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Creating a New Standard: Living, Learning, and Teaching in Southern Appalachia

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Creating a New Standard: Living, Learning, and Teaching in Southern Appalachia

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A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green State University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the field of English

with a specialization in English Teaching

Summer, August 14, 2019

Dr. Heather Jordan, First Reader

Ms. Kimberly Spallinger, Second Reader

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Creating a New Standard: Living, Learning, and Teaching in Southern Appalachia

Growing up in southern West Virginia, I was raised with standard southernly traditional values: family, faith, and hard work. However, my parents, who were not afforded post-secondary opportunities, also raised their three children with a thirst for education. My mother and father knew that our hopes lie in what, and how much, we learn.

The last of the Holt sisters, I knew I had big shoes to fill as I graduated high school and looked forward to finishing my undergraduate degree, just like they had done. And so I did, but something always felt unfinished, even after I had my diploma in hand.

Since my undergraduate degree in English Education finished in 2009, I had missed the personal satisfaction and growth I garnered from the educational setting and writing assignments. I had never considered myself a strong writer and felt it silly to submit anything for publication, so after I had finished my career as a student and began teaching, my writing fell to the wayside. It wasn't long until I felt unfulfilled and found myself pulled to do something more.

When I made the decision to further my education through BGSU and become the first graduate student in my family, I was anxious. Did I have the abilities? Was I smart enough to keep up with these northern professors and students?

But as soon as my courses began, my nerves subsided, and I was elated with my choice. I was able to have stimulating conversations, was assigned meaningful and challenging writing tasks, and was learning new material and methods that I could easily implement in my classroom. My students loved hearing what I was learning and how it inspired what they were doing in class. They loved the connections between my classes and theirs.

As my classes continued, my enthusiasm only grew: I pulled samples from course materials, I used examples from my own work, and I found a new spark for my curriculum. All

teachers, no matter how we may try, fall into the inevitable “rut.” We do the same things each year, we read the same course materials, we assign the same assignments. And we very quickly lose our excitement for our curriculum; we get bored with what we are doing, just as our students do. However, what I was learning in my courses—the exposure to new ideas, the reinforcement of long forgotten ideologies—renewed my enthusiasm, and my students and colleagues could see the difference.

It was through my coursework at BGSU that I discovered codeswitching and the incorporation of natural dialect in writing and the classroom. I have always loved dialect, growing up with a fascination for authors such as Zora Neale Hurston and Mark Twain. However, I had never considered dialect as acceptable within the classroom. I fell into the pattern of the “old-school” teachers who insisted on a strict adherence to Standard English. But courses such as *The Teaching of Writing* and *Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing* gave me new tools for my arsenal, as I found applications to my southern West Virginia, Appalachian-rich classroom.

Professional benefits aside, the program has done wonders for me personally. My introduction to the academic memoir in *Graduate Writing* led me to a personal growth, not just as a writer or student. I gained confidence in my writing, assurance of my place in the English classroom (as both a student and a teacher), and found my voice concerning a very personal incident.

As I approached the Master’s Portfolio, I wanted to display not only what I had learned and accomplished as an English student, but also the professional and personal growth I had sustained. I wanted to present myself as an English teacher in southern West Virginia as well as

an Appalachian woman who has found her voice in a culture that may very well stifle voices such as hers.

Paper 1: From Across the World to Our Home: Teaching Students History, Perspective, Culture, and Connection Through Literary Studies

My portfolio begins with a defense of literary studies within the classroom. For decades, West Virginia public education has fallen to the bottom of the totem pole, ranking lower in student success, graduation rates, and teacher pay, just to name a few. In the last two years, the state's education system has been under strict scrutiny from lawmakers, as teachers took to the picket lines to defend public education. In a trickle-down effect, post-secondary institutions have found lower enrollment overall but most significantly in education preparatory programs. My substantive research paper presents the argument for literary programs in a state in which all curriculums and programs feel under attack.

Not only was I defending the "classical" literature program, though. I also sought to defend inclusion of local literature, specifically Appalachian, in the general classroom. Throughout my education, I was taught a heavy emphasis on the "classics" but could only find literature from people who spoke like me in elective mini-course offerings. Therefore, I wanted to include such literature for my students, to open them up to new opportunities and connections that may otherwise be lost.

As I first edited based on my instructor's comments, I sought to strengthen my research within the argument as well as include a more substantial discussion on Appalachian literature. In the first version, my connection consisted of rather loose, vague references and applications that included a number of different cultural tie-ins. Instead, I wanted to more clearly communicate my passion for Appalachian literature and the necessity of it within the classroom.

Then, through peer review, I was able to make my argument stronger and more coherent, seeking to clarify misconceptions and remove redundancies. I've also revised the title in order to provide my readers with a stronger sense of my purpose from the beginning. In my final revisions, with Dr. Heather Jordan's guidance, I was able to correct errors in citations and formatting, finalizing the paper to one that I am proud to present.

Paper 2: Teaching English in the Southern Appalachian Classroom: It Ain't What You Think

My second submission is one that I am very proud of as a West Virginia teacher. Connecting the discussion of dialect in my defense of literary studies, this paper highlights the value of not only studying dialect, but also teaching students acceptable use and codeswitching.

I am so proud of my culture, of the little things that have shaped and molded me into who I am. And part of that is the language that surrounds me. Often, we Appalachians are viewed as less educated and therefore English teachers in the area are the "bad guys." So many of the "old school" teachers have spent their lives correcting the pronunciations, contractions, and colloquialisms of their students that it has become a stigma to be an English teacher in this area. When I tell people what I teach, I immediately prepare for the "well you aren't going to like talking to me" or "I better watch my spelling."

But I am the English teacher who grew up in a holler, where we sang about the "pow'r" in the blood, where my mother "warshed" our clothes, where we have buggies and pop at the grocery store, where we drop the endings of words and sometimes the beginning, and where we add letters to the beginning or the ending of a word. I embrace my Appalachian dialect and its Elizabethan English roots.

Still, I know the value of teaching my students the “rules” of English, but I also want them to know more than the basic rules, more than how to write a standard essay or to sound like their textbooks. I want my students to know how to communicate in a variety of situations, how to recognize what is appropriate, and, most importantly, I want them to be able to find their own voice in writing. This paper explores that.

In editing, I took the suggestions of Dr. Wood and included some of the activities that I use in my classroom, making it a little more applicable rather than just theoretical. While these are not textbook examples (such as from Weaver), I used Dr. Wood’s suggestion, coupled with the advice of other professors, and used myself as an authority, including authentic examples from my classroom. After receiving the feedback of my peers, I trimmed a couple of redundancies and expanded my explanation and the connections I was seeking to make in areas. I also edited my student’s name whom I used as an example to only an initial to avoid confusion with her pseudonym I had provided and to ensure anonymity. Finally, with Dr. Jordan’s suggestions, I included headings within the paper in order to provide a more coherent organization for my readers.

Paper 3 Major Assignment Design: The Academic Memoir

My third selection for the portfolio presents a lesson for my students to produce an academic memoir. Within the lesson, I use sample papers from other Appalachian authors (as suggested by my instructor), including myself, using my third portfolio piece as a sample within the lesson. Having Dr. Riley-Mukavetz for the Graduate Writing course the semester prior (in which I crafted Paper 4), I was inspired to create this lesson plan for her Teaching of Writing course. I wanted my students to have the opportunity for the same personal and educational

growth that I found as I wrote my own academic memoir. And, having the necessary scaffolding already in place, I found this to be the only logical step for my classroom.

In courses past, I found lesson planning tedious and more like “busy-work.” I felt as though I was often required to include theory and practice that do not truly reflect my classroom practices. However, this piece fit seamlessly into my coursework. It is a nice addition to my classroom that takes two previously taught writing styles and molds them into one, challenging even my most advanced writers and facilitating personal and educational growth. The classroom procedures within the lesson plan are an accurate description of what a regular day is like my small West Virginia classroom. For these reasons alone, I felt pulled to include it in my portfolio.

The lesson plan format is a little different than I would normally have, as I have included footnotes that reference the research and theory behind my instructional choices. I maintained the formatting, although a peer reviewer suggested otherwise. This rhetorical choice is two-fold in nature: it displays a different style of writing and formatting than my other pieces, and it provides a rationale for my pedagogical decisions within the document, so that a fellow teacher or administrator has a direct answer for what inspired each particular aspect.

In revising, I included some suggestions of my peers such as having the students apply the checklist to a sample writing piece and clarifying activities or procedures that were redundant or unclear. Per Dr. Jordan, I included citations for my sample readings to assist other educators who may wish to utilize the lesson in their classrooms.

Paper 4: Verbal and Emotional Abuse: Words Really Do Hurt

My final selection was actually the first paper that came to mind as I began considering my portfolio. It is the academic memoir used as a sample in my Major Assignment Design for

Paper 3. I included this paper for a number of reasons. First, and possibly the most obvious, is because of its use as a sample in another work. I could not include all of the samples in my lesson due to the sheer volume it would create within my portfolio, but this will allow my portfolio audience the opportunity to further expand their understanding of my intentions in my lesson plan.

Additionally, this paper is me. Not only does it show my readers who I am and where I am coming from, but it led me to a better understanding of the same. With such a self-actualization resulting from the paper, I couldn't resist including it. I've often said that I have considered publishing the paper but never followed through because of a lack of self-assurance. Including it here forces me out of the safe bubble I've built around myself. Now, my story is out there for others to read, to empathize with, and to learn from.

In editing the paper, I've included some details that failed me at the time I initially wrote it. After receiving some very encouraging peer review, I have moved a poem to create a stronger transition, added additional secondary sources, and corrected a few errors and areas of weakness. I've also attempted to make my research less of the focus, per the suggestions of Dr. RM. Finally, I wanted to make sure that the Appalachian connection is clear. While this issue is not one that is geographically isolated, I know that domestic violence is something that many of my fellow Appalachian women endure, and it is something that is often not talked about. If I think of this paper on a larger scale, my hope is that it will help another woman recognize the situation she is in and speak up, as well as empower my students should they ever find themselves in such a place.

Having the portfolio culminate my experiences in this program has only reinforced the growth I have achieved both professionally and personally. This degree has been far more than a

pay raise and recertification; it has been an enlightening path to new, innovative practices for my students, an example set for the next generation of Holts to always seek to learn more, a better understanding of my own teaching philosophy, personal growth, and ultimately a renewed thirst for continuing to grow and learn.

While reading these pieces, you'll get to know me, get to see my classroom practices and philosophy, hear a voice that once was quiet and timid, a voice silenced at one time. This portfolio is multi-leveled me: the Appalachian woman, the writer, the college student, and the high school teacher.

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English 6070

Dr. Erin Labbie

15 December 2017

From Across the World to Our Home:

Teaching Students History, Perspective, Culture, and Connection Through Literary Studies

Education has become a numbers game in today's world. Elected officials—along with state, county, and university administrators—are seeking to put their systems back in the black. But how do they do that? West Virginia Secondary Schools and the state superintendent have taken action by cutting the number of courses students must complete in order to graduate. In their proposed cuts, students would need to only complete three years of history studies and would no longer need to complete two years of foreign languages. Currently, students need only 24 credits for graduation, and these cuts would reduce that to 21. Although this drastically reduces the potential learning and preparation of high school students, lawmakers and policymakers see the potential for money and positions saved. The same is being considered in post-secondary schools, as colleges and universities have been dramatically cutting the number of required credits from general studies programs as well as removing many liberal arts programs from their offered majors.

Meanwhile, these current proposals leave teachers wondering what will be next. West Virginia teachers, seeing this as just a start of things to come, cannot help but fall down the slippery slope that comes in the wake of such cuts. Which class is next to be deemed unnecessary for high school graduates and college students? The more pragmatic and linear thinkers will cry out that literature courses are not as applicable or relevant to all students

graduating high school as the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) courses take precedence.

Literature courses are often viewed more as the “arts,” which have suffered their own cuts throughout the years. In our capitalist driven world, business professionals and politicians often consider the arts as more expendable than other core subjects as they are deemed less practical in general, less career applicable than STEM courses, and typically less “needed” in the real world. However, cutting literary studies from any curriculum would be detrimental not only to the educational process but to society as a whole: “a society which [has] ceased to value literature [is] one lethally closed to the impulses which had created and sustained the best of human civilization” (Eagleton 56). Students must be exposed to personal worldviews that can often be expressed only through the written word. Through literature, students gain the wisdom of playwrights such as Shakespeare, philosophers such as Socrates, novelists such as Melville, and folklore such as John Henry. Depriving students of literary studies is cutting away learning that can never be replaced through any other medium. It is essential to teach literature at all levels of education: primary, secondary, and collegiate. Literary studies are essential and relevant to the educational process as students experience historical events, witness new perspectives, achieve a sense of cultural pride through the works of various authors, and discover a personal connection and motivation for reading and writing.

