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## Identity: A Final MA Portfolio

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MASTER'S PORTFOLIO

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A Final Portfolio

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with a specialization in  
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Dr. Heather Jordan, First Reader  
Ms. Kimberly Spallinger, Second Reader

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### Analytical Narrative: Choosing Who You Are

When I was twelve years old, I started writing a novel based on a dream I'd had. The dream had been so impactful that I immediately woke up, grabbed a notebook, and composed feverishly until the last traces of my sleepy fog had vanished. The specifics of the story have been lost to time, but that moment solidified my desire to put to paper what was in my head. I had written a lot before this, mostly song lyrics or poems or very short stories, but this was a fully formed idea that I wanted so desperately to chronicle, if only for my own enjoyment. There are, I know, countless stories like this, of people who had to place into the world something that wasn't there before, and had to do so using the written word. The desire for writing, for whatever reason, had permanently taken up residence in my mind. It was the first time I saw myself as a possible writer.

Twenty-five years later, I decide to codify in some way my passion for writing by beginning my Master's in English with a teaching specialization. I had hoped to learn to write well, or at least write better than I had previously. I also loved teaching, and wanted to teach the works that had such an impact on me as a student. I wasn't quite sure what I was getting into: this was a new world, different from the pastoral work I have undertaken for the previous two decades. The learning curve at times has been steep, but always rewarded with the knowledge that I was advancing as a writer and, hopefully, as an eventual teacher.

So much of our identity as human beings comes from how we are employed. When asked, "what are you?" or "what do you do?" our first instinct is to offer up the answer of how or where we are employed. There is so much more to who we are, or even the professions we have chosen, but we are often defined by what we do for a living. I had flirted with the idea of being a writer or a teacher for two decades, and these two notions are what started me on this journey of what we might term a change of career but is also often change of identity, simply because our self is so tied to our profession. It certainly has been a theme in my recent life. It's no wonder, then, that much of my work in my master's program revolves around defining identity.

The four papers contained in this portfolio dwell and ruminate on the concept of identity: its delineation, its codification, its transference, and sometimes even its degradation. And more often than not, the work contained herein is attempting to reveal some underlying truth about who we are through art or writing itself. Whether the goal is using social identity to teach the rhythm of writing, rendering music lyrics

as a holistic statement on the 'other', or endeavoring to teach students about the interpersonal in dynamic relationships, the thread that runs through each paper is one of defining the self.

The first project I wanted to revise for this portfolio was also my substantive research project. Titled "Writing for Self: Finding Identity in Academic Discourse", this paper was written for Ms. Kimberly Spallinger's ENG 6040 class, Graduate Writing. I had felt that much of the published work I was assigned to read for classes was impersonal and cold, as if it was mechanized in a way. There are, after all, people behind the works we read in these classes, who have personal experiences, feelings, and attitudes that may be germane to the work they are publishing. I desired to explore this idea a little, and, inspired by the class exploration of Barthes' "The Death of the Author" and Foucault's conceptualization of the author function, decided to extol the virtue of injecting the self into academic writing.

The largest hurdle to revising the paper was clarifying the audience to whom it was written. The ultimate goal, at least at the start, was to encourage any academic writers to feel comfortable using a more personal tone in their writing, at least where appropriate. It was clear from the original paper that not only had I decided to shoot for too large an audience but, because of this, it was confusing as to who should consider themselves the audience. Was it undergraduate or graduate students? Was it academics who want to be published in journals? It was a little confusing. I decided to zoom the focus in a little, and write it to both graduate students and academics who want to be published. I did this mostly because graduate students are often called upon to mimic the style expectations of academic journals, and I wanted to start this process early enough so that graduate students, many of whom become published journal authors, would feel comfortable using personal voice and tone in their writing.

There is a tension within graduate work, where you are expected to write like the authors you study, and at the same time provide meta-analysis as a student, having one foot in the higher echelons of the academic world, and having the other foot set firmly in the student realm. It seems to me that both graduate students and published academic writers have a commonality within the ground that they cover, and thus both are addressed in my paper. Much of my revision comes from tightening up the understanding of audience, focusing on the commonality of the two worlds, and clarifying the audience. Because considering audience and estimating perception can be something that I struggle with in my writing, I was glad to have the opportunity to clarify the audience within the paper, and also within that, address the concerns I have for

undergraduate students where applicable.

The second work chosen for the portfolio is my major teaching-based project for ENG 6200, Teaching Writing. This class and project represented the biggest challenge for me during my graduate work. I am not a teacher, and have no undergraduate training in being a teacher. So, although I have in my capacity as a pastor taught and prepared lessons for over twenty years, this paper was my first foray into official lesson planning.

My goal was to create a unit that revolved around biography in some way. Most of my personal reading during this time was biographies or autobiographies, and I felt that biography not only reveals identity, but has the potential to teach students something about themselves and the possibilities of their lives. Because so much of how we define ourselves comes from the perception that other people have of us, I decided to frame the unit within a study of the dynamic between famous partnerships, and allow the biographical story of the student's subjects to be defined by who they were known to interact with professionally or personally. To paraphrase Denizen's *Interpretive Biography*, biography turns and twists on the important points in a person's life. Those turns and twists are often a result of serendipitous meetings with other people of like interests or goals.

I decided to frame the capstone assignment of the unit as a submission to an anthology that is a compilation of essays about famous partnerships, friendships, or other dual interpersonal dynamics. Because we had discussed the importance of considering audience in this class, and because students often have no audience other than the teacher for which to write, I wanted my fictitious students to have some sort of target in mind when composing their essays. This conceit, I hoped, would encourage the students to frame their chronicling of intertwined lives in ways that would reveal identity but also be engaging instead of rote.

My revision of the unit simply was to make it clearer to the reader regarding the rationale of my planning. Organizationally, I wanted to present a more concise explanation as to why this particular unit taught in this way could be an effective avenue to teach students how to write a biographical essay. Also, based on the feedback I received, I resituated the unit not as a first-year unit, but for a second-year class where English majors would already have been given the foundation to delve into more specific territory like this take on the biographical essay. Unfortunately, I was not able to obtain the original feedback received from the instructor, but the peer review aided my revision immensely.

The third work chosen for the portfolio is a post-colonial reading of Bob Dylan's 2001 album, *"Love and Theft"*. Dylan has long been a favorite of mine personally, and as we studied literary theory in ENG 6070 (Introduction to Literary and Critical Theory), I felt that Dylan's work on this particular album lends itself well to a post-colonial study not only because of its pre-rock musical forms which set the music in a time period before the civil rights movement, but also because of the lyrical content (which echoes Jim Crow south in many places) and because of the controversy surrounding Dylan's remixing of culture for his own means. The title itself is derived from a book about blackface minstrelsy and cultural appropriation, and Dylan himself borrows passages from disparate sources as his source material for the lyrics. I felt that some analysis of his methodology would also bolster the discussion of appropriation.

However, the ultimate goal with this piece was to apply post-colonial literary theory to Mr. Dylan's lyrical work. Because post-colonial theory deals with issues of identity and the ways in which colonized peoples are encouraged to assimilate to their colonizers, I wanted to analyze Dylan's depiction of the colonization of the culture of African Americans. The aftermath of such action, typified by cultural decimation or appropriation, is central to some of the themes presented in *"Love and Theft"*. A secondary analysis reveals Dylan's own "colonization" of works, from Charley Patton's blues to Junichi Saga's *Confessions of a Japanese Yakuza*, both of which find their way into the lyrical content. Is Dylan as a lyrical raconteur either interpolator or thief? My hope was to bring this question to some resolution within my text, and, in the process, make a statement about what happens in the aftermath of colonization and the texts of those who are overtaken. I was interested in taking Foucault's author function concept and applying it to Dylan's work in this light. My revision was mostly comprised of minor corrections and illuminating some portions of my analysis to a greater extent.

My fourth piece for this portfolio is titled "Academic Rap: Using Hip Hop to Teach Prose Rhythm", and it emanated from an assignment in ENG 6220 (Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing). Although the concept of using hip hop to teach English and writing principles is not new, I wanted to explore the ubiquity of the genre and how its place in popular culture might be used to teach poetic rhythm to aid the pacing of writing. In the piece, I advocate for placing our instruction in cultural contexts that are relevant to our students, utilizing the artistic and cultural vernacular that our students would find familiar to help them relate classroom concepts to social ones. The goal in mind is to make information "sticky", to attach

academic concepts to real world constructs. Bridging the gap between how students identify with their own music and culture, and the world of education, allows students to better define a clearer and more well-rounded identity.

The feedback I received mainly had to do with paper organization. Some of my sources weren't cited, and I was also expected to include more of the readings for the class in the paper. During my revision, I remedied the former, and placed our most important source from the class in the paper. This source, in fact, was the inspiration for the paper, but there was such a wealth of information in the literature about this topic that I initially did not include classroom sources and allowed the feel of the paper to take me where I felt it needed to go. I was surprised at just how much has been written about hip hop in the classroom, but also how much it can be utilized in ways that have yet to be realized.

This process of rewriting and creating a portfolio has certainly been a teachable moment for me. I would not have noticed the narrative theme of identity in these works had I not been encouraged to do so by compiling these works. It speaks to the fact that identity, owning one's self, and one's own agency are all very important concepts to me, and I will work in classroom settings to allow students a space to compose and hone their own identity.

Lloyd Evans

Ms. Kimberly Spallinger

ENG 6040

December 4, 2018

### Writing for Self: Finding Identity in Academic Discourse

When someone enters the realm of academic writing, they most likely take note of the patterns that emerge in the texts they are reading. From font style (more serif than sans) to titles (the ubiquitous colon) to jargon (“the literature”), we identify those earmarks of academic discourse by informally cataloging the repetitions we see in grammatical construction, linguistic conventions, and stylistic choices. The authors of these texts, just like any writing subculture, have a language which carries with it a vocabulary, a lilt that ebbs and flows in seemingly fixed ways, and an organized group think that reveals solidarity with ideas and expectations. These ideas and expectations, many of which are unwritten, are thrust upon those that step upon the precipice of academia’s tomes, entering with hopes of acceptance and understanding.

Although there may be some who quibble about the finer points of identity in academic discourse, it is clear that most of the audience for such discourse desires to see the form of the writing hold a certain shape and a stylistic cache. The jargon, the organization, and even the Oxford comma are all, in their way, conventions that we expect to see in a published academic article. This is, in fact, the ‘language’ of those who write and subsequently read such articles. We writers are expected to adhere to what many might say are stringent guidelines that are viewed to be academic, and implicitly taught that coloring outside of the academic lines is a behavior reserved only for those who have proved themselves worthy of flouting the rules by their mastering of the rules first. For the purposes of this paper, flouting those rules means inserting your own identity into a discourse that often encourages what could be termed “dispersonalization”, the removal of self from writing. So, to that end, I want to encourage academic writers, graduate writers and scholars whose writing is either theoretically or practically composed for academic publication, to remove the veil of anonymity that permeates so much of what academic writers compose. After all, your writing choices can reveal who you are, and academic writers should feel unencumbered to write from a personal perspective. Writers whose work has as its ultimate goal to be accepted by the academy, either in

classrooms or academic journals, should endeavor to insert themselves into their work by various acts of personalization.

Understanding academic identity in its various contexts is key to viewing the landscape of self in academia. James Gee writes of the systematic ways the academic self can be recognized in his essay “Identity as an Analytic Lens for Research in Education.” According to Gee, identity is “being recognized as a certain ‘kind of person’ in a given context” (99). Bethan Benwell and Elizabeth Stokoe, in *Discourse and Identity*, view identity as “a public phenomenon, a performance or construction that is interpreted by other people” (3). Both definitions give us a clear picture of how conditional identity is: it is both dependent on context and interpretation and reliant on external forces that are largely out of our control. For those of us who endeavor to be academic writers, there is both the expectation of meeting those forces with fluency while also retaining a voice that is our own. This is the tension in which we find ourselves as writers, and it can often feel akin to a minefield, the writer trotting carefully across a potentially explosive wordscape. As we pour ourselves into our work, we are also cognizant that this is work that must exude a professionalism which can often render our impassioned notions and theories sterile. Therefore, academic writers stand in an intellectual and creative gap: we must satisfy both the academy and the self.

The tension of academy and self is nothing new. Socioeconomic, interpersonal, and historical considerations all play a role in deciding what is acceptable in academic identity. Because “textual production is at the core of negotiating the interactive relationships among the members of academic communities and claiming and constructing academic identities” (Flowerdew, 82), the texts that are produced are a product of both self and the community from which they emanate. Peter Elbow has asked, “why don’t we hear *all* texts?” (5) and answered his own question with a nod to the complexities of academic voice and identity: “our culture of literacy has inculcated in most of us a habit of working actively to keep the human voice out of our texts when we write” (5). We therefore feel encouraged to remove ourselves from work in which we have poured so much of our time, thoughts, and energy because we are encouraged to eschew the language of speech, of idiom, of anything that may mark a text as our own.

Much has been made of identity in academic discourse, and specifically as it relates to competence and mobility. The proper handling of the self in academia has often been relegated to the back burner of academic need, with those in positions to change this culture deciding whether or not to move the line.

Flowerdew, et., al., tell us that “students have to demonstrate their competence to their degree examiners, who function as gatekeepers, in order to move on to the next stage of their academic careers” (82). Duff explains that “[the inaccessibility of academic discourse] serves to perpetuate the distance between experts and novices to some extent, to the experts’ advantage” (171). Both Flowerdew and Duff understand that there is an inherent “play by the rules” mentality forced upon those who wish to enter the academy by the academy itself, while also see that change rarely comes from within. We as writers must maintain our fluidity, and perhaps even our naivete, so that our academic assimilation does not leave the self outside the gates of the university.

