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A Final Master's Portfolio

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Final Master's Portfolio

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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

December 11, 2019

Ms. Lucinda Hunter, First Reader
Ms. Kimberly Spallinger, Second Reader

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Not Just Another Item on the Bucket List: An Analytical Narrative

When I was a senior in college, I made my first bucket list. On that list, I wrote that I wanted to move to a city to pursue theatre, sing on stages in many different parts of the world, and travel to Europe. On a whim, I decided to add “get a master’s degree” to the list. At the time, it seemed like a safer way to pursue theatre if I felt that moving to a large city was too much of a leap. Post-graduation, I still tossed around the graduate school idea a bit, but decided to make the move and see where life took me. I moved to Chicago and hit the audition scene with vigor. That also meant that I trudged daily to work jobs that did not ignite passion within me--answering phones, folding chinos, substitute teaching, and feeling an overwhelming sense that I was not achieving what I set out to achieve. Yes, I was able to perform in a big city and cross that item off the bucket list, but what I had to give up was too much to bear. One of the schools where I was substitute teaching eventually offered me a full-time job teaching middle school language arts. I was faced with a dilemma: if I took this job, I wouldn’t have much time to audition and perform; conversely, I would finally be putting my degree to use. Maybe I would start to feel the passion I was missing! I accepted the job and learned more in that first year of teaching than I had ever thought possible. I learned what it felt like to make a difference in the life of a child; I saw the daily glimmer of realization dance upon my students’ faces; I led conversations about literature and life and watched my students grow and mature before my eyes. Needless to say, I was hooked. Once I realized that I was meant to follow in my parents’ footsteps and use the teaching degree I had earned three years before, I knew I wasn’t supposed to stay in Chicago. Life eventually brought me back to South Dakota, where I began teaching sophomore English at the school where my student teaching experience first began.

Back in South Dakota, I still found time to create theatre--first by joining up with an area community playhouse and later by starting my own theatre company with three of my friends. Starting my own company was a dream come true, but I still felt something drawing me towards graduate school. This time, though, I knew I wanted to study English, specifically, how to become a better teacher of English. A simple Google search brought me almost immediately to the orange glow of the Bowling Green State University home page, and I haven't turned back since. I began my journey at BGSU in 2017, partially because I wanted another bucket list item to check off, but mostly because I love being a student almost as much as I love being a teacher. What I wanted to learn most of all, though, was how to be a more effective instructor. I wanted to know how to challenge my students--how to help them enter into conversations about life and literature. I wanted to *be* better so that my students could *do* better.

What I didn't realize when I enrolled at BGSU was how much the program (and the students and instructors I would encounter) would impact me on both a personal and professional level. Having never met my classmates or professors, I feel a strange connection to them. There are some students who have been in nearly all of my classes alongside me. I can sense their "voice" through their writing and feel such a sense of camaraderie with them. The process has not just resulted in new connections, though. In my journey through the Master's in English with a Specialization in English Teaching, I have learned how to read and write more critically and have contributed to rigorous and relevant conversations with my peers and instructors. I suppose my journey here started as a fantasy and transformed into a necessary means of survival in my teaching career; in a similar way, each piece in this portfolio focuses on either the magic of fantastic worlds--whether it be a world of Victorian witchcraft or the age-old fairy tale-- or the "survival skills" each teacher needs in order to make an impact in the classroom.

The following portfolio includes the pieces of which I am most proud in my time at BGSU and is a testament to the growth in analysis and pedagogy with which this program has provided me. The first piece I chose to include serves as a substantive research piece because it took considerable time to conceptualize, research, and craft. This piece, written for Dr. Erin Labbie's Theory and Criticism class, was one that caused me great anxiety. The class itself provided me with many challenges that strengthened my critical reading and writing skills. Most of all, the course encouraged me to enter into the literary criticism conversation, which was not something I felt comfortable doing. What finally eased my nerves about writing a critical piece was the fact that I brought up one of my favorite movies, *The Princess Bride*, in a class conversation and was encouraged by my instructor's response. In fact, Dr. Labbie's words of support and advice helped build up my confidence enough to even attempt such a challenging essay. I eventually wrote "Inconceivable: The Power of Language in *The Princess Bride*" as a look at how the cult classic fairy tale uses language to connect to J.L. Austin's theory of performance acts, Friedrich Nietzsche's evaluation of truth, and Ferdinand de Saussure's analysis of the object of linguistics.

As I ventured into the revision process with this piece, the feedback my peers and instructor gave me provided me with a firm basis for editing and ensuring that my voice was more present than the words of the theorists I was citing. That in and of itself was challenging even when I was in the initial writing process, but the separation of time helped me to read my piece with a fresh perspective and resulted in many changes. Most of these changes involved removing direct citations and adding more of my own thoughts, a process which seemed to get easier as time went by. Many of my peers could sense that I enjoyed working on this piece, and it's true. After all, I was able to write about one of my all-time favorite films, which ended up

becoming a bucket list item I didn't know I had. After some polishing, a few tears, and a lot of love, my *Princess Bride* analysis is one of which I am extremely proud.

The second piece I chose to include in my portfolio is a writing plan that I originally created in 2015 for my sophomore-level English class and have revamped and honed with each passing year. This particular version of the assignment incorporates elements from Dr. Cheryl Hoy's Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing class that I took in the Fall of 2018. Her class was one that I definitely needed to take; that course has greatly impacted how I teach and structure my lessons on a daily basis. Formerly, I had been taught that grammar should be taught in isolation--with worksheets and the "drill and kill" mentality of the daily oral language days. Dr. Hoy's class, with the expert advice of Henry Noden, Constance Weaver, and others, revealed just how impactful grammar instruction can be if it is taught when students are in the midst of the writing process. The unit I modified is titled "Survivor Essay Grammar and Writing Unit Plan," which begins with full-class instruction of stories that focus on survival. As a class, we analyze the writing style of a variety of authors, using carefully-chosen mentor sentences to inspire students to SHOW rather than TELL with their writing. Eventually, the students are instructed to write their own narrative-style essay about someone they know who has survived an obstacle in life. Even though my students are only sophomores, I always have a few every year who ask if they can write about their own survival stories. Their tenacity humbles me and continues to drive me as I pursue continued professional development.

In the survival writing unit, once my students begin work on their writing, I start incorporating more grammar instruction, most of which focuses on the use of semicolons, colons, and commas, as well as Henry Noden's suggestions from his book, *Image Grammar*. I use multiple methods of assessing my students' grammar skills, including Pear Deck, Google

Forms, and the essays they eventually submit. One reason Pear Deck is a platform that I use nearly every day is because it allows students to write something on their screen, which I can eventually pull up (anonymously) on the Smart Board. This way, we can look at a student's writing as a full class and determine if they are indeed using grammatical skills and techniques correctly, depending on the day's goal. The unit plan includes daily grammar and writing exercises as well as the final assignment instructions, a model essay, and a rubric for scoring. I was able to use this modified unit plan this fall and was so pleased with the results. My students' writing was stronger and more interesting than ever.

This piece didn't require much revision, but Professor Hunter and my peers did comment on the fact that I could expand the justification for this assignment, specifically why I chose to focus on the three punctuation marks in conjunction with this writing. I also spent quite a bit of time proofreading for any writing mistakes in my instructions or reflection pieces. While this unit plan was quite a lengthy assignment, it was nice to have the opportunity to polish and revamp an assignment that I have actually incorporated into the classroom for years. Many of my professors have allowed us to create projects that are directly relevant to what we are currently teaching, which is very helpful.

The third writing piece I included in this portfolio stems from a class that piqued my interest with its alluring title, *Victorian Femme Fatales*. Throughout the course, Dr. Piya Pal-Lapinski asked us to analyze the female character of the Victorian era through film, literature, and analysis. The end result was a research essay, titled, "The Psychological Riddle of Witchcraft and the Supernatural in the Writings of Elizabeth Gaskell and Vernon Lee." In this piece, I looked closely at the authors of works that included the femme fatale, as well as their use of magical elements in their writing. This piece was written during a summer session, which

operates essentially at double the speed of the typical semester class. As I read through my essay and prepared for peer reviews, I could sense the rush of my original draft. My peers helped me identify areas in which my thoughts were being shadowed by the words of others. The specificity of their remarks, as well as those from Ms. Lucinda Hunter, gave me a clear direction for revision and polishing that seemed overwhelming to me at the beginning of this portfolio process. Ms. Hunter's request for clarification and expansion on my points forced me to look at my essay through the eyes of someone who had not read the stories I had studied. Her questions helped me craft an essay that is much more reader friendly. In fact, as I re-read my work, I struggled to remember specific details from stories I read early in my BGSU career. Having to go back and double-check facts helped me clarify some areas that were unclear even for me. Having an entire semester to revise provided many opportunities to walk away when inspiration didn't strike. I appreciated the fact that I had the time and energy to go through the essay paragraph by paragraph, fixing transitions and adding more of my own words to the piece.