Through these studies, students are able to gain various or alternative perspectives of historical events that may otherwise be overlooked. In *Tristes Tropiques*, Levi-Strauss explains the usefulness of writing in preserving a culture or group’s history: “The possession of writing vastly increases man’s ability to preserve knowledge” (1422-23). It is not simply through history books and records that students learn about the past but also through speeches, autobiographies,

letters, and even fiction. Literary studies provide students with a unique preservation of their ancestors, events, and lives. One may find a wealth of resources while studying the words of presidents, historical figures, and unsung voices of the past. Literature “can be thought of as an artificial memory, the development of which ought to lead to a clearer awareness of the past, and hence to a greater ability to organize both the present and the future” (Levi-Strauss 1423).

Through literary studies, students have access to inauguration speeches, personal accounts, and theoretical essays and proposals. Without literary studies, students wouldn’t have an inside look at the Holocaust through Anne Frank’s eyes, feel the passion of the Civil Rights Movement through Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr’s words, or understand the hysteria that ensued during the Salem Witch Trials as Miller dramatically replays. Charles Baudelaire states “The past is interesting not only by reason of the beauty which could be distilled from it by those artists for whom it was the present, but also precisely because it is the past, for its historical value” (792-93). While these may be matters of the past, they are also necessary steppingstones in understanding not only what the human race, worldwide, has been able to overcome but also how we have evolved throughout the years. The personal and intimate details that literary studies offer students make history feel more entertaining, engaging, and even easier to understand and retain.

While the study of literature holds significant historical value, it also lends perspective on worldwide cultures. In previous decades’ attempts to make education “multi-cultural,” we find that insufficient literature studies are padded with the “usual” representatives, those of different races and cultures that proliferate the basic literary overview. “But is permission to represent a given community limited to card-carrying, epidermically suitable representatives of that community?” (Shohat 343). Instead, a truly integrated literature program should delve into the

nuances present with the culturally diverse study, most specifically the language attributes that comprise the cultural identity. “As potent symbols of collective identity, languages are the foci of deep loyalties existing at the razor’s edge of national and cultural difference” (Shohat 191). A literary program that goes beyond the surface of worldly cultures will open a new discussion of language, language acquisition, and the morphing of language into multiple dialects for students. Shohat sums that “the issue of linguistic self-representation does not simply entail a return to ‘authentic’ languages but rather the orchestration of languages for emancipatory purposes” (194). It is the subtle, and at times not so subtle, differences in dialects that enable one group to identify themselves apart from those around them. The study of dialects which differ from their own will help students analyze through compare and contrast, experimenting with ways to say words and how different phrases may be used. This experimentation and study will open doors for students to communicate with speakers of various dialects. Students exposed to a variety of dialects will have fewer communication hinderances as they travel and interact with people from different parts of the state, country, and world. Providing a more in-depth program for our students will allow them not only the additional view of history, but also of cultures and language nuances that they may otherwise never truly experience.

Additionally, students will be exposed to new perspectives that only literary studies can facilitate whether those be cultural, religious, political, or interpersonal. “Each of our perceptions is accompanied by the consciousness that human reality is a ‘revealer,’ that is, it is through human reality that ‘there is’ being, or, to put it differently, that man is the means by which things are manifested” (Sartre 1336). Reality, then, must be “revealed” to the perceiver, i.e., it is through literary studies and the writing of others that readers experience a true reality. Through both nonfiction and fiction, students are exposed to a variety of experiences and

viewpoints that they may otherwise never experience. Without literary studies keeping these perspectives alive, many of those in great opposition would never gain exposure. Voices that may be generally silenced are given the opportunity to present themselves timelessly through literature.

Baudelaire posits that the writer “began by being an observer of life, and only later set himself the task of acquiring the means of expressing it. This has resulted in a thrilling originality” (798). Monsieur G., the humble and anonymous artist whom Baudelaire discusses, first seeks life in order to “drink it in” (798) and then sets about to represent his observations for his audience. Through this original expression of life, students will see the world through the eyes of another and thereby gain a worldly enlightenment which they may either accept or reject. Students will find within the works of various authors a desire to experience life and may find themselves yearning to seek, experience, and express for themselves. Without such studies, students would be deprived of this “fantastic reality of life” which has, for many, “become singularly diluted” (Baudelaire 798), whereas with it, students gain the fully concentrated insights that authors have to offer. The preservation of such observations and perspectives is essential to student growth as learners and future observers themselves. “It can be thought of as an artificial memory, the development of which ought to lead to a clearer awareness of the past, and hence to a greater ability to organize both the present and the future” (Levi-Strauss 1423). Students draw understanding and meaning from the meditations of authors such as Thoreau or writings such as Psalms. While studying these writings, students begin to find reinforcements of their ideas or the start to a new theory. Without literary studies, students would be limited to the factual, proven events of science and history and would not discover the untested theories and hypotheses of such philosophers.

Yet there are also times in which the materials we read present us with a counter to our established mores and stances. As well as learning about new, previously unheard perspectives, students of literature will also be exposed to viewpoints that challenge their pre-established belief systems and force them to consider sides they may never have otherwise considered. Reading and studying the writing of those that adamantly oppose the reader's preconceived notions and beliefs will expand the students' understanding of all aspects of the issue, making them more well-rounded in their beliefs. Hurston explains that "Discord is more natural than accord. If we accept the doctrine of the survival of the fittest there are more fighting honors than there are honors for other achievements" (1153). Disagreement is natural and healthy for the growth of the individual and the whole. However, without the study of literature, what is there to dispute? James Paul Gee explains that "language is not about conveying neutral or objective information; rather, it is about communicating perspectives on experience and action in the world, often in contrast to alternative and competing perspectives" (119). If we are all of one accord, there can be no real discussion, no bending and learning from one another as we simply assent with no opposition. One cannot argue about the events of history without beginning to question morality, nor can one oppose a scientific hypothesis without having read from the musings of another scientist.

In order to have a fully informed opinion, one must be conscious and knowledgeable of the other side of the argument. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel explains in the "Phenomenology of Spirit" that one side of any relationship exists only with the existence of the other: "but this action of the one has itself the double significance of being both its own action and the action of the other as well" (631) as it prompts the reader to think, react, and respond. Students must be aware of the opposing side in order to fully form their beliefs. "Reading instruction must be

rooted in the taking and imagining of diverse perspectives on real and imagined material and social worlds” (Gee 120). Who can know what they truly think without having encountered another saying they are wrong? There is no argument if there are not contradictory viewpoints. Hegel states, “action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both” (631). As students are reading, forming opinions, and responding to literature, they are completing this transaction, forming their own hypothesis and challenging the writing of others. But without this written discourse, students would have nothing to respond to; they would have nothing to dispute. Therefore, without the study of literature, students cannot challenge their opinions and thereby strengthen their convictions.

By studying world literature, students are able to glean a portion of lives and worlds that seem exotic, strange, and new because they have previously been unheard. This exposure will broaden a student’s frame of reference and understanding of how other societies and cultures function. Many groups have suffered the attempted silencing of their class, culture, gender, race, and have fought back though the mightiest of weapons, convincing speech. For example, throughout the rise of modern feminism, women such as Hélène Cixous called for more women to raise their pens and sound their voices: “Woman must put herself into the text – as into the world and into history – by her own movement” (2039). As Cixous asserts about women, all underrepresented people:

must write through their bodies, they must invent the impregnable language that will wreck partitions, classes, and rhetorics, regulations and codes, they must submerge, cut through, get beyond the ultimate reserve – discourse, including the one that laughs at the very idea of pronouncing the word “silence,” the one that, aiming for the impossible, stops short before the word “impossible” and writes it as “the end.” (2049)

Should the literary curriculum be cut from our school systems, students would not be inspired by minority authors such as Maya Angelou, Mary Shelley, or Frederick Douglass. Thus, if we remove literary studies from our curriculum, we will then be silencing these voices once more. It is through the study of passionate change makers such as Cixous that students find inspiration to fight injustices and are emboldened to speak their convictions.

As well as learning about cultures far and wide, through local literary studies, students will also be able to establish a sense of cultural pride. As Hurston illustrates in “Characteristics of Negro Expression,” it is through literature that students can study local heroes and folktales which illustrate parts of their culture that can instill a sense pride. Literary studies help to keep this folklore alive and relevant to the newer generations: “folklore is not a thing of the past” (Hurston 1150). It is vital that younger generations explore the lore of their ancestors, learning the timeless morals and values that can only be expressed through literature. This folklore passes down the local, although possibly fictional, characters of the land, maintaining traditions that very well could be lost without the continued study of literature. With a broad literary program, students will be afforded the opportunity to discuss the connections of local folklore and that of other cultures. This allows the students to make meaningful worldly connections that may otherwise be lost without the guidance of a strong literary program.

Hurston explains that through her cultural folklore, readers will see a unique trait among African American people: “Its great variety shows the adaptability of the black man: nothing is too old or too new, domestic or foreign, high or low, for his use.” (1150). The traditions and tales of African American folklore illustrates a resiliency that may be lost without the written tales. Students of folk literature will gain a sense of understanding and pride as they study the traditions and tales from their individual cultures that do not make it into the history books.

Additionally, through literary studies, students will be able to carry on traditions of folklore and build upon them because it “is still in the making” (Hurst 1150). Students who study literature including folklore in an ageless fashion, garner an understanding that not only is history continually being made, but the stories that highlight that history and their cultures are continually being written. Therefore, the stories of today could very well be the folklore in future decades. Surely the authors of ages past were unaware of the great influence they would hold in future generations. Students may be privy to new tales and traditions in the making as they study current cultural literature and also find inspiration that they may be the authors who are studied in the future.

In the Appalachian culture, this need for local literature and the passing of folklore remains great, as students struggle not only to find themselves but also to find value in their heritage. Often viewed negatively by “outsiders” and natives alike, the Appalachian culture suffers from horrible stereotypes and misconceptions. Students find themselves buying into these negative images and gaining a disdain for their home. Therefore, the need arises to supplement students with the images of the resourceful Appalachians of Charles Frazier, the original “rednecks” illustrated by Denise Giardina, and even the rejection of tradition in the tale of Homer Hickam, Jr. Eagleton expresses that “to read literature [is] thus to regain vital touch with the roots of one’s own being” (59). While studying local literature, students identify with positive traits and thereby reject the stereotypes that leave them without a sense of cultural identity.

Students who study the local dialect, identifying with pronunciation tendencies as well as colloquialisms and idioms, gain a stronger pride and sense of ownership for their particular language. Through the use of dialect, authors are able to more appropriately describe and depict

the characters. These characters, thus brought to life, illustrate to students how their language is unique to the area in which they belong. Hurston explains that dialect carries with it a precise and unusual set of rules to most accurately describe it: “there are so many quirks that belong only to certain localities that nothing less than a volume would be adequate” (1158). In *Breaking Rules: Liberating Writers Through Innovative Grammar Instruction*, Edgar Schuster explains, “I speak a dialect, you speak a dialect, all God’s children speak dialects” (62). In areas such as Appalachia, students benefit from the study of various dialects and languages in relation to their own as the area vernacular is a melting pot of languages and dialects. Mikhail M. Bakhtin explains that specific features of language are built upon such blending: “they knit together with specific points of view, specific approaches, forms of thinking, nuances and accents characteristic of the given genre” (1211). The study of literature is the only discipline that can carry an inside look at various dialects and open the conversation for a more in-depth study of language. For instance, Appalachian students reading Chaucer may find dialectal qualities that were previously dispelled as uneducated and incorrect. From there, students can further compare their particular dialectal quirks, discovering similarities and discussing the causes of differences. “As such, these languages live a real life, they struggle and evolve in an environment of social heteroglossia” (Bakhtin 1213). This study benefits students twofold, bringing a sense of language ownership to the students as they analyze and understand their personal dialect and dispelling the belief that the Appalachian dialect demonstrates ignorance or a lack of education. Students, through literary dialect, will be able to recognize the feeder languages and dialects that built the Appalachian dialect and gain an even stronger cultural identity.

As well as gaining knowledge of dialect and a stronger cultural identity, students will learn from local/regional writers, helping them to see the success of those who come from the

same roots as themselves. In “Contingencies of Value,” Herrnstein Smith defines “existence” and “qualities” as “the variable products of the subject’s engagement with his or her environment under a particular set of conditions” (1914). When authors depict their particular experiences within the same environment, students find the conflicts they are facing more meaningful and are then able to see resolution to issues they may be facing, hope for their future, or a deeper connection to their surroundings. For instance, when Carrie Bishop falls in love with the rebel Rondal in *Storming Heaven* or when Homer Hickam rejects the coal mining traditions in *Rocket Boys*, students can identify with the realness of these characters and their problems. These personal connections cannot take place in any other curriculum than that of literature. Readers, of any age, seek to identify with authors who possess a sense of authority; therefore, seeing the resolution to a similar conflict inspires the reader to persevere.

