The weapons are words.
I will not fall in line.

To the women who finally spoke up.
Public shame to public truth.
No more room for this violence.
No more fear for **me**.
Too much to say now.

Paris's Artist's Statement:

"The #MeToo movement has brought to light the extent that sexual harassment and sexual aggression has infiltrated our society. Women were either silenced when they tried to speak out or were negatively viewed by society after speaking out. My piece uses word play with hidden messages such as "stop talking, shut up, silence" to represent how these women had to keep their feelings inside because they were under threat of ridicule and alienation from speaking out. The turning point in the poem is when women finally get the courage to speak out and be heard. My poem ends with the words, "Me too," to pay homage to the movement that has righted the wrongs of the past for many years."

What I thought was great about this poem was how Paris played with the language, the enjambment, and the word play of spoken word. And if we failed to catch it while reading the poem, it came up in her Artist's Statement. She addressed an issue that she cared about, she examined Hammad's structure closely, she used it to create criteria for her own writing, and she took risks and persevered through multiple drafts.

Part 6: Perform: Publish, Prepare, and Recite

One student was responsible for creating a poetry booklet using InDesign. I selected this student because she was familiar with this graphic design program. We printed these books and gave them to students and parents. As well, we had a poetry evening at our school for the Grade 11s. In future iterations of this unit, I would like to take my students out into the world with their poetry to a Youth Poetry Slam that happens once a month at Cafe Deux Soleils on Commercial Drive. There's both a poetry open mic and a poetry slam, and it's open to youth between 13-22. More info at www.vancouverpoetryhouse.com.

My Reflection:

What an incredible experience this was—to take students through the process of inquiring into themselves and their identities—and for them to emerge with an issue they cared about. Taking action on those issues was empowering and the audience at our poetry evening felt the students’ power that night as they spoke their words. This unit left me feeling grateful for the privilege to walk with these students through the journey of coming to know themselves and for the opportunity to show them that poetry can be both a personal and a political act.

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Amber Moore

“Why Don’t We Always See Her Face?": The significance of the gallery walk in teaching trauma literature

Introducing gallery walks:

You know, I haven’t actually done a gallery walk before in any of my classes, so I appreciated the impact of it -
teacher candidate participant

As a former secondary English teacher, current Ph.D. Candidate, and sometimes- teacher educator, there is an engagement strategy that I have consistently employed over my past ten years in the classroom: the gallery walk. Likely, this is a strategy many readers of English Practice know well; a ‘gallery walk’ is an activity where texts are put on display and students are invited to treat the materials like they would at a gallery, walking around and experiencing them. How students take up the posted texts depends on the design and goals of the lesson. Gallery walks are noted as a significant pedagogical tool across learning contexts (see, for example, Borrero & Sanchez, 2017; Franzblau & Haque, 2018; Karlsson, 2019; Rodenbaugh, 2015), including in language and literacy education (see, for example, Hakim et al., 2019; Morse, 2008; Townsend, 2009; Tracey et al., 2016).

Gallery walks can be employed in a variety of ways, as any educator can augment it for their own personal pedagogy. For instance, Townsend (2009) moved ELL students through a timed gallery walk as part of a language workshop; in the style of speed dating, student teams visited picture stations with illustrated key vocabulary and then wrote collaboratively. Gallery walks can also be incorporated into learning at any stage, from an initial introduction to a topic (as I will go on to describe), as a midpoint learning check in, an assessment strategy or even a celebration of learning. For instance, Tracey, Menickelli, and Scales (2016) demonstrate its usefulness to reinforce previous learning on a particular theme across a text set designed for enhancing critical reading and synthesizing across texts for deeper understandings. Gallery walks can also be employed in a variety of ways; as Borrero and Sanchez (2017) demonstrate, they are especially dynamic and interactive when used as a community sharing of culturally relevant learning, for example. In combination with a potluck, their gallery walk was designed to showcase and celebrate students’ cultural asset map projects.

Because gallery walks are ripe for educators to utilize in diverse and dynamic ways, I hope to make a case for designing a gallery walk for the particular purpose of teaching difficult subject matter. More specifically, I posit that the gallery walk can be an entry point for teaching and learning trauma literature - narratives about intense loss or fear (Balaev, 2008).

Gallery walks to introduce teaching trauma texts

This pedagogical invitation emerges from my own experience with using gallery walk activities while teaching trauma texts. For several years, I taught YA rape novel *Speak* (Anderson, 1999) to my grade ten English students, and used the gallery walk as engagement strategy - a method for “tantaliz[ing] curiosity” (James, 2013, p. 8) in entering this text (see Moore & Begoray, 2017 for a snapshot of this work). Due to my past success with this activity in secondary education, in approaching my present doctoral project - which is focused on teacher candidates’ responses to teaching sexual assault literature emerging from a two-day workshop I ran focused on this pedagogy

in fall 2018, I again returned to the gallery walk. However, it is pertinent to note that several advance content warnings were offered, I conferenced with concerned teacher candidates to discuss personal safety strategies and review my lesson plans, and we moved through self-check in, grounding, and validation activities on Day 1.