The same process of adding transitions is one that I applied to my final piece in this portfolio, a critical essay on the importance of literature in the lives of struggling students. This piece, which is titled, "In the Silence, Words Speak," was written for Dr. Kim Coates' Teaching Fiction class in February of 2018. While much shorter than others, this essay reveals more of my "voice" than the others do. I thought it was important to include a work that emphasizes my passion for the delicate and complicated students who grace me with their presence every day. Within this essay, I focus on the power of literature during times of trial. The essay is particularly close to my heart because at the time, a student from my school had just lost his life and his classmates were struggling to get by. It was in those moments that literature offered solace and escape for those hurting students and teachers. In this critical essay, I cite the words

of Elaine Showalter, Helen Vendler, and Martha Nussbaum, who emphasize that English teachers have so much power in times of trial. We can bring in the words of others or have students write as a means of processing their feelings.

One suggestion my peers gave me as they read through my essay was to flesh out more of my thoughts and not to rely so heavily on the words of the authors I was citing. Some of them encouraged me that this piece didn't have to be lengthy to be impactful. As I combed through the essay, searching for areas in which my voice could shine through a bit more, I realized that this piece is the culmination of my Bowling Green adventure, and it aligns to the arc of this portfolio, which begins with an essay focusing on a fairy tale from my childhood, moves into a teaching unit on survival, takes a look at the role of women in Victorian literature, and finally ends with a heartfelt piece that emphasizes the saving power of literature. This portfolio itself provides both an escape from reality to worlds of princesses and witchcraft and the necessary tools for an English teacher's survival.

I am certain that my graduation from BGSU will not just result in a checkmark on my bucket list. I know that this degree will take me places. My studies at BGSU have already impacted the way I teach; I have incorporated lessons and suggestions that my peers have shared with me as well as those projects I have crafted on my own. I have spent hours discussing class readings with my classmates and poring through pedagogical texts. I have excelled in classes in which I never thought I could succeed. I have read thousands of pages of literary criticism and have learned how to enter into analytical conversations. I have gained so much from the English program and have made valuable professional connections that I hope will endure past our commencement. I am honestly sad to be saying goodbye. Knowing that my Canvas app will not send me alerts to let me know that a classmate commented on a discussion or a professor posted

another announcement on our class page makes me feel a sense of loss. However, the knowledge and pride that I have gained in my studies at BGSU will certainly assist me in checking off more of my bucket list items.

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Inconceivable: The Power of Language in *The Princess Bride*

William Goldman's *The Princess Bride* is a testament to the impact that language has on a piece. He artfully balances the line between fiction and fantasy by presenting a world within a world, a meta-fantastic narration, which means that he writes a fairy tale within another fairy tale. This concept allows the reader (and viewer) to recognize that what they are experiencing is not reality, therefore strengthening the imaginary elements within the piece. Goldman's cult classic, *The Princess Bride*, has been revered for its adventure and imaginary elements by children and adults for over twenty years, and consequently, has earned a very loyal fan base. Some may claim that the fairy tale nature of the film is what draws audiences; others may believe that the action is what viewers find irresistible. It is ultimately Goldman's expert use of language that drives the comedy and wit of his fairy tale. William Goldman's command of language within *The Princess Bride* draws upon Friedrich Nietzsche's evaluation of truth, J.L. Austin's idea of performative utterances, and Ferdinand de Saussure's analysis of the object of linguistics and results in a fantastic tale of power and play.

Part of the intrigue behind Goldman's *The Princess Bride* is the fact that it revolves around a fairy tale story of a commoner-turned-princess who finds her happy ending after a series of unfortunate events. In order to fully appreciate the nature of the story, the audience must enter into this fantastic world with Princess Buttercup and her friends and foes. In this world, Buttercup endures being kidnapped by a group of bandits, swimming in eel-infested waters, a

forced marriage to an evil prince, an excursion through a forest filled with unusually large rodents, and the near-death of her beloved Westley. Buttercup's story, although unbelievable, is one that entices audiences from the first scene and takes them on a grand adventure of good versus evil.

In order for audiences to fully invest in the story, they must allow themselves to pretend a bit--to ignore certain elements of truth and reality. In Friedrich Nietzsche's "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense," he ponders the definition of truth. In his words, "truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour..." (768). In many ways, the idea of the fairy tale is completely illusory; we have full knowledge that we are being lied to, yet we seek the escape from our mundane reality. Goldman's Rodents of Unusual Size (R.O.U.S), flame sand, and fire bursts within the fire swamp that Princess Buttercup and Westley have to pass through play into the imaginary land that he has created. Audiences are fully aware that the unusually large rodents are actors in furry suits, yet there is a sense of excitement that stems from committing to the "lie" of fantasy.

Nietzsche further explores the difference between truth and lies in his essay titled, "The Birth of Tragedy," in which he acknowledges the fact that humans are able to discern whether or not a dream is reality. He claims that "even though this dream-reality is most alive, we nevertheless retain a pervasive sense that it is a *semblance*" of reality (Nietzsche 775). Perhaps this is why audiences flock to fairy tales and horror films alike. They enjoy the thrill of both and also bask in the fact that neither one is true to life. In "Birth of Tragedy," Nietzsche gives humans the benefit of the doubt and suggests that they do actually know the difference between reality and fiction, but they often choose to expose themselves to fictional ideas as a means of

escape. A prime example of Nietzsche's theory is the fact that from the very beginning of *The Princess Bride*, viewers are witnessing a fantastical story that a grandfather is reading to his grandson, yet they are able to knowingly forget that notion and throw themselves fully into the storyline of Buttercup and Westley.

Goldman's *The Princess Bride* takes the notion of the fairy tale and flips it on its head, as noted by Eva Alfonso and Marta Frago, guest lecturers in screenwriting and film for The University of Navarra, Spain: "...In contrast to the nineteenth-century fairytale, Goldman presents a beautiful girl who wants to be rescued from her wedding to the Prince by a fearsome pirate, or a gentle giant who fights for charitable purposes, or a witch who happens to be the voice of truth" (Alfonso and Frago 10). For these reasons, we are more inclined to let the playful nature of the language envelop us and carry us through the magical world of Westley and Princess Buttercup--one in which William Goldman "exalts the human need to play and to enjoy fiction" (Alfonso and Frago 11). In other words, viewers are acutely aware of the fictitious nature of Goldman's script and are merely along for the entertaining ride, as Nietzsche suggests.

While Alfonso and Frago praise Goldman for his acumen in writing about topics that force audiences to play along with him, Friedrich Nietzsche would instead criticize viewers for being so willing to be tricked: "Human beings themselves have an unconquerable urge to let themselves be deceived, and they are as if enchanted with happiness when the bard recites epic fairy-tales as if they were true..." (Nietzsche 772). In these words, Nietzsche tears apart humanity's comfortable definition of truth, thus enforcing the fact that if truth is fluid and "a comfortable lie," we will never know if fairy tales are just tales told by a liar or are prettier versions of reality recited by a dreamer (Nietzsche 760). Eva Alfonso and Marta Frago would further purport that William Goldman is not a liar but a creative genius whose enchanting story

provides a lifeline for audiences: "... *The Princess Bride*...and as we shall see,... is not exactly tragic, but melancholic, since it points to a disappointing real world and a celebration of fiction as a necessary refuge" (Alfonso and Frago 9). Part of this "celebration of fiction" involves realistic, enticing performances that create a semblance of truth.

In any performance, there are bound to be elements of play--of taking on the role of another, which is an idea that J.L. Austin explores in his essay, "Performative Utterances." The definition of performance acts, according to Austin, are utterances that involve a promise of action and come with an implied expectation of honesty. For example, in *The Princess Bride*, both The Man in Black and Inigo Montoya make utterances that result in performance acts. As the two embark on a journey to scale the Cliffs of Insanity, they realize that once they reach the top, a fight is inevitable. Inigo Montoya claims that he will not begin his sword fight until both participants are ready: "I promise I won't kill you until you reach the top." Then, later, he claims, "I swear on the soul of my father, Domingo Montoya, you will reach the top alive" (26). According to Austin, there must be rules involved in a performance act, just as there must be rules in a proper duel. Following these promises, the two begin a seemingly endless duel that involves trickery, acrobatics, and prowess.

Another example of a performance act Austin gives in his essay is the act of marrying. This type of performance act is present within *The Princess Bride*, and yet, the marriage between Princess Buttercup and Prince Humperdinck is not necessarily legal. The reason for this falls under Austin's definition of a misfire: "If any of these rules are not observed, we say that the act which we purported to perform is void, without effect" (Austin 1292). While Buttercup is certain she has just sealed her fate as the wife of the detestable Prince Humperdinck, Westley reveals the truth in the following scene:

Buttercup: "I got married. I didn't want to—it all happened so fast."