All humans, of any age, tend to mimic what they find enjoyable and relatable and studying regional literature will give students a new library from which they may mimic. Hurston describes the mimic as one who does so not out of a lack of originality but for the simple pleasure of the language: “He does it as the mockingbird does it, for the love of it, and not because he wishes to be like the one imitated” (1153). Through regional literary studies, students will relate to the author’s perspectives and experiences but will also gain inspiration though the success of those that have come from the same situations and upbringings. Students can connect to the author’s experiences in the same or similar environment and therefore can gain a better understanding of their own existence.

Ultimately, literary studies help students find personal connections and relations to the chaos of their lives. Hurston describes literature as drama filled, showing every emotion, hardship, and struggle: “Everything is acted out. Unconsciously for the most part of course.

There is an impromptu ceremony always ready for every hour of life. No little moment passes unadorned” (1146). These moments, little or big, placed under the magnifying glass of literature, enable students to find meaning in the trials and troubles of their everyday lives. When a student is in a troubling situation, it can be a comfort for them to read a narrative, a poem, or song lyrics. Young people, and people of all ages, seek to find not sympathy for their situations but consolation that they are not alone. Literature provides that, showing a student that the same problems they are facing are recorded in a timeless piece, that Ophelia felt the same heartache, that Poe anguished as they did, that Thoreau also felt the need for isolation.

This consolation can come as a relief to the one who feels as deeply as Nietzsche describes in *On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense*; “of course, *when* he suffers, he suffers more severely; indeed he suffers more frequently because he does not know how to learn from experience and keeps on falling into the very same trap time after time” (883). Within these personal connections, students may also stumble upon answers, epiphanies even, that will help them move beyond their current circumstances. The personal impact literature can have on a student is immeasurable and sadly often not discovered as students are not exposed to the literary influences they desperately need as classes are already cut to the bare minimum.

Literary studies can help students with introspection as Hurston explains in “What White Publishers Won’t Print:” “Literature and other arts are supposed to hold up the mirror to nature” (1162). Through the arts, one may discover her natural thoughts and emotions. For instance, the anonymous artist that Baudelaire discusses creates not for fame or notoriety. He does not sign his drawings with “that string of easily forgeable characters which spell a name” but instead “with his dazzling soul” (794). His choice to remain anonymous illustrates his desire to create for art’s sake, to represent what has personally inspired him. Baudelaire compares this

inspirational view of the world as seeing through the eyes of a child, who “sees everything in a state of newness; he is always *drunk*. Nothing more resembles what we call inspiration than the delight with which a child absorbs form and colour” (795). When authors present to the world what they have discovered within themselves, they are showing the world the most intimate parts of themselves. “Few men are gifted with the capacity of seeing; there are fewer still who possess the power of expression” (Baudelaire 795). Those that find themselves able to express their personal observations and introspection will inspire future generations. Literature offers the vice in which thinkers can be stirred to explore their inner reflections. Through various forms of literature, students will find themselves not only relating but also comparing, contrasting, and drawing a deeper understanding about themselves in relation to what they are reading.

Writing and the study of literature help students grow to be more well-rounded, intellectual individuals: “Writing is a strange invention. One might suppose that its emergence could not fail to bring about profound changes in the conditions of human existence, and that these transformations must of necessity be of an intellectual nature” (Levi-Strauss 1422). Literary studies take the student through a time of vast changes, demonstrating the evolution and advancements society has made in the thousands of years, since story-telling originated. Today, we carry with us the traditions of storytelling, bringing many of the same elements with us, holding dearly to the traditions of our forefathers. Yet, literature is more than simply a history of storytelling. It is a combination of all curriculums, a look into the life of someone from a long-ago era, a means of exploring scientific theories or future possibilities, a medley of rhythms and accents, an exploration of internal conflicts and musings, a self-portrait, a virtual mirror. To cut this curriculum from our students is to deprive them of molding their various interests and expertise into one.

Cutting the literary studies program from any level would be disastrous for the education and personal fulfillment of the future generation. Education should not suffer the horrendous cuts they have been facing. Diminishing a student's opportunities for learning places them at a particular disadvantage that they may never overcome. While it is tempting to cut requirements to ensure the "success" of our students while saving a dollar, it only serves to put them further down on the scale of well-rounded and capable young adults, future employees, and humankind in general. Yes, literature can be studied at home, independently. However, the study of some literature can seem ominous, overwhelming, and impossible without the guidance of a more experienced reader. We cannot now, nor ever, cut the literary programs from any level of education as students must benefit from the range of influences it carries. To deprive our students of such study is to deprive them of more than half of their education, histories, insights, meditations, and much needed personal connection and reflection.

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English 6220

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Teaching English in the Southern Appalachian Classroom: It Ain't What You Think

As English teachers, we are charged with instructing our students on reading, writing, and language. We are called “Grammar Nazis” by our peers who feel they are walking on thin ice as they speak to us, believing we are taking a proverbial magnifying glass to their language and searching for errors to pounce on at a moment’s notice. But the reality is we simply love and value language. All languages: not just English, Spanish, or French, but also Chicano, Creole, Urban, Appalachian, and so many more. Therefore, it is necessary that we accept, include, and study the various dialects of our classrooms. In the Southern Appalachian classroom, that means not only studying and celebrating the vernacular of the region, but also learning the history included in the dialect and the necessity of code-switching.

What is Standard English?

First, we must define “Standard” English, or the language we are to impart to our students. In *Breaking the Rules*, Schuster explains, “Broadly, it is the dialect of educated speakers, of those who ‘run things’” (54). So, the language we are requiring of our students is the same we would expect of college educated CEO’s and other professionals. We are expecting our teenage students to be as mindful of what they say and write as those who are much more advanced in education and experience. “However well intentioned our motives, we English teachers must not hold students to the standards of professional writers” (Schuster 97). These

expectations are not only daunting but irrational when one looks at the professional writing of many noteworthy authors and find that “the work of professional writers is far from error-free” (Schuster 97). We see many authors who use fragments, run-ons, and split infinitives. One cannot turn to a page of Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*, or really any title, without seeing a run-on sentence. After reading from what should be their writing models, we expect our students to construct prose that more strictly adheres to standard English grammar rules.

And yet, we set to task “correcting” the errors of our students’ spoken and written language. We are envisioned as those that correct each utterance and sentence with merciless vigor through the bleeding red pen. But this is an outdated image. “A little thought should convince anyone that it is not always simply a matter of correct versus incorrect” (Schuster 55). In our classrooms, students should not fear the almighty red pen. Still year after year, student after student anxiously awaits the harshly marked returned paper. This fear can inhibit student growth as writers: “Overconcern with following rules may undermine self-confidence and may be the root reason why so many adults fear writing” (Schuster xiv). Notes on papers should not be “corrections” but an analysis of what the student has put together and the means in which they represent it. Our goal should be to help students discover patterns in their writing and identify what is the most appropriate means of communicating their ideas. We must also maintain different expectations for each form of writing and let go of the idea that one must “master all of the rules” before they are allowed to break them.

“There are significant differences between written and spoken standard English, and we should not hold speakers to the same standard as writers” (Schuster 54). First, we must realize that our students should not be expected to hold the same level of thoughtfulness and precision in their everyday language as we find in textbooks and the media. But yet, there are many “old

school” teachers who insist that students not only write but speak according to the traditional grammar rules:

One of the problems with the TSG tradition is that it finds usage errors in every kitchen cabinet and corner, making the task of learning standard English seem almost insurmountable, even for speakers whose dialect is much closer to the standard than are those of many of our students. Moreover the *attitude* toward those who use less than ‘proper’ speech is appallingly negative. (Schuster 66)

The errorless use of Standard English is not only a daunting goal for many students, but it is also an inaccurate representation of our everyday language and will often sound out of place and forced in more casual situations. When we insist that students use “proper” English in all contexts, they become less communicative of their actual thoughts and feelings as their focus shifts from the “what” to the “how.” For young writers, criticism on their grammar and usage translates to criticism of their ideas. Therefore, we must allow students the opportunity to express themselves without this overwhelming hinderance. By forcing them to conform their language to our expectations in all situations we also facilitate a breakdown of the students’ cultural makeup in addition to the loss of meaning in communication.

What do our students speak?

In classrooms throughout the United States, there is a wide variety of dialects and languages spoken. We have students who are learning English for the first time, homes that are not English speaking, and unique blends of first languages and English. Along with this, students pick up the unique dialects from the region. “We can bewail the fact that there are expressions that divide native speakers of English from one another [. . .], but it is impossible to escape that fact” (Schuster 55). Whether we like it or not, each person’s language varies from

the next; meaning there is no “standard” in our everyday speech. What is not spoken on a daily, informal, basis is the Standard English to which we aspire our young writers to attain. Schuster explains, “I speak a dialect, you speak a dialect, all God’s children speak dialects” (62). Weaver also addresses this point, explaining, “since everyone is associated with a particular regional or social group, everyone speaks a dialect” (239). It boils down to the fact that none of us actually speak “Standard English” on a daily basis or without a good deal of concentration and forethought. We all speak a different variation of English based on where we live, who we are around, and a multitude of other factors. Therefore, we must recognize the differences among our “informal” speech and seek to differentiate between times when either type of speech is most appropriate.

What does our language say about us?

Within each student’s speech we will find a deep and personal connection with their culture and home. Students who grow up in a home that primarily speaks Spanish will carry a strong Spanish accent as well as interweave Spanish words into English sentences. Even students who don’t know their parents’ native language will often pick up on pronunciation patterns of a language that they do not speak. For instance, an 11th grade student, A, in my southern West Virginia classroom has a mother whose first language is Spanish. Upon immigrating to the United States, her mother stopped using her native language in her home and only spoke Spanish when speaking to her family in Chicago. Now, although her mother only speaks English at home, A has a very strong Latino accent. What makes this unique is that A does not know Spanish; she struggles to learn it in her foreign language elective! Yet, this dialect, the inversion of sentences, her pronunciation, and unusual phrasing illustrate unique characteristics about her home and heritage. “We must begin by respecting the students’ own

dialect” (Schuster 63). Dialects are not randomized, illogical creations of the student’s mind, and they do not represent a lack of intelligence. They are made from the same foundations as the students themselves, from their homes and their surroundings. So, is it worth it to correct her when she says “For why?” rather than simply asking “Why?” Correcting her inverted syntax would only serve to impose on her a notion that while her meaning was effectively conveyed in her natural dialect, it is inherently wrong because it demonstrates *her* culture rather than the *expected* culture.

When we ask students to stop using their natural dialect, we are asking them to give up a part of their culture as well as their identity. The slight idiosyncrasies in A’s speech that may go against the “Standard” in English are what deepen her connection with her mother and other Spanish speaking family members. Although A does not speak her mother’s native language, her acquired accent, inverted syntax, and Spanish-influenced diction provide an extra tie to her mother and her mother’s history and heritage that might otherwise be lost. It is in striking contrast to the southern Appalachian, “redneck” dialect that surrounds her, and that separation is something she shares with only her family. To ask A to surrender this aspect of her speech, we are asking her to not only conform to a strange new culture but are implying that her cultural language is subpar. In reality, it is a unique characteristic that she shares with only the closest to her although it does set her apart from her more southerly accented peers.

In addition to culture, language celebrates the historical foundations of a group of people. For instance, speakers of Appalachian English can trace their dialect to English proper, with pronunciations and colloquialisms going as far back as Middle, and even Old, English. Wylene Dial explains in the article “The Dialect of the Appalachian People” that the language in southern Appalachia should be viewed more as archaic rather than incorrect or non-Standard:

“Many of the expressions heard throughout the region today can be found in the centuries-old works of some of the greatest English authors: Alfred, Chaucer, Shakespeare, and the men who contributed to the King James version of the Bible, to cite but a few.” With more careful study and thoughtfulness, similar statements can be said of all dialects, as language builds and alters when cultures and civilizations form and evolve. Creole and Cajun dialects reflect their French settlers, and areas in Pennsylvania show off Dutch heritage through dialect among many others. Sadly, this part of history is often lost as we ignore it in our classrooms.

English teachers aren’t here just to correct errors.

Language dialects are a strong link to historical foundations that we threaten to wipe out as we attempt to force Standard English on all students across the United States. “Rather than follow the correctionist approach, they observe the contrast between the *rules* of the students’ dialect (called *home speech*) and the rules of standard English (*school speech*)” (Schuster 64). Teachers must employ contrastive analysis, in which “the teacher draws on the linguistic insights that all language is patterned and that dialects systematically contrast with one another” (Weaver 242). When teachers employ contrastive analysis, they do more than simply “correct” student papers during assessment. Instead, the teacher seeks to identify patterns in student language and how this compares not only to the standard but also to their peers. Through this process, teachers and students can achieve a deeper understanding of individual dialects, the influences upon them, and how expressions can translate from one dialect to another. In doing so, teachers and students gain a deeper appreciation for individuality, culture, and heritage and avoid marginalizing an ever-growing portion of the classroom.