As such, during my data collection phase where I taught a two-day workshop on teaching about rape culture and sexual assault narratives and invited teacher candidate participants to my study, I began with a gallery walk focused on visuals from the MeToo movement on Day 2. On the classroom walls, I created a visual text set to capture representations of rape culture in popular media. Images that required contextualization were coupled with brief descriptions (i.e. for the artwork, artist quotes were posted to make clear their intent and message). The following is a sample of the curated collection:

- A portrait of the MeToo movement founder, Tarana Burke, with her hand out in a 'stop' motion, "Me Too" written on the palm of her hand (*Time Magazine*; see image below)
- A photograph of women marching at a MeToo protest in South Korea (*Asia Times*)
- A Twitter exchange between a mother and son disagreeing on the hashtag "HimToo" (*Twitter*)
- Artwork by Celia Jacobs portraying trans people's experiences of sexual assault (Clements, 2018)
- A cartoon of Harvey Weinstein opening his robe, yelling "action!" (*The New York Times*)
- A photograph of Brett Kavanaugh (*The Washington Examiner*)

As a preamble to the walk, I offered a few anecdotes about using this strategy and provided my rationale by describing how this activity especially allowed me to 'take the temperature' of the classroom before deeply diving into a controversial or intense topic like sexual violence. For example, I described gauging problematic adolescent student responses during the Speak unit based on responses during the gallery walk (i.e. rape jokes, misogynistic and/or sexist comments, etc); in this way, the gallery walk provided me with an opportunity to get a sense of how the topic and text(s) would be received so I could plan accordingly. The teacher candidates were then invited to gallery walk - alone or with colleagues, in silence or with chatter. They were also asked to consider the following: *What do we know/think about the MeToo movement, and/or rape culture overall? Please record any words or phrases that come to mind with respect to "MeToo" and write them beside the images. If you wish, add your name to your response.* Students were assured that they were not required to respond and were reminded that they were welcome to take breaks, exercise personal self-care, leave the room, and so on.

What unfolded was what I have come to understand as a characteristically quieter activity; students walked around mostly with partners or in small groups and discussed their responses. Some did this in silence. There was a bit of nervous laughter. A few recorded responses while others just looked. I stayed near the front of the class, trying to be mindful of space. Overheard snippets included: "I didn't know this," "What does that say?" "Take a look over here...", and "Can you believe?" as they carefully moved from image to image. One student loudly said, "asshole" as they came to the photograph of Brett Kavanaugh; he had been confirmed to the Supreme Court the weekend before. See the image below for an example of a response recorded on the visual texts; one teacher candidate importantly asked "Why don't we always see her face?" under a photograph of MeToo founder Tara Burke:



After the gallery walk activity, I opened the floor for a class-wide discussion of ideas and impressions that surfaced during the activity, which students generously offered.

The gallery walk as an intimate inquiry of witnessing

I am now in the process of data analysis for my dissertation and am fortunate to revisit my participants' responses through interview and focus group transcripts where in several moments, they reflected on the significance of that gallery walk activity. For example, one teacher candidate expressed: "I really thought the gallery walk was... such a great way of making... what is happening [in the MeToo movement] visible." Another shared that she appreciated that not only are gallery walks "student directed," but also that "there were images I didn't recognize and that was what I was most interested in." Finally, a third offered that the activity was "shocking in a good way." As such, what I am coming to understand is that the gallery walk is an activity that promotes witnessing - a kind of intimate inquiry because, as Laura (2013) argues,

"the act of witnessing is an invitation to pay attention, to reflect, to learn about lived lives, and to explore rationalizations of people's experiences. There is a particular urgency for the act of witnessing within the context of marginalization or wrongdoing." (p. 219)

In this way then, gallery walks hold potential to promote deliberate attendance to individuals and/or issues such as rape culture that demand our attention because witnessing is a critical activity (Felman & Laub, 1992) that I would encourage every educator to experiment with.

Top tips for getting ready for gallery walks to introduce trauma texts

One thing that was really, really powerful for me was that gallery walk and having all those images on the wall. Ah, it actually made me feel sick... in some instances - teacher candidate participant

Engaging in a gallery walk activity when teaching trauma literature might seem like an intimidating endeavour because, as evidenced by the epigraph of this section, it can be an intense experience when working with trauma texts. Please consider the following tips when planning for such a gallery walk:

- **Plan ahead:** Provide multiple content warnings well in advance of addressing difficult subject matter (for more on content and trigger warnings, see Gay, 2014; Gerdes, 2019; Lockhart, 2016, for example). Use content warnings in person, in syllabi (see my example below), and offer frequent reminders. Extend invitations to communicate questions and concerns. Plan to teach trauma topics and/or literature later in a course after developing rapport and building classroom community. Consider sending a 'heads up' email to families.