The challenge for us as academic writers, then, is to bring pressure to bear upon those gates and diminish the distance between academy and self so that we can create a space for ourselves and our identity as we enter the academy. When we begin to write as novices, we have fixed patterns and thought processes that emanate from our thinking instinctively, that comprise our writing self. These writing habits are wholly our own: the way we organize, the way we color our clauses, the way we decide what words to use; those choices are a part of who we are. As we begin the process of learning how to write academically, and as we learn the expectations of the academy, we can, if we are not careful, obtain new writing skills to the detriment of those instincts. The academy, after all, has expectations and conventions that writers must follow in order to gain admittance to its hallowed halls. Our reality, however, is that our identity and the academic expectations of our writing really is a balancing act of sorts. We want to grasp the new while holding on to the best of what has come before. My hope is to empower academic writers, those who are writing for professors or publication, to achieve a balance, to write with both the personal and professional in mind. I want these writers to navigate the world of academic writing by both grasping its rules and still holding fast to their personal style and voice.

### Literature Review

Before we move those academic wrought iron gates, though, we must understand from where this altering of self has emanated. The literature has demarcated myriad factors that impact academic writing identity, and at times oppress it. One such area is pre-academic writing. The juxtaposition, for example, of pre-academic writing culture and the expectations created by the academy can create a dissonance of identities. Ken Hyland writes that “[f]or those new to a particular social context, [aligning identities] can pose a

considerable challenge as they are likely to find that the discourses and practices of their disciplines support identities very different from those they bring with them" (1092). Looking to past practices for assistance in navigating this new writing world can create confusion: "[t]he assumptions [beginning college writers] carry from previous school experiences clash with expectations about writing and self in college classes, and they struggle to understand the new roles writing in the broader academic community requires of them" (Ritchie, 152). There is no doubt that, for many aspiring academics, the new roles that they are expected to inhabit as writers are different from what came before: the research more rigorous, the tone more impersonal.

So beginning college writers struggle to find their place in a new world of guidelines, and they can carry these notions with them beyond their undergraduate work. And as they enter the sphere of graduate study, they find that previous conventions can be internalized. So it stands to reason that this struggle can carry over into the academic realm, where the tension between speaking for the community and speaking for the self may not be totally alleviated. The available literature, corpus studies, and the sheer amount of knowledge a student must process in order to create writing within varied academic assignments can be intimidating. Because of these considerations, it is far easier to remove the personal rather than walk the unsure tightrope of the multiple expectations all of these allowances hold. Likewise, as these graduate students grow into potential authors, they experience a world that can incentivize impersonal published writing. Writers in classrooms or those seeking to be published can also be encouraged to leave themselves out of their writing when confronted by the present expectations inherent in genre, field of study, community expectations, and power dynamics.

Regarding genre, we know that there is underlying motive and expectation behind each individual type and classification of writing. Hyland says that "[g]enres signify certain roles and relationships as a result of their institutionally defined purposes" (Hyland, 1109). In this light, genre can carry with it much more than the conventions with which it may be attached. In different fields of study, we find that conventions are varied, even among disciplines that otherwise may share a sense of cohesion. Nigel Harwood's review of corpus data regarding personal pronouns in different kinds of academic writing reveals a striking variety across the disciplines. He states that the disciplines he studied in his corpus use "inclusive and exclusive pronouns to differing degrees of frequency and to help create a number of different

textual effects” (365). Contrarily, Eunice Wallace tells writers to “[t]ake out personal pronouns, I, me, my, mine, we, us, our, ours in scientific writing. They're not wrong; they're merely out of place...” (54). Interestingly, while interviewing political science faculty at California State University in Sacramento, Edward Lascher et. al., found that there was no one convention regarding the appropriateness of personal pronouns: “[t]here is little consensus among the faculty on the degree to which the use of "I" is accepted in academic writing in political science, and whether or not the traditional scholarly voice is ‘professional’ or ‘boring’ and ‘painful to read’” (805). Because there is not a consensus on expressing the personal academic writing, writers, especially new ones, can find the ‘rules’ confusing and contradictory. It can be at times challenging to find agreement across each area of study and even within them.

Also, students and would-be published writers may have expectations of how their work will be perceived in the academic community at large and their immediate instructors and peers specifically due to differences in genre. Student authors especially can feel this tension: “[f]or student authors, their identities as knowledgeable and competent participants in the discourse community of the classroom and in the world are constructed through a difficult navigation of the no-man's land between expertise and learning in which students sometimes perceive that they are to replicate knowledge rather than develop expertise in deep and meaningful” (Wolsey, 716). Graduate students who are being asked to write theoretically for publication, or graduates who desire publication, are left wondering if they are being empowered to create or exhorted to copy, and the incongruity can be difficult to navigate. There are both written and unwritten rules, and even these rules can change based on what these students and authors are asked to emulate because, as Hyland writes, “[w]hen we employ the discourses in a community there is strong pressure to take on the identity of a member of that community” (1094). Should these writers give into that pressure or should they embrace a more individualistic path? More specifically, where or how do they navigate the many possible choices available to them to both appease the community and the self?

It is clear that power dynamics also play a role in crafting academic identity within writing. Instructors, institutions, politics, and even financial supporters all hold sway to a varying degree over writing metrics and social rubrics which influence output and can force the hand of new academics. Patricia Duff explains it this way: “[l]anguage and literacy socialization experiences and accounts will almost inevitably involve the negotiation of power and identity, and especially when examined within a larger

sociopolitical and sociocultural context” (171). That these writers will most likely not come equipped with the tools that facilitate handling the intricacies of that negotiation well reveals a possible root of unwillingness to speak as an independent and confident voice. Joanne Podis and Leonard Podis, in writing about *pedagogical in loco parentis*, frame the power dynamic by discussing the parental figures whom instructors replicate. Whereas once the concept of *in loco parentis* was more concerned with social trivialities, it is now associated with teaching and student output, for better or ill. Podis and Podis write that “[s]tudents are pushed to practice the new conventions of college writing: to consider questions for which they don’t have answers, or to write for readers who aren’t already converted to their way of thinking, and to accept their own minds as capable of synthesizing and making judgments about dense ideas” (133). Whether aiming for the requirements of a syllabus or a journal, it’s no wonder that these writers feel their voice must be stifled and boxed into the descriptive thesis because it “names or reports on phenomena rather than articulating claims based on an analysis of the evidence” and is “symptomatic of the novice” (134), not so much empowered as indoctrinated by form, with little room for personal attachment to the text or personal insertions in it.

There are other considerations as well. Students who are ESL learners, for example, face unique obstacles. Second language, or L2, students “need to become L2 ‘acquirers’, not merely L2 ‘learners’”, writes Diana Diaz (1989, 6). Therefore, they must attain a level of comfort and ownership with their new language. Ramanathan and Atkinson postulate that because of the Western world’s focus on self, and because this focus varies greatly in different cultures, “a concept of written voice that centrally assumes the expression of a ‘unique inner self’ may be problematic” for L2 students (51). They also suggest that L2 students’ cultures that place more emphasis on group dynamics may struggle with peer review because they eschew anything that might disrupt unity (58). This is significant for L2 students trying to find their identity within both the confines of academic writing and the English world at large. Financial and socioeconomic considerations have also been a possible bailiwick that escape newer writers. “Academic freedom”, Scott writes in *Knowledge, Power, and Academic Freedom*, “demands extraordinary restraint from those used to exercising power based on judgments they themselves make and outcomes they project and pay for” (459). Therefore, those who “write the checks” may have a vested interest in stasis regarding academic output. Socioeconomically speaking, writers who come from poorer backgrounds may hold the same interests but

with different motives, not desiring to control voice but to simply remain in the good graces of those who hold power.

Because of all of this, the cultural, financial and political considerations inherent in the writing process, it is clear from the literature that there are myriad obstacles to finding appropriate voice, tone, and above all identity in academic writing. At seemingly every turn, there is some anticipatory hurdle that awaits the writer who endeavors to turn the tide, even slightly. While there is no doubt among the academic community that there is some room for the personal touch in commentaries and reviews, that same community does not always see that the research paper, the journal article, and other subgenres of academic writing are still rife with opportunity for authors to insert parts of themselves into their work. It is my goal, then, to propose research into several subcategories of academic writing that can be used as a catalyst for personal identity writing constructs.

### Proposal

In an effort to integrate the self in our academic journal writing, we first must pick the ‘low hanging fruit’ of academic identity. There are certain areas in our writing where we can include more integration of the self with relative ease. I believe we can begin to allow students to feel comfort in the self, in some preliminary ways, even before the graduate level in preparation usage of personal voice at the graduate level. Hyland, for example, suggests several constructs where the personal can intermingle with the professional and become an effective hybrid. Using personal pronouns for research collected, he writes, “seemed a natural way” for students to take responsibility and own their findings (1102) in his study of L2 undergraduate writing. He also extolled the value of expressing self-benefits in the writing and stating a purpose that was, at least in part, personal. Research that someone has done is naturally attached to who they are in their work and approach. Therefore, using personal pronouns to communicate what someone’s research has revealed seems normal and appropriate for writers endeavoring to be published as well. Allowing personal pronouns in undergraduate work will facilitate their usage in work designed for journals later on.

We should also consider areas of growth where encouraging personalization of voice create unique meaning making. Globalization and ESL learners represent such an opportunity. Flowerdew states that

“[t]he fluidity of identity is also a consequence of globalization, a phenomenon that has profoundly changed the landscape of academic communication” (83). In part because of globalization, English has become the lingua franca of the business world (and, in other ways, of the world in general). To differentiate the self in this global world, finding identity in writing has become even more important. To rise above the din of a multiplicity of voices sometimes saying the same thing in the same way, we must retain our uniqueness even as we communicate fact and truth with responsibility and vigilance.

So, taking a page from the book of globalization and differentiation, the writer can engage in the personalization of academic texts which can be effective in providing socialization contextualization. This is true for L2 learners and writers especially (Hyland, 1102). Because higher proficiency, non-native speakers may have a greater sensitivity to the frequency of personal pronouns in academic writing (Abbhul, 502), reading appropriate usage of such parts of speech could be instrumental in instructing non-native speakers how and when to use such language. Rebekha Abbuhl writes that “[r]esearchers investigating the use of self-referential pronouns in academic discourse routinely advise that instruction be given to NNS to help raise their awareness and understanding of this rhetorical strategy” (503). Abbuhl’s study used artificial essay types with personal pronouns to instruct NNS students on usage; I offer that an increase in the usage of personal pronouns in general academic writing could also be instructive, whether it be in the form of examination of corpora or review of peer-generated texts. Some examples of this would include utilizing personal phrases in literature reviews, (e.g., “I have found” or “From my research”) to transforming your thesis into a personal statement, (e.g., “I believe that academic writing can be personal”). Allowing authorship to be more visible in the text allows for more personal ownership of a text, and can provide the reader with a kind of emotional ‘buy-in’: instead of a text existing solely outside of the reader, it has the opportunity to be relational as well as informational.

It is clear that placing yourself within your work is empowering. Peter Elbow writes that he encourages his first-year writing students to engage in writing using autobiography, and viewing their writing as theirs and as original in an effort to produce interaction with ideas, not regurgitation of texts:

“I’m afraid that I invite first year students to fall into the following sins: to take their own ideas too seriously; to think that they are the first person to think of their idea and be all wrapped up and possessive about it...rather than feeling, as they often do, that they must summarize what others have said

and only make modest rejoinders from the edge of the conversation to all the smart thoughts that have already been written” (80).

There certainly is a lesson here for those who aspire to be published academic writers. They can take hold of the portions of biography and personal introspection that enhance their academic work. They can choose to carry with them into the graduate realm the self that they may sometimes feel is being removed by their own academic environs. To do this, writers must take the initiative in making ideas their own instead of simply regurgitating information for the sake of a grade. When writers are encouraged to do this in undergraduate writing, we can be hopeful that this will carry through to their graduate writing and their eventual published work. It begins, however, with first year students making ideas their own and being allowed to do so. And making ideas your own means being allowed to provide your personal stamp on your synthesis, process, and concepts. Some simple ways that this can be done in the undergraduate classroom that can carry through to graduate writing and beyond is teaching and encouraging unique word choice, using personal examples, and utilizing creative titles and headings. This can also be done by teaching extensive use of elements of story, where multiple voices can be heard via their ownership of their perspective.

Academic writing can be a milieu where more personal writing elements like story can be utilized effectively and successfully. Placing writers on the ‘edge of the conversation’ within their own story by encouraging them to eschew the personal places them in the territory of the ‘other’, where the ‘other’ is not a distant construct socially, economically, educationally, but rather one who sees through a glass clearly yet impeded to grab hold of what they are encouraged to become. Ken Hyland’s corpus examination of self-mention explains why: “In constructing their texts writers also construct themselves, and self-reference represents the confidence to speak authoritatively rather than concealing authorship behind the impersonality options the genre provides” (2001, 224). Telling the actual stories of the disenfranchised while engaging the literature not only brings those two worlds together, but enhances them by allowing each the possibility of definition and explication. For example, sharing personal success stories about inner city teachers accessing student culture by using rap, when juxtaposed with the literature regarding teaching to culture, allows those authors to tell in first person narrative an inspiring academic story. Likewise, giving academics a forum (such as publication) to share the differences and commonalities between different student groups by sharing first person stories is as valuable as third person academic writing in that it gives us real world truths which are applicable. This can be done effectively and impactfully via first person

narratives. Allowance of story gives rise to voices from communities that value story. Desiring more disparate voices in our writing instead of embracing removal of the human element allows those voices to pen their works confidently. Situating your work beside authors who have a canonized oeuvre can be intimidating; weaving your words in and out with storied works can have the potential to cause apprehension. Whether using the concept of story to convey academic data or anecdotal perspective, story allows personal voice and identity allows writers to comfortably join the ranks of the echelons of the wordsmiths they are so encouraged to emulate. Allowing writers of all types to grasp their own voice propels them to use the perspectives that feel natural to them, and this will eventually filter through to their academic writing.