Westley: "Never happened."

...

Buttercup: But it did, I was there; this old man said 'man and wife.'"

Westley: "Did you say 'I do?'"

Buttercup: "Um, no... we sort of skipped that part."

Westley: "Then you're not married. You didn't say it; you didn't do it" (Goldman 113).

Thus, the act of marriage is "void, without effect" because the essential words are omitted from the ceremony.

Misfires are not necessarily lacking in intention; there may be a mistake like in the aforementioned example. However, if, when uttering a performance act, "you do not have the requisite thoughts or feelings or intentions then there is an abuse of the procedure, there is insincerity" (Austin 1293). Buttercup certainly does not care for Prince Humperdinck in the slightest, which adds to the lack of sincerity of their planned nuptials. In fact, the idea of their marriage is one that requires some imagination. Buttercup is a commoner--a beautiful one--who has lived a plain, country life. Her beauty alone is what draws Prince Humperdinck to her; he does not love her at all. Truth be told, he plans to murder his new wife and frame a rival country so that he will be able to start a war with them. Their marriage is the very definition of an insincere act, but it is not the only example within the story.

A lack of sincerity is present during the sword fight between Inigo and Westley (disguised as The Man in Black) when they exchange these words:

Inigo: "You seem a decent fellow; I hate to kill you."

The Man in Black: "You seem a decent fellow; I hate to die" (Goldman 29).

The assumed insincerity in these lines leads to what Austin refers to as infelicity--or trickery--within performance acts. Inigo certainly does not think that the Man in Black is a decent fellow, nor does he loathe killing him. The Man in Black (Westley) clearly does not intend to die during this fight. As the duel continues, there are moments of deception from both men. While there is not much speaking involved, the fact that both Inigo and The Man in Black pretend to be left handed is an example of an infelicity because they are tricking the other in what they claim is a fair fight. At various points throughout their duel, both participants reveal that they have been deceiving the other. Inigo Montoya is the first to reveal that he's been acting deceptively when he says, "...[I] know something you don't know...I'm not left-handed" (31). In this scene, audiences must allow themselves to believe that these two duelists are impressively ambidextrous, which of course, plays into Nietzsche's notions regarding the false nature of the fairy tale.

J.L. Austin might also claim that the very production of *The Princess Bride* is an example of an infelicitous act because of the fact that it is merely pretend--it was crafted and presented to us by William Goldman, and is therefore, not a true example of a real performance act. Because Goldman's story is an example of a meta-fantastic narration, there are certainly moments in which the audience is in on the joke. For example, during Buttercup's marriage to Prince Humperdinck, Inigo, Westley, and a giant named Fezzik join forces with a wheelbarrow to masquerade as a floating, menacing giant. Goldman's stage directions describe the creature as "a giant in a strange cloak, with a voice that could crumble walls" (Goldman 102). The trio then bellows a performative utterance as they light their cloak on fire: "I am the Dread Pirate Roberts and there will be no survivors" (102). The audience, of course, knows that this vision is not in fact the Dread Pirate Roberts; instead, it is the group taking on an identity in a moment of

desperation, which J.L. Austin asserts is an infelicitous, yet arbitrary performative act.

Furthermore, according to Austin's definition, the group should not be held accountable for their disingenuous actions because of the fact that they are attempting to save Buttercup. If Austin is correct that performance acts within a play follow different rules, then audiences have an innate understanding that what they view is not reality; it is merely an author playing with words to create a fantastic escape for viewers.

William Goldman plays with words on multiple occasions throughout the course of his tale. One example of this is Westley's use of the phrase "as you wish." In the beginning of the story, Westley is a farm boy who works for Buttercup's family. While she spends her days ordering him around and treating him terribly, he does everything she asks, responding with the words "as you wish." As Goldman's story goes, "she was amazed to discover that when he was saying 'as you wish,' what he was really saying was this: 'I love you'" (Goldman 5). Westley's actions, then, are what proved that he loved Buttercup. J.L. Austin would analyze this instance by saying that "it is always necessary that the circumstances in which the words are uttered should be in some way, or ways, appropriate...and either the speaker himself or other persons should also perform certain other actions..." ("How to Do Things with Words" 8). In other words, Westley's admission of love goes ignored by Buttercup until certain actions of his prove his love for her. Buttercup is too blind to see that his actions in the beginning of the story are enough to show his affection; instead, she only loves him after he performs heroic acts in order to save her. Additionally, Westley's phrase "as you wish" has a greater meaning; it may refer to the fact that Buttercup has always wished for a strong, handsome man to save her and whisk her away to a life of love and adventure. The duality of meaning that Westley's phrase represents is just one example of Goldman's expert wordplay.

Theorist Ferdinand De Saussure would have a field day with William Goldman's playful writing, specifically the artful wordplay that takes place between the characters of Vizzini and The Man in Black. In this memorable scene, Vizzini challenges The Man in Black to a battle of the wits after seeing just how accomplished the man is with a sword. The Man in Black takes the challenge up one level, and, turning his back, adds Iocane powder to the goblets, saying, "The battle of wits has begun. It ends when you decide, and we both drink, and find out who is right and who is dead" (Goldman 42). What follows is a battle of word and mind that leads to confusion based on the arbitrary nature of Vizzini's argument. His logic is not "...obvious at first glance; only after many detours does one discover [it]" (Saussure 854). Ultimately, though, Vizzini's intellect is dominated by the physical strength of The Man in Black, who has (unbelievably) built up a tolerance for Iocane powder. This scene proves Saussure's point that "there is at times a double similarity of meaning and form" and that "a word can always evoke everything that can be associated with it in one way or another" (Saussure 866). Vizzini's double meanings and intense wordplay--while impressive--are no match for the bodily strength of The Man in Black. Once more, the audience is asked to set aside reason and accept the fact that anything is possible in Goldman's fantastical land of Florin, including The Man in Black's immunity to the deadly Iocane powder.

While The Man in Black is hailed for his strong body and skillful swordplay, he does eventually experience a point of weakness. In this particular scene, Prince Humperdinck captures Westley (as he is now known), and tortures him using a barbaric electrocution device. Nearly paralyzed and weak with pain, Westley is unable to communicate with others. Westley's predicament is one of which theorist Ferdinand De Saussure comments upon in his essay titled "A Course in General Linguistics": "[Language] is such a distinct thing that a man deprived of

the use of speaking retains it provided that he understands the vocal signs that he hears” (Saussure 850). In the scene in which Westley is “mostly dead,” a character named Miracle Max attempts to resuscitate him. Westley cannot move or breathe, yet after Miracle Max inserts a bellows into Westley’s mouth and demands to know what on earth Westley has to live for, he is able to squeak out the following words: “tr...ooo...luv” (92). His utterance proves Saussure’s point that even in the midst of extreme pain and paralysis, Westley is able to respond verbally because he understands the concepts that he hears. As the scene continues, however, Miracle Max maintains that Westley has claimed that his purpose for living is not “true love,” but “to blave,” or to bluff, as Miracle Max defines it. This minor linguistic difference completely changes the meaning of the sentence and would impact the viewer’s interpretation of Westley’s true intentions. Furthermore, Saussure claims that the main purpose of language “with respect to thought is not to create a material phonic means for expressing ideas but to serve as a link between thought and sound” (856). Westley is clearly still able to form thoughts, and while the sounds he makes are not completely clear, anyone with sense could interpret that his message is clearly about love. These elements would also have to be in place for Miracle Max, the listener and interpreter of Westley’s thought-sounds. The very nature of the interaction between Miracle Max and Westley, however incoherent the latter seems to be, follows de Saussure’s definition of the purpose of linguistics.

Friedrich Nietzsche could further comment upon Miracle Max’s actions in this particular scene. By very obviously ignoring Westley’s true meaning, Max “...misuses the established conventions by arbitrarily switching or even inserting the names for things” (766). By doing so, Miracle Max loses the trust of the characters in the film and audiences alike. We do learn, however, that Max knows exactly what is being said; his wife calls him a liar and reveals that his

confidence has been shattered ever since Prince Humperdinck hurt him. Max is telling an untruth to avoid potential pain. Eventually, he discovers that Westley's true motive is to stop the marriage between Buttercup and Prince Humperdinck, a move that would result in the suffering of Prince Humperdinck. After learning this, Miracle Max tells the truth and joins ranks with Westley and his crew. Following a quick dose of Max's Miracle Pill, Westley begins to come to, although his physical abilities are severely impaired. In this particular scene, both Max and Westley's friends provide examples of Nietzsche's theory of deception, which implies that humans "do not hate deception but rather the damaging inimical consequences of certain species of deception" (766). Max had been deceived by Prince Humperdinck in the past, so he wanted to avoid any action that would bring him into contact with the prince. Valerie, Max's wife, was hurt by her husband's denial of the truth in this scene, so much so that she screams, "...I'm your wife, but I'm not sure I want to be anymore. It was true love, Max, true love..." (Goldman 92). In Valerie's eyes, Max's disavowal of Westley's comments is hurtful in two ways, both of which Nietzsche lists in his essay "On Truth and Lying in a Moral Sense:" Max selfishly focuses on his own fears rather than on his ability to help others, and by ignoring Westley's statements of love, he undermines the love that he and Valerie have shared for years. His actions further prove Nietzsche's point that lying for selfish reasons will result in exile from society.