This true multi-cultural appreciation will translate to other cultures and dialects as students explore the languages around them, looking at differences and patterns rather than

mistakes and corrections. “Students are not expected to use school speech on all occasions – we all vary our speech somewhat, depending on the occasion” (Schuster 64). In order to facilitate and embrace the cultural and personal connection with language, classroom teachers must teach and encourage code-switching within the classroom. “In *code-switching*, students learn to choose the language style to fit the context – to fit the time, place, audience, and communicative purpose” (Weaver 242). In classrooms that do not teach and utilize code-switching, it is assumed that all contexts require the same communication levels and language skills. However, this is not accurate in real-life situations. Once teachers open the conversation about language and employ contrastive analysis, students can begin to think consciously of how they use language. Students will then realize that they are using language differently when they speak to their parents, teachers, and friends. For each context, students will use a different lexicon, different pronunciation, and different syntax, all unknowingly. Teachers and students must therefore approach student writing and dialect as a comparative study rather than a basic assessment. It is through contrastive analysis and instruction on code-switching that teachers will bring to light how students already implement these and the powerful effects they can have once they begin to knowledgeably use language to fit each context.

Once students are familiar and comfortable with communication expectations in the classroom, they can begin to understand and appreciate how various language situations call for different levels of appropriateness. As students become increasingly conscious of rhetorical situations and the expectations for them in each, they will feel more comfortable and confident in code-switching without prompting. Weaver suggests, “When your students are writing their own essays and assignments, have them discuss what kind of language serves their goals and the expectations of the audience” (252). After modeling such, students will then begin to automatize

the process and will make such decisions without needing guidance. The ultimate goal of the English classroom is for students to effectively communicate in an appropriate manner depending upon the context. Students should leave their high school English classrooms confident that they can communicate with their future professors, bosses, and other superiors as easily and effectively as they can with their peers.

Therefore, prior to leaving high school, students must have experience making these rhetorical decisions independently. Our students must be allowed the freedom to discover what they need to accomplish in writing and what grammatical choices would help them achieve this. “Standard English [. . .] is usually appropriate for the reports or test essays students write. However, in narratives with dialogue, vernacular English is surely an appropriate choice” (Weaver 252). Yet, even suggestions as such can be limiting to a student’s personal voice. Hand in hand with Standard English, we teach our students to stick to third person voices in writing, completely eliminating the student from the essay, seeking to make the author omniscient. This too limits the students as they write, causing them to focus more distinctly on diction and syntax rather than what they are truly trying to communicate. Schuster points out the effect this has on the tone and overall feel of the paper: “Even in the *best* student research papers, the voice too often seems to be coming from a nonperson” (106). By forcing students to adhere strictly to the “rules” we set before them but often do not follow ourselves nor do professional writers, we are eliminating their voice and individuality. We must allow our students the freedom and opportunity to discover what is best for each situation. Else, we are simply creating automatons, not writers.

Allowing students the freedom to develop their own rhetorical voices will open a new ease of communication for students as they anticipate different communication situations and

even gain a new appreciation for different writing styles. Many students who are more traditionally trained today often find difficulty relating to authors such as Zora Neale Hurston or Mark Twain who freely express dialect in their works through characters such as Janie or Huck. Much the same, students who have not gained a good understanding of standard English will also struggle with textbook samples as well as essays and speeches from more formal situations. Through the open conversation of dialect and vernaculars, students will be able to not only appreciate different writers' techniques but also find inspiration and a deeper understanding of the many functions of various forms of language. Students should be shown how formal language should be used in a job interview but more conversational language is most fitting for a family reunion. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to utilize contrastive analysis and instruct their students on how to move their vernacular to the so-called standard.

Once students find an ease in the communication gap between dialects, they will be able to express ideas and open up to not only their peers but also the adults with whom they interact. When students are allowed to write freely and make their own rhetorical decisions, without fear of criticism or punishment for straying from the norm, they feel more confident in truly expressing themselves, exploring new ideas, and writing out of their comfort zone. However, when teachers and classes focus more solely on the method in which students express their ideas and how that adheres to traditional grammar, students feel less freedom to experiment, which will hinder their writing as a whole. Students are inhibited from expressing themselves in their most natural means as they feel boxed in due to the fear straying from the norm. "Premature attention to rules may inhibit creativity and cause students to 'play it safe'" (Schuster xv). When students are "playing it safe," they are not reaching or growing, which is the goal of all educators. "Given that kids already know most the important rules of the native language by the

time they enter school, why is it that so many teachers continue to teach *grammar*” (Schuster 6). When we consider that students have this prior knowledge long before reaching our classrooms, it seems ridiculous to include such heavy emphasis in our curriculum. If we focus our courses and our students on grammar rather than rhetoric, we are not successfully teaching them anything new, our students are not growing, and learning is not taking place.

Students should be encouraged to focus more on the what not the how of communication. However, to get our students there, teachers must prioritize their concerns as well. “In responding to student writing, always put content first *and* second” (Schuster 104). After all, the goal of writing, and speaking for that matter, is to convey thoughts, feelings, convictions, and confusions. And for some students, the best way for them to do so may be through their vernacular. With that in mind, teachers should read student samples without pen in hand, without marking each and every error, mistake, unusual wording, with an open mind to hear the student’s voice, and with a focus on what the student is trying to convey, not on the grammar selection. From there, teachers should analyze student writing--not necessarily assess by accumulating the number of errors per page. This means to look for patterns and connections to the vernacular while assessing the effectiveness of the student’s message based on his or her intended audience. Thus, teachers must allow students to have more liberty in establishing their writing voice.

In my classroom, we say “y’all.”

When should students be introduced to code-switching and the idea that their vernacular should not be shamed? Throughout my public education, my Appalachian dialect was regarded as not only incorrect but also a sign of ignorance. When I went on to college, also in southern West Virginia, I felt ignorant with every exaggerated long vowel sound or use of “y’all.” I

struggled in class discussions because I thought I would be looked down upon, thought of as uneducated, and laughed out of the English department. I anguished when I had to speak to my professors, concerned that somehow my language would reflect on my capabilities and place doubt in their minds. This same fear carried into my graduate career. In my first online course, I was required to video chat with class members from Ohio and other northern states. Within my first sentences introducing myself, I apologized for my accent and speech. My first few writings for the course were very rigid and therefore bland because I was so conscientious about my grammar and word choice. However, lucky for me, I soon found a refreshing change from my expectations in the course. We were encouraged to embrace our natural language, to allow our voices to shine within our writings. Because of that reassurance, I found myself engaging more completely with the assignments and courses and began thinking more about the content and less about the words I was selecting.

In my Sophomore English classroom, I teach both “formal” writing and narrative writing. We start with the formal research paper, to which I have remained true to the English teacher form, banning first and second person pronouns, contractions, and slang. In the second half of the year, we write our less formal personal narrative. In between, we have shorter writings that vary from daily journal entries to short compositions. Each year, we discuss what is expected of each type of writing and how they may or may not incorporate slang depending on assignment and situation. We discuss words such as “ain’t:” where they originate, what they mean, and when they should or should not use them. My students are always fascinated when I reveal to them that it is acceptable to say “ain’t” or “y’all” if it is done so appropriately and in the right context. And each year, I am criticized by my colleagues for such conversations.

However, students need to understand their own language before they are able to understand the language we expect them to write, and using contrastive analysis facilitates this learning in the most organic manner for them. We need to spend time really exploring our own language, in oral conversations, in writing, and even in more modern communications. Students are assigned to keep a “word log.” For a full week, students are to record any words or phrases they find typical to their vernacular but outside of the Standard English norm. This includes instances in which they shorten word endings or create unusual contractions. At the close of the week, we have an open discussion on their findings, discussing what words are colloquially inspired and which are generational. Furthering the assignment, students may choose to compare their findings to the language of their parents and their peers to find what influences have affected them.

In order to help students practice codeswitching, we take their most common form of communication: the text message. Students select a text of substance, one that has a clear and definable message. Then, they must alter that message so that it would then be acceptable for their mothers/fathers/guardians to read. Next, students must make another revision, making the message acceptable for a teacher or principal to receive. After students have three separate texts, they analyze the changes they have made. What abbreviations did they extend? What words did they change? Did they alter the syntax of the message? Students then write a reflective piece on the changes they have made and what thought process spurred them.

I have increasingly become aware that in teaching code-switching, I will also need to discuss the different expectations from teachers and other professionals. There are still teachers who subscribe to the “old school” line of thinking. These teachers would admonish me for encouraging students to use their “uneducated” speech, much less to put it into writing. I don’t

intend to paint these teachers in a negative light. In fact, I don't really blame them for their point of view. For years, our area has been viewed as one of lower standards, worse education, and higher ignorance. We've been the "dumb hillbillies" of the United States for so many years the stigma is one that is difficult to shake. Our choice in language as well as our pronunciation of particular sounds is often portrayed in the media and society as one of the unlearned. It is because of this stigma that our teachers seek to "correct" this dialect and keep our students from facing a preconceived disadvantage. The teachers here, and really the same is for all areas where the dialect is strong, fear that we are hindering our students if we allow them to write in their vernacular. I certainly do not want my students to feel the same shame and fear of admonishment that I felt throughout my various levels of education. I do not want my students to receive the blank stare of disdain as they speak to new acquaintances of non-Appalachian origin.

Yet, at the same time, I want my students to find their voice, their own personal writing style, rather than simply becoming another cookie-cutter, run of the mill writer in their standard English course. Therefore, it is necessary that students have a firm understanding of rhetorical situation, audience, and purpose. While there certainly are times in which a closer adherence to Standard English will serve their rhetorical situation best, in others, it is much more necessary that my students utilize their dialect to best reach their audience. Using shorter as well as more sustained pieces of writing, students examine their compositions through a rhetorical analysis lens. Students must determine their audience, assess if their language choices are suitable, and then evaluate if their language choices have added to or detracted from their purpose.

So where does that leave my classroom? Somewhere between "ain't" and "thusly." Focusing too heavily on the standard grammar that they only see in their textbooks and other

publications will set unrealistic and frustrating expectations for them. Yet, on the other hand, ignoring blatant issues such as “learnt” or “he don’t” may reinforce habits that do not accurately demonstrate the intelligence level of the student to an outsider. Adhering strictly to the traditional grammar instruction goes against my deeply rooted ties to my love of the Appalachian culture while completely breaking from said instruction lessens the chances of student success in their upcoming classes.

Therefore, it is essential that we teach code-switching. We cannot blatantly ignore the culture that our students have been raised in, nor can we mindfully place them at a professional disadvantage because of outdated yet still present stereotypes. It is our duty to have them grow as writers and to prepare them for the world outside of what they already know. To achieve both goals then, we have to teach a type of translation as we teach code-switching. Students write their initial responses in the vernacular, as if they were telling their peers. Then, after identifying patterns in their speech, students must translate their writings into standard English, making it appropriate for others who are not of the Appalachian dialect. After reading a portion of their textbook, students translate the formal, “standard” English into their vernacular. We cannot ignore the standard anymore than we can ignore our culture; our students have to be prepared to communicate with those in and outside of our communities. To neglect either side of this extreme is to let our students down.

Through careful study of the vast differences in language throughout our country and within our communities, we can open the door to discussing individuality and the need to show understanding and acceptance of personal and cultural differences. Once English teachers and academic institutions loosen the reigns on the expectations of informal speech in the classroom, they will be able to strengthen the idea that language forms deep and significant bonds between

those who share it. “If breaking ‘rules’ leads to better writing, let students break them” (Schuster 104). Overall, our focus needs to be not how well our students can conform their writing to the norm but how well they can communicate to a diverse population.

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Major Assignment Design: The Academic Memoir

Writer's Memo

Dr. Reader,

Thank you for taking the time to look at my Major Assignment Design. I hope that my goal of introducing a new, meaningful, form of writing for my students with this assignment is clear and that you will get a glimpse of what an assignment looks like in my classroom.

Initially, I designed this project for my 10th Grade Honors course in rural Summers County, West Virginia., although it could be expanded to higher level courses as well. I feel like these students are the most sophisticated of my bunch and the most likely to be able to initiate this new assignment. Eventually, to some extent, I would like to incorporate a version of this assignment into different courses, based on the maturity level of my kids.

The annotations provided are meant to support the theory and philosophy behind my pedagogical decisions. While they are cumbersome in nature at time, this formatting will be most beneficial in my classroom as it aligns to my normal lesson plans. This method also allows for an answer within the document rather than a lengthy justification prior to the plan as often seen in rationales. I have aimed my remarks in these annotations towards teachers in public schools (teachers such as myself) as well as members of administration who regularly review our lesson plans.