Revealing identity in our academic writing can also bridge the power dynamic gap between students and faculty. Understanding that the academy is comprised of people who hold biases (no matter how much they try to strain them out of their research, writing, and attitudes) and allowing glimpses of humanness into our writing reveals a vulnerability that diminishes the chasm that is created by power held and power withheld. Magda Lewis and Roger Simon, in "A Discourse Not Intended for Her", write that "to the extent that academic discourse appears objective and distanced (and is understood and privileged in this way) it becomes a vehicle for domination. It devalues alternative perspectives, understanding, and articulation of experience. It denies the lived reality of difference as the ground on which to pose questions of theory and practice" (469). Many times, even most of the time, 'articulation of experience' and 'lived reality' are communicated most effectively from human context and perspective. How we have lived and what we have experienced are personal notions that are valid in different ways from raw data and research. If the personal and the experiential should not be placed on an equal footing with research, then it still should be considered to be true in an individual sense.

### Conclusion

To this end, new and accomplished academic writers should feel free to explore the personal in their published work. First person pronouns, personal anecdotes and stories, relevant asides that are drawn from informed opinion, along with developing a unique style and specific word choices and patterns all reveal a person behind the writing. All of these constructs allow writers to reveal themselves to the reader,

who in turn is allowed to validate the text emotionally. Reading the personal alongside the professional elevates the human element and makes the logical more tangible.

We must as writers be seeking our own identity in what we create, while still inhabiting the space known as academic writing. David Bartholomae puts it succinctly, stating that there must be “some compromise between idiosyncrasy, a personal history, on the one hand, and the requirements of convention, the history of a discipline, on the other” (135). Our observation, our experience, even our research, is chosen by our own interpersonal dynamic. We already reveal ourselves by the choices we make when we write even if we never acknowledge the human voice behind the text. Placing your stamp upon your work using personal pronouns, stories, and asides gives you your proper place.

To all writers who offer their work for consideration in classrooms and for publication in academic journals, I am exhorting you pour more of your personal self into your endeavors. Injecting personality and voice into your writing allows it to be set apart even as it sets with other scholarly works. Reading personality and voice in your writing allows readers to grasp context and assign a specificity to the barrage of words and phrases to the text. Revealing the personal can create a commonality and community by exchanging mutual identity and create a space for metadiscourse by allowing writers to comment on their own writing using their own identity. In short, it can allow writers and readers to come together and share an ownership regarding the text and the information therein. Therefore, I implore writers of articles for publication in journals to challenge the convention of the impersonal, and build emotional capital by injecting the personal into their academic voice.

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ENG 6200

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## OVERVIEW

The ultimate goal of this assignment is for students to learn how to create a biographical narrative essay. In an effort to teach biography, I have also included the element of empathy by examining relationships, with the intended goal of having students place themselves in the proverbial shoes of both parties in dualistic relationships. Therefore, the main difference between this essay unit and most biographical essays is that the essay unit will focus on the relational aspect of two individuals, and their friendship, partnership, or rivalry. I believe there is great value in understanding personality dynamics by studying interpersonal relationships. I also believe that many times (but not always), we can become greater than ourselves by pairing with another person. Developing a narrative that centers on the dynamic of two people who have formed some sort of connection can help us understand how to derive truth from that connection, and possibly even inform our personal connections.

Denzin, in *Interpretive Biography*, writes regarding the Western notion that lives turn on significant, one-time events. He calls these *epiphanies*. Biographies, he then concludes, are “structured by the significant, turning-point moments in a subject’s life” (20). The turning point for the purposes of this unit is the effect of meeting another individual. Analysis of the impact of that meeting (or *epiphany*) would comprise the bulk of the essay. Students will examine cultural, social, economic, and personal impacts that this relationship generated.

The target “class” for this assignment would be a 200 level writing class. The main project will be a five to seven page relational biographical research paper that discusses the impact of two lives intersecting. This assignment would be given under the guise of writing for an anthology compiling essays on friends, partners, and rivals. The assumption is that the anthology would contain biographies of people of like interests (for example, a student writing an essay on John Lennon and Paul McCartney would assume that the audience for the anthology is either Beatles fans or music fans). I have created this fictitious scenario to allow students to consider in their writing a real audience, but also to allow them an avenue to write for a

mass market as opposed to an academic audience. As Wiggins points out, in the real world “there are consequences for succeeding or failing as a real writer” (30) and the classroom should reflect this.

Therefore, the readings will reflect what I feel are excellent examples of approaching what I would term “relational biography” and commercial (as opposed to academic) writing, as we as a class discuss and define the expectations of narrative and biography. Because biography can provide an opportunity to create different narratives, I decided to allow the concept of human relationship to narrow the field a bit. This will encourage students to ask questions regarding what their audience would like to read, while also feeling the tension of being responsible in their retelling of history.

Biographer Ida Nadel identifies three types of narrative stances used in biography: the dramatic/expressive, the objective/academic, and the interpretive/analytic. Because students will be encouraged to analyze these relationships to create a narrative, and in turn provide analysis about their narrative, this biographical essay will be interpretive/analytic in nature. Students will be expected to contextualize their subjects regarding the surrounding history and milieu, as well as chronicling the dynamics of race, class, gender and other factors that impacted the forged bond between the two individuals about which they will be writing.

#### RATIONALE

Because the target class is a 200 level writing class at Bowling Green State University, I will be relying on the collaborative document “Framework for Success in Postsecondary Writing”, compiled by the Council of Writing Program Administrators, the National Council of Teachers of English, and the National Writing Project. Because of the constructs outlined in this document, this essay unit endeavors to teach students to:

- Develop rhetorical knowledge
- Develop critical thinking through writing, reading, and research
- Develop flexible writing processes
- Develop knowledge of conventions

In an effort to help students develop rhetorical knowledge, I wanted to make sure I have provided a specific rhetorical situation (an anthology of biographical essays) and rationale for this writing, which is

why the assignment is fairly narrow in scope. This rhetorical situation also allowed for the students to consider a certain audience when writing as opposed to writing for the sake of the assignment itself. In this case, students will be encouraged to envision an audience interested either in the subject about which they are writing, or that person's associated field of study or career. Specifically, the rhetorical situation is an essay that will be placed with similar essays in a topical anthology. Douglas Park writes that "the task of analyzing audience is a matter of identifying the nature of the contexts that are already given by some aspect of the occasion of publication and of understanding the relationship between those that are given and those that must be more explicitly defined within the discourse" (253). My hope is for students to contextualize their writing by placing it within a specific rhetorical situation not wholly in their control, to provide analysis for their audience by understanding those contexts, and work with in real-world parameters that are reasonable and realistic. The texts I have chosen will allow them to interact with similar writing which present historical events using elements of story. Discussions will include what kind of person would purchase an anthology of topical biographical essays so that students can conceive of the social aspect of their writing. The genre of biography allows students to develop a natural narrative that is in many aspects already at their disposal, namely that these lives have already been lived, chronicled, recorded, and dissected.

Because I want students to develop knowledge of conventions in the genre in which they will be writing, we will dissect and interpret the two main texts we are reviewing as examples of effective biographical works. This includes instruction in critical interpretation and extensive discussion of these texts as we find out what works and what does not regarding writing about the lives of others. Allan Gurganus wrote that "[t]he greatest writing is that which is most luminously and searchingly mortal" (151), and to that end we will search for the human element in biography: not merely a chronicle of a life, but the truth of the human condition of that life. Much of this assessment will come from the students themselves via class discussion rather than lecture.

Also, so that students will develop critical thinking through writing, reading, and research, they will engage in various stages of peer review and rubric development. Hansen and Liu write that good peer review can be "a rich source of information for content and rhetorical issues" and can "enhance intercultural communication" (31). I understand that as an instructor I have but one perspective and that students in any

given classroom have myriad perspectives that are essential to the critique of the writing of their peers.

There is a temptation, perhaps even a natural inclination, to set up a hierarchy in the classroom that centralizes power. Mike Rose exhorted instructors of writing to “rigorously examine our own teaching and see what model of language lies beneath it” (357). But our own internal examination of our own prejudice and assumptions can only lead us so far. Therefore I have decided that, along with in-class discussion and peer review of student papers, the class will develop a rubric. The student developed rubric will be based on in-class discussions and will be focused on what makes narrative and biography succeed or fail. I believe this will get us closer to what actually works and what does not regarding writing that falls outside the academic walls, which dovetails with our understanding of the reading audience that will be our implied target. It also allows me to understand what students are looking for in both the writing they read and the writing they create, and holds them accountable for their writing, reading, and research. This is due to what Rick Stiggins frames thusly: “Perhaps the greatest potential value of classroom assessment is realized when we open the assessment process up and welcome students into that process as full partners” (18). Allowing students to be a part of their own assessment provides for a peer review process that is perceived as equitable and collaborative.

Also, I never consider students to be just students but also writers, especially at the level where this plan would be implemented. I want to encourage an environment where students see themselves as equals in the writing and grading process. Whitney, et., al, proclaim, “[o]ur challenge is to help beginning teachers to see student writers as writers, and as people, rather than solely as students” (19). I consider anyone who writes to be a writer. This deconstruction of the teacher/student mythos can be positive in many ways, most strikingly in how we see the work that students submit. If their writing is a true reflection of self or of their research, then they have written. It is my goal to design a “partnership experience” (Whitney, 20) where both students and teachers have a stake in that writing. To that end, besides allowing students to design the rubric, we will be sharing biographical sketches in class, including the instructor. The goal in this is two-fold: to allow students an arena to start to interact with the biographical form, and to help students understand how biographers form understanding of their subjects through relating to them. Through empowering students input on the rubric and me sharing my own sketch, I hope to accomplish this sense of partnership.

I also want to allow students to develop knowledge of conventions, but also flexible writing processes. I believe it is important for students to understand where they are going by understanding what has come before. I do not believe that a strict adherence to traditional genre conventions benefits either the student or teacher, but rather that a working knowledge of convention allows writers to flex and bend convention at the whim of effective communication. In my instruction, I will be giving students a basic understanding of writing structure and expectations, but in peer reviews and the construction of the rubric, I will encourage students to promote originality, creativity, and experimentation with form and structure. This will include multimodal freedoms such as using art, music, or film in one assignment and having discussions about framing events through various perspectives spurred on by our readings. I will be utilizing student feedback through peer review of student writing, but also through discussion and analysis of the two main biographical texts we will be reading. The review of these two texts will give students an understanding of biographical convention, and also give concrete examples of the freedom students can have to approach convention using their own voice. This idea of “knowing the rules so you can break them” comes from “Genres”, where Devitt writes, “[genres] must be taught as both constraint and choice so that individual awareness can lead to individual creativity” (191). One of the texts I have chosen, *Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie* is illustrative of approaching biography, utilizing elements of story and art to connect the reader to lives lived. It is also illustrative of how biography can be approached in creative ways (via visual art and layout) while still retaining the constraints and expectations of any biography might bring with it.

I hope to impress upon students the existence of their own voice in writing a biography. This essay can only encompass highlights of two lives brought together, and in that it can only interact with action that pertains to the overarching theme of the relationship being related. Hibbard writes that the presence of the biographer is there, “even if subtly, in the choice of subject, the determination of the type of biography (literary, psychoanalytic, cultural, etc.), the selection of material, interpretation of events, inclusion of related background material, narrative arrangement, pace, style, tone, and voice” (21). I want students to understand that whenever they are writing about someone, they are, in a very true sense, representing the whole of someone by what information they leave in or out, what tone they use to communicate certain nuances of personality or action. That the writer has the power to affect perception of another human being

is no small responsibility. Our sharing of our personal narratives, for example, is illustrative of the power in the personal story and its communicative capabilities because of the choices students will make in how they choose to write about their lives.

The idea of narrative in biographical works can be deceptive, in that it can seem that there is only one obvious narrative. But we know that this is not true, if only from a brief perusal of biographies of individuals such as Abraham Lincoln or Martin Luther King, Jr. Every person is multifaceted, with various perspectives available to the biographer. In the same way that all of us have various stories and anecdotes about our own lives, biographical subjects have their own threads that run through their existence. Especially when we are considering the intertwining of those threads with the threads of another life, we see that there are many possible avenues to take regarding the perspective of any given relationship. What threads to bring to the forefront, and what threads to relegate to footnotes or not discuss at all, is a dilemma born not only out of the brevity of the assignment but the ethical consideration a biographer has to the subjects at hand. Students should have to make a case for their analysis of the interpersonal dynamic that they are portraying. To accomplish this, our discussion of the film *Walk the Line* will enable the class to deconstruct the choices of the filmmaker and the relationship dynamics that arise in the movie.

There are several learning outcomes that I hope to accomplish with this essay unit. At the end of the unit, students will be able to create a narrative based on a section of someone's life, and include relevant details and appropriate historical sequence. They will be able to organize research from varied sources to create an engaging and factual narrative. They will be able to write in the subgenre of biographical essay. It is also my hope that students will engage with ideas of audience via target audience consideration, self and peer appraisal via peer review and rubric creation, and examination of the role interpersonal dynamics play in biography.