Ferdinand de Saussure is another theorist who focuses on the intricacies of semantics. In his essay titled "Course in General Linguistics," de Saussure remarks that "when two words are confused through phonetic alteration, the ideas that they express will also tend to become confused if only they have something in common" (862). Vizzini, a short, stocky character whose self confidence has reached fairy tale levels, continuously uses the word "inconceivable" as a means of commenting on the happenings around him. Eventually, after a few misuses of the

word, Inigo Montoya says, “You keep using that word--I do not think it means what you think it means” (Goldman 23). In the case of *The Princess Bride*, Vizzini’s spoken misstep is merely a comic device--and one that has been quoted time and again. De Saussure, however, would give this character more credit because, as he says, “two ideas that are no longer distinct in the mind tend to merge into the same signifier” (862). This merging is precisely what happens in Vizzini’s case, although he could have arbitrarily chosen any word to mutter in those moments.

De Saussure writes at length regarding the “‘arbitrary’ nature of language. Rather than the world consisting of things that need names, each language brings into being, by describing, a world that it then knows as external...[whose] reality remains quite nebulous until language articulates it” (Saussure 846). This concept is true in the scene in which Westley and Princess Buttercup trek through the fire swamp, aiming to avoid the three terrors that live within: the flame spurts, the lightning sand, and the Rodents of Unusual Size. These ideas, particularly the Rodents of Unusual Size, are arbitrary in nature, but Goldman’s naming of each brings them to life, adding fresh elements of adventure to his tale. Goldman also masterfully uses seemingly arbitrary language in comedic form in the wedding scene between Buttercup and Prince Humperdinck. In this scene, their officiant is the most reverent, impressive man imaginable; however, his speech impediment muddies everything he says and detracts from the true meaning of his words. In one utterance, he speaks of their ceremony with great reverence: “Mawwige, that bwessed awwangement. That dweam wiffim a dweam (101). Now, these words could have been arbitrarily chosen, but at further glance, they may imply far greater meaning. The Impressive Man may be commenting on the dreamlike nature of the script--and the fact that only in dreams can Westley and Buttercup be together. Additionally, his words reveal the lack of blessing in these nuptial acts; neither Prince Humperdinck nor Buttercup appreciate the great implications of

what they are about to do. The double meaning behind the impaired, comical language of The Impressive Man aligns with de Saussure's notion that "a word can always evoke everything that can be associated with it in one way or another" and that there are certainly multiple interpretations of meaning and form (866).

Eva Alfonso and Marta Frago also comment upon the arbitrary nature of the script in their essay, "The Adventure Screenplay in William Goldman..." They suggest that "...*The Princess Bride* is precisely a tribute to the arbitrary conventions of fairy tales," and go on to note Goldman's use of "*deus ex machina*" as a comic resort after Westley's tragic death" (8). Goldman's tactics are necessary; the audience would not have cooperated if their dear Westley had died. After all, he is the only character who maintains viewers' love throughout the entirety of the story. There are certainly moments of frustration, but overall, he tugs at heartstrings from the moment he utters his first "as you wish."

William Goldman's *The Princess Bride* is much more than a fairy tale; he defies the typical format and presents a strong-willed, ordinary girl who wants nothing to do with the prince of the kingdom. Goldman "exalts the need to play and to enjoy fiction" and does this by using language as a tool to emphasize the innate human desire to avoid pain and find a happy ending (Alfonso and Frago 11). Expert wordplay, performative misfires, and artful untruths within William Goldman's *The Princess Bride* all lead to a favorable resolution that has charmed audiences for years: after defying the odds, escaping villains, and acknowledging their true feelings, Buttercup and Westley live happily ever after.

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Survivor Essay: A Sophomore Writing Unit

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ENG 6220

Dr. Cheryl Hoy

5 December 2018

Survivor Essay Unit

Grade level: 10th

Supporting Theory/Theorist:

Nilson, Linda B. "Improving Student Peer Feedback." *College Teaching*, vol. 51, no. 1, 2003, pp.

34–38.

Noden, Harry R. *Image Grammar: Teaching Grammar as Part of the Writing Process*. 2nd ed., Heinemann, 2011.

Weaver, Constance, and Jonathan Bush. *Grammar to Enrich & Enhance Writing*. Heinemann, 2008.

Justification:

Every fall, I have my sophomore students write a narrative-style essay about someone who has survived a difficult situation in life. More often than not, because this is one of the first formal, multi-draft writing assignments of the year, these assignments are riddled with grammatical and structural errors. In order to avoid that, I have begun implementing grammar lessons throughout the writing process in the hopes that teaching these skills in conjunction with writing will warrant better results. In Constance Weaver's book, *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*, she writes of the traditional grammar dilemma: "Historically, most students have not learned grammar well, fewer have remembered much after being tested on it, and fewer still have independently applied the relevant aspects of grammar study to their own writing" (Weaver 23). I have taken Weaver's challenge with this survivor essay unit.

After reading multiple stories on survival and disaster from some of the greats: Jack London, Haruki Murakami, and Isabel Allende, among others, I ask my students to keep the descriptive writing styles of those authors in mind as they venture forth on their own writing journeys. The first step in preparing my students to write with imagery and description is by having them do some image writing. *Image Grammar* writer Harry Noden suggests providing

students with multiple opportunities to practice “showing,” rather than “telling” their readers: “Showing engages the reader’s mind as a catalyst for visualization. Telling lulls the reader to sleep” (Noden 3). While the activity I have chosen to introduce my survivor essay involves students mimicking mentor sentences from a novel as they write about an image from a photography website, my goal is that they will provide enough description of the image to paint a picture of the woman’s life. This alone takes skills that my students do not exercise on a daily basis: “it requires a knowledge of technique, the ability to select words like colors on a palette and apply sentence structures like brush strokes to a verbal canvas” (Noden 4). After multiple encounters with mentor sentences and example essays from teachers and students alike, I have found that my students’ writing improves over the course of this unit.

It is true that students have a stronger grasp on grammar and mechanics than we often believe. I occasionally find my students making comma splice errors, but I have to remind myself that they are recognizing that there should be some sort of break between their independent clauses; they just do not remember which punctuation mark to place there. In Constance Weaver’s *Grammar to Enrich and Enhance Writing*, she claims that “grammar instruction should not be limited to the scope and sequence found in a textbook series, but should build on students’ developmental readiness” (31). Her words provide my justification for focusing on semicolon usage in conjunction with this writing unit. If I were following the sequence in my grammar textbook, I would be focusing on parts of speech and building towards clauses and semicolons. However, I recognize the necessity of focusing on semicolons and commas right from the beginning of the year in order to help my students add variety to their writing and aid my eyes as I scour their essays.

As far as editing goes, I believe firmly in the benefits of effective peer review. In her essay titled “Improving Student Peer Feedback, Professor Linda B. Nilson provides valuable suggestions for ensuring that peer reviews are beneficial for both the writer and the reviewer. So often, students do not know what to look for as they skim others’ papers. Nilson suggests “writing a different kind of peer feedback item--one that does not ask for judgment or opinion and so evokes no emotion; one that any student, no matter how unfamiliar with the discipline’s rules, is capable of answering” (36). Some of Nilson’s suggestions for peer review questions and prompts include the following: “Highlight any passages that you had to read more than once to understand what the writer was saying”; “Bracket any sentences that you find particularly strong or effective”; “Put a checkmark next to the line that has a spelling, grammar, punctuation, or mechanical error”; and “What do you find most compelling about the paper/ speech/ project” (Nilson 36). Questions like these do not require that students be accomplished writers or grammar fiends; instead, the prompts ask them to recognize qualities within another’s writing. Any student can do that. I have used Nilson’s format in the peer review questions I assign in *Turnitin.com* with a high degree of success. I found that students were much more willing to dive in and actually make marks on others’ papers because they were required to “carefully attend to the details of the work in question” (36). Nilson’s suggestions have erased the broad, yet impossible to answer questions that prompted my students to tell me if the “thesis was strong and effective.” I will continue to follow Nilson’s suggestions in writing assignments to come.

Standard(s) to which this lesson adheres/supports:

9-10.W.3

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

9-10.W.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

9-10.W.5

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.

9-10.W.9

Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

9-10.L.1

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

9-10.L.2

Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English capitalization, punctuation, and spelling when writing.

9-10.L.3

Apply knowledge of language to understand how language functions in different contexts, to make effective choices for meaning or style, and to comprehend more fully when reading or listening.