I chose to do an academic memoir because I want my kids to not only experience something new—a fresh look at writing—but I also wanted them to see how the events of their lives are connected to larger, more complex issues. I know that when I completed the assignment in a previous course, I learned a lot about myself and the overall topic that I was

discussing. I found myself understanding more about why I act the way that I do and why I make the choices that I do. It was a catharsis.

I want my students to gain what I did from the experience. I want them to learn about themselves as they also learn about a pivotal issue in their lives. This is one of those moments when a cliché is appropriate – knowledge is power. As my students learn more about themselves and see how their lives have been impacted by this larger issue or global topic, they will gain strength. They will realize what they are able to overcome and accomplish and how they are maturing.

Additionally, I want my kids to learn that there is a way to incorporate both academic and narrative writing into one piece. I want them to recognize this genre as a valid way of writing that they can use in various academic situations. This is a necessity to make writing meaningful and for the author to put themselves in the work, to create their voice, and to establish themselves through their writing (Whitaker 3).

I'm mostly interested in how this type of writing (academic memoir) will benefit students as they make a deeper connection to a large societal issue. In my decade of teaching in the area, I have found that my students, all too often, believe that the issues they are dealing with are isolated within the area, contained within the mountains. However, this project will allow them to see how their personal experiences relate to those outside the area. It will be interesting to see how this connection will influence their writing styles and capabilities.

I want to do this as a culminating project, an end of the year top off to their portfolio. In their 10th grade year, we cover research writing and the autobiography extensively, although separately. Additionally, the students will have read and written about various stories, novels,

and poems. These short writings will have aided them in using and discussing textual evidence as well as general writing skills, all preparing them for this project.

This project will allow the students, after continued experience in research writing and exploring writing on a metacognitive level, to combine the different genres they are already confident in completing.

I feel as though within this project I have justified my classroom writing assignments. I had someone look over my unit and notes to make sure that I had fully explained my reasons behind my activities and methods. She told me that not only had I done so but that I also impressed her. As a colleague, she knows what I do in my classroom on any given day. When she commented that what I have in the MAD is actually what I would do in my classroom, I felt pretty good. It's good to know that I would have something of this rigor and quality easily incorporated in my classroom. Like many of my colleagues, I worry frequently that what I do in class is not enough and that I am not challenging my students. So, in doing this assignment, I've found that I not only have the capability of creating meaningful and rigorous assignments but that these assignments are seen and used in my regular classroom.

Thank you,

Martha Holt

Daily Schedule

Week 1

Date	Journal Entry	In-class Activities	Assessment
Mon 4/24	Describe a story from your life that may have an impact on another person. ¹	Sample readings ² : - JD Vance “Chapter 1” of <i>Hillbilly Elegy</i> . The class will discuss ³ how the author is able to convey his/her story while also incorporating research. ⁴	Participation in class discussion.
Tue 4/25	What central issue or topic does your story revolve around?	Sample readings: - M. Holt ⁵ “Verbal and Emotional Abuse: Words Really Do Hurt” The class will discuss and compare how the author incorporates personal narrative along with research and how this differs from typical research papers. It is at this point that I will introduce them to the term “academic memoir” and discuss its attributes and the benefits of writing in such a way. We will discuss how they may have encountered this type of writing before, but were unaware of the term for it.	Participation in class discussion

¹ Each day, the students will complete a bell-ringer journal writing to prime them for the day’s work. Reflective and open-ended journals have shown to be beneficial to students’ focus and writing abilities. “They are more willing to risk making interpretations and receiving criticisms in class, are working more closely with the texts they read, and are more willing to challenge each other, the instructor, and the sources they read. Finally, they write more cleanly, more clearly, and more persuasively than previous students” (qtd. In Bazerman 63).

² The students will read examples from the academic memoir genre, from both published and unpublished sources. These are meant to help students draw inspiration. “A very important practice is to lead students in reading and discussing samples of writing like those the students plan to write” (Whitaker 5). As this is a very different type of writing than the students have encountered before, I feel that it is necessary to provide them with a range of examples so that they can see the genre in use and better understand the expectations set for them. The samples all come from Appalachian authors, in order to further inspire students.

³ To foster discussion amongst all students, as they read, the students will, as previously instructed and modeled, write quotes from the text as well as follow up, open-ended questions. After reading, the students will share and discuss their questions in a whole group setting (Wilens). When students are encouraged to write as they read, they are less likely to forget their “lightbulb” moments and will provide more genuine discussion to the reading.

⁴ It is worth noting that there is a lack of homework within this module (with one exception only to provide students a “safe space” to write on their own time), which is purposeful. With research and theories both supporting and discounting the benefits of homework (DeNisco), I have found that my students tend to not benefit from a traditional homework assignment. Instead, homework in my rural classroom includes studying for their weekly vocabulary quizzes, rereading, and working on or completing unfinished classroom assignments.

⁵ I have chosen to have the students read a sample I wrote for another class. This is one of the examples. However, I would use discretion and chose another piece depending on the students in my class (as it is a rather personal piece and a small community). No matter the selection, I want to include a piece that I wrote as I feel that it is often more meaningful when students read what their teachers have written. I often use myself as a model and will either share what I have done or will write along with the kids. This helps to establish a rapport with them (Whitaker) and allows them to see the work as more meaningful and not as “busy work” because I am willing to complete it as well. “In order to grow as readers, writers, and thinkers, our students need to watch us do precisely that” (Urbanski 51).

Wed 4/26	What group(s) of people do you think could benefit from your story? Explain.	<p>Sample readings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chris Offutt “Why I Will Always Write About Appalachia” <p>The students will annotate the sample reading, highlighting narrative in one color and research in another. The students will discuss how the author creates a balance in the two genres.⁶</p> <p>The last 15 minutes of class, the teacher will pass out a checklist that will help the students as they write their paper and will be the basis for self-evaluation and assessment (taking the place of a traditional rubric). The class will discuss the expectations and requirements for the paper and review yesterday’s paper through completing the checklist.⁷</p> <p>For homework: students will narrow down topics, focusing on experiences that have either exemplified a particular personality trait of theirs or shaped and molded their personalities. This may be done in any manner of prewriting that will suit the students’ needs, using from their store of methods we have practiced in class.</p>	Annotation Participation in class discussion
Thurs 4/27	Explain what concerns you have about sharing your story.	The students will be assigned to write their narrative, without stopping for the entire class period. ⁸	Prewriting Homework Completion of messy draft

⁶ At the beginning of the year, we cover how to annotate a text, practicing in gradually larger pieces. We practice with a variety of different goals and discuss the use of annotations. Additionally, the students are aware that I am assessing them based on the level of thought and engagement with the text (Stuart). They must do more than simply highlight and underline.

⁷ Because of the high number of students in my class and because of negative feedback and experiences with rubrics, I have moved to using checklists to guide students’ assessment of their work. On this, I have listed the qualities of a well-written paper, specifically those qualities we identify in the sample readings. “Sometimes checklists based on samples are formed to serve as a resource when students confer with each other or with the teacher; the checklist can be useful to students as they revise their work” (Whitaker). I have found that my students respond better to a checklist than a rubric and have a better understanding of what is required of them. I then adapt that into a qualitative rubric in which I had points possible and points earned (Filene). Because I will share the checklist, which shows all of the necessary skills the kids should be illustrating, with the students, I will use the rubric primarily for grading. The students using the checklist to review a previous class reading will add authenticity as well as a deeper understand of what is expected of their writing.

⁸ Early in the year, the class reads “Shitty First Drafts” by Lamott. The students are always encouraged to write with abandon, knowing that much of what they write may be of no use for later drafts. However, the goal is for them to get as many of their ideas out on paper, almost serving more as a brainstorming activity. We call these “messy” drafts so that the kids do not feel like they have to commit to what they have on paper at that time.

Fri 4/28	Describe struggles or accomplishments in completing the messy draft.	Using the drafts from the previous day, the students will annotate, isolating portions they would like to keep, removing unnecessary parts, and identifying portions that they want to expand upon.	Annotation of messy draft
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Week 2

Date	Journal Entry	In-class Activities	Assessment
Mon 5/1	What concerns do you have about researching?	Using their drafts and journals from the previous week, the students will isolate the society/cultural topic/issue that relates to their experience and which they will be researching. Students will create questions to guide their research, including defining, statistics, etc. Students will share their questions with the class, or in small groups. ⁹	List of questions Participation in discussion
Tue 5/2	In previous experiences researching, what problems have you encountered? What would help make the process easier for you?	Using their questions from the previous day, the students will begin researching their topics. They will be required to use at least one source from EBSCOHost and then 3 other sources from reliable internet/book sources. ¹⁰	Observation of research Checking progress (should acquire 1 st source)
Wed 5/3	Explain how your first day researching went.	Students will continue their research on their topic. They are to record their sources, questions, and information on a log. Formatting is up to the students, but they must include correct MLA citation, particular research question, information, and quotes from the source. Some examples include expanded	Observation Progress check (should acquire 2 nd source)

⁹ I have taught research using different methods. In those times, and in reading from other professionals, I have found that students become more invested and interested in their research when they devise their own questions. This will absolve students from being forced to answer questions they already know or searching for answers that they don't really want to know. Of course, I will be reviewing their questions, and we have discussed at length what constitutes a "good" question. However, the students can feel free to cross off or add to their questions as they research, giving them more ownership of their project. As Urbanski states, we must give the students "control over their own thinking, reading, and thinking about what they read" (9).

¹⁰ This is the second major research paper, discounting many smaller research projects throughout the year. The students have become well versed in what constitutes a reliable source, where to search, and how to tailor their keywords to aid in finding appropriate information from both Google searches and EBSCOhost (Heick). I have included the EBSCOhost database as a means to aid them in finding published academic papers. As students work, I will be observing student progress and providing assistance as necessary.

		outline, three column notes, or charting/boxing. ¹¹	
Thurs 5/4	What have you learned about your topic so far?	Continued research.	Observation Progress check (should have 3 rd source)
Fri 5/5	What problems have you had? What do you need to do over the weekend in order to begin drafting Monday? ¹²	Continued/completing research. At the end of class, the class will look at the checklist and see what they have prepared for and what will be required of them during the drafting process. Through class discussion/interaction, will be create a needs chart for the class, listing what they still need to accomplish, how I am able to help, as well as any physical necessities, including materials or additional time. This will remain on the board as we continue for reference, review, and additions. ¹³	Observation Progress check (should have 4 th /final source)

Week 3

Date	Journal Entry	In-class Activities	Assessment
Mon 5/8	What helps you draft a paper?	Students will use their research and their messy drafting to begin organizing and drafting their papers. Students must produce a well-	Observation Outline

¹¹ While students do have freedom of formatting, I have provided them with a sample log. This is meant only to illustrate a way, or two, in which they may choose to record their information in a succinct and efficient method. However, I choose to give the students freedom of formatting because I have found in my own frustrations as a student, that every student has a different method for recording notes. Throughout the year, I have provided them with a wide variety of options. The log I have provided for example has been the most successful for students in organizing and completing their research. It also tends to make their research move a little more smoothly as they know what in particular they need to look for.

¹² Self-reflection is a major theme in my journals. I want my students to think about what they are thinking and doing in class. This is how I've included metacognitive writing for my students, by guiding them with questions that make them assess their own writing and progress. They need to be continually aware of their progress, and the journals give the students an opportunity to speak freely about what they are doing and how they feel about their work. This also serves as a way to encourage time on task and as a self-check for the students to monitor their own progress.

¹³ The students will be reminded to refer to the checklist as they work. However, there will be time for the students to do a self-evaluation and discuss as a class. This will allow students to give feedback to the teacher, allowing me to add days if needed or to review particular strategies if needed. The students will have the opportunity to share successes and setbacks with their peers. This will also allow me to offer additional support and guidance to students.

		organized outline that balances narrative and research. ¹⁴ Once the outline is complete, students will begin writing.	
Tue 5/9	Compare writing this paper to writing a typical research paper.	Students will continue drafting. ¹⁵	Observation Progress check (Each student's progress will differ. This should be a measure of how the student is moving through the project).
Wed 5/10	What issues are you having in completing your draft?	Continued drafting.	Observation Progress check (Each student's progress will differ. This should be a measure of how the student is moving through the project).
Thurs 5/11	What do you think is the strongest part of your draft?	Continued drafting.	Observation Progress check (Each student's progress will differ. This should be a

¹⁴ Again, formatting is left up to the students. I will not require that the students have a particular number of points, subpoints, etc. or that they use phrases or sentences. The goal here is that the students simply have a "map" to follow, to keep themselves on track as they write. Earlier in the year, we discuss different ways to prewrite and how each own has benefits in helping the students keep their paper organized and on topic.