Content note: *This week, we will be exploring ways in which we might explore difficult subject matter in literature class. We will be reading short, or excerpts of, sexual assault narratives – a sub-genre of trauma literature – as an example of the kind of 'risky' and intense issue that can emerge, and/or we can create space for, in teaching. It is critical that you are informed so that you have time to raise any questions or concerns with me prior to these classes. Please feel very welcome to do so. My intention is to use this topic as an exemplar for how you might address a whole host of 'risky' topics. I want to assure you that I've not selected sexual assault and rape culture arbitrarily or to be provocative. Rather, I've long privileged such issues in my teaching. In short, I feel: (1) very comfortable talking about this topic, (2) that rape culture is important to address with adolescents (especially now), and (3) this is the best way in which I might explore 'risky reading' with this class.*

- **Create a safety plan:** As I have suggested elsewhere (Moore & Begoray, 2016), create a safety plan in case students are triggered. Consult administration, guidance counsellors, colleagues, and community resources (your local crisis centres, for example), when planning this pedagogy. Invite experts to team teach with you. Listen to students who ask for accommodations and/or additional supports. Remember your own safety (see below).
- **Be mindful in the moment:** Invite students to take breaks during the gallery walk activity. Let them leave the room for a drink of water or a quick walk. Consider having sit-down response activities available alongside the gallery walk in case they do not wish to participate or want to take a break without drawing attention to themselves. Make yourself available to talk through responses one-on-one. Be flexible; don't rush students through gallery walks for the sake of timing in your lesson plan.
- **Debrief:** As Rak (2003) argues, "...in teaching and learning situations, the witnessing response also needs to take place on a group level because the organization of classrooms is collective" (p. 63). Consider allowing time for small group discussions following the gallery walk activity so that students can debrief their experiences either before or instead of a whole-class discussion. Provide optional guiding questions for small groups to help facilitate talk. Also allow opportunities for private sharing of their experiences, such with exit slips.
- **Rehearse gallery walks that showcase learning:** If you are using a gallery walk as a celebration of learning to showcase student work, for example, consider running a rehearsal to ensure that students can get a sense of their classmates' meaning making processes (Borrero & Sanchez, 2017) and work through any feelings of nervousness and/or trepidation.
- **Practice rigorous self-care:** Teachers can be at risk when planning for and teaching trauma literature as well; many of us have experienced trauma and have personal connections to particular topics and texts. Be gentle with yourself if you are concerned; take your time with the work, pause when you need to, consider reaching out for community - in-school and professional - support, and practice whatever personal self-care serves you. Ultimately, do not teach a trauma text until you feel ready and supported to guide this learning.

A final word

Roxane Gay (2017) insightfully argues: "We don't necessarily know how to hear stories about any kind of violence, because it is hard to accept that violence is as simple as it is complicated... that you can be hurt in so many intimate ways" (p. 40). Teaching trauma literature is certainly difficult work and indeed, planning pedagogy to enter into such stories is complex because they are sometimes "hard to accept." As such, a gallery walk might offer an intimate, meaningful entry point to this witnessing work because it is an augmentable student-centered activity that can produce both quiet contemplation and collaboration, discussions and silences, insights and questions.

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Kathleen (Kaye) Hare

Connecting Students with the Stories of Their Bodies

In the 21st century, it is well known that attending to students' social and emotional learning is a key component of K-12 education (Durlack et al., 2011). Learning environments are social, with students interacting with peers, teachers, coaches and families in a range of circumstances. Likewise, students' emotions can facilitate or impede engagement, motivation, commitment and enjoyment in school and beyond. Socio-emotional learning aims to help students effectively address these aspects of their educational processes, through engaging in effective decision-making, managing their emotions, building relationships, deepening their sense of self, and fostering critical thinking (Frey, 2018).

Research tells us that socio-emotional education is more effective if it is integrated across the curriculum and is a part of students' everyday experiences at school (Björklund et al., 2014). Within schools, the English Language Arts classroom provides a particularly rich learning space for socio-emotional teaching and learning. In detail:

- A. An English Language Arts classroom can offer a place where students engage with a plethora of rich texts encompassing various genres, topics and perspectives. Students can practice reflecting upon relationship dynamics and challenging emotions from numerous points of view (Moore & Begoray, 2017).
- B. An English Language Arts classroom is often a place of creativity. Students engage in processes of reading, composing, talking, enacting and listening in ways that ask them to think and work in novel and open-minded ways (Den Ouden, 2018).
- C. In many English Language Arts classrooms, story is central. As Carl Leggo (2008) remarked, "we make sense of ourselves through stories" (p. 9), and narratives can help students work through the complexities of the social, emotional parts of their lives.

In my own work developing arts-based pedagogies and helping prepare teacher candidates to enter secondary school classrooms, I take seriously the challenge of considering how we, as educators, can help promote socio-emotional learning in spaces such as English Language Arts classrooms. To guide my pedagogy, I have found it helpful to draw on theories about bodies/embodiment and students' meaning-making. As detailed by Jones (2013), bodies and meaning-making can help educators attend to the ways that students use their thinking, feeling, experiencing, and doing bodies to understand the world. This can be helpful for encouraging students to recognize the role of emotions such as happiness, sadness or anticipation in their shaping their behaviour. Furthermore, this focus can also provide a means for identifying larger societal power relations that imprint on students' bodies, such as sexism, racism and heteronormativity.