Lesson Plan

The number of class sessions needed: 10

Descriptions of activities for each class period:

Class Session #1:

Objectives: Students will express their opinions in a writing prompt; students will read and annotate “And of Clay are We Created;” students will identify imagery in literature.

Materials: Chromebooks, SmartBoard, Writer’s Notebooks, literature books, dialectical journal example

Description of lesson:

- Bell Ringer: Journal prompt: Journalism: Should journalists remain detached and objective when reporting a tragedy? What issues arise when a journalist allows their thoughts and feelings to infiltrate their work?
 - Students will share their responses in a write (think)-pair- share format
- Students will continue with survival and disaster literature unit by reading “And of Clay are We Created,” found in McDougal Littell *Literature* book.
- Show students dialectical journal example and have them replicate in their writer’s notebook.
- As we read, pause to allow students to contribute notes to their journals.
 - Frequently, teacher will have students select one entry to share with their pod as a means of propelling discussion.

Formative Assessment: Writer’s Notebook response (checked by teacher)

Summative Assessment: survivor essay

Class Session #2:

Objectives: Students will use commas correctly, based on example mentor sentences; students will read and annotate “And of Clay are We Created;” students will identify imagery in literature; students will extend their annotations by polishing their writing in a graded Google Classroom post.

Materials: Chromebooks, Smartboard, Writer’s Notebooks, Literature books

Description of lesson:

- Bell Ringer: Mentor sentence: comma usage
"She was the little cinder girl, living in the shadows of an inaccessible palace, in love with the unseen prince, who would one day hear her music." Taken from *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, by Azar Nafisi, page 31
- Using the above sentence as a guide, students will write a sentence of their own that follows the same format. If students are not sure what to write about, they may write about Azucena, the character from “And of Clay are We Created,” in their examples. Their responses will be recorded anonymously via PearDeck and will be presented to the whole class for discussion and analysis.
- Continue reading “And of Clay are We Created,” stopping every few minutes to allow students time to complete dialectical journal entries.
- Pause to notice imagery in Allende’s writing.
- Closing: students will select one entry in their dialectical journals and polish it by extending, challenging, connecting, or questioning that piece of writing. They will post their elevated responses in Google Classroom for the teacher to view and assess.

Formative Assessment: PearDeck sentences with comma usage; elevated writing in Google Classroom

Summative Assessment: survivor essay

Class Session # 3:

Objectives: Students will write with detail and imagery, based on a photograph they view and mentor sentences they analyze; students will identify elements of an essay in an example survivor essay; students will brainstorm topics for their essays.

Materials: Chromebooks, SmartBoard, Writer’s Notebooks, Humans of New York image, *Elegance of the Hedgehog* mentor sentence example, survivor essay example; survivor essay instructions and rubric

Description of lesson:

- Bell Ringer: Image Writing--joinpd.com
 - Students will write using mentor sentences; responses will be shared anonymously with the class using PearDeck. Teacher will point out strong writing to the whole class and give hints when writing is weak.
- Intro: Survivor Essay
- Example- have students read in small groups and identify elements within the paper (thesis, imagery, figurative language, transitions, etc.). Go over these elements with full class.
- Turnitin.com registration
- Brainstorming time
 - Remind students that the focus of their survivor essay may also include those who endured pain or illness for an extended time and showed resilience in that way, as Azucena did in “And of Clay are We created.”
 - Students will begin brainstorming by answering these questions:
 - What is the definition of a survivor?
 - What are the extraordinary qualities of a survivor?
 - Who do you know who exhibits these qualities?

Formative Assessment: PearDeck writing will be shared with full class; analysis of example essay

Summative Assessment: survivor essay

Class Session #4:

Objectives: Students will write for an extended period of time as they begin crafting their survivor essays; students will identify and incorporate correct MLA title page information.

Materials: Chromebooks, SmartBoard, Writer’s Notebooks

Description of lesson:

- Continue working on essays (teacher checks in for topic choices)
- Turnitin.com registration (for absent students)
- Closing: MLA title page info

Formative Assessment: student-teacher conference regarding topic; teacher check of MLA title page construction

Summative Assessment: survivor essay

Class Session #5:

Objectives: Students will correctly use semicolons and commas in sentences; students will write for an extended period of time as they begin crafting their survivor essays; students will conference with teacher.

Materials: Chromebooks, SmartBoard

Description of lesson:

- Semicolon/ comma practice: in PearDeck
 - Student responses are anonymously displayed on the SmartBoard; teacher walks class through some student responses and points out errors in thinking.
- Writing time (teacher available for conferences)

Formative Assessment: PearDeck check for semicolon, comma usage; student-teacher conferences

Summative Assessment: survivor essay

Class Session #6:

Objectives: Students will identify when to correctly use semicolons and commas; students will analyze student model essays in order to identify weak and strong areas; students will write for an extended period of time as they begin crafting their survivor essays.

Materials: Chromebooks, SmartBoard, student examples, Noden's hook suggestions
Google Form quiz

Description of lesson:

- Semicolon full-class practice via PearDeck
- Student examples: analysis
 - Students will view weak and strong student examples of the survivor essay and make note of what they observe in PearDeck. They will share their ideas with their pods and also with the whole class.
 - Students will view Harry Noden's suggestions for effective hooks (on board) and will rewrite their hook using Noden's examples as a guide
- First semicolon/ comma assessment: Google Forms
 - Students receive immediate feedback regarding their work.

Formative Assessment: PearDeck check of thinking regarding student models; Google Forms instant feedback regarding semicolon/ comma usage; rough draft of essay

Summative Assessment: survivor essay

Class Session #7:

Objectives: students will develop revision skills by editing others' essays; students will make edits to their own papers using others' feedback

Materials: Chromebooks, Smartboard, Turnitin.com platform

Description of lesson:

- Rough Draft Due
- Watch "Austin's Butterfly" Youtube video for inspiration
- Peer Reviews via Turnitin.com
- Students will complete two peer reviews, answering teacher-created prompts.
- When finished, students will take a look at their own papers and begin editing.

Formative Assessment: rough draft (to be viewed by teacher and peers), peer review responses (to be assessed by teacher)

Summative Assessment: survivor essay

Class Session #8:

Objectives: Students will make final changes to their papers, using the feedback from their peer reviews as a guide

Materials: Chromebooks, SmartBoard

Description of lesson:

- Students will look at peer reviews and follow this Editing Checklist:
 - If you had to do research for your paper, do you have a Works Cited page? Input your sources to Noodletools for help with this!
 - Are your two semicolons used correctly?
 - Have you completed at least two revision suggestions (and used the "comment" feature to show me)?

Formative Assessment: comments on Google document

Summative Assessment: survivor essay

Class Session #9:

Objectives: Students will edit sentences in their essays, using mentor sentences as a guide; students will make final changes to their papers, using the feedback from their peer reviews as a guide

Materials: Chromebooks, SmartBoard, mentor sentences from popular novels

Description of lesson:

- Have students look at and analyze mentor sentences; have them apply those stylistic elements to sentences in their own essays.
- Make final edits as teacher conferences with students.
- Students will submit papers by the next class.

Formative Assessment: PearDeck sharing of sentences crafted from mentor text; student-teacher conferences

Summative Assessment: survivor essay

Class Session #10:

Objectives: students will reflect on their writing process by writing a letter to the teacher; students will submit final drafts of survivor essays

Materials: Loose leaf paper, access to computers and printers

Description of lesson:

- Students will reflect on their writing process by crafting a letter to the teacher.
- In this letter, students will reflect on the essay process as a whole: what went well for them, what they struggled with, and areas that they would like me to take a closer look at as I grade their essays.
- Students will head to the library to print off essays and turn them in.

Summative Assessment: survivor essay, final reflection

Daily Materials and Presentation Information

Day 1:

Objectives: Students will express their opinions in a writing prompt; students will read and annotate “And of Clay are We Created;” students will identify imagery in literature.

Dialectical Journal Example for “And of Clay are We Created,” by Isabel Allende

Imagery I am drawn to	These images tell the story of	Full Quote	Analysis (Explanation)
<p>“odor of death”</p> <p>“weeping of orphans”</p> <p>“rocked the cotton fields, curling them like waves of foam”</p>	<p>loss of life</p> <p>death, solitude, despair</p> <p>mother nature’s wrath</p>	<p>“I believe that the lens of the camera had a strange effect on him; it was as if it transported him to a different time from which he could watch events without actually participating in them. When I knew him better, I came to realize that this fictive distance seemed to protect him from his own emotions”</p>	<p>Here, the narrator is saying that Rolf Carle uses the lens of the camera as a shield. He does this so that he doesn’t become emotionally involved in the situations that he observes.</p>

Day 3:

Objectives: Students will write with detail and imagery, based on a photograph they view and mentor sentences they analyze; students will identify elements of an essay in an example survivor essay; students will brainstorm topics for their essays.