I am aware that this is not a typical assignment. In my research, I could not find a similar assignment. I wonder if this might be skewed toward students who are more involved in anthropological studies. At the same time, I feel strongly that writing reveals something about us and something about the subject, and I believe that a study of how to write about two people who come together as friends or adversaries could have potential to teach students about personality dynamics and how to write about such things as well. In that writing, perhaps, an opportunity is given to learn about how to process those

relationships independently in their personal lives as well.

### ASSIGNMENT

5-7 page relational biographical research paper utilizing at least five sources.

A biographical research paper that culminates in the intersecting of the lives of two people, the results of their meeting, and the ensuing after effects. Examples include Paul McCartney and John Lennon, Marie and Pierre Curie, Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera, Steve Jobs and Steve Wozniak, and Yassar Arafat and Ariel Sharon.

### ASSIGNMENT GOALS

During the course of this assignment, students should be able to:

- Access relevant resources; read, evaluate, and select resources; draw from resources to create a cogent narrative
- Critique own and others' essay drafts in an informed way.
- Use a body of knowledge inside written work: paraphrase, quote, summarize, explain/interpret/comment, cite, and document (MLA).
- Compose a focused and cohesive biographical essay.
- Reflect upon their reading processes, writing processes, and rhetorical effectiveness.

### ASSIGNMENT GUIDELINES

- Students must utilize to reasonable effect the five elements of story (character, setting, conflict, plot, and theme).
- Students must not venture into fictional territory, or place upon the main inhabitants their own emotional suppositions; rather, they must draw out from the literature and research a reasonable configuration of the complexities of the two individuals and their relationship.
- Students will delve into the personality dynamics, how real life individuals are products of their time, and cultural difference and commonality that led to the forging of the relationship.
- Students will create a narrative of relational dynamics using their research.
- Students will analyze the impact of what the narrative depicts, namely the after effects of their two subjects developing a relationship.

### CLASS READING

*Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie* by Lauren Redniss

“A Feud That Lasted A Lifetime: Ariel Sharon Vs. Yasser Arafat” – Greg Myre

“Writing Biography as a Relationship” – Amia Lieblich

“Biographer and Subject” – Allen Hibbard

*Beyond the Miracle Worker: The Remarkable Life of Anne Sullivan Macy and Her Extraordinary Friendship with Helen Keller*

### GRADING

Writing prompts and the biographical sketch are graded completed/not completed.

The rubric for the biographical narrative essay will be completed in class

Biographical Sketch – 5 pts

Writing Prompts – 5 pts each

Elements of Story Writing – 5 pts  
 Relational Biography Outline – 5 pts  
 Biographical Narrative Essay – 70 pts

### OTHER

- Class schedule assumes eighteen sessions in total that meet for fifty minutes each session

### ASSIGNMENT CALENDAR

#### Week 1, Day 1

1. (15 min.) Write personal biographical sketch in class. One page, single spaced.
  - a. Will cover pertinent facts relating to student’s life
  - b. Will be written with the class as audience in mind
2. (15 min.) Questions regarding sketch
  - a. What is your introductory sentence?
  - b. What mental criteria did you use to include or leave certain facts?
  - c. What is one fact about your life that you left out, and why did you leave it out?
3. (20 min.) “What is biography” discussion?
  - a. Placing someone in a context (socioeconomic, physical location, etc.,)
  - b. Delineating outward and inward pressures (Sartre)
  - c. Identifying turning points (critical markers) (Denzin)
  - d. Chronicling tension
4. Begin reading Radioactive: Marie and Pierre Curie and Zinn PDF (available in Canvas)

#### Week 1, Day 2

1. (15 min.) Writing prompt: My favorite memory of my closest friend is \_\_\_\_\_.
2. (20 min.) Discussion: What does a biography accomplish?
  - a. What are possible end goals of biographies?
    - i. Record events of a life
    - ii. Speak truth about the human existence
  - b. What agendas could biographies hold?
    - i. Selecting events to depict the good or bad
    - ii. Attitude or disposition of biographer toward subject
    - iii. Mini-discussion: Zinn – “A People’s History...” Ch. 1 PDF
    - iv. Example: Albert Goldman and rock music
      1. He disliked the culture of this genre of music
      2. He was a biographer of Elvis Presley and John Lennon
3. (15 min.) Introduce relational biography paper

#### Week 1, Day 3

1. (20 min.) Discussion of possible topics
2. (30 min.) Discussion: Viewpoints and perspectives of biographies
  - a. Avoiding bias while retaining the human element
  - b. Avoid wholly good vs. evil tropes; allow characters and lives to reveal themselves in total.
  - c. Sculpt the narrative out of what is already there.
  - d. “It is the sculptor’s power, so often alluded to, of finding the perfect form and features

of a goddess, in the shapeless block of marble; and his ability to chip off all extraneous matter, and let the divine excellence stand forth for itself. Thus, in every incident of business, in every accident of life, the poet sees something divine, and carefully scales off all that encumbers that divinity, and permits it to be revealed in all its transcendent loveliness.” (The Methodist Quarterly Review, 1858)

- e. Find the arc (the up and down) of the relationship. There is always one.
- f. Remember that the arc may resemble a roller coaster

### Week 2, Day 1

1. Read for this session: “A Feud that Lasted a Lifetime”
2. (30 min.) Discuss “A Feud...” reading
  - a. Identify the five elements of story in this reading:
    - i. Character
    - ii. Setting
    - iii. Conflict
    - iv. Plot (or arc)
    - v. Theme
  - b. What are some “angles” as which this story can be told?
    - i. Religion
    - ii. Personality
    - iii. Ethnicity
    - iv. Class perspectives
    - v. History
3. (20 min.) Writing: Apply the elements of story to your subject. Define the five elements that would/could be in your paper. Turn in at end of class

### Week 2, Day 2

1. Read for this session “Life as Narrative”
2. (20 min.) Presentation of interpersonal biographical essay topic (announced in class) and student suggestion and feedback
3. (30 min.) Lecture/discussion: “Good Biography” (from <http://www.greatlakeswiki.org/the-best-5-tips-on-writing-biographical-narrative-essay-for-students.php>)
  - a. In the world of essay writing, there are four different types: persuasive, descriptive, expository, and narrative. Most students become comfortable writing persuasive, expository, and descriptive essays because teachers in a wide variety of courses assign them. When it comes to narrative, those are only assigned in language arts courses. Due to their limited experience in writing narrative essays, many students have little to no idea how to write one. If you have been assigned a biographical narrative essay and you need help, here are a few tips:
  - b. Tell the story.
  - c. Create a purpose.
  - d. Organize in chronological order.
  - e. Create a thesis or claim.
  - f. Include actual names and place.

### Week 2, Day 3

1. (15 min.) Creative prompt: Create the shortest story you can utilizing all five elements of story: character, setting, conflict, plot, and theme (This will be assigned during week one, and can be either a written document, song, art design project, or video)
2. (35 min.) Discussion/Lecture: Summary of terminology in narrative and life history research

(Ojermark, 2007, p, 4)

- a. Biographical research: Research undertaken into individual lives employing auto biographical documents, interviews or other sources and presenting accounts in various forms (e.g., in terms of editing, written, visual or oral presentation, and some degree of researcher narration and reflexivity).
- b. Family history: The systematic narrative and research of past events relating to a specific family or specific families.
- c. Narrative: A story with a plot and existence separate from the life of the teller. Narrative is linked with time as a fundamental aspect of social action. Narratives provide the organization for our actions and experiences, since we experience life through conceptions of the past, present and future.
- d. Oral history: Personal recollections of events and their causes and effects. Also refers to the practice of interviewing individuals about their past experiences of events with the intention of constructing an historical account.
- e. Case history: History of an event or social process, not of any person in particular.
- f. Life history: Account of a life based on interviews and conversations. The life history is based on the collection of written or transcribed oral accounts requested by a researcher. The life story is subsequently edited, interpreted and presented in one of a number of ways, often in conjunction with other sources. Life histories may be topical, focusing on only one segmented portion of a life, or complete, attempting to tell the full details of a life as it is recollected. The life history offers a triangulated account employing the life narrative as recounted, other testimonies and historical documents.
- g. Life story: The account of a person's story of his or her life, or a segment of it, as told to another. It is usually quite a full account across the length of life but may refer to a period or aspect of the life experience. When related by interview to the researcher it is the result of an interactive relationship.
- h. Narrative inquiry: Similar to 'biographical research', or 'life history research', this term is a loose frame of reference for a subset of qualitative research that uses personal narratives as the basis of research. 'Narrative' refers to a discourse form in which events and happenings are configured into a personal unity by means of a plot
- i. Testimonial: The first-person account of a real situation that involves repression and marginalization.

### Week 3, Day 1

1. (40 min.) Discussion: Interpreting Text/Sources Critically (from <https://www.esc.edu/online-writing-center/resources/critical-reading-writing/general-reading/interpreting-texts-asking-questions/>)
  - a. Question what you read.
  - b. Think about what the author wants you to believe and works to convince you.
  - c. Decide whether the author's views are worthy of agreement
  - d. Ask questions about what you read requires your careful examination of the writer's claims, as well as the use and quality of the writer's supporting evidence.
  - e. Root your analysis in the text rather than biases
  - f. Consider these in your analysis
    - i. The authority of the writer
    - ii. The logic of the writer's argument
    - iii. How the writer gets your interest
  - g. Identify strategies for reader involvement
    - i. Trying to get the reader to identify with the author or evoke respect for the authority of the author (for example, through the tone)

- ii. Trying to get the reader to care about a subject, cause or problem (perhaps by appealing to his/her emotions by using shocking statistics, anecdotes, or detailed descriptions)
  - iii. Trying to get the reader to align him/herself with a reader
  - iv. Using the assumed interests and values of the reader as a foundation for another argument
    - v. Ask yourself which of these techniques the writer is using and how. Are they effective?
    - vi. Consider the writer's use of language and style
  - h. Consider the ideology that informs the text
2. (10 min.) "Structure of a Personal Narrative Essay" handout and discussion

### Week 3, Day 2

1. (50 min.) Viewing biographical film "Walk the Line"

### Week 3, Day 3

1. (50 min.) Viewing biographical film "Walk the Line"

### Week 4, Day 1

1. (30 min.) Film discussion: "Walk the Line"
- a. What is the narrative that the director is trying to create?
  - b. Compare and contrast the dynamic of the main character with
    - i. His brother
    - ii. His father
    - iii. His wife
    - iv. June Carter
  - c. Discuss the impact the intersecting of these lives have on the players. What occurs as a result of this intersecting? In what ways do these people become more (or less) than themselves as a result of these relationships?
2. (20 min.) Submit essay outline and discussion.

### Week 4, Day 2

1. Read "Writing Biography as a Relationship"
2. (50 min.) Discussion: Relationship dynamic
- a. Define relationship of writer to subjects
  - b. Define relationship of subjects to each other (cordial, adversarial)
  - c. Examine the roots of the connection and the dynamic
    - i. What creates friendship?
    - ii. What creates adversaries?
  - d. "In essence, the core of interpersonal relations theory is that mental health is established by harmonious interaction between conscious and unconscious mental processes and drives on the one hand, and adaptation to the requirements of the outer world and to relationships with other people on the other." (Hildegard Peplau pg 167)

### Week 4, Day 3

1. Read "Biographer and Subject"

2. (50 min.) Rubric review and creation
  - a. Sample rubrics
  - b. Student rubric formulation
    - i. Students will form groups of four
    - ii. Reviewing the two sample rubrics and others found online, each group will develop its own standards and wording for a rubric
    - iii. A representative of each group will then discuss with the whole class this formulation
    - iv. Students will discuss the merits of each rubric and collectively piece together the appropriate portions to form the class rubric for the paper
    - v. Students will consider assignment goals and guidelines

**Week 5, Day 1**

1. (50 min.) Rough draft due and in-class peer review

**Week 5, Day 2**

1. (50 min.) Discussion of reading: Beyond the Miracle Worker
  - a. Students will get into groups of three and:
    - i. Discern what they believe to be the overall narrative of the book
    - ii. Outline three supporting facts or stories that point the reader to that narrative
    - iii. Outline various sections of text that reinforce their understanding of the formed narrative

**Week 5, Day 3**

1. (50 min.) Discussion: Representing two lives
  - a. Personality traits vs. projecting personality
  - b. Allowing patterns in action to define people
  - c. Cultural impact
    - i. What systems can be used to measure cultural impact?
    - ii. What defines culture(s)?
    - iii. Can a biographer chronicle a culture they are not familiar with?
      1. Cultural appropriation
      2. Cultural intersection
      3. Conceptualization of cultural mores and standards

**Week 6, Day 1**

1. (50 min.) Work time, advising, and revising

**Week 6, Day 2**

1. (50 min.) Work time, advising, and revising

**Week 6, Day 3**

1. Final draft due
2. (50 min.) Q&A

- a. Why did you choose the narrative path you did?  
 b. What did you learn about your two subjects?  
 c. What commonality did the class find between subjects?