¹⁵ While students are drafting, I will be working with them individually, having brief conferences with them at their desks, checking up on their progress, and offering support and assistance when needed. This is supported in Urbanski's chapter as she states that the "easiest, and in many ways most productive, {conference} is to walk around and talk to students as they work" (133). I use these brief conversations to identify and assist students who are having difficulty, need more research, or have something their classmates could benefit from.

			measure of how the student is moving through the project).
Fri 5/12	Before someone reads this draft, what disclaimer would you like to give them?	Continued/completed drafting. ¹⁶	Observation Progress check (Students should be either finished with initial draft or near finished).

Week 4¹⁷

Date	Journal Entry	In-class Activities	Assessment
Mon 5/15	What do you usually focus on when revising/editing?	The students will print two copies of their drafts, keeping one and turning in another. <i>Today, they will work on their drafts.</i> The students must also refer to their checklist as they mark. Each student will receive different colored highlighters. They will identify and mark mechanics errors or rewording substitutions with yellow, possible deletions in pink, exceptional passages in green,	Marked drafts

¹⁶ This time may seem excessive in drafting at school. However, as the students are working with a new genre, I did not want them to feel pressured by time. As they are required to interweave narrative and research, they are given ample time to work in class in order to have multiple individual conferences with me. Also, as this is a rural area, my students tend to have limited access to internet, and as a low-socioeconomic area, many of my kids are employed in the afternoons and will work into the later hours of the evening. Because of this, I feel that it is most prudent to have my students complete the bulk of their work in the classroom rather than at home where they may not have the support that they often need. Additionally, the students are free to share and work with one another as they work. They are encouraged to work collaboratively but organically. On any given day, a passerby will notice that my “room has a low buzz as students write, or turn to one another for a quick read or opinion” (Urbanski 135).

¹⁷ I have limited the schedule to four weeks to keep students interested. I have found that students, when given a strict timeline, will adhere to that time, and when not, will take as much time as possible. When units go further than four weeks, students will become disinterested, bored, with the assignments.

		and passages needing reworked/reorganized/or expanded on in blue. ¹⁸ For each highlighted marking, students should identify suggestions or make remarks. ¹⁹	
Tue 5/16	After reviewing your draft, how do you feel about it?	<i>Today, students will review one another's drafts</i> in the same manner they reviewed their own the previous day. ²⁰ The teacher will pass out the drafts, with names removed and replaced with identifying numbers. This is to allow students to feel more willing to make comments and suggestions under anonymity. After completing the marking, the students will return the paper to the teacher who will discuss the student's review of the paper with him/her.	Marked papers
Wed 5/17	How do you feel about the suggestions made by your classmate?	The students will use the class to review the suggestions and work on their drafts. Today, they should focus on correcting/changing anything marked yellow or pink. ²¹	Observation
Thurs 5/18	What do you think about this assignment? Is it something you	Completing revisions. Students will focus on blue markings and will return to checklist to help assess their paper as they work on revisions. ²²	Observation

¹⁸I'm adapting what Sommers states as the "four revision operations:" deletion, substitution, addition, and reordering (380). I wanted to include, though, editing strategies as well as having students identify what they have done well. At the same time, I did not want to overwhelm high-schoolers by having them look for too much. Therefore, I have adapted and combined addition and reordering and included substitution with the editing marks. I have color-coded the different types of errors so that as they rewrite and revise, the students will be able to identify and focus on one particular need at a time.

¹⁹ Students are required to make specific comments in order to foster better revision. When not provided with guidance in their feedback, students have a tendency to scan for basic errors rather than critiquing even their own work for clarity of thought and message.

²⁰ Although this is the first formal use of partners in the classroom, my classroom design is one that fosters collaboration amongst students during regular class assignments. "The pupils learn by doing, from each other, in groups, by talking" ("A Noisy Classroom"). During drafting, annotating, and researching, it is common to see students slide together, ask one another questions, or discuss their progress. Informal collaboration benefits students as it is not forced and is more open and organic. We use a written format versus oral as students are more likely to be honest with one another in writing rather than a face-to-face situation (Peterson). This is also why students are partnered anonymously with their names removed, and papers identified by a number.

²¹ Revision strategies have been broken up into different days in order to allow students time to focus and really consider the changes they need to make throughout their papers. "Thus, writers can concentrate on more than one objective at a time by developing strategies to sort out and organize their different concerns in successive cycles of revision" (Sommers 387). By separating the revision days, students are able to more effectively revise and edit their papers because they are not focusing on all of the needs at one time.

²² I have the students focus on the "errors" of their paper first so that they will be able to, hopefully, remove the distractions from their overall message. As students tend to focus on rewording and correcting when they are assigned to revise (Sommers), it is my hope that the students will be able to use the second day to work on making

	would like to revisit later?		
Fri 5/19	If you were the teacher, what grade would you give this paper? Justify your answer.	Students will complete work on their drafts and turn them in. This draft will be reviewed and marked by the teacher. It will receive a grade. However, it is not a “final” paper as it will be included in the student’s portfolio with their messy and marked drafts to be reviewed and revised once more later in the semester. ²³	Paper

certain that their message is clear and that they have fully expressed their ideas and message. This to me, is the most important part of the piece, and what I focus more heavily on grading.

²³ Here, I am attempting what Wilcox refers to as an active portfolio. I do not want my students to feel as though their papers are finished just because they have been turned in. I want them to think of them as works in progress. By this, I mean that I encourage my students to keep their papers for use later, to revise as they grow both as people and as students and writers (36). Maybe, one day, they will be able to share their papers with their students, as I did in this lesson.

Student Assignment Handout

Dear Students (and Parents),

As we wrap up the school year, I am looking forward to including some different writing methods and styles.

I would like to introduce you to a genre of writing that you may be unfamiliar with: the academic memoir. In this writing, we will be exploring personal experiences and how they relate to a larger societal discussion. In doing so, you will combine personal narrative, such as in your autobiography, and academic writing, such as in your research paper.

We will begin by looking at samples from this genre, including one from an author that I believe you know quite well! I hope these will help inspire you as we begin this four week unit.

After reading samples, I hope that you will have an experience that you would like to focus your narrative on. We will use our “messy draft” technique that we have used throughout the year to help you get all of your story out on paper (or at least a good start to it!).

Then we will move to research. You will create research questions (just like in our research paper) to guide you as you find information on the societal topic that relates to your narrative. You must find a minimum of four sources, including one from EBSCOhost.

Next, we will combine that information with your narrative, working to blend the two styles in a logical and organized manner.

Finally, we will use our blind revisers to help us strengthen our work before adding it to our portfolio.

I believe that you will find this assignment very beneficial; I know I did when I completed one not too long ago. It will help as you work on discovering yourself, your qualities, and what has brought you to this point in life. Additionally, you will find how you fit into a larger discussion, something many of us struggle to see in our everyday lives.

I am excited to see how you progress as writers and work with this somewhat challenging yet interesting genre!

Ms. Martha Holt

Research Log Sample²⁴

Guiding Question	Information/Data/Quote	Citation

²⁴ This is only a sample. The students will be allowed to use any type of log that best fits their learning style. They must, though, have the citation, questions, and information on a record of some sort.

Checklist²⁵

Information:

- _____ I introduced and explained the context of my sources.
- _____ My purpose is clear.
- _____ I have expressed my narrative in a clear and concise way.
- _____ There is a clear link between my narrative and my research.
- _____ There is a smooth transition from my narrative voice and my research.
- _____ My language is clear, concise, and expressive.
- _____ There is a clear message that my audience can gain from my paper.
- _____ The research helps to establish my purpose and strengthen my point.

Organization:

- _____ My paper is logical.
- _____ My paper reads smoothly, with appropriate transitions.
- _____ My moves from narrative to research make sense.

Mechanics:

- _____ My sources on the Works Cited page are in the correct formatting.
- _____ I have cited (in parenthesis) sources in every body paragraph.
- _____ I have cited a source (in parenthesis) after every sentence that has information from the source.
- _____ I have at least one direct quote in the paper.
- _____ I have used “quotation marks” around direct quotes and cited the source after the quote.
- _____ My sources are cited by either the author’s last name or the title of the article.
- _____ I have proofread.

²⁵ I have not included the points for the qualitative rubric because I believe that is at the discretion of every teacher. It will vary each year as the number of assignments and the number of points per assignment vary. However, the checklist is ordered descending in importance, with the highest number of points going towards information and content, then organization, and finally mechanics. I explain this to my students when we review the guidelines, both at the start of the unit as well as they move into revision and editing.

Standards²⁶

WV Next Generation Standard	Date(s) Used	Explanation of standard and alignment to Common Core State Standards
ELA.10.R.C1.5	4/24 – 4/26	determine two central ideas of an informational text and analyze their development over the course of the informational text, including how they emerge and are shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the informational text. (CCSS RI.9-10.2)
ELA.10.R.C1.6	4/24 – 4/26	analyze how the author unfolds an analysis or series of complex ideas or events in informational texts, including the order in which the points are made, how they are developed and interact. (CCSS RI.9-10.3)
ELA.10.R.C2.6	4/24 – 4/26	determine an author's point of view or purpose in an informational text and evaluate how an author uses rhetoric to advance that point of view or purpose. (CCSS RI.9-10.6)
ELA.10.W.C9.3	4/27 – 4/28 5/8 - 5/12	write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details and well-structured event sequences. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> engage and orient the reader by setting out a problem, situation or observation, establishing one or multiple point(s) of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; create a smooth progression of experiences or events. use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, description, reflection and multiple plot lines, to develop experiences, events and/or characters. use a variety of techniques to sequence events so that they build on one another to create a coherent whole to build upon a particular outcome. use precise words and phrases, telling details and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting and/or characters. provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on what is experienced, observed or resolved over the course of the narrative. (CCSS W.9-10.3)
ELA.10.W.C10.1	4/27 – 4/28 5/8 - 5/12	produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in Text Types and Purposes.) (CCSS W.9-10.4)
ELA.10.W.C10.2	5/15 – 5/19	develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting or trying a new approach, focusing on addressing what is most significant for a specific purpose and audience. (Editing for conventions

²⁶ The WV Next Generation Standards are derived from the CCSS. The corresponding CCSS is listed in the description of the specific standards of learning ("English Language Arts"). I have listed the dates that correspond most appropriately to the standards for this unit. There will always be "teachable moments" in the classroom in which we cover other standards. However, these are the focus of the unit.

		should demonstrate command of all Language objectives up to and including grade 10.) (CCSS W.9-10.5)
ELA.10.W.C11.1	5/1 – 5/5	conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation. (CCSS W.9-10.7)
ELA.10.W.C11.2	5/1 – 5/5	gather relevant information from multiple authoritative print and digital sources, using advanced searches effectively; assess the usefulness of each source in terms of task, purpose and audience answering the research question; integrate information into the text selectively to maintain the flow of ideas, avoiding plagiarism and following a standard format for citation. (CCSS W.9-10.8)
ELA.10.W.C11.3	5/1 – 5/5 5/8 – 5/12	draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection and research. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • apply <i>grade 10 Reading objectives</i> to literature (e.g., “Analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work [e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare]”). • apply <i>grade 10 Reading objectives</i> to literary nonfiction (e.g., “Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is valid and the evidence is relevant and sufficient; identify false statements and fallacious reasoning”). (CCSS W.9-10.9)
ELA.10.SL.C13.1	5/15 – 5/19	initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas. • work with peers to set rules for democratic collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines and individual roles as needed. • propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others’ perspectives into the discussion; and clarify, verify or challenge ideas and conclusions. • respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, analyze points of agreement and disagreement and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented. (CCSS SL.9-10.1)

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Verbal and Emotional Abuse: Words Really Do Hurt

Dear Reader,

When I was first assigned the academic memoir, I immediately thought of sharing the story of my marriage. I have had a number of circumstances that have helped mold me into the person I am: growing up poor, being raised in Appalachia, losing my father at 15, sharing an unusual bond with my mother. Although each of these events and situations in my life did shape me into the individual I am, it was the disaster of a marriage that I endured, although briefly, that has changed me emotionally, physically, sexually, and psychologically. I knew that this was my chance to really get my story out, a story that I have not been able to completely verbalize in the years since it happened. Although this has been an exceptionally trying experience, I feel that I have benefitted from it more than I am even aware.

After getting the initial feedback on my brainstorming, I started to panic. I wondered if I would really be able to do it. Could I really put myself back into that situation, visualize and relive those moments, just so that I could get them on paper? I tried using the course daybook as an aid, but what helped me most was taking a day, turning off my phone, turning on some angry female country music, and writing it all out. I labelled sections, with the full intent of later deleting those labels, so that I could correctly order and incorporate the events that really stuck in my head. Before I knew it, I had 8 pages, single-spaced. So, I did have something to say. Now I just needed to make it coherent.