An important task for educators lies with assisting students to productively, thoughtfully and carefully access the knowledge stored in their bodies. This prompts the question: *what are some of the ways that educators can help students connect to the stories of their bodies?*

Three Body Story Activities

In response to the above prompt, I have experimented with and implemented various activities focused on stories of the body in my own classrooms. My aim is to provide short, accessible and arts-based activities that engage students in major domains of socio-emotional learning. I have found three activities to be especially useful for young people in my post-secondary classes. Students' responses suggest that these activities help them distill and identify their emotions (i.e. listen to the stories that their bodies are telling them); understand emotions as malleable (i.e. recognize if they like/dislike their current body stories and acknowledge stories can be changed); and identify steps to change or maintain body stories (i.e. determine strategies to continue writing, engage in re-writing, or initiate writing new stories for and about their bodies). In my conversations with teacher candidates, they have expressed that they too have had success bringing these activities into their secondary classrooms, as a part of overall strategies to embed socio-emotional learning in daily teaching.

I conceptualized the three activities here as adaptable prompts that can be worked into existing units or used as body check-in activities during class (e.g., responding to an exciting/difficult event; engaging with a particularly rich and challenging unit; or providing grounding during the year). Of note, while I present these activities as self-stories, the activities can be very easily adapted to focus on bodies in texts, imagined bodies, or students' bodies in a broad, general sense.

Activity 1: Six-Word Stories



Figure 1: Six Word Memoir

Six-word stories, which are also called six-word memoirs, invite students to tell a story about their lives in only six words. Six-word stories offer students a safe way to share a small piece of who they are, the life experiences they have had, and what matters to them. Whether a story is humorous, profound, or something unexpected, this exercise will help students distill memories and emotions. It might be helpful to have students watch a six-word memoir project compiled online, such as the wonderful YouTube video by HarperTeen called "I can't keep my own secrets" (accessed at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TesQtK5JG68>), to find inspiration and mentor texts.

A framework for using six-word stories in a lesson:

- 1) Introduce the activity much the same as above – as a way to share a small piece of who they are, the life experiences they have had, and what matters to them.
- 2). Have students create a "you" list by writing as much as they can about themselves in three minutes. Ask

students to describe themselves in as much detail as possible – what they like about themselves, their major emotions and feelings, their interests and hobbies. Ask student to write in a free-flowing way, and not to cross out, change, edit or rewrite. Remind students they are writing for quantity.

3) Have students circle three items on the page that inspire them to say more. These might be events that have happened, stories or ideas, or something else important to them.

4). From the three items, have students select the one item that feels the most interesting to them. They will then free write about that item at least two minutes. Ask students to write whatever comes to mind.

5) Have students synthesize their writing. Ask them to look through the free writing to develop a six-word story or phrase that captures the essence of their interesting topic. They may illustrate the memoir if they desire.

6) Invite students to share their stories in small groups and the class, leaving time for discussion and connection.

The benefit of six-word memoirs is that while structure is built into the fabric of the activity, students access their bodies through choice and selection. In writing their six-word stories, students can pick content and decide how much of themselves to share. They can share anything about their lives, from their fashion choices to their families to their experiences like migration. Students can choose to share whatever emotions are echoing within their bodies – or simply acknowledge those feelings and decide to share something else.

Activity 2: The Feeling Wheel

The *Feeling Wheel* activity utilizes an emotion or feeling wheel, as designed by Dr. Gloria Wilcox. The wheel is a colourful chart that can help students quickly and easily identify the specifics of their emotional state. The *Feeling Wheel* allows students to name their bodily experiences, which can then enable the introduction of tools and strategies that can help students manage those emotions.

A framework for using a *Feeling Wheel* activity in a lesson:

1) Introduce the activity by discussing the importance of doing emotional self-checks. It can be useful to normalize the experience of having trouble fully identifying the feelings one is experiencing. Similarly, it can be helpful to describe how emotions can occasionally be expressed differently than how they are felt (e.g., anger expressed in place of sadness). Perhaps have students identify such examples from class texts.

2) Show students Wilcox's wheel and explain how the wheel features three rings, the innermost of which includes six core emotions that are often our "go-to" emotional states: sad, mad, scared, joyful, powerful, and peaceful. Note that the outer two rings distill specific emotions associated with those larger emotional states. Remind students it can be helpful to 'see' emotions tangibly in words, as it takes us outside our bodies and social relationships.

3) Provide students with a prompt (e.g., how are you feeling in response to the ending of a book; how are you feeling to be back at school after the holidays) and ask them to take 2 minutes to identify their corresponding emotion. Invite them to start with the major emotional state and then work through the layers of the wheel to come up with a more precise word. Invite students to pair-share their selected emotion and tell a connected story.

4) Ask students to take 1 minute to silently reflect on their identified emotion and story – is it something



Figure 2: Wilcox's *Feeling Wheel*

they want to be feeling?

5) Explain that the wheel can also be used as a tool for identifying goal emotions and strategies for achieving/maintaining emotions. If a student wants to feel the primary emotion of joy, they can engage in activities that enables the second and third-tier emotions under joy. For instance, one such activity that can lead to feelings of joy might be doing something that makes them “proud”. It is also useful to highlight that emotions sit opposite each other on the wheel – joy is the opposite of anger and therefore feeling “proud” might also reduce anger. Students can use the outer rings of the wheel as a guide for major positive mood states.

6) Have students pair-share a strategy that they can use to either a) maintain an emotion or b) change an emotion.