**SAMPLE RUBRIC 1** ([http://web.gccaz.edu/~mdinchak/101online\\_new/rubric\\_narrativeessay.htm](http://web.gccaz.edu/~mdinchak/101online_new/rubric_narrativeessay.htm))

3	2	1	0	
<b>INTRODUCTION</b> Background/History Thesis Statement  <b>CONCLUSION</b>	Well-developed introduction engages the reader and creates interest. Contains detailed background information. Thesis clearly states a significant and compelling position. Conclusion effectively wraps up and goes beyond restating the thesis.	Introduction creates interest. Thesis clearly states the position. Conclusion effectively summarizes topics.	Introduction adequately explains the background, but may lack detail. Thesis states the position. Conclusion is recognizable and ties up almost all loose ends.	Background details are a random collection of information, unclear, or not related to the topic. Thesis is vague or unclear. Conclusion does not summarize main points.
<b>MAIN POINTS</b> Body Paragraphs	Well-developed main points directly related to the thesis. Supporting examples are concrete and detailed. The narrative is developed with a consistent and effective point-of-view, showing the story in detail.	Three or more main points are related to the thesis, but one may lack details. The narrative shows events from the author's point of view using some details.	Three or more main points are present. The narrative shows the events, but may lack details.	Less than three main points, and/or poor development of ideas. The narrative is undeveloped, and tells rather than shows, the story.
<b>ORGANIZATION</b> Structure Transitions	Logical progression of ideas with a clear structure that enhances the thesis. Transitions are present throughout.	Logical progression of ideas. Transitions are present equally throughout.	Organization is clear. Transitions are present.	No discernable organization. Transitions are not present.

	ns are mature and graceful.	essay.		
<b>STYLE</b> Sentence flow, variety Diction	Writing is smooth, skillful, coherent. Sentences are strong and expressive with varied structure. Diction is consistent and words well chosen.	Writing is clear and sentences have varied structure. Diction is consistent.	Writing is clear, but sentences may lack variety. Diction is appropriate.	Writing is confusing, hard to follow. Contains fragments and/or run-on sentences. Inappropriate diction.
<b>MECHANICS</b> Spelling, punctuation, capitalization	Punctuation, spelling, capitalization are correct. No errors.	Punctuation, spelling, capitalization are generally correct, with few errors. (1-2)	A few errors in punctuation, spelling, capitalization. (3-4)	Distracting errors in punctuation, spelling, capitalization

### SAMPLE RUBRIC 2

<b>SHORT STORY RUBRIC</b>	<b>Distinguished 4</b>	<b>Proficient 3</b>	<b>Developing 2</b>	<b>Needs Improvement 1</b>
<b>Engaging the Audience</b>	Engages the audience with an interesting introduction that makes the audience connect with the story and the writer	Adequately engages the audience	Makes an attempt to engage the audience but is not successful	Does not try to engage the audience or establish the context of the story
<b>Elements of a Short Story</b>	Establishes a situation, plot, point of view, setting, conflict, and resolution using careful detail and emotion	Provides an adequately developed plot, but needs more depth with conflict, resolution, detail, and emotion	Barely develops the plot; conflict and resolution are sketchy; more detail needed; emotion minimal	The plot is difficult to follow or understand and requires further development; lacks conflict and resolution; minimal detail/emotion
<b>Organization</b>	Balances and unifies all narrative elements required in an essay; chronology of events very clear	Shows a clear attempt at balancing and unifying the story; chronology of events evident	Shows minimal effort to balance and unify the story; chronology of events confusing	There is little or no organization present; chronology of events not present
<b>Style and Fluency</b>	The ideas are clearly and effectively	Most ideas are clearly expressed; writing is generally	Some ideas may not be clearly expressed; fluency	Many ideas are difficult to understand; fluency

	developed; writing is fluent and polished with effective verbs, adjectives, and transitions; thesis clear	fluent, with some use of effective verbs, adjectives, and transitions; thesis adequate	and transitions may be lacking; infrequent use of effective, verbs, adjectives, and transitions; thesis unclear	and transitions are lacking; few effective verbs, adjectives, and transitions; no thesis
<b>Grammar, Editing, Revising, and Proofreading</b>	Demonstrates mastery of the rules of the English Language including punctuation, spelling, and grammar.	Makes good attempt to revise/edit with only a few errors in punctuation, spelling, grammar	Efforts to revise/edit are made but with many errors in punctuation, spelling, grammar remaining	Shows little to no evidence of proofreading, with many punctuation, spelling, grammatical errors
<b>Special Sentence Structures</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Effective dialogue incorporated into essay correctly</li> <li>• Three different brushstrokes correctly written, highlighted, and labeled</li> <li>• 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrative clearly maintained</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dialogue incorporated, but not totally effective and/or punctuated correctly</li> <li>• Two different brushstrokes correctly written, highlighted, and labeled</li> <li>• 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrative maintained adequately</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minimally effective dialogue and/or not punctuated correctly</li> <li>• One different brushstrokes correctly written, highlighted, and labeled</li> <li>• 3<sup>rd</sup> person narrative weak</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ineffective/no dialogue</li> <li>• No brushstrokes evident</li> <li>• Narrator not evident</li> </ul>
<b>Format</b>	Meets all of the requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One page</li> <li>• typed, Times New Roman, size 12</li> <li>• double spaced</li> <li>• MLA heading</li> <li>• correctly punctuated and capitalized title</li> <li>• pages numbered (MLA format)</li> </ul>	Meets all except one or two requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One page</li> <li>• typed, Times New Roman, size 12</li> <li>• double spaced</li> <li>• MLA heading</li> <li>• correctly punctuated and capitalized title</li> <li>• pages numbered (MLA format)</li> </ul>	Meets at least half of the requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One page</li> <li>• typed, Times New Roman, size 12</li> <li>• double spaced</li> <li>• MLA heading</li> <li>• correctly punctuated and capitalized title</li> <li>• pages numbered (MLA format)</li> </ul>	Meets less than half of the requirements: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• One page</li> <li>• typed, Times New Roman, size 12</li> <li>• double spaced</li> <li>• MLA heading</li> <li>• correctly punctuated and capitalized title</li> <li>• pages numbered (MLA format)</li> </ul>

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06/22/2018

### A Post-Colonial Reading of Bob Dylan's "*Love and Theft*"<sup>1</sup>

Gayatri Spivak explained her concept of the subaltern thusly: "In postcolonial terms, everything that has limited or no access to the cultural imperialism is subaltern—a space of difference" (de Kock, 45). The purpose of this work is to examine African American post-colonial themes in the Bob Dylan album "*Love and Theft*" in order to show that Dylan's use of traditionally black music forms reveal Dylan as a conduit for those forms, and that the implications of cultural appropriation do not apply to Dylan's work when viewed through the post-structuralism of Foucault and Barthes. Dylan's lyricism will be read through a post-colonial interpretation because of Dylan's use of African American imagery and his implied embodiment of that imagery, and his ownership of this work will be examined through the conceptualization of authorship, which will assess Dylan as a cultural colonist, and the question of implied morality of this work both inherent in the text itself and his methodology. This analysis will include the title of the work (derived from the book *Love & Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* by Eric Lott), its perceived view of race as a whole regarding the power structures created and maintained by white dominance, its abject use of African American concepts within the lyrics, the "colonization" of that culture, and what its authorship connotes as a result. As Ashcroft, et., al. state "Another way in which post-colonial analysis has been deployed is in approaches to the black diaspora scattered by centuries of slavery" (202). This paper endeavors to employ that approach in a cultural context, and in so doing, provide a short post-colonial analysis on this work in an effort to offer a reconciliation between cultural appropriation, cultural embodiment, and authorship.

"*Love and Theft*" was Bob Dylan's thirty-first studio album. It was the second in a series of albums lauded as a comeback of sorts for the legendary songwriter. Its twelve songs relied heavily on styles that

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<sup>1</sup> The actual title of this work contains quotation marks, thus rendering it "*Love and Theft*".

were associated with music somewhat removed from Dylan's former signature style. As Rob Sheffield of *Rolling Stone* writes, "Dylan veers into country, ragtime, vaudeville, deep blues, cocktail-lounge corn, the minstrel show and the kind of rockabilly he must have bashed out with his high school band more than forty years ago" (Sheffield). Those musical styles, all of them, have a deep seeded contextualization attached to them individually and collectively. Perhaps the most striking thing about that list is its racial diversity: country music, for example, known as largely a white musical milieu juxtaposed with deep blues, a decidedly African American artform. "*Love and Theft*," then, is musical melting pot of sorts, and stylistically and lyrically illustrates not only the variety of American music, but its race tension.

First, its September 11, 2001 release date should not be lost on its audience. As Scheuller wrote in 2004 regarding the sociopolitical aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in the U.S., "[t]he heightened climate of xenophobia and compulsory patriotism, as well as the rallying together behind 'Western' values by many intellectuals in the aftermath of the tragic events of September 11, makes painfully clear the necessity of interrogating US culture through the lens of post-colonial studies" (162). "*Love and Theft*" was released in the direct aftermath of a cataclysmic event which galvanized, to some extent, American ideals of a time when America was a distinctly white-dominated America, of harkening back to a time when there were two Americas: one for whites, and one for "the other". It is somewhat ironic then, that, even though "*Love and Theft*" was hardly recorded to be a commentary on that retrofitting of the American ideal, it can heard as such, even as its multifaceted styles reveal a different pre-civil rights movement America that was far more integrated artistically than it may have been socioeconomically, as its styles and lyrical themes seem to complement each other and function as one unit through its twelve songs in ways that would have been unimaginable when those styles first gained widespread acceptance.

And yet, the title itself is the first clue that there is great tension within those traditions as well. Eric Lott, in his essay "Love and Theft: The Racial Unconscious of Blackface Minstrelsy" which precipitated his book on the subject, writes that blackface represents "a strong white fascination with black men and black culture, that is to say, underwrote this popular expropriation. Blackface performers were conspicuously intrigued with the street singers and obscure characters from whom they allegedly took the material that was later fashioned to racist ends" (25). The appeal of blackface and the use of black entertainment idioms, Lott argues, has an aura of sexual intrigue even as the act is twisted to appeal to the feeling of superiority that

those using blackface as a device. Bob Dylan's appropriation of cultures that are not native to him is not anything new in his work, nor is his appropriation new to the rock music world. The motive behind Dylan's work, however, seems to be different from the assumed motive of white musicians, like Pat Boone recording versions of Little Richard songs during the early rock and roll era to make them safer, and thus more palatable, to a white audience. But as Roland Barthes states in "The Death of the Author", a text is a "multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash" (1324). It is "made of multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue, parody, contestation, but there is one place where this multiplicity is confused and that place in the reader..." (1325). Influence draws from wherever it might. It is only centralized in the reader. For our purposes, it is best to envision Dylan as reader: he is simply following Barthes' concept of authorship by remaining true to not only Barthes' vision, but the many musical traditions from which he draws and the scenarios which play out in his lyrics. He is conduit. In fact, by summarily taking the very name of his record from a work about nefarious cultural appropriation, Dylan is openly making a statement about what he has done, and what is to come in this work. He has done his own appropriation, but with different intent in mind, to read the ideas that have come before, to expose his work for what it is, and to ultimately tell stories that transcend time and race.

Consider Dylan's "High Water (for Charley Patton)". Charley Patton was a blues artist in the 1920's and 1930's. Patton was, as David Evans writes, "the first recorded black folk artist to make it a frequent practice to comment in his songs directly and extensively on public events that he had personally witnessed or participated in, and to treat incidents in his own life as news" (23). Patton wrote about his own life experience as a reporter might. Regarding the song "High Water" specifically, he had experienced the great Mississippi flood of 1927, brought about by torrential rains that occurred during Easter weekend of that year. The Army Corps of Engineers had built levees to withstand a weather event such as this, but the levees failed. This cataclysmic event inspired artists at the time, including Bessie Smith, to write songs like "When the Levee Breaks." Patton's own song about the flood, "High Water Everywhere", is worrisome and panic stricken:

*Lord the whole round country, lord creek water is overflowed  
 Lord the whole round country, man, is overflowed  
 You know, i can't stay here, i'm bound to go where it's high boy  
 I would go to the hill country, but they got me barred*

And this theme of panic is what Dylan uses for his own lyric:

*High water risin', six inches 'bove my head  
Coffins droppin' in the street  
Like balloons made out of lead  
Water pourin' into Vicksburg, don't know what I'm going to do  
"Don't reach out for me, " she said  
"Can't you see I'm drownin' too?"  
It's rough out there  
High water everywhere*

We see that the sense of urgency is maintained in both pieces (“Creek water is overflowed” and “Water pourin’ into Vicksburg”, respectively), but the perspectives are different. It was not Bob Dylan’s event. He did not live through it. In this homage to Patton as the title suggests, Dylan all at once honors Patton and, knowingly or not, exemplifies one way in which colonizers take from those who are colonized, the way those who engaged in blackface did, taking from the experience and stories of black culture and appropriating it as their own. It is not his flood event: he was not even alive when it took place. The racial overtones of the Patton lyric (“I would go to the hill country, but they got me barred”) are replaced with anti-intellectual sentiment (“They got Charles Darwin trapped out there on Highway Five, judge says to the high sheriff ‘I want him dead or alive’”), but both reveal a power structure gone possibly awry when events like this occur.

The flood depicted in both songs represents a diaspora evinced by nature, but Patton’s narrative is set personally, with Dylan’s weaving in and out of personal narrative. The movement expected of people of color in such an event, especially in the south in the 1920’s, is very different from the movement expected of white people, and typical of the experience of the Spivak’s subaltern. This is illustrated well in the effort to save the land on the banks of the Mississippi: “To save the land, frantic efforts to raise the levee by stacking sand bags on the top were begun. Charles Williams was an employee of former Mississippi Senator Le Roy Percy's on one of the largest cotton plantations in the Delta. He set up "concentration camps" on the levee protecting Greenville, complete with field kitchens and tents, for thousands of plantation workers--all African Americans--to live as the men handled sand bags.” These African Americans, moved to this work by poverty and institutionalized racism, is part of the context of Patton’s flood. Dylan ignores the racial subtext suggested by Patton and the culture in his reworking of the concept of the song. He takes the story and it becomes a tale, not of oppression or recolonization, but of unified borderline hysteria. Here, Dylan

removes authorship from the original concept, and also his own ties to the theme, which are nebulous at best.