I started to gather sources, or tried to. I came up rather short as most of the research dealt with physical abuse, or how emotional and verbal abuse coincide with physical. I did not want to use these resources, although some were great, because I wanted to show that this type of abuse is real, even when it is inflicted without physical abuse. With a little extra digging, I found a couple of good resources that explored the effects of emotional and verbal abuse. And they said the same thing: there is little out there about this type of abuse.

This led me to my audience. Ultimately, I would like to have this published, on the internet or in print. I think my story could help someone dealing with the same thoughts and fears as myself. I'm not an expert, but sometimes it's nice just to know that you aren't alone. One of my sources, "He Never Hit Me," was this for me about two years ago. I had found the article online, and I remember thinking, "She gets it. Maybe I'm not crazy after all." So I sought to be as truthful and blunt as possible. I didn't want to sugarcoat, gloss over, or downplay what had happened or what I was feeling. If my story could help another woman deal with these feelings, it would make a little lemonade out of my life's lemons.

There were times when I had to put this paper aside, times when I would start shaking from the inside because it reawakened so many emotions. I got very frustrated at times because I couldn't remember exactly what was said or in what order something happened which made me question the validity of the entire paper. So, if there is detail lacking in some areas, please know that I did all I could. There are still some blocks that I can't quite get past.

Even though I know there are still many things for me to learn, from the moment I wrote this paper, I have begun to understand myself a little better, to know who I am and why I am the way I am. I find myself sticking up for others more, letting people know when they are being unkind, telling random people I encounter something nice, complimenting them because that may be the only nice thing they hear today. Each day, I try my best to compliment myself as well, to remind myself of positive attributes that I possess.

For many reasons, I enjoyed writing in this “new” genre. Before this semester, I had never heard of the academic memoir. Although I was hesitant and a little worried about the outcome, I think this is a form of writing I’d like to explore more, both personally and in my classroom. I’ve developed lesson plans for my classes and am looking forward to implementing them soon. This includes not only the academic memoir but also the multi-genre formatting I chose. My previously private writings, poems and journals, that I included in the paper lend an authenticity that a traditional term paper could not attain. They illustrate more completely what I was feeling at particular points in time.

No matter if I go further with this paper and no matter the grade I earned, I know that I have benefitted from writing this. I’m proud, not only of the writing, but of the fact that I got it out. I told about things that I couldn’t before, and that is such a relief.

Sincerely,

Martha Holt

Verbal and Emotional Abuse: Words Really Do Hurt

Broken

Fractured glass
reflects the fragments
of a girl
Broken.
Shattered bits
of a life
no more,
Jagged edges
beyond repair.
They may be
replaced,
but Never
will She
be whole
as the cracks
Remain.

A guest preacher at my church once started his sermon about being “broken” and described it as breaking the individual will of an animal or person. He talked of how humans break animals to tame them, force them into submission of their owners. Ron Meredith, President of Meredith Manor International Equestrian Centre, discourages trainers from “breaking” horses and explains that breaking a horse is not training it. He urges trainers to treat their animals with respect: “Let other people be the ones who jerk on horses and slap them around or hassle them until they've ‘learned’ something.”

So what does breaking a horse have to do with my marriage? According to my ex-husband, Ray, I didn’t know how to be a wife; I needed to be “trained on the job” so to speak. But there is no training program, no instruction manual for marriage. Instead, my husband took

to the task of breaking me. Several years after he left, I am still trying to put myself back together.

It starts out small.

It's in the tiniest of details that we can later look back and identify the "warning signs," but in the moment, they seem like minor problems that all couples face. Unfortunately for women like me, we aren't always aware of what is happening, how our spirit is being broken, little by little, and how we are losing control of ourselves.

The first time I noticed something off with Ray, I was going to the beach with some co-workers for the week. We had been together for about three months and were moving along rather swiftly. We were already telling each other we loved one another—a major development for me. Right after we got to the beach, I could tell something was wrong when I called him. He said it was nothing, but when I told him I was going for a drink with my friend, a woman more than 20 years older than me with children my age, he became irate. He let me know under no uncertain terms that it was inappropriate for me to go. I was acting like a "whore" and a "slut." What was I planning anyway? Did I really plan to cheat on him while I was there?

But this had less to do with my intentions and more to do with control. That's what abuse is about: control. In her literature review, Valerie Packota explores the far-reaching effects of verbal and emotional abuse and discusses its impacts within different cultures and the literary realm. Within the review, Packota emphasizes that abuse, in all forms, is about exerting control over the partner: "any relationship that consists of strategies to control or overpower another person must be considered maladaptive" (Packota). Like many women who find themselves in this type of situation, I couldn't see it at the time, but the whole scenario at the beach had

everything to do with controlling me. I was hundreds of miles away. He couldn't be sure of what I was doing and had to have some sort of say in the matter.

So that night, because I didn't want to lose him, I didn't go out with my friend. Instead, I spent the night on the beach, begging him to forgive me. But really, what had I done to need forgiveness? Nothing. I had done nothing but be slightly out of his grasp and control. In the end, he was able to achieve exactly what he wanted. I wonder now if this had turned out differently, if I hadn't conceded, would the rest of the relationship have been different? But I did. And Ray knew from that point on that he was in control.

Irrational jealousy will show itself more as time goes on.

Not long after the trip to the beach, I was assigned to student teach at the local middle and high schools. I had some trouble getting the middle school placement, but the education department worked with the school to find a teacher for me. I was excited as it was the end of my undergraduate career and was looking forward to getting some real experience in the classroom. But Ray wasn't happy. He told me that he didn't think I should be with Jarod, a longtime friend, at the high school because he didn't trust him. Ray said Jarod wasn't professional, and he didn't like me being there; I would get a bad name for working with him. He insisted that I do something about it.

So, again, I did just what Ray wanted. I called the education department and asked to get my placement changed. The rather annoyed secretary who had been working so patiently with me explained that because my placement had taken so long to get at the middle school, it was unlikely that I could get my placement changed. Ray wasn't happy with the placement, but there was nothing that could be done. After a number of arguments, in which he explained that I would never get a job after working with Jarod, he realized that this was actually beyond his

control. I couldn't change my placement and there was nothing he could do about it. I would be working alongside another man, which I assume was the actual cause of his irrational anger (I never got a clear answer as to why he was so upset by it). So, rather than supporting me in the most important semester of my undergraduate career, Ray refrained from asking me about my placement or really discussing it at all. Instead of pride in my accomplishments and upcoming graduation, I felt ashamed, as though I was doing something wrong. Because he was unable to control the situation, Ray wanted nothing to do with it, no matter how important it was for me. This imposed shame translated into my overall attitude toward the placement, feeling as though I did not belong in that setting. In his mind, and slowly creeping into mine, I belonged only where he wanted me.

His last woman was a model.

Control isn't always about a particular situation or event. It can also be a frame of mind. I've always been rather self-conscious concerning my appearance. In a seemingly normal conversation one night, Ray mentioned how he obviously didn't want to marry me for my looks. After all, the girl he was with before me was a model, so he could have just stayed with her. He explained that he "wasn't saying [I'm] ugly" just that the woman before me was a "knockout."

For some, including myself, this may not sound like a clear-cut example of emotional abuse and control; after all, he did not directly insult me. However, I internalized this as Ray was telling me that he didn't find me attractive, that I didn't measure up to the women of his past, and that I just wasn't good enough. I was adding to the list of faults, to the ways in which I "didn't deserve him," but I didn't consider this as abuse because of the way he worded it. Looking back now, I can see how Ray and others like him use this type of language to exercise control. In her literature review, Packota states that constant criticism is often named as one of

the strategies abusers use in exerting dominance. By criticizing my appearance and letting me know where I stood among other women, Ray was ensuring that I did not have the confidence to defy him or question his treatment of me while also instilling within me a self-hatred which I still carry.

And although he made it clear that I was not the most desirable of women, I was still not allowed to wear shorts too short or tops too revealing, even at our own home. He explained to me that it was inappropriate for me to wear shorts and a tank top when our neighbor came over unannounced one evening. I was his wife, and only he was allowed to see that much of me.

I couldn't please him.

Ray's criticism didn't end with my physical appearance. My cleaning, laundry, and cooking never quite pleased him. And neither could I. After the wedding, I couldn't make him happy sexually. Packota explains that "excessive sexual demands and sexual put-downs are characteristic of psychologically abusive relationships." On a number of occasions, Ray told me that he had hoped that once we were married I would be open to more with our intimate relationship. I wasn't as "into" it as he was. He could tell that I didn't enjoy it as much as he did, and he would vividly describe how "happy" other women were with him; why wasn't I? Then, with disgust, he would reject me, saying he didn't find me sexually desirable anymore. I started to feel like there was something wrong with me, something I just couldn't fix.

These fears would come to the forefront of my thoughts even during our few intimate moments, making me preoccupied and self-conscious. And they still do. I'll find myself wondering if I had been able to make Ray happy sexually if everything would have turned out differently. I wondered if I could make any other man satisfied. It's largely because of these fears that I have refrained from becoming intimately involved with other men since my divorce.

If I was really committed to him, I wouldn't have male friends.

Although I did not have any ex-boyfriends, or even former interests, as friends on social media, Ray made it clear that he did not trust me using it. He didn't subscribe to social media and let me know on numerous occasions how little he trusted it or my use of it. One evening, he was on the computer and asked that I come sit with him. He said he was thinking about getting on Facebook and wanted me to show him what all it was. He asked me to pull up my friends list – he was “curious” about who all I was friends with on there. After I pulled it up, he started to ask me about every male friend on my list and none of the females. Getting a little frustrated, I started to get up; I could tell what he was up to and didn't want to sit through it. At that point, he grabbed me and insisted that I stay, pulling me back into my seat. He wanted the backstory for each man: how did I know them, how long had we been friends, did I still talk to them, had we ever dated. There was one person in particular that he took a strong dislike for, my friend Joe.

Joe and I had become friends in college and kept in touch after he went to law school. We had no romantic feelings towards one another. Ray wanted me to delete Joe as a contact, a man I had no real history with and a man he had never met. I told him he was being irrational. He began berating me, telling me how he couldn't trust what I was doing, how he was only looking out for our marriage. He told me that it was inappropriate for me to maintain any male friendships. If I really loved him, I wouldn't want to.

By the end of the night, Ray had stopped talking to me at all, and I was sobbing so hard I began to vomit. In the moment, I thought he may be right. This was affecting our marriage. However, as I reflect years later, I see this as his way of isolating me from others, which is a

common tactic among abusers. Packota lists isolation as one of the "features of a prototypic pattern of psychological maltreatment." Through this isolation, the victim becomes only more dependent upon the perpetrator. Because I felt that I had no one else, I grew more desperate to please Ray and become a "good" wife. After our marriage ended, I found myself very alone. I had lost the one person that I associated with, confided in, and laughed with. This loss was devastating for me, and only now can I see how the isolation made that possible, making it feel impossible for me, the abused, to truly "get away."

I brought out his violent side.

I had quit socializing with my former friends completely. In fact, the only socialization I had, other than the little time with my family, was in a bar with his friends. Because I had realized that his attitude only worsened when he drank, I was hesitant to enjoy even that glimpse of a social life.

We went out one night for drinks at his insistence. Once we got there, we noticed many of my co-workers at a table and joined them. I was ready to go home early, hoping to make it there before Ray's mean side made its appearance, so I offered to pay the tab. When I got to the bar, a man, whom I had never met before, accidentally bumped into me. He put his hand on my shoulder, apologized, and asked if I was ok. I assured him that I was and turned back to the table. I could see Ray's expression from across the room. He was furious. I knew what was coming.

When I sat down, he asked if I had anything to tell him. No. I really didn't because nothing of importance had happened. Ray asked if I thought he was stupid; he had seen the whole thing he said. I tried to tell him what had happened, but he was having none of it; he had already assumed the worst. In frustration, I told him to ask the guy. Instead of a rational

conversation, Ray decided to sucker-punch the stranger and start a fight that got us kicked out of the establishment. On the way home, he became paranoid that someone was following us. Before I had the car parked, he was out of the car and in the house, getting his pistol. He ran out of the house and towards the road. Luckily, the car had driven off after pausing briefly at our house to deliver the morning paper.

Once we were inside, the argument continued. I was upset by his rash actions, which he felt were completely justifiable. He screamed at me, called me names, and ended his fit by throwing the bathroom mirror at my feet. What should have been a minor, insignificant issue escalated into one of the scariest nights I had with Ray. Dalrymple, in describing the Othello Syndrome, states, “the more trivial the occasion of his violence, the better, for the more fearful she becomes. And the more fearful she is, the less she can think for herself; the more he is the total focus of her being” (Dalrymple).