“My name is Renee. I am fifty-four years old. I am a widow; I am short, ugly, and plump. I have bunions on my feet, and, if I am to credit certain early mornings of self-inflicted disgust, the breath of a mammoth. I live alone with my cat, a big, lazy tom, who has no distinguishing features other than the fact that his paws smell bad when he is annoyed.”

From *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, by Muriel Barbery

Now, you are going to mimic Muriel Barber’s writing style by including as much description as possible about a photograph you will see in just a moment. You will write from the first person perspective, but your writing can take the form of a poem, a monologue, or a conversation. Tell me about “yourself” in the form of another character. Write until I call time.



Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

Survivor Essay

Our last unit focused on natural disasters and emergency situations in which characters were forced to risk their lives in their attempts to survive. In our world today, people everywhere are fighting to survive the obstacles that life throws at them. Many of these survivors have taught us how to better appreciate the gifts that we have been given. For this assignment, you will select someone in your life (or someone in the world) who has fought to survive a difficult situation. You will be writing a 5-paragraph essay with a guiding thesis about the person you selected. Each paragraph should begin with a topic sentence and the sentences that follow in each paragraph should flow smoothly. As you write, I want you to focus on writing complex sentences and using imagery and descriptive words.

Answer these questions to get started.

- What is the definition of a survivor?
- What are the extraordinary qualities of a survivor?
- Who do you know who exhibits these qualities?

Rubric--40 points!

- 1.) 5 paragraph essay that includes a title (Times New Roman, 12-point font) - 10 points
- 2.) Intro: grabs the reader's attention and contains a clearly-stated thesis statement - 10 points
- 3.) Well developed paragraphs that are supported with a topic sentence - 5 points
- 4.) The author uses transitions that maintain the flow of the paper - 5
- 5.) Use of memorable language (descriptive words and complex sentences) - 5 points
- 6.) Grammar and mechanics - 5 points
--You must correctly use a semicolon at least twice in your essay.

The Art of Breathing

An Example Survivor Essay

Published on *Breathebravely.blogspot.com*

65 Roses: the phrase may bring to mind flashes of color and life. You may imagine a garden full of floral beauty and life-giving splendor. Now picture the full, deep breaths you may take as you inhale that fragrant, floral perfume. For me, the phrase “65 Roses” unleashes images of a merciless weed--one that is overtaking my best friend’s “garden of life.” You see, the phrase “65 Roses” was coined in 1965 when a young boy found it difficult to pronounce the name of his fatal genetic disease, cystic fibrosis. According to the Cystic Fibrosis Foundation, “cystic fibrosis is a life-threatening, genetic disease that causes persistent lung infections and progressively limits the ability to breathe.” Many who suffer from this devastating disease never see the age of 30. My best friend, Ashley, has spent the past 27 years fighting to survive the life-threatening effects of cystic fibrosis.

There are some days when it seems I go through the motions without fully breathing; when I finally allow myself to rest, I inhale full, gratifying breaths and feel my body relax and my thoughts begin to clear. These seemingly unremarkable moments pass me by in a flurry on a day-to-day basis. In those moments, though, rarely do I take the time to give thanks for the ability to take those clear, full breaths. Rarely do I reflect on the ways that my lungs fortify and sustain me. But I should, because my best friend doesn’t have this luxury. Her lungs function at half the rate of a healthy person’s, and yet she continues to fight for her right to a happy, fulfilled life. She is an inspiration to all who meet her; in fact, up until a few years ago, only a few select people in her life knew that she suffered from cystic fibrosis. She had found a way to put on a mask of health and vigor so that the world didn’t have to worry.

All of that changed a few years ago, when Ashley made the brave decision to share her story with the world. She began writing a blog, sharing her daily struggles--the ugly truths and the debilitating effects that the disease had entrusted her with. On the day of her blog reveal, Ashley stoically unveiled the layers of protection and safety that she had built and allowed herself to be fully vulnerable. She wrote, "Today is the day. I am removing a layer of paint and showing the world what I AM, not what I am not. Today I show the world how grateful I am for each breath, each beautiful person I know and love, and each opportunity life has to offer." Now those are the words of a fighter. Those are the words of someone who wants not only to survive, but to truly LIVE.

The world was desperate to hear Ashley's story; in the span of a few years, her blog, *Breathe Bravely*, has gained hundreds of thousands of followers and has gained recognition from the *Huffington Post* on dozens of occasions. She has been named one of Augustana University's "Forward Under 40" for her efforts to make the world a better place. She is also in the process of building the "Breathe Bravely" Foundation, which will raise money for children who suffer from Cystic Fibrosis, and has agreed to write a book chronicling her story. Her testimony of living life to its fullest, despite the demon that tries to stifle her fire, is one that the world needs to hear. Ashley is a wife, daughter, friend, musician, teacher, quilter, and traveler. But most importantly, Ashley is a survivor.

Ashley courageously battles cystic fibrosis every day. Her morning routine involves gulping down a cocktail of prescription drugs. The side effects of each of these pills range from nausea to insomnia. Her sleepless nights are spent anxiously pondering the uncertainty of her future. The hospital has become her home away from home and her nurses are on speed dial. Ashley's disease has stolen her innocence and replaced it with apprehension, yet Ashley still

strives to find the beauty in every day. So tomorrow, or the next day, when you find yourself out of breath after running a mile or talking excitedly to a friend, remember this: each of those breaths is precious, and my friend Ashley is one of many cystic fibrosis survivors who is fighting for the very next breath. Ashley's story reminds us all to breathe bravely.

Day 4:

Objectives: Students will write for an extended period of time as they begin crafting their survivor essays; students will identify and incorporate correct MLA title page information

Survivor Essay Day 4 Grammar Activities

Head to Oatmeal Website for an introduction to the semicolon.

Note: all below are from slides presented using the PearDeck presentation platform, which means that students can access the presentation from their devices and are able to provide responses that I can see up on the SmartBoard.

Here's the idea:

A semicolon separates different elements within a sentence.

It indicates a pause that is stronger than a comma.

A semicolon typically takes the place of a period; it is used to connect complete, related thoughts.

Use semicolons to separate two independent clauses (complete thoughts). Write your own sentence in the box to the right. Stumped? Write using characters from *TKAM*.

Gavin wasn't happy; his sickness prevented him from seeing the concert.

Despite eight hours of sleep, Maddy was exhausted; marching band required so much time and energy.

Use semicolons to separate items in a series if any of the items contain commas.

The friends traveled to Atlanta, Georgia; Orlando, Florida; and Louisville, Kentucky. This is a rare time when you would use a semicolon before the word "and."

Use a semicolon before a conjunctive adverb that joins the clauses of a compound sentence. Use a comma after the adverb.

The winter weather advisory scared us; therefore, we postponed our road trip.

Storms pose great risks for outdoor family pets; in fact, they can be deadly.

My dad experienced a terrifying situation; however, it ultimately brought our family closer together.

Practice

Some of these sentences need commas, while others need semicolons.

Format your responses as follows:

My sister encountered obstacles that few people have to face she is a survivor. Ex: face; she

1. Many players on the team are doing well in school those who are struggling however need to step it up so they can continue to play.
2. My viola teacher played the violin professionally for many years and he now conducts a community orchestra.
3. Miss Maudie's nut grass was flourishing but the rest of the lawn was dying.
4. The hill was covered with wildflowers it was a beautiful sight.
5. As I turned around, I heard a loud thump the cat had knocked over Grandma's vase.

Day 5:

Objectives: Students will correctly use semicolons and commas in sentences; students will write for an extended period of time as they begin crafting their survivor essays; students will conference with teacher.

Semicolon/ Comma PearDeck Practice

1. I thought registration day would be tiring but I didn't know I'd have to stand in so many lines.
2. Gavin and Joe were both in English class this morning they gave an interesting presentation on *To Kill a Mockingbird*.
3. The snowstorm dumped twelve inches of snow on the interstate subsequently, the state police closed the road.
4. Professors are experts in their field and I would agree with that claim since I've been in college.
5. The suspect said that he had never met the victim however, the detective knew that he was lying.
6. In the first place, it was raining too hard to see the road in the second place, our windshield wipers broke.
7. I have read *Harry Potter* but I have not read *Mockingjay*.
8. Chicago is my favorite city in fact, I lived there for three years.
9. Swimming is excellent exercise I used to do it every day.
10. Large supermarkets fascinate me I can find anything I could possibly need in one place.

Intro and Conclusion Analysis and Practice

Take a look at the following student examples. They both wrote about the same event, yet there are some distinct differences between the two. What do you notice?

Example 1: Intro

Your plane finally lands in sunny Las Vegas; stepping out, you feel the blazing sun beating down on the pavement below. You take a deep breath, relieved to have escaped work for a short while. Little did you know, your vacation would very quickly become something much more terrifying. Brian Wills, from Brandon, South Dakota, was one of the 527 civilians injured in the Las Vegas shooting on October 1st. Despite Brian's encounter with a mass shooting, he has come out of the situation alive; he is a survivor.