Students’ feelings will be different, depending on their own needs, experiences, personality, and circumstances. The wheel can be useful for helping students more accurately identify their emotions and also recognize how they might change their feelings and emotions, even if they cannot change major circumstances in their life, at a given point in time. The stories of our bodies will fluctuate as we make our way through life; however, it is a helpful reminder that we all can take steps to recognize our feelings and seek balance.

Activity 3: Meme Creation

An internet meme is a concept or idea expressed through pictures, gifs, symbols, words, between the creator of the meme and the audience of the meme. Memes are often represented by an image with an overlaid brief, bold caption, and importantly here, are based on presenting distilled emotions to which other people can connect. With memes, students can express their emotions in a fun, relatable medium.

A framework for using meme creation in an activity:

1) Knowing that students are likely familiar with memes from social media, introduce that we can also academically understand memes as a



Figure 3: Socio-emotional Meme

medium to creatively put forth our understanding of a topic, such as a plot, an event or a conflict.

2) Show students several sample memes that can foster their imaginations and encourage them to have fun with the topic.

3) Introduce students to a meme-generator online, such as <https://imgflip.com/memegenerator>. Depending on your class, this might also be a good point to discuss types of humour that rely on harmful tropes and remind students to think critically about how they are commenting on bodies within their memes.

4) Provide students with some relevant prompts to engage with. I would suggest that teachers be careful about how much instruction they provide at this stage, to avoid stifling students’ creativity.

5) View students’ memes as a class and discuss the range of reactions and emotions expressed in the memes. As with six-word stories, memes are helpful for socio-emotional learning because they provide structure, while also allowing students to have choice, expression and connection in the activity. This multimodal activity can enable students to distill their own emotions, express their emotions in a constructive way that encourages connection with others, and by the same token, remind students that their peers understand and have similar emotions. Memes are ultimately pieces of shared humanity and through thoughtful use, can provide a unique forum for sharing short body stories.

Final Thoughts

When I use these activities in my classrooms or put them forward for teacher candidates to try in their own classrooms, it is my hope that students will become more self-aware, realizing the impact that body stories can have on their learning and overall wellbeing. In particular, I highlight the powerful role that emotions and feelings can have on our behaviour, attitudes and engagement levels. I further encourage students to consider how structures of power may intersect with their bodies and the bodies of others (e.g., taking a moment to look at how language might be used to define someone in a six-word story or how racist tropes can cause attempts at memetic connection to take an ugly, harmful turn).

Altogether, it is my aim that these activities speak to the challenges that young people face in the world, with the recognition that facing those challenges creates knowledge and resources that are stored in their bodies. The impetus behind using these activities is thus not only to help students find ways to access that bodily knowledge to foster their socio-emotional understandings of self, but to enable the transference of that knowledge to others' bodies and different contexts.

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Adrienne McChesney & Demetra Loukopoulos

Lights! Camera! Critical Thinking! Film as Text: Active Viewing in the English Language Arts Classroom

A democratic civilization will save itself only if it makes the language of the image into a stimulus for critical reflection -not an invitation for hypnosis.

-Umberto Eco

Without an understanding of media grammars, we cannot hope to achieve a contemporary awareness of the world in which we live.

-Marshall McLuhan

If students aren't taught the language of sound and images, shouldn't they be considered as illiterate as if they left college without being able to read or write?

-George Lucas

What films do you love? What films profoundly affected you? What films haunted you for days? What films have you never forgotten?

We all have them.

The Godfather. Shawshank Redemption. Stand by Me. Apocalypse Now. Life is Beautiful.

Film is a captivating and powerful form of visual communication. It has the ability, as all good stories do, to transport us to different places and to experience different lives. Why not harness that power for the classroom?

WE LOVE USING FILM IN OUR CLASSROOMS BECAUSE IT IS:

- **Visual** – Alfred Hitchcock used the term “pure cinema” to refer to how a director can express thoughts, create mood, and tell a story through their choice and arrangement of images. Because film is visual, it is the perfect medium for teaching the narrative principal of “show, don’t tell” and for helping students to practice the skill of making inferences.
- **Contemporary** – Popular and pervasive, film is a modern and relevant art form deeply intertwined into young people’s culture.
- **Inclusive** - All students, regardless of ability level, are engaged by and learn from well-constructed films.
- **Interactive** – Watching a film in class can be an exhilarating communal experience. Everyone in the classroom experiences the panic, or the fear, or the pity, *together*.

The Importance of Visual Literacy

Students today are avid consumers of screens. So much of their understanding of the world, of their daily dose of information, is transmitted through imagery. Visual literacy is about comprehending the ideas and values conveyed through imagery, and therefore it is key to cultivating critical thinkers who can successfully navigate the “real,” and increasingly digital, world outside of the classroom. Being visually literate is the difference between passively consuming imagery for entertainment and actively viewing it as communication. When processing information, we want students to think, *how is this text constructed and for what purpose?* We want them to resist, in Umberto Eco’s words, “the invitation to hypnosis,” to lift the curtain and recognize that behind the message sits a wholly human wizard operating machinery with powerful special effects.