Ray was extremely volatile and violent, but not directly towards me. However, his demonstration of violence achieved exactly what he hoped, instilling within me a sense of fear, and for abusers like Ray, fear equals control. This is something that Dr. Clare Murphy identifies as "symbolic aggression" in her online articles aimed to educate men and women on coercive control and psychological abuse. Symbolic aggression teeters on the edge of violence and, as admitted by the abusive men Dr. Murphy interviewed, has serious effects on the victim; it "belittled her, took something away from who she was, made her depressed or miserable, and made her feel pretty worthless or helpless" (Murphy). To this day, I am afraid of making those around me angry and of the consequences of that anger. I find myself unable to express myself, my concerns, or my displeasure with someone as I fear their ensuing anger.

Don't question him or his intentions.

When Ray told me he had feelings for another woman, we had only been married three months. He refused to talk about it at all. He just wanted me to know that he had feelings for someone else. He thought he may love her. Of course, I wasn't allowed to know who. Anytime I asked to discuss it, Ray said there was no need in talking about it. This too was another tactic meant to drive me further under his control, as he played on my insecurities.

But this time, I reacted. Before going to work one morning, I looked at our phone records. Unbeknownst to me, he had it set to get a notification on his phone when I accessed it. When I got home that evening, he was waiting for me. He asked why I had looked at the records. Rather than explaining my suspicions or defending myself, I immediately admitted that I was wrong and told him I knew I shouldn't have done it. He cornered me against the kitchen counter, continued to yell in my face about everything I had done wrong, cursing, and throwing his phone across the room. I can't remember everything he said, but I remember being slouched in the floor, with his face against mine, blood red, screaming: "What did you think you were going to find? You stupid bitch." All I could do at that point was cry.

When men like Ray act out with such aggression in the face of such defiance, they are really seeking to reestablish dominance. He towered over me to illustrate that he was in control, using physical proximity to demonstrate power and control and as another means of intimidating me (Murphy). I was huddled on the floor, looking up to his face, red with anger, and all I could do was apologize, upset with myself that I made him so angry.

One day, it will start to get physical.

After discussing it with his mother and his friend, Ray decided it was best for him to leave. A couple of days before, he had promised that he would quit drinking (we were trying to work things out), so I was upset to find him on the porch with a beer because I knew he had a

more serious problem than he was willing to admit. I was sitting beside him and had turned my head away; I had never liked for someone to look at me while I was upset. He told me to look at him, and I didn't reply. He repeated himself. When I didn't comply, he took my face in his hands, forcing me to turn my head towards him. He held me there as I struggled to turn away, telling me that I would look at him when we were talking. He left that night for good.

He wouldn't let me move on.

Months after the divorce was final, I was still hearing from Ray. He would call or come by to "update" me on the checking account. He insisted that there was trouble with the joint checking account that he was supposed to close as he was the original account holder. One night, I went into the local grocery store. While I was in there, Ray had texted me that he needed to talk. He then texted that he parked next to me. When I left the store, I saw that Ray had indeed followed me to the store and parked so that his driver's side was so close to mine that I couldn't open my door. He gave me another reason why he couldn't close the account and tried to talk until I told him I had to leave.

Ray's behavior after the divorce verged on stalking as I never knew when he may suddenly appear. "Stalking is a form of invasion of space" (Murphy). After this behavior began, I started to fear going into public, not knowing what, or who, was around the corner. I didn't feel safe, even in some of the most familiar places. Luckily, I have a wonderfully supportive family: my brother-in-law confronted Ray about his behavior. Shortly thereafter, I didn't hear from him anymore. Ray was shown that I was not alone; I had spoken up and found support.

When people say, at least I was smart and got out of it...

"Hate"	Excitement,	The broken mirror on my floor,
The feelings in the pit of my	Nervousness,	The drunken rants that
stomach,	Now are	OF COURSE
The butterflies,	hate	Were always my fault.
Those that used to be love,	For the way you treated me,	For the many

many	that I must bear.	or reminding
many	For every way that	That is all hate.
things that were my fault.	you've changed	I despise what you've done
For the wall that you tore down,	my outlook on life,	to me
piece by piece,	my self-image,	Please,
Bringing my guard along,	me . . .	Just let go,
For the wall	And how you cannot,	Let me move on,
That I've had to rebuild	will not,	And let me
reinforce	allow me to move on.	let go of
And make impenetrable.	How you are	this
For the bitterness I carry,	constantly	Hate.
the untrusting nature	a reminder	

2/9/10

I did not “get out.” He left me. And the sad reality is that if he had not left, I probably would never have either. The night he first left, I begged him to stay. I was devastated. I cried, pleaded, thought I couldn’t continue without him. I remember saying I couldn’t live if he left. I wasn’t exactly happy in the marriage, but I loved him, and he had shown me in our time together that I was nothing without him. I had never considered divorce an option in our short marriage. I didn’t file. I wasn’t strong enough. I needed him; I was completely dependent upon him.

In the last few years, female students have commented on how they want to be like me, not “needing” a man or someone to take care of them. I just smile. I wish I was as strong as they think I am. Every day, I make a conscious effort to display myself as an independent, strong-willed woman. Unfortunately, I know the truth. I know the cowering woman on the floor, the pleading voice, the weeping divorcee. But I don't want my students to know this version of me because I know they need to believe that a woman can be strong alone.

These students may never know that I have lived the last decade questioning everything that I say, think, and do. They will not understand the nights that I have spent sobbing, self-loathing, believing that I was to blame for his actions. They will not know I miss him, need him, love him, and hate him all at once. They will never understand how weak I see myself and how I

wonder if I can make it on my own. They will not read the notebooks that I filled with letters to him in which I question what I did to make him hate me so much, trying desperately to work out all of the mixed-up emotions that I held inside. I won't let them see these ugly truths because they need someone to look up to, someone who "has it all together."

But he never hit me.

In her personal story, Nancy Globus-Goldberg, through the details of her experiences with abuse, explains that verbal and emotional abuse have long lasting psychological effects: "Emotional abuse is more insidious than other abuses and just as damaging. Through this type of persecution, my partner attacked my very soul – using words and mannerisms that caused much pain and suffering. Over time, he systematically eroded my self-confidence and self-worth." Those who have not been through this type of relationship may not understand how a person's words and actions could really affect your life. After all, we are taught that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." But emotional and verbal abuse does hurt. It hurts the victim's perception of themselves and their future relationships. But, it can also hurt physically.

Since Ray left, I've have emotional breakdowns. I've been medicated for depression. I've had increasingly worse migraines. I have anxiety attacks in the middle of a crowd. I never feel "good enough." Before, I wasn't exactly the portrait for confidence, but, now, I question my capabilities, appearance, and likability to an extreme. There are things that I find myself physically incapable of explaining to anyone.

The mere thought of seeing him face to face, even after so many years, mortifies me. Recently, he and his new family moved back to town. I've seen them trick-or-treating, at the state fair, at local parades. The first time it happened I had gone trick-or-treating with my sister

and her kids. As I followed my nephew from one house to another, I saw them and froze: I couldn't move, I couldn't speak, I could barely think. I felt my face grow hot, my limbs numb, my stomach drop, and my throat close. I couldn't breathe. Standing in the middle of the street, I could feel myself falling apart. All of the progress I thought I had made in the past years was slipping away in seconds, and I was back there, huddled on the floor as he screamed at me. My sister's hand, laid gently on my back, guiding me on up the street, brought me out of the shock, and for the rest of the night, I was paranoid, aware of everyone around me, afraid that he may be anywhere. It didn't even take direct contact to make me regress and feel like the broken, afraid, and weak woman who never stood up for herself.

It is no surprise that I can't have a functional relationship with a man now. Of course there are trust issues: I always question his intentions, his motives, his plans, everything. I also question myself: will I sabotage this relationship? Will I mess it up? What will I do wrong this time? I see myself as temporary. I picture the end of the relationship before it begins, dooming it from the start. So to cover this, I let on as if I'm just cynical. And maybe I am, to an extent. But really, it's just easier than explaining that I'm more broken than anything. A year after the divorce, I tried journaling to get out some of what I felt:

Everything was my fault. Everything that was wrong was always a result of either something I had just done or something that I had done in my past. While I had not been promiscuous, he made me feel like I had been. He made me feel like a whore. The worst part is that I can't get that out of my head. Not that I really believe that he was right, but now I feel like anything I do now is going to negatively affect my future. I want to get past this; I really do. But even now, when the opportunity presents itself, one that I actually want to pursue, I can't act. I'm too afraid. I'm afraid of what will happen in the future, what I might be destroying before it even begins. Basically, I just wish that I could erase the awful ways that I feel about my past, about what I have done. I wish I could erase the fears that I have about my actions and my feelings. I just want to be me again.

Years have passed, and there are time when I feel as though I'm still broken. I can't seem to find myself.

What if it's all in my head?

Even as I type this, I wonder if maybe I have imagined it all. Maybe things weren't that bad, and my perspective is just skewed. I know that many women have had it worse than me, by far. I suffered no broken bones, black eyes, or any physical pain. How could I consider myself "abused?"

In her online blog "He Never Hit Me," Reut Amit illustrates verbal and emotional abuse for her readers and expresses some of the lasting effects on the psyche in an effort to help other women struggling with similar situations: "I used to default to the trained belief that I was crazy, overly sensitive, or had imagined it all because I could not reconcile the love and the abuse" (3). When someone has been told by her abuser that it is her fault, that she "brings it out in him," it is difficult to overcome that belief in the end. Throughout our relationship, none of the arguments were Ray's fault; they were all a direct result of something I had done, or so he led me to believe.

I found myself, and still find myself, wondering if I am making a mountain out of a molehill, if what I experienced was nothing more than the typical husband and wife spat. I have expressed this to a dear friend, one confidante who is privy to the details that others may never know. I knew she came from a difficult childhood, and part of me feared that she must be thinking that I was just being dramatic. Instead, she assured me that not all trauma is the same, and that because one person may "have it worse" does not negate the real pain I, and others, have been through. But because society does not typically see verbal and emotional abuse as "that bad," we are more likely to dismiss it when it happens to us.

Packota justifies her literature review by citing the “small amount of literature published exclusively on emotional abuse.” Because physical abuse has easily discernable characteristics, degrees, and effects, it is easier to discuss than the varying and difficult to identify psychological and emotional abuse. Yet, there are women such as myself who search for an answer, a reason, for what is happening in their relationships. “The lack of a precise definition and a focus on treatment specifically for these women may be contributing to the trivialization of this phenomenon in our society” (Packota). When I first began researching the abuse that I suspected in my previous marriage, I found myself in a confusing whirlwind. While I was finding literature, it was always clumped with physical abuse, as if to say that it cannot exist as an entity.

Denise Brandt and Karen Pierce conducted a study in which 120 undergraduate female students read from scenarios depicting verbal abuse apart from any other form of abusive behaviors. Many of the assumptions and hypothesis they made based on previous studies were not valid, because “people perceive verbal aggression differently when not paired with other types of aggression” (Brandt and Pierce 76). We see it as “not that bad,” and compare it to something it is not, but “there are different ‘rules’ for interpreting verbal abuse as opposed to physical abuse” (Brandt and Pierce 76). Instead, we will shrug it off when our partners call us names or demean us in front of others. Like many others, I initially saw Ray’s behavior as “protective” or a way of showing how much he cared. When his jealousy began to cross the line, though, I was so invested in the relationship that I still could not, or would not, identify his behavior as toxic. I believed that because he was not physically violent to me, he, therefore, wasn’t abusive. This excuse allowed the behavior to not only continue to but escalate.

Victims of emotional abuse “will trivialize or minimize the abuse” (Packota) in our experiences because of the magnitude physical abuse holds. But, verbal and emotional abuse are

not physical. That's the same as comparing football and basketball. They are both games that involve a ball, but the comparisons really end there. Verbal, emotional, and physical abuse are all about control and manipulation. The methods differ as do the results and aftermath. Society needs to recognize them as separate, yet equally detrimental, entities. They are all real and can exist separate from one another just as they can coexist.

Perspective does not come into play here. It is not "just how you look at it." I would have never known how detrimental verbal and emotional abuse can be had I not been in this toxic relationship. Unfortunately, my moment of understanding came too late to help myself. But, maybe my story can help someone else; maybe I can be a positive example to the young ladies I see every day. By sharing my story, I want them to see in themselves the powerful, independent, capable young people who can't be controlled by someone else's actions and words. I want them to know that love is not about control because for far too long I didn't understand. I want others to recognize and listen to the warning signs because they are there. I want to be there for those that, unfortunately, find themselves in situations like mine. I want them to see that they can overcome those situations, that they can end the abuse in their lives and move on. And I want them to see that, as my friend told me, they should never downplay what is happening to them. Abuse is abuse, no matter the form in which it comes.

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