Example 2: Intro

Have you ever wondered what it feels like to be shot or maybe even injured? It was mass chaos when this all broke down, people were there not knowing where it came from or even knowing that it was going to happen. Many people died from around the country, even people that were close to our state like iowa and even some people were injured from even Sioux falls. Would you have ran or would you have stayed to help others?

Example 1: Conclusion

The night of October 1st, 2017 will be one that will weigh heavily on people's hearts for many years to come. Although it may not seem like it, there is also a positive lesson that the concert attendees gained from the situation; they learned how important it is to treasure one's family and friends, because they will not live forever. When it comes to being a survivor, it is important to possess the qualities of intelligence and determination, both of which Wills embodies. Despite the hardships that Wills encountered, and will continue to encounter, he is persistently pushing through; he exhibits all the qualities of a true survivor.

Example 2: Conclusion

In this world we should not be fighting people and killing them because, they are what make this country great and the cities and ext. We should care more about the other people in the world.

We should love each other and not want to ruin each other's life because we all deserve a good life and a good life is all that matter.

Effective hooks. Using one of the following strategies as a guide, rewrite your hook.

-Taken from Harry R. Noden's *Image Grammar*, Chapter 9: "A Closer Look at One Form of Nonfiction"

Mystery lead: Heart thumping, palms sweating, my dad watches as the enemy shows its face: nine men, all wielding weapons of war and destruction. Although the enemy does not outnumber my dad's side, he realizes that their skill is far superior and that at any time one man could win the war. Still, he does not lose faith and holds his breath as he awaits the almost inevitable onslaught.

Descriptive lead: The midsummer sun was high in a yellow, brown sky. The morning's filmy clouds had dissipated, and the temperature was 8 degrees--way up from last night low of minus 100 degrees. A breeze wafted from the west at about eight miles an hour; a perfect afternoon for a drive on Mars.

Question lead: Have you ever had to glue your shoes to hold them together? Cut your own hair or make your own clothes? Watch as your older sister becomes pregnant at sixteen? Or, with sirens screaming and light lashing, watch an ambulance take your mother to the hospital after depression nearly lured her away? These memories, dark and piercing, are from my mother's childhood.

Statistic lead: Child abuse is becoming one of the fastest growing acts of violence in the United States. According to the American Humane Association, 1.4 million cases of child abuse were reported in the U.S. in 1982. Nearly 1/3 of these victims were teens between the ages of 13 and 17; last year, nearly 1,300 abused children died.

(Noden 207-215)

MLA Header Info and Works Cited Formatting

Last name 1

Name

Ms. Stai

English II

5 December 2018

In the Silence, Words Speak

Works Cited

Gowdy, John. "Avoiding Self-organized Extinction: Toward a Co-evolutionary Economics of Sustainability." *International Journal of Sustainable Development and World Ecology* 14.1 (2007): 27-36. Print.

Day 6:

Objectives: Students will identify when to correctly use semicolons and commas; students will analyze student model essays in order to identify weak and strong areas; students will write for an extended period of time as they begin crafting their survivor essays

Select the sentence that is punctuated correctly

- A. When you went to the doctor, did they give you a flu shot?
- B. When you went to the doctor; did they give you a flu shot?

Select the sentence that is punctuated correctly

- A. Although I try to keep my cool; many people caught me crying during *TKAM* presentations yesterday.
- B. Although I try to keep my cool, many people caught me crying during *TKAM* presentations yesterday.

Select the sentence that is punctuated correctly

- A. Many people must not understand the message of *TKAM*, that is why it is considered a banned book.
- B. Many people must not understand the message of *TKAM*; that is why it is considered a banned book.

Complete this Google form, using what you've learned today!

Name: _____ Period: _____ Date: _____

Semicolon or Comma?

Directions: determine whether the clauses need to be joined with commas or semicolons. Put the proper punctuation on the blank.

1. The artist preferred to paint in oils ____ he did not like watercolors.
2. Even when the house looks clean ____ there is usually a layer of dust under the rug.
3. I'm going to leave early today ____ unless the boss comes back from the meeting.
4. The computer can perform many calculations at once ____ however, it cannot reason at all.
5. In the first place, it was snowing too hard to see the road ____ in the second place, we had no chains.
6. France is my favorite foreign country ____ in fact, I plan on vacationing there for two weeks this summer.
7. I went to a concert in Minneapolis last night ____ that's why I'm tired.
8. I was going to do all of my English homework last night ____ but I got distracted.

Day 7:

Objectives: students will develop revision skills by editing others' essays; students will make edits to their own papers using others' feedback.

Peermark Questions for Turnitin.com Peer Reviews**Peer Review**

1. Identify the thesis. Does it provide a preview of the entire essay?
2. Is this a complete rough draft? That is, is it done, with beginning, middle, and end, even if the writer doesn't necessarily tell the story in that order?
3. Rate this paper's CONVENTIONS trait: The writer does an acceptable job of using language correctly (e.g., spelling, punctuation, capitalization, grammar, usage, paragraphing). There are only a few errors for the writer to fix before turning in a final draft.
4. Tell me about the transitions between paragraphs or between ideas. Could the author improve or add any of these?
5. Comment with the word "reread" on any passages that you had to read more than once in order to understand the meaning.
6. Place a comment bubble next to any line that you believe has a spelling, grammar, punctuation, or mechanical error.
7. Place a comment next to any transition words you find (therefore, although, likewise, similarly, conversely, in the same way, additionally, also, etc.).
8. Take a look at the list below and give a suggestion about a place where the writer could use a transition word. Place this suggestion in the margin.
9. Which questions does this essay raise for you?
10. Rate this paper's SENTENCE FLUENCY trait: The writer has crafted sentences that flow easily and clearly express ideas.
11. What are your thoughts regarding the conclusion? What suggestions do you have for the author?
12. Write any other comments that you think would offer feedback to the writer.

Day 9:

Objectives: Students will edit sentences in their essays, using mentor sentences as a guide; students will make final changes to their papers, using the feedback from their peer reviews as a guide

Mentor Sentences:

What do you notice? Select one sentence format and mimic it, using the subject of your survivor essay.

The faces around him displayed nothing but shock; he might have announced that he wanted to borrow one of their arms (from *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, by J.K. Rowling).

Summer was our best season: it was sleeping on the back screened porch in cots, or trying to sleep in the treehouse; summer was everything good to eat; it was a thousand colors in a parched landscape; but most of all, summer was Dill (from *To Kill a Mockingbird*, by Harper Lee).

When I stepped out into the bright sunlight from the darkness of the movie house, I had only two things on my mind: Paul Newman and a ride home... (from *The Outsiders*, by S.E. Hinton).

I look at my little sister and think how she has inherited the best qualities our family has to offer: my mother's healing hands, my father's level head, and my fight (from *Mockingjay*, by Suzanne Collins).

I can still see the hole like it was yesterday, and it was. Life is a perpetual yesterday for us (from *The Lovely Bones*, by Alice Sebold).

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27 June 2018

The Psychological Riddle of Witchcraft and the Supernatural in the Writings of Elizabeth Gaskell and Vernon Lee

“I pursued her, her physical image, her psychological explanation, with a kind of passion which filled my days” (Lee 117). This physical image is none other than a Victorian femme fatale by the name of Mrs. Oke, a creation of Victorian author, Vernon Lee. Lee, alongside her contemporary, Elizabeth Gaskell, crafted female heroines who were not beautiful in the traditional sense, but something about their energy was alluring to others. In “The Poor Clare” and “Oke of Okehurst,” Elizabeth Gaskell and Vernon Lee craft women who defy stereotypes and refuse to conform to the expectations of their gender. This refusal may stem from the authors’ own inner desires for freedom. The characters of Lee and Gaskell are drawn to the supernatural, lending them a sense of spiritual power, which both enthralls and consumes others. Their stories include wild and unpredictable women who are living out the repressed passions of their authors. Inspired by their dissatisfaction with a patriarchal society, Elizabeth Gaskell and Vernon Lee crafted ghost stories that enabled them to step out of their world and into one in which women’s spiritual awakening allowed them a sense of power.

The esteemed wife of a minister and a woman noted for her charitable actions, Elizabeth Gaskell’s interest in the macabre seems unexpected and even juvenile, yet, “she saw fiction as a way of leading people to unpalatable truths, of extending their awareness and understanding of those around them” (Martin 32). Gaskell’s imagination was an escape from her mundane reality,

where she felt she needed to be the perfect housewife and mother. She took great joy in sharing ghost stories around a fire; however, many people of the time did not welcome her witch stories, which teemed with subliminal social messages. Gaskell had to deal with the outrage of members of her husband's congregation who burned her books and ostracized her in public (33). In Gaskell's letters, which were discovered upon her death, she wrote about the conflict "between propriety and truth, between doing what is expected from a woman, a wife, and mother, and acting and thinking according to her own beliefs" (33). This internal conflict plays out in her ghost stories as well; she was living out her dark fantasies and her discontent with her place in society in the form of spooky tales.