Film as Text

One of the benefits of BC’s new ELA curriculum, is its broad definition of “text” and “texts” as “generic terms referring to all forms of oral, written, visual, or digital communication.” Texts are not only the traditional English teacher’s repertoire of short stories, novels, and poems, but now also TED Talks, YouTube videos, podcasts, posters, memes, cartoons, advertisements, blogs, TV shows, and *films*.

For three years now, we have been teaching film based New Media English Language Arts classes at École Alpha Secondary in Burnaby. Our New Media: Film Studies 10 and 11 classes are rigorous English classes where we study film in conjunction with traditional literary text forms. In other words, we view films with the same academic rigour that we read short stories and novels, and we analyze shots and scenes with the same critical eye that we deconstruct poetry and paragraphs of prose.

When analyzing any text, we deconstruct it in order to understand how it works. When close viewing a film, we break down its visual composition. We consider *how* the director constructs theme, character, and conflict through the use of standard storytelling techniques such as irony, symbolism, flashback, and foreshadowing, and film techniques such as camera shots, position and movement, editing, lighting, and sound.

The Vocabulary of Film

Using film as text requires both teachers and students to become familiar with the vocabulary and grammar of film¹, and this learning takes time and practice. Not all ELA teachers feel comfortable with analysis of film; after all, most of us are trained in the analysis of words, not moving images. The vocabulary and grammar of film may be unfamiliar, so teaching film as text may require taking a risk, jumping right in, and learning along with your students.

THE VOCABULARY OF FILM

General Terms

Shot – a single piece of film from “action” to “cut.”

Scene – a series of shots within one location.

Mise-en-Scene – everything that is in a frame.

Camera Shots

Extreme long shot – a shot taken from a long distance away. These are often landscape shots or shots that give a view of a whole world – a city, a town, or even a galaxy – where the story is set.

Long shot – shows whole location of action and the entire body of any human figure.

Medium shot – shows a human body from the ankles or knees up and is generally used to show

¹ The following “Vocabulary of Film” handout is adapted from Visual Storytelling and the Grammar of Filmmaking, Part I

interaction between characters, including dialogue and movement.

Close up – Head and shoulders shot often used to create intimacy, show emotional responses from characters, or focus attention on an object.

Extreme close-up – Usually eyes or mouth. The most intimate of shots. Conveys emotion.

Shallow focus – foreground is in focus, but background is blurred.

Deep focus – both foreground and background are in focus at the same time.

Soft focus – blurring.

Camera Position

High angle – camera placed above the subject. Subject may appear small, insignificant, or threatened.

Eye level – camera is on the same plane as the subject. This is the most common angle.

Low angle – camera placed lower than the subject and gives the impression of looking up at the subject. Implies subject's significance, power, and authority.

Dutch tilt (canted) – the camera is tilted on an angle. Indicates discord, confusion, and may unsettle the viewer.

Camera Movement

Tracking or dolly shot – camera moves forwards (“dolly in”) or backwards (“dolly out”).

Pan – camera moves horizontally from one thing to another.

Tilt – camera moves vertically, up and down.

Editing – assembling shots together in a certain order

Cut, Dissolve, Fade, and Wipe – different ways of changing from one shot or scene to another.

Shot-Reverse-Shot – action/reaction between two characters.

Parallel action – interweaving two or more sets of action that are happening in separate locations at the same time.

Sound

Diegetic (die-uh-jet-ic) sound – natural sounds coming from characters or objects in the story world.

Non-diegetic sound – sounds added to the soundtrack that do not originate from the scene. For example, voice over narration, music, or sound effects.

Lighting

High key – shots are brightly lit, most shadows eliminated.

Low key – uses shadows to create atmosphere and suspense.

Lighting a character from below – creates a feeling of power and authority.

Lighting a character from above – creates a “halo” effect and suggests beauty or innocence.

Lighting a character from behind (backlighting) – obscures features and creates either a sinister silhouette or a glow.

Teaching Strategies for Close Viewing

We use graphic organizers to help students practice their close viewing skills. Our methodology is simple. First, we ask students to view a scene from a film and make observations. What do they notice? We often guide students by asking them to focus on certain techniques like imagery, contrast, sound, or camera shots. Then, we want students to reflect on why their observations are important. How does the use of colour or camera movements in a particular scene build character? How does a film's use of point of view and dramatic irony create suspense?

We have found that, just as we would break a novel into manageable parts, it is important to hit the pause button regularly, to give students the opportunity to process, to comment, and to discuss what they see. Also, when analyzing a particular scene, we have found that viewing it multiple times and asking students to focus on different techniques each time is effective as it builds students' understanding in layers.

Lord of War (2005) by Andrew Niccol

(00:40-04:30)

We use the affecting introduction to Andrew Niccol's *Lord of War*, which takes viewers on a journey through the life of a bullet from conception to use, to teach students how film techniques contribute to the development of point of view and theme in a story. We ask students to pay attention to light, sound, camera angles, and camera movements, and to take notes on what they notice. They are then asked to reflect on how these techniques manipulate the viewers' perspective and create meaning. What message is being conveyed through images?

Jaws (1971) directed by Steven Spielberg


(00:30-05:05)

Jaws is a classic film with perfect narrative structure. Students love it! *Jaws* is exciting and suspenseful without being too graphic, controversial, or frightening. Because of its clear narrative arc, *Jaws* works well as a vehicle for reviewing story terms and structure. It can be paired easily with other suspenseful texts that explore the theme of "the monster" like Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," Edgar Allen Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado," or Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*. In fact, Spielberg uses many of the same techniques to create suspense as these masters, including dramatic irony, foreshadowing, point of view, and symbolism.