To paraphrase Raja Rao via Ashcroft, then, Dylan has tried to convey in an experience of the spirit that is one's own (38). Barthes decentralizes ownership of story in much the same way: "[i]t is language which speaks, not the author" and "language knows a 'subject', not a 'person'"(1323). There is a universality to the story, the human fear of events beyond our control, but the subtext of race that was a large part of the story of the 1927 Mississippi flood is removed. Dylan's ventriloquization of Patton's story reveals an artistic colonization of sorts, but its motive is to honor the story and the man. That it does so without showing its hand regarding race is perhaps disconcerting, but not surprising. Dylan places himself in the role of interpreter in this regard, and as Ashcroft, et., al. state, "The role [of interpreter in colonization] entails radically divided objectives: it functions to acquire the power of the new language and culture in order to preserve the old, even whilst it assists the invaders in their overwhelming of that culture" (79). But Dylan is not an invader. Yes, Dylan interprets Patton's experience through his own, and in doing so both propagates the story and mythos of Patton while emasculating or de-racing it to an extent. However, the relevance of any story is decidedly a choice that a reader makes, whether or not we like that choice. Foucault writes that "the function of an author is to characterize the existence, circulation, and operation of certain discourses within a society" (1481). Foucault mentions, in this context, items like a contract or an anonymous poster. But Foucault's "author-function" concept, when applied to Dylan, yields his "High Water (For Charley Patton)" as a commentary on the discourse of the flood of 1927 as much as it is a chronicling of events, a characterization of not only what happened, but who told the story of what happened. In other words, it's not just about the story but who told the story. Both are of interest, because both are depicting an important event through a singular lens, and both are noted in musical circles for their unique perspectives.

bell hooks, a prominent black feminist, writes, "I believe that the black experience has been and continues to be one of internal colonialism" (148). And there is clearly a thread of social and artistic colonialism in not only Bob Dylan's work, but in musical traditions such as folk, where artists would rework African American songs and recreate them as their own. Mambrol writes in his overview of African American and Post-colonial studies, that "[m]ost post-colonial theorists who have engaged with the issue

have seen the study of black culture in the Americas as, in part, the study of one of the world's major diasporas. In this respect, the history of African Americans has some features in common with other movements of oppressed diasporic peoples. Many groups were moved against their will from their homelands to serve the economic needs of empire in the societies that evolved from the wave of European expansion from the sixteenth century onwards." In that movement, there is also a cultural colonization that continually takes place when one's culture is appropriated: the colonizer moves into territory not native to them, takes what they desire, and moves on. And nothing is off limits. Even the songs that come from this movement are assimilated or discarded without the context in which they were born.

I would assert, however, that this appropriation is not always attached to a defined morality; rather, in the interest of creating art, appropriation and remix are much the same thing, the latter being an amoral version of the former. If Dylan is a revealer, a chronicler, circulator, textual raconteur, then Dylan engages in his remix of Patton's experience, much like rap artists sample portions of songs as backdrops for their lyrical expression. Both remove some context, and both have a different artistic purpose than their original parts. In that view, Dylan's work is removed from the weight of racial and cultural theft because he is not the author, he is the person through which the concept is channeled. "We can", Foucault writes, "easily imagine a culture where discourse would circulate without any need for an author" (1489). Credit and attribution aside, Dylan functions as the circulator, not origin of the idea in need of circulation.

Dylan has had a habit of appropriating all manner of songs and literature, including fairly blatant revisions of blues material (see his 2006 recording *Modern Times* and specifically the songs "Rollin' and Tumblin'" and the aforementioned "When the Levee Breaks", retitled "The Levee's Gonna Break"). But a racial post-colonial understanding of Dylan does not end with a discussion of his source material. "*Love and Theft*" seems to be rife with the power dynamics created by racial colonization. Dylan seems to embody the spirit of "the other" in his understanding of it, whether or not that is the intent of one of themes of the album. Although not explicit, "Mississippi", the second song on "Love and Theft", seems to suggest much the same kind of societal setting at "High Water". First, it takes place in the south; second, its character speaks in the first person of being unwanted; third, its refrain, "Only one thing I did wrong, stayed in Mississippi a day too long" implies the need to flee. The song even begins with lines that could describe the African American experience in the Jim Crow south:

*Every step of the way, we walk the line  
Your days are numbered, so are mine  
Time is piling up, we struggle and we scrape  
We're all boxed in, nowhere to escape.*

Elsewhere, Dylan tells us that he “was raised in the country, I’ve been workin’ in the town, I’ve been in trouble ever since I set my suitcase down”, echoing the Great Migration that took place in the 1910’s and 1920’s, where large groups of African Americans relocated from the American rural south to northern cities because of employment opportunities and Draconian segregation laws. Working conditions were often dangerous, and those who migrated still experience the sting of racism. Still, “staying in Mississippi” was no longer an option for many. But that movement is bittersweet, as he moves en masse with his fellow compatriots:

*Well my ship’s been split to splinters and it’s sinking fast  
I’m drowning in the poison, got no future, got no past  
But my heart is not weary, it’s light and it’s free  
I’ve got nothing but affection for all those who’ve sailed with me*

Those that moved to the northern American cities still found strained race relations and tensions, along with assumed racist attitudes that, while not explicit like Jim Crow, still presented challenges for those who made the trek. This mass movement also began a race revolution and political activism, perhaps symbolically indicated by Dylan’s line “things should start to get interesting right about now”. This movement also factors into other lyrics. “Floater (Too Much to Ask)’ talks about leaving with immediacy:

*They all got out of here any way they could  
The cold rain can give you the shivers  
They went down the Ohio, the Cumberland, the Tennessee  
All the rest of them rebel rivers*

“Po’ Boy” moves its character into a different state because of unfair laws:

*“Time and love had branded me with its claws  
Had to go to Florida, dodging them Georgia laws”*

In both sets of lyrics, people move (or, rather, are moved) under some duress. This is a part of the history of “the other” in America, from the Trail of Tears to Japanese internment camps. In African American communities, it often happened more insidiously, covertly, with a less organized (or maybe, official) yet still effective effort.

“Lonesome Day Blues” draws from the blues tradition with a direct parallel both in title (inspired

by the Muddy Waters' song "Lonesome Day") but also with the first verse (a direct lift from Leroy Carr's "Blues Before Sunrise"). Many of the lines read like a man suspicious, and rightfully so:

*Last night the wind was whisperin', I was trying to make out what it was  
Last night the wind was whisperin' somethin', I was trying to make out what it was  
I tell myself something's comin'  
But it never does*

And there must be a reason why this person is suspicious. Much like Robert Johnson's "Hellhound on My Trail", or Blind Lemon Jefferson's "Hangman's Blues" the lyric suggests that the singer feels like something insidious could be a foot, something is coming, much like the specter of mob violence and lynchings that lorded over the southern African American community. "It" (the violence) may never come, but it is never totally out of the question. As Gussow phrases it, "The true terror of lynching for black southerners, after all, was the faceless, merciless, apocalyptic vengefulness of the massed white mob" (11). That "massed white mob" could take at will, including life.

There is also, in this postcolonial rendering of the lyrical content of "Love and Theft", a hopefulness which echoes Negro spirituals, most vividly illustrated in this excerpt from "Bye and Bye":

*I'm rollin' slow, I'm doing all I know  
I'm tellin' myself I found true happiness  
That I've still got a dream that hasn't been repossessed  
I'm rollin' slow, goin' where the wild roses grow*

Dylan's dream that hasn't been repossessed recalls Hughes' dream deferred, or maybe Angelou's caged bird in a better way, namely that there are deferred dreams, but perhaps not this particular dream, that hope will grow like "the wild roses", and the new destination, whether external or internal, holds that hope. In all these texts, Dylan writes in implied first person generative: he knows more than his character, and the text is being written on him. That history, that *écriture*, happened independent of the person now illuminating a continued humanization of the black experience in the southern United States.

The reading of these lyrics in an African American, post-colonial context leaves us with a conceptualization of Dylan as the anti-minstrel, forming completing visions of the black experience in America, something that the minstrel shows of the nineteenth century were unwilling to do. While many of Dylan's lyrics are written in first person, they seem to be telling an overarching story outside the man (or character) himself. As Dylan evokes the post-reconstruction south and some of its racial proclivities, he also

develops a rich characterization of his subjects, something that the culture in which he seems to often delve, was decidedly against, namely an overarching humanization of a group of people who were not afforded such a luxury in certain white circles. He clearly respects the African American tradition (read: “love”) and he obviously borrows from it, both in milieu, lyrical content and story (read: “theft”), but it is not with the intent of the blackface that the title references. On the contrary, whether the narratives presented here were intended or not, the goal is to uplift that milieu, those stories, those truths, the black, post-colonial experience in America. He is not purveyor but *conveyor*. Dylan becomes the embodiment of Barthes’ understanding of the writing process: “As soon as a fact is narrated no longer with a view to acting directly on reality but intransitively...the voice loses its origin, the author enters into his own death, writing begins” (1322).

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### **Academic Rap: Using Hip Hop to Teach Prose Rhythm**

I bomb atomically, Socrates, philosophies, and hypotheses.  
– Wu Tang Clan ft. Inspectah Deck, *Triumph*

The first time I heard Public Enemy, I knew I had heard the future. There had been rap before: Run DMC, Grandmaster Flash, the Beastie Boys. And the most popular acts of the genre had filtered down to my small town in rural Northwest Ohio, before the internet, before cell phones, before social media could create the rise and fall of a musician in minutes instead of months. My friends and I, as makeshift musical aficionados, would copy each other's cassettes with glorious music of all kinds, creating a wonderful collage of perspectives that would emanate from our K-Mart car stereos as we discussed the finer points of the music we loved.

But when I friend of mine lent me Public Enemy's "Fear of a Black Planet", I knew something had shifted. This was not the cartoonish rap of the past, with its large, unlaced sneakers and its blatant and seemingly meaningless braggadocio. This was different. And for a white kid in rural America who didn't seem to fit anywhere in particular, while I knew I hadn't found my voice, I knew I had found a voice that could reach people who felt like they didn't belong, in the way that metal bands like Guns 'N' Roses and Metallica had done for me a couple of years previous. These acts, Public Enemy included, said things that in my mind rattled the small town cages that I felt adults had placed outsiders into with the end hope of making them conform. And just as significantly, the rhythm of the rhymes on that Public Enemy cassette handed to me by a like-minded friend flowed like a raging river. It was percussive. It was angry. If you rapped along with it, you had to use your whole body. You felt it in your gut. This wasn't only rap, it was poetry, like the sonnets we had just finished studying in English class, or the book of Edgar Allen Poe's works given to me by my grandmother. It moved the pen with power. My fourteen-year-old mind had made this connection, this bridge between what I was being taught and what I was teaching myself. I wouldn't be the first or last to make that connection, but it was at that time that I internalized the possibilities of hip hop

and composition enmeshed together in some way.

Writers using the cadence of music to communicate through the bounce and lilt of lyrical movement is nothing new. Harry Noden, in *Image Grammar*, provides several examples from Carl Sagan's *Cosmos* to The Bible to illustrate this truth, and then goes on to say that "[t]hrough the ages authors have relied on the musical rhythms of prose. In the phrases and clauses from early editions of the Bible to the latest Dean Koontz horror novel, one can hear the subtle drumbeats of parallel structure" (50-51). We know, as Fred Newton Scott writes, that from our earliest dalliances with verse we are 'singing': "Is it not the fact that the earliest recitation of poetry was really what we should consider a childish sing-song? This becomes more probable when we remember that music and dancing were frequent accompaniments of the earliest kinds of poetry, the effect of which would undoubtedly be to emphasize and regulate the beats or accents of the line" (716). That the rhythmic pattern of writing has some of its very roots in music, then, is of no surprise. The notion that hip hop especially is well-suited to teach those patterns should be clear, with hip hop's repetitious paces and continual, revisited inflections.

The lyricism of rap and traditional poetic cadence do seem like a perfect fit. Laurie Walker, in a short article penned just as rap was taking hold in the pop music realm, wrote that she wanted her English classroom "to be a fertile field for cultivating strong voices and active ears" (99). To that end, she worked to find the role of rhythm in discourse by doing such activities as singing Robert Frost's "Stopping by Woods" to the music of the William Tell Overture and, specific to our topic, set heroic couplets to then-current rap rhythms. Similarly, anyone who has studied Shakespeare might find it easy to speak his iambic pentameter phrases over a 'fat beat'. There is much overlap in both schools of composition. So while the rhythm of writing isn't a new concept, there are unexplored avenues regarding the culture and sound of hip hop and its cultural relevance that can be utilized to teach writing.

I believe we must continually find new ways to teach the rhythm of writing using contemporary touchstones. There can be no doubt that, for a variety of reasons which we will examine, cultural relevance is a natural fit for the kinds of instruction in which English teachers delve. And there also can be no doubt that hip hop is the quintessential cultural touchstone of our times in youth culture. Specific to teaching English and writing, hip hop in many ways seemed tailor made for such an endeavor: the word play, the poetic lilt, the power of the writing. It is this collusion of sorts that I am proffering in this paper, namely that

teachers must utilize the cultural cache of hip hop to teach writing in ways that are creative, relevant, and freeing for our students.