An analysis of the film poster for *Jaws* makes an effective pre-viewing activity. Ask students to make observations about imagery, the arrangement of images, colour, and proportion, and after each observation, ask the simple question, "Why?" Students are often surprised by the depth of meaning they can coax from such an iconic image.

The first 5 minutes of *Jaws* are excellent for close analysis. During students' first viewing of the clip, have them work individually to make observations about sound, colour, and lighting. Then, during a second viewing, have students focus on point of view and imagery. They could discuss the possible significance of their observations in pairs or small groups before opening up for a class discussion.

CLOSE VIEWING NOTES	
Observations – What do you notice?	Significance – Why is it important?
Camera Shots and Angles/Camera Movement:	

Imagery:		
Colour & Lighting:		
Sound:		
Summary Understanding:		
What do you notice? • Observations	imagery, arrangement (of images), proportion/size, colour & lighting	What does it mean? • Significance
		

Secret Life of Walter Mitty (2013) by Ben Stiller

(00:42-05:47)

The Secret Life of Walter Mitty is a modern retelling of the classic American short story of the same name by James Thurber. The short story and the film work well together as a compare and contrast exercise. In both texts, Walter Mitty is a man who lives in a fantasy world; but in the short story, he is a tragically static figure, whereas in the film, he is dynamic. We don't tell this to our students, however! We let them come to this realization themselves.

A close viewing of the first few scenes of the film allows students to study how film techniques are used to create Walter Mitty's character. Again, a layered viewing works well. First, have students focus on imagery and camera movement. Then, the second time through, have students focus on colour and sound. There is a dramatic shift in the clip, so have students make observations about what changes as well. Then, as a class, discuss what their observations add to their understanding of Walter Mitty's character.

As students watch the remainder of the film, we ask them to continue noting observations – what do they think is important? – and to gather important quotations. We stop the film 15 minutes before the end of class to debrief and discuss students' observations about the day's viewing.

Post viewing and assessment activities revolve around comparing and contrasting the original Walter Mitty with Ben Stiller's more modern version.

Sample New Media: Film Studies 10 Course Outline

New Media: Film Studies 10: The Art of Storytelling

Introduction:

- Focus on story telling: What makes a story powerful?
- What is "visual text": Martin Scorsese on Visual Literacy
- Introduction to film terminology: Intro to "Lord of War"
 - Additional terminology: elements of fiction and poetic devices

Unit 1: Defining and Expressing identity

We will explore how text and story deepens our understanding of diverse, complex ideas about identity, others and the world.

- What makes up one's identity? Identity Spiral
- Poetry and Prose: "When I think about myself" by Maya Angelou, "From the Inside Out" by Alice Van Wart, "The Rules of the Game" by Amy Tan and Lyrics to "Stand by Me"
- Films: "The Mirror" by Ramon & Pablo, "Stand by Me" by Rob Reiner
- Assignments: Identity paragraph, reading comprehension assessment, poetry writing, Socratic seminar, Essay on "Stand by Me" and Graphic Synthesis Essay Project

Unit 2: The Importance of Place

Texts are socially, culturally, geographically and historically constructed

- Poetry and Prose: "Borders" by Thomas King, "Never" by H.E. Bates,
- Films: "The Grizzlies" by Miranda de Pencier,
- Assignments: Reading Comprehension Assessment, Why We Matter, Socratic Seminar, Essay writing, Scene Analysis

Unit 3: Ideas Worth Spreading/Fighting for

We will explore how Personal, social, cultural contexts, values and perspectives play a role in texts, how people manipulate text and image for a desired effect

- Prose: Fahrenheit 451 by Ray Bradbury

- Films: “V for Vendetta” by James McTeigue, “SuperSize” Me by Morgan Spurlock & “Riverblue” by David McIlvride and Roger Williams (The battle of the Documentaries)
- Assignments: Quote Quizzes, Quote of the Day, Found Poetry, Group Work on Campaigns worth fighting for and Essay on documentaries and Close Scene Analysis Group Work

Unit 4: What’s Love got to do with it?

- Play: “Romeo and Juliet” by William Shakespeare
- Films: Video clips of different types of love, “Romeo + Juliet” by Baz Luhrmann, “Stardust” by Matthew Vaughn
- Assignments: Reader’s theatre, Socratic Seminar, Letter writing, Close Scene Analysis Group Work

Sample New Media: Film Studies 11 Course Outline:

New Media: Film Studies 11

Unit 1: The Dark Side

- How are film and literary techniques used for effect in texts?
- How is suspense created in stories and for what purpose?
- Consider the monster... What do we fear?

TEXTS

Short Stories: Edgar Allen Poe’s “Cask of Amontillado” and Shirley Jackson’s “The Lottery”

Films: Steven Spielberg’s *Jaws* and Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*

SKILLS

Reading/Viewing: review of film and literature terminology, annotation and analysis skills, use of devices for effect, focus on understanding irony and point of view

Writing/Expression: observation map of *Jaws* (analysis of literary elements and film techniques), analysis essay

Unit 2: Fantasy and Reality

- What are some conditions that lead to the desire to escape reality?
- What are the benefits and pitfalls of using the imagination?

TEXTS

Short Stories: Anton Chekov’s “The Lottery Ticket,” and James Thurber’s “The Secret Life of Walter Mitty”

Film: Ben Stiller’s *The Secret Life of Walter Mitty* and Roberto Benigni’s *Life is Beautiful*

SKILLS

Reading/Viewing: annotation close reading practice, reading comprehension quiz, analyzing tone and film/literary techniques (hyperbole, symbolism, colour)

Writing/Expression: synthesis essay

Unit 3: Delving Beneath the Surface

- Why do writer’s use extended metaphors and symbols?

TEXTS

Short Stories: WD Valgardson’s “Saturday Climbing” and Shinichi Hoshi’s “Hey, Come On Out!”

Film: Bong Joon-Ho’s *Snowpiercer*

SKILLS

Reading/Viewing: practice spotting symbolism and decoding images, viewing notes for understanding allegory

Unit 4: The Nature of Evil

- Why do good people do bad things?
- Is violence ever justified?
- Do the means justify the ends?
- Are there circumstances under which it is reasonable to break one's personal moral code?

TEXTS

Films: Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* and Akira Kurosawa's *Throne of Blood*

Media: YouTube video – Einar Overenget's "Why Good People Do Bad Things"

SKILLS

Reading/Viewing: reading comprehension quiz, analyzing character and theme, synthesis viewing notes

Writing/Expression: *Macbeth* adaptation project

Unit 5: Technology and Society - Our Robotic Future

- What makes us human?
- What qualities separate humans from machines?
- Will robots and artificial intelligence help us perfect ourselves or will they make humans obsolete?
- What ethical limitations should there be (if any) on the development of AI?
- Can you love, trust, or have an authentic connection with an artificial being?
- Is it ethical to evolve the human body?

TEXTS

Short Story: Isaac Asimov's "Robot Dreams" and Asimov's "Three Laws of Robotics"

Non-Fiction: Francis Fukuyama's "Transhumanism" and Margaret Atwood's "Are Humans Necessary?"

Media: YouTube – "Sophia Awakens", *New Yorker* cover – Kikuo Johnson's "Tech Support"

TED Talks: "Can We Build AI Without Losing Control Over It?" Sam Harris, "What AI is and isn't," Sebastian Thrun, and "What Will Humans Look Like in 100 Years?" Juan Enriquez

TV Episodes: *Humans* S01E01, *Black Mirror* "White Christmas"

Poetry: BotPoet.com

Films: Alex Garland's *Ex Machina* and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* (Spike Jonze's Her for home viewing)

SKILLS

Reading/Viewing: recognizing persuasive/rhetorical techniques, analyzing theme, decoding images quiz

Writing/Expression: persuasion project

Unit 6: War

- What is the impact of war on the individual and society?
- What is the impact of point of view on a text?

TEXTS

Poems: "Diameter of a Bomb," "The War Works Hard," "The Soldier," "Dulce et Decorum Est"

Films: clips from Ken Annakin's *The Longest Day* and Steven Spielberg's *Saving Private Ryan*

SKILLS

Reading/Viewing: analysis of figurative language and point of view

Writing/Expression: poetry analysis paragraph

Unit 7: Humanity and Nature

- What is humanity's proper relationship with nature?
- How does living in an urban setting affect our connection to the natural world?
- What effect does the natural world have on the individual?

TEXTS

Media: YouTube – Carl Sagan's "Pale Blue Dot"

Poetry: Mary Oliver's "Some Things Say the Wise Ones" and Wendell Berry's "The Peace of Wild Things" and Wordsworth's "The World Is Too Much With Us"

Film: Sean Penn's *Into the Wild*

SKILLS

Reading/Viewing: practice interpreting and connecting to poetry

Writing/Expression: poetry analysis – visual representation, creative writing

Advantages of Using Film as Text

After studying film in our classes, students have come to us excited (and dismayed!) by the fact that they can no longer passively watch movies and TV shows. Their eyes are now opened to the layers present in film, and once their eyes are opened, that awareness transfers to all text. They are now denizens of the land of critical thinking.

Michael, a Grade 10 student who normally struggles with reading comprehension, became an active speaker during class discussion, analyzing film like an expert. His comprehension of literary texts improved as he began to realize the viewing skills he was using for film were transferable to the printed word. Being a learner who benefits from visual instruction, he found the process eye opening. Grade 11 student, Andros, found English class "boring," until he started interpreting movies. After a light bulb moment where he "saw" Alfred Hitchcock use foreshadowing in *Psycho*, this once reluctant reader is now interpreting visual metaphors in Bong Joon-ho's *Snowpiercer*, diagnosing character flaws in Roman Polanski's *Macbeth*, and tangling with the unreliable narrator of Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse Five*.

For us as English Language Arts educators, the imperative is clear and simple. As Marshall McLuhan says, if we want students "to achieve a contemporary awareness of the world in which we live," we must help build their literacy in "media grammars." Using film as text in the classroom is an engaging way to fulfill this goal.

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