### **Literature Review**

If this rap shit don't work I'm going for my masters.  
-J. Cole, *College Boy*

Since the early days when rap was just starting to take hold in popular music, it has become ubiquitous. So much of the popular music that tops the charts isn't rock and roll any more, as it was in my high school days. It is now more often rap that emanates from the ear buds of students moving to and from class, getting on a bus, or generally walking around the neighborhood. Walking through college dorms or listening to cars blaring their radios and you're more likely to hear bass and a trap beat than squealing guitars. According to Patrick Ryan of USA Today, for the first time in history, rap has surpassed rock to become the biggest music genre in terms of consumption in 2017. Because rap and hip hop are seemingly everywhere, attaching this omnipresent musical style to teaching the rhythm of writing can enhance both teaching and writing techniques by affording teachers the opportunity to be both relevant and creative in using a medium that is closely related to the material they are teaching. It is ensconced in the collective mind of popular culture, which has a fluidity all its own that allows for interpolation in the classroom.

And there is no doubt that using popular culture to teach, in short, works. Utilizing resources at hand that students already have a vested interest in allows teachers to attach ideas to those concepts already ensconced in student thinking. A good place to begin our discussion on this kind of association is the study of E2 students, who, much like students in general, have their feet planted in two different worlds. Chi-Kim Cheung, when writing about E2 students in Hong Kong, tells us that "popular culture touches the lives of students, and grows out of their natural experience and interests. If teachers can make use of popular culture in a teaching context, in which students find a need to learn and have something to achieve, [a] students' attention can be organized through desire rather than coercion" (58). Students want to learn about popular culture because of the influence it has on their lives, and that influence can be associated with relevant themes in the English classroom. Using popular culture can assist E2 learners because there exists within pop culture a commonality, much of it American but not all, that can bridge some of the language gap. After Donna Pasternak journeyed to Norway to teach English, she applied this truth by having her Norwegian

students compile lists of what her students already knew about American identity, which was mostly based on their exposure to American film and television. She found that her students' knowledge was quite extensive almost solely based on their interaction with these two arenas of American popular culture. That kind of extensive knowledge, where applicable, can allow us to form an alliance between that popular culture and classroom culture.

Music, another significant area of American popular culture, can also have an impact in student and teacher interaction. Alvermann and Hong Xu tell the story of a research team visiting classrooms as they saw the power of music to cross communicative barriers:

Three years ago, Donna, Jennifer, and Margaret were part of a research team...interested in exploring the uses that teachers and children made of popular culture in classroom settings. One of the classes the team visited was in a school known for its effectiveness in helping immigrant children feel at home in their new environment. A favorite story told by teachers in this school involved the music room. It seems that children who often spoken little or no English on their first day at the school were invited into the music room to play the piano. Regardless of whether they had had piano lessons, they found ways to communicate through making music (2).

This common ground that music knowledge gives between teacher and student opens up a whole new conceivable realm of communication and relational possibility for E2 students, and it would follow, other students as well.

And it does indeed follow that this use of popular cultural venues is not just for second language learners. Pop culture, and how students use pop culture, affords unique opportunities to instruct everyone. "When we engage with pop culture texts..." write Hagood, et. Al., "we negotiate the producer's assigned meanings and our own accepted meaning, at a given point in time and place. In this way, we construct meaning and determine how we are going to use a text in a given context and what the text means" (9). Pop culture is a pliable and malleable construct. And because hip hop and its associated culture is so much a part of pop culture in this moment, its use not only allows instruction to be relevant, but also to be flexible. It can also decentralize power because pop culture knowledge imbalance lies often with the bulk resting with the student, not the instructor. This is not always the case, of course, but popular culture is usually tied to the young, who are often the deciders on what is popular and what is not. It is this ebb and flow of what holds the attention of the young that can integrated into everyday instruction: "In my Advanced Placement Language and Composition classes" Melissa Page writes, "I often combined everyday popular culture and

current issues with our traditional print texts. My students read television commercials, political slogans, even the junior class ring presentation, all while learning to analyze rhetorical strategies” (130). Page notes that her students notice pop culture remixes such as a Pygmalion reference in *Family Guy*, and tells us that she “found that I could help students make connections and construct meaning by bringing popular culture texts in the classroom and using digital media” (129). It is significant to note that popular culture texts often quote or parody previously popular texts, some of which are now canonical in teaching instruction.

So it would seem, from an examination of the literature, that using popular culture in general to teach language concepts is an established practice. It can overcome cultural barriers, it can allow students to create and maintain meaning, and it nurtures commonality between teacher and student by referencing both the present and the past. Because hip hop has been a part of popular culture for almost forty years and has risen through the annals of culture to become seated at the front of cultural and musical milieus, and is certainly a part of the popular culture canon, its popular culture cache can be used in the English classroom to teach. It would appear that its association with the world of popular culture make it a ripe avenue for bridging the gap between classroom instruction and a student’s outside world. After all, it is clear that popular culture has invaded the classroom in many ways and has been a positive force for illustrating concepts and connecting students to both their culture and their learning. And, because of the ubiquity of hip hop, it seems like a natural fit for the classroom.

Not only this, but hip hop at its essence is based in orality, and oral expression was the primary mode of information transference long before the written word. Before culture was divided into “popular” or not, people were handing down information orally universally, and then later, memorizing texts based often on their oral rhythm. Daniel Banks, in his essay “From Homer to Hip Hop: Orature and Griots , Ancient and Present”, recounts briefly the history of the concept of Orature, explaining that the term denotes “the unique skills and production of the oral artist, and to give this means of communication and documentation equal legitimacy next to written texts” (239) and that Orature has its own set of rules and cultural expectations. Most importantly, and for our purposes, it signifies the handing down of important cultural truths orally from generation to generation. While the term is associated primarily with African and African-diasporic performance, the concept is illustrative of the vibrant ubiquity of oral tradition and the roots with which it grows in various cultures and communities.

The fact that these oral traditions were effective is revealed through their repeated use. Oral texts passed down from generation to generation were seen to hold general relevance. Oral histories and wisdom literatures, much like portions of the Biblical text, were oral first. And many of these oral texts had rhythm to them. Dobbs-Allsopp writes in *On Biblical Poetry* that “[b]oth the informing orality of the Bible’s poetic tradition and the likely nature of its music strongly implicate rhythm” (117). The Biblical text was memorable precisely because it was rhythmically poetic.

And, conversely, some texts lend themselves better than others to oral renderings, as Bakker writes in *Poetry in Speech*: “texts may be oral to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the nature of the conception underlying them” (9). Using Homeric discourse as the subject matter, Bakker views Homeric discourse not as oral poetry but as “special speech” (17) and that this discourse stylizes ordinary discourse by “departing from it and yet retaining, or even highlighting, its most characteristic forms” (17). Hip hop lyrics, when textualized, accomplish exactly this feat. Hip hop can serve as a bridge between the oral and the written and create transference by highlighting those characteristic forms that Bakker says Homer reveals; in this way, rap music can function as conduit for the transfer of patterns inherent in oral discourse to the written word. Both the Biblical and Homeric texts reveal value placed on the rhythmic qualities of texts that elicit retentive responses.

And yet, given all the evidence that hip hop is viable as an art form, that it has the ability to teach as a part of the popular culture zeitgeist, and that it can function as a bridge between our human orality and textualization which can cause transference, not everyone is convinced. It would seem that, for example, there is a straining of the matter of popular culture, and hip hop can sometimes be seen as the leftover detritus. Darius Prier recounts an interview where he was asked about his views about people who do not see hip hop as a worthwhile area of study in the academy. He tells his readers that there are several problems with the question itself: it assumes that hip hop is not of value in academia, it speaks to the assumed elitism of the academy, and it ignored the myriad courses about hip hop taught at the university level (187). While the canonization of rock music has been decided, with various colleges offering history courses on the genre, and its safety firmly ensconced in the list of resources teachers can use to instruct, hip hop either hasn’t aged enough or emanated from arenas that some corners of the academic world consider intellectual enough to be welcomed in as a feasible area of study. Even though rap music also has its courses

and texts, questions like the one posed to Prier are still proffered. There is still a stigma attached to it, and I offer that this stigma is what prevents, in some quarters, its usage as a teaching tool for writing students. “The very phrases ‘hip hop’ or ‘rap music’”, writes April Henderson, “often possess a strong referential context for many people’ they are frequently wedded to another provocative term, ‘gang’, in private and public discourse about youth crime” (299). It is still, as inconceivable as it might seem, can be seen in the academy as the music of the other, or of the street, or both, where both are seen to be inextricably intertwined. Both the street and the other have much to teach academics, though, so here is where we begin our defense

### **Discussion**

#### *Using Hip Hop to Teach Writing Organization*

Now I do what I want, now I do what I want.  
-L’il Uzi Vert, *Do What I Want*

When we teach writing, we are also teaching organization. We want students to move their text in ways that allow the reader to feel the order of the writing naturally. Popular music has its own order: usually it follows the pattern of verse, chorus, verse, chorus, bridge or solo, and then one final chorus. Because we desire to teach students to order their writing, music is illustrative of the kind of organization a text needs, and we can certainly use music as a springboard for textual organization. Music, especially hip hop, can teach this textual organization in ways that are relevant to how we are writing and processing texts as a society. Clark and Ivanic observe that “[T]he increasing use of hypertext on computers is fast rendering linear representation of ideas obsolete” (214). Ideas are represented and organized in a multitude of ways, from randomization to spatial to climactic. The days of always organizing text only by chronology or even patterned logic are behind us, and the world of music and specifically hip hop both reflects and illustrates this well. In fact, allowing hip hop to hold a voice in how students organize texts allows those texts to mirror what is happening societally regarding common extra-scholarly writing practices, where subgenres like memes and text messages are created in often non-linear ways.

Many times, we think of text and music coming together to create lyrics to songs. But, as has been suggested, music may be used for much more than that. Peter Elbow echoes this in his article, “The Music of Form”, where he sees music as a potential organizational tool for the writer and reader. He exclaims that

“[m]usic is a paradigm for well-ordered events in time” (622) and that “music forces us to see two questions... ‘How is something structured or organized or shaped?’ and ‘How is it held together, bound, or made to cohere?’” (623). Elbow’s discussion on the cadence of the familiar tune of “Happy Birthday” and musical meter in general illustrates how music can set up expectation (and either bring it to completion or decimate it), and show the reader how a text travels. It is not too much of a leap, then, to look to rap lyricism, with its sometimes askew meter and asymmetrical repetition, to educate students on the possibilities that lie within their writing regarding the rhythm of their prose.

Rap also has much to teach about freedom in writing. Because of its innovation with verse and extemporaneous forms like freestyle, rap is adept in pushing the form of language and writing into new territory. Adam Bradley, in his book “Book of Rhymes: The Poetics of Hip Hop” illustrates this point well:

Line breaks are the skeletal system of lyric poetry. They give poems their shape and distinguish them from all other forms of literature. While prose writers usually break their lines wherever the page demands—when they reach the margin, when the computer drops their word to the next line—poets claim that power for themselves, ending lines in ways that underscore the specific design of their verse. Rap poets are no different (vii)

Bound by the page and by history, writers are often encouraged to follow constraints and conventions that can stifle the more creative notions that writers may have. The following lyric, from Rapper’s Delight’s ‘Hip Hop Hippy’, shows an almost free association rhyme as a would-be template for the rhythm of an introduction to a short story:

I said a hip hop  
Hippie to the hippie  
The hip, hip a hop, and you don't stop, a rock it out  
Bubba to the bang bang boogie, boobie to the boogie  
To the rhythm of the boogie the beat

Now view the text, rewritten in the same syllabic construct, as that introduction:

I said to her, “No”.  
Never would I ever.  
The world, broken up, like shards of glass, or used egg shells...  
This is how she made men, her men in her image.  
In pieces like so much trash that’s tossed out.

In this example, the odd rhythm of the hip hop text offers beginning writers a simple template to see how writing can be moved out of static patterns into something wholly new and original.

Consider also the writing you have read that utilizes multimodal, non-text features. While

compiling facts and the literature can allow knowledge to speak for itself, transmitting that knowledge in creative ways can allow knowledge transfer to be facilitated in areas where text-only documents cannot. Bezemer and Kress begin their “Writing in Multimodal Texts” with this truism: “Frequently writing is now no longer the central mode of representation in learning materials—textbooks, Web-based resources, teacher-produced materials. Still (as well as moving) images are increasingly prominent as carriers of meaning” (166). Their examination of textbooks provides the exact kind of example that illustrate the change from pure text to text and graphic, and reveals a writing culture with an adept comprehension of semiotics. Hip hop can assist with this comprehension of multimodality by helping writers envision texts in new ways, outside the constraints of the type-written page. Consider this verse from Eminem’s “Lose Yourself”:



The construction of the lyric lends itself well to an inspirational quote, but its odd meter works well as visualized text. Because hip hop is not constrained by particular rhyme or meter schemes, it can be reappropriated easily and transformed into a variety of multimodal uses to teach students the design aspects of our graphic-laden culture, and how to navigate textual creation and usage in that culture. As Edwards-Groves writes, “[e]very day as students step into their classrooms, they bring with them a broadening range of technoliteracies knowledge and skills learnt and practiced within out-of-classroom or ‘third-space learning sites’” (50) such as online spaces, iPads and other technological forms. Hip hop inhabits many of

those spaces, whether it be a song playing in the background of a SnapChat or the latest Lil Uzi Vert video on YouTube. Edwards-Groves, in her study of process writing, submits this truth about using technology to facilitate contextualization: “[i]t seems feasible, therefore, to suggest that the role of interaction plays a significant part in the successful use of technology in classroom learning; it cannot be seen as an isolated activity or ‘digital colouring-in’ (or skills and drills activities) – it must be situated within the context of authentic interactions and authentic learning tasks” (61). Hip hop and its extensive culture should rise to be a part of this organic contextualization, because its real world content (and, its real world consumption by students), enables an aspect of the achievement of the goals regarding how technology is accessed and remixed.

The rhythmic power of hip hop also allows some learners access to texts that may have otherwise proved challenging. Creating a space for phonological awareness with regard to reading students who struggle can yield positive results. David, et., al., write that “[r]hythm is an important part of language, becoming salient almost from birth” and that there is an “increasing interest in the notion that rhythm may play a role in reading development” (171). Huss, et., al, tell us that “[i]n language [like music], speech rhythm has a similar organizational role, reflecting syllable, word and clausal boundaries (675)”. The data in their study of dyslexic readers and their perception of music meter suggests that “prosodic development and phonological development are intimately connected to individual differences in sensitivity to rise time” (686), meaning that the processing of the rise and fall times of how fast an increase in intensity reaches its peak and then lowers are directly associated with the development of understanding of the rhythmic qualities of speech and its auditory components. Exposure to the varied prosody of hip hop cadences can give dyslexic readers exposure to varied rhythms in speech, and allow them to emulate those rhythms in ways that can be associated with speech and reading. This can be done by reading texts in the style of rap, or by rewriting texts in the hip hop milieu, with percussive rhythms permeating these renderings. Using hip hop musical elements such as beats and repetitive samples of familiar music can also aid in increased comprehension by emulating the redundant portions of songs (“hooks”) to reiterate significant concepts of a given text.

At your front door with a Draco, let me in  
-Soulja Boy, *Let Me In*

Hip hop in the classroom can also provide access to culture. Since the 1970's, there has been an influx of African American students into higher education (Sanchez, 478). And yet, according to Peter Elbow, "we need to help speakers of vernacular dialects in our classrooms today to meet the demands of most teachers and employers" by establishing a new culture of literacy. In this new culture of literacy, it would be hoped that more value can be placed on non-standard American English vernaculars so that Elbow's vision of the classroom can come to pass. Bolstering the worth of such vernaculars in academic realms (and the English instruction world in general) allows the speakers of those vernaculars potential buy-in into those arenas. Hip hop in particular features the use of AAVE (African American vernacular English), and for African Americans who may feel caught between to dialectic worlds, the inclusion of hip hop as instruction module creates value and bridges gaps within vernaculars. After all, "hip-hop music/literacies [are] the principal medium for black youths to express themselves, [so] it seems pertinent that educators capitalize on this medium to assist students in making the literacy transition" (Sanchez, 486). Validating the life experience in the classroom can offer reciprocation of validation. It can give the student the ownership of concepts that may no longer be viewed as disparate, but working in tandem to create a new subgenre or remix. Bringing hip hop literacies into the classroom can foster this kind of environment of exchange and interdependency.

Lauren Leigh Kelly tells us that "[w]e are asking a great deal from our students when we ask them to invest in material that does not reflect, respond to, or engage with their cultural identities" (53), and indeed we are. As much as teachers might encourage non-native SAE students to codeswitch in an effort to level power dynamics within and without the academy, asking students to engage in codeswitching as a rule in the classroom can feel akin to becoming a different person entirely. In response to the book authored by Rebecca Wheeler and Rachel Swords titled *Code Switching: Teaching Standard English in Urban Classrooms*, Vershawn Ashanti Young takes some umbrage: "[the authors] are not promoting what I see as the better alternative: code meshing: blending dos idiomas or copping enough standard English to really make yo' AAE be Da Bomb" (50). Elsewhere, Young frames the problem in this way: "[it is a] strategy to negotiate, side-step and ultimately accommodate bias against the working-class, women, and the ongoing racism against the language habits of blacks and other non-white peoples" (51). This is often done in lieu of

full academic acceptance of other vernaculars, where vernaculars that vary from standard American English may be seen at the language of the ‘other’ academically, and thus not welcomed into the esteemed but often stolid corridors of higher education.

Encouraging students to engage their own language in the classroom must be of importance to teachers, with the goal of creating an inclusive environment. Peter Elbow states that we can take on student anxiety that emanates from difference by “inviting them to take on full literacy in their oral dialect” (1999, 372). Hip hop achieves this goal by the very nature of its popularity: it crosses boundaries of race while allowing the voices of the disenfranchised to be heard in the classroom as they are in the homes and streets of teenage neighborhoods. It is the dialect of both the youth culture generally, and urban culture specifically. Lisa Delpit phrases the matter of how we can use our student’s natural Discourse succinctly: “[a]ll we can do is provide students with the exposure to an alternate form, and allow them the opportunity to practice that form in contexts that are nonthreatening, have a real purpose, and are intrinsically enjoyable” (54). Those contexts can utilize hip hop texts which speak to a variety of backgrounds in varying ways to elucidate alternative forms in a manner that is comfortable while still holding onto its instructional value and values.

### *Using Hip Hop as a Cultural Touchstone*

Welcome to the culture. If you don’t know, it’s called hip hop.  
-Macklemore, *Welcome to the Culture*

The target goal of using hip hop as a teaching touchstone is the efficaciousness with which it can facilitate attachment, that is, connecting one concept with another. Teachers have become accustomed to using pop culture materials in an effort to make concepts ‘sticky’ so that they stay with the student by connecting something familiar with something new. And the texts that are used can range from films to music to internet memes. Hip hop certainly falls within the definition of a popular culture text that can accomplish teaching goals.

Hip hop texts, when viewed as popular culture texts, not only allow students to attach new concepts with old, but they can also be used to translate ideas, bridge gaps between academic and common culture, and create meaning making environments for students. For example, Miguel Centellas writes of how using pop culture in the classroom can be successful in this endeavor: “[s]uch materials not only help make

otherwise dry material more fun for undergraduates, but they also help students hone critical thinking skills, integrate classroom lessons into the real world (as they understand it), and build holistic understandings of learning and exploration that are consistent with the liberal arts tradition” (562). Material that otherwise may not be well defined or associated with familiar ideas can be viewed through the lens of pop culture, thus creating clearer understanding and allow for connections to be made which otherwise may have remained separate.

The ways in which we can attach popular culture to concepts are numerous, and there are numerous concepts that are familiar to us. Many of us remember watching the 1970 film *Romeo and Juliet* (or the Baz Luhrmann postmodern remake) while reading the Shakespeare play. Beyond watching the simple portrayal of the Baird’s tale unfold before our eyes, we also were viewing the work in a medium with which we were arguably more familiar (film), thus making the text more relevant. Dale Allender expanded his *Romeo and Juliet* unit using Marvin Gaye’s music and other films to portray love and love lost, and advocates for the use of pop culture in teaching by expressing that “[popular culture] should be used in a variety of ways as one would use texts generally in a constructivist, cultural studies classroom concerned with student achievement and transformative learning” (14). While this is no small feat, Allender clearly feels that popular culture is up to the task, also pairing the hip hop group Fugees with Langston Hughes to teach James Weldon Johnson or exploring the teaching possibilities of the pre-teen series *Lizzie McGuire*.

*Using Hip Hop to Foster Inclusion in the Classroom*

I gotta get mine in the here and the now.  
-Dred Scott, *I Gotta Get Mine*

As much as hip hop has become a culture that is relevant to many socioeconomic groups, it still maintains its roots in urban youth culture. When artists like Jay-Z rap “I done what I could, to come up with this paper 'til this day still, run with the hood, guess it's part of my nature” they are in essence saying that they still have their street cred, that their urban cultural cache is still intact. In fact, throughout the sometimes turbulent lives of urban students and the changing cultural perspective of the outside world, peer credibility, this notion of being true to self, has always been of paramount importance. Hip hop journalist Rodney Carmichael explains it in this way: “[a]uthenticity started out as street solidarity [and] I’d like to think today that it means being true to yourself. And for a lot of artists, I think it does. From the industry

heavies to the Soundcloud rappers, this wave, this generation in some ways feels more authentic to self than ever before” (Williams). It is no wonder then that students in urban settings find that hip hop can explain important life lessons. This attachment to hip hop can also be used to connect dots in classroom instruction using the genre of rap with students who not only listen to hip hop but identify with its proponents on a personal level and may even strive to emulate the life they hear illustrated in the latest Migos or A\$AP Rocky song. It is possible, then, for students to attach the credibility they derive from their music, to classroom situations where teachers are using a vernacular that students know well.

Because of their familiarity with the genre of hip hop, students that have been disenfranchised by exclusionary instruction can benefit from utilizing their dominant culture and discourse in classroom settings. Specific to popular culture and hip hop, this mode of teaching allows students to make connections to material which previously may have seemed attached to oppression. Ernest Morrell makes exactly this point in his essay, “Toward a Critical Pedagogy of Popular Culture”: “Popular culture can help students deconstruct dominant narratives and contend with oppressive practices in hopes of achieving a more egalitarian and inclusive society” (72). Both classroom and extra-classroom practices that have been oppressive to non-white students have existed since there have been schools in America, from segregation to outmoded student busing laws. And while it may be tempting to feel that the gap caused by oppression has been largely bridged, there is still far more work to do. Because of this, measures that foster a more egalitarian learning environment are warranted, and in that environment hip hop has a clear place.

To that end, we should strive for building bridges that bring about connection. Stone and Stewart write that, in their first-year writing course at Huston-Tillotson College, they must always allow for the “enduring achievement gaps” that they experience between white students and students of color. Most of their students come from urban areas, with some students never having even written an essay. Because of this, they developed a methodology called the Critical Hip Hop Rhetoric Pedagogy (CHHRP). Inspired by linguistic anthropologist H. Samy Alim, CHHRP’s aim was to use hip hop as the course content and to center on students as the source of knowledge. While involved in CHHRP, students were instructed to research with the goal of creating multimodal projects. The preliminary findings of this pedagogy revealed more student involvement and “a heightened sense of academic self-efficacy” (185).

Stone and Stewart’s work illustrate well that when we situate learning in the experiences of

students, the exclusion caused by class knowledge and social knowledge becomes inclusion. Engagement of texts on a personal level allows ownership of those texts, but also produces some intangibles, namely the emotions that come parceled with familiarity. Students own texts when they care about those texts. The class work matters not because of the grade, but because the work seems relevant and close: its proximity changes. Students end up engaging ideas not because they have to; they do it because they desire the interaction. As Jamal Cooks phrases it, “[i]f students are to write effectively, they must feel that their voice is important and [they] must have opportunities to develop that voice” (75). He goes on to point out that many urban students are already engaging literacy practices that are not tied to school at all such as writing hip hop lyrics of their own. We as teachers must decide purposefully to allow our pedagogy to make the classroom a laboratory of sorts where this voice can develop. After all, it is not just about some manner of appropriation, and certainly not negation. Rather, the goal at which Cooks is aiming is one of elevating personal voice and authorship. As we develop students as writers, we should not desire to manufacture another writer in the style of Twain or Shakespeare, but to bring about the next individual whose style is unique but also whose name may appear comfortably in a list alongside those already revered.

But success in engaging with hip hop in the classroom for urban students is not just about relation. It is also about equality. It means that hip hop can stand head to head and shoulder to shoulder with both academics and the texts that academics teach. For a student whose main Discourse (as Gee would define it, his or her identity kit) is the subculture created by the hip hop genre, this means that their culture can be viewed on an equal footing with forms of higher education. Wayne Au tells us that “negotiating this tension between the Discourse of education with its promise of success after graduation and the economic reality of the world outside of school” (213) is an idea that pervades the work of some rap lyricists. From Kanye West’s *The College Dropout* to J. Cole’s “College Boy”, the viewpoint that college is at least a world away from the rap lifestyle is prevalent. Bringing West or Cole into the classroom allows those worlds to collide in the best possible way.

### **Conclusion**

Using the familiar to explain or relate to the unfamiliar in a classroom is nothing new. Attaching real world ideas to abstract classroom concepts can be both efficacious for the teacher and the student. The use of hip hop, with its traits such as unique phrasing, repeatable lyric motifs, and popularity, to create a

learning environment that is both relevant and enjoyable. I personally recall my fifth grade teacher playing a song recorded on cassette from an episode of the television series “Happy Days” that explained how the human heart functioned. Hip hop it was not, but either way such is the power of the connection: one of my favorite television shows as a child was “Happy Days”, and I can still sing the song that the teacher played for us students. I remembered it for no other reason than it came from a source that I already liked.

Ever since then, I have craved those times when teachers would reach into my world and connect it with something from their world. And now that I am in the latter category, I desire to bring the former with me. And I have no doubt that most students also long to see their personal lives reflected in their instruction. In many ways, it is not optional as much as it is necessary. We read of politicians peppering their talking points with facts and figures about the state of American education. We hear of the frustration of teachers regarding the unreasonable expectations levied against them by government, school boards, and parents. We often see in our classrooms students’ attention drift away from what we believe is information that can be transformative. And because of all this, we feel our hands our proverbially tied by regulations and expectations. Meanwhile, our students know every line to the latest Machine Gun Kelly track. They might possibly even know all the words to “Your Shot”, the uplifting and challenging hit from the Broadway play “Hamilton”. If we are not latching onto hip hop culture, which is in effect the vernacular of our students, we are simply not speaking their language. In the same way that a French teacher would not speak in only Spanish to a group of native English speakers, a teacher should not speak to students in outmoded methods and cultural references that are basically the same as speaking a strange and unfamiliar language. Hip hop gives teachers part of the language they need to be relevant and clear so that they might empower students to become effect writers and communicators. We must ensconce our instruction firmly at the edge of cultural movement. We must integrate forms like hip hop to bring our students into the academic fold today.

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