In "The Poor Clare," Gaskell's protagonist is a wild, unpredictable woman named Bridget Fitzgerald, whose life has been riddled with misfortune and pain. Bridget begins the story as the maid to a woman named Madame Starkey, a position which allowed Bridget "great influence over her [Madame], and, through her, over her husband" (Gaskell 3). She is described as a woman of "strong character and passionate anger" with a "masterful spirit and "vehement force of will" (Gaskell 5-6). This description differs dramatically from the description of the woman she served, Madame Starkey, whose beauty and grace are praised to no avail. Bridget had one daughter, Mary, whose relationship with her mother was a loving, yet tumultuous one. Eventually, Mary was given the opportunity to travel abroad to work for a friend of Madame Starkey, which caused heartbreak for both mother and daughter. The worst was yet to come, as Bridget stopped receiving letters from her daughter and had no idea what had become of her beloved child. Shortly thereafter, Madame Starkey passed away, leaving Bridget Fitzgerald alone, jobless, and yearning for her daughter. Bridget's eventual isolation from society and her strange movements led many to believe "that she held converse with some spirit; in short, she

was unconsciously earning for herself the dreadful reputation of a witch” (Gaskell 6). It is interesting to note that the community was so quick to jump to this conclusion merely because she retreated from society for a time. Bridget’s one source of comfort during this period is her daughter’s dog, Mignon, which is her last connection to her beloved child. When the dog is accidentally shot by a man named Mr. Gisborne, who shows no remorse for his actions, Bridget’s heartbreak turns to fury as she curses his future: ““ You shall live to see the creature you love best, and who alone loves you...you shall see this creature, for whom death would be too happy, become a terror and a loathing to all” (Gaskell 7). With this, Bridget flicks Mignon’s blood on Gisborne, who was “half curious, half uneasy” at the encounter (7). The object of the curse, which is revealed later in the story, is none other than Bridget’s granddaughter, Lucy, who was in Gisborne’s care.

Lucy, who is described as a great beauty, has captured the heart of the unnamed narrator. At first, he is completely unaware that his darling Lucy is inhabited by the demon spirit of her grandmother’s curse that appears from time to time “complete in likeness...but with a loathsome demon soul looking out of the gray eyes, that were in turns mocking and voluptuous” (Gaskell 17). Upon discovering this alarming fact, the narrator is both repulsed and enthralled with his beloved Lucy; he writes, “I never loved her more fondly than now when...the idea of her was becoming so inextricably blended with the shuddering thought of IT” (18). Try as he might, the narrator cannot back away from the object of his desire, even when she has shown him the demon that possesses her. Her breathtaking beauty and kind heart contrast starkly with the dark spirit that lives within her. The fact that Lucy, and not Bridget, is the one possessed by a demon makes the story all the more heartbreaking. Bridget has endured every possible heartbreak and has been left all alone; she must now come to terms with the fact that the impulsive curse she

placed upon a man who carelessly destroyed her last connection with her daughter has haunted the life of her one and only grandchild.

In a seemingly odd turn of events, Bridget Fitzgerald finds herself seeking forgiveness for her sins in a convent of an order called the Poor Clares “in order that, by perpetual penance and constant service of others, she may at length so act as to obtain final absolution and rest for her soul” (Gaskell 27). Bridget Fitzgerald’s final moments on earth are filled with suffering and despair; she seeks recompense for the curse she inadvertently placed upon her only living relative, sweet Lucy. She is only able to experience freedom when she receives the sacrament of extreme unction from a priest, which caused her eyes to open wide with “a strange intensity of joy, as with the gesture of her finger and trance-like gleam of her eye, she seemed like one who watched the disappearance of some loathed and fearful creature.” After the exorcism, it is Bridget, and not the priest, who proclaims, “She is freed from the curse,” just before she dies (Gaskell 32). With this sacrifice, Bridget has secured the fate of her granddaughter, who will no longer be possessed by an evil spirit and will be free to marry the narrator of the story.

In Gaskell’s “The Poor Clare,” as with other depictions of witches in Victorian literature, Bridget Fitzgerald is viewed as “other” and is ostracized from society for her evil ways. She is described as “seamed and scarred by agonies of solitary weeping” (Gaskell 10). Bridget’s fierce devotion to the Virgin Mary and her Catholic faith seem at odds with her dark sorcery within the story: “She has called up the powers of hell to punish her enemy instead of forgiving him” (Martin 37). This conflict within Bridget also mirrors the conflict that Elizabeth Gaskell must have felt as she wrote these stories. Outwardly, she was a faithful minister’s wife, but her ghost stories reveal a much darker side. Like many other Victorian writers of the time, Gaskell may have written about witchcraft to send a message about society’s expectations for women,

especially those who did not conform to their perceived gender role. In “The Poor Clare” in particular, “the old patriarchal order in which ...Bridget Fitzgerald must live stifles them [her], turning their [her] potential for good into a power that destroys them [her]” (Martin 33). If her heartbreak over the death of her daughter’s dog had not been met with such disdain, perhaps she would not have cursed Mr. Gibson, and her story might have been a different one. The witches in the stories of many Victorian writers show the dangers of women “unfathomable in rage, capable of undermining domestic tranquility and social stability, and harboring an obstinate independence of spirit all the more powerful because hidden” (Moran 129). Not only can these women not be controlled, but their wild temperaments give an unpredictability to their fascination with witchcraft. In “Light No Smithfield Fires,” Maureen F. Moran notes, “To be a witch is to become part of a timeless network of strong and powerful women and to reject man’s model of femininity” (136). “Man’s model of femininity” was one that the majority of women subscribed to, so not only were witches condemned and feared by men, but they were also looked down upon by their female counterparts. This rift among females further isolated and fueled the fire of accused witches: “Gaskell reinforces this point by showing how particular groups assert their identity by threatening or expelling the feared Other to the boundaries of its structure or integrating it in a humiliating fashion” (Moran 146). In “The Poor Clare,” Bridget is ostracized for her Catholic faith as well as her witchcraft as others chant, “The Coldholme witch! The Irish papist” when they hear mere mention of her name (Gaskell 23). Bridget’s lack of money, Irish heritage, religious fanaticism, and inclination towards witchcraft lend her a reputation as someone to be avoided at all costs.

While Elizabeth Gaskell’s personal faith and role as a minister’s wife played into her writing, another Victorian writer, Vernon Lee, dismissed the idea of religion. Her “declared

atheism...was lifelong and undeterred” (Leighton 2). Lee didn’t fear the judgment day, as Elizabeth Gaskell seemed to, which is present in the way in which she crafted her ghost stories. Instead, “Lee’s ghosts ‘figure not the terror of the seductive, fascinating difference of the past’” (Benjamin qtd. in Mahoney 51). Many of these elements of the past are objects that Lee has woven into her stories. In “Oke of Okehurst,” Alice Oke is obsessed with the clothing and belongings of her ancestors, thinking that these items connect her with loved ones who have since passed. Mrs. Oke’s obsession eventually leads to the disintegration of her husband’s mental stability. In her essay titled, “Haunted Collections: Vernon Lee and Ethical Consumption,” Kristin Mahoney writes about this phenomenon in Lee’s ghost stories: “historicized consumption retrieves the art object from degradation...and reendows it with aura to the point where the art object’s capacity to shock and destabilize...has become truly dangerous” (52). While Alice Oke’s fascination with clothing from the past might be dismissed as a silly quirk of a listless woman, her husband is alarmed by her actions, and though he praises her as being a “remarkable woman,” he also tells a painter he has commissioned that she is “awfully strange” (108).

Like many witches or femme fatales in Victorian literature, Mrs. Oke is not described as being breathtakingly beautiful. Instead, her allure comes from her “Narcissus attitude” and lack of interest in others (Lee 116). The commissioned painter finds himself immediately under her spell, noting, “I became interested in Mrs. Oke as if I had been in love with her; and I was not in the least in love” (Lee 117). Something about her captures the painter’s attention, although he cannot quite describe what it is. He also notices the woman begin to change before his eyes as he spends more time with her.

Initially, Mrs. Oke seems nearly catatonic in her listlessness and is described by her husband as being perpetually unwell. This makes her seem weak and harmless, yet the narrator

describes a drastic change in Mrs. Oke's demeanor when she dons the clothing of her ancestor, saying, there was something "almost repulsive in this exquisite woman. She seemed to me, suddenly perverse and dangerous" (128). It is as if she is consumed by the spirit of her dead ancestor's ghost. Typically apathetic and underwhelmed by the world around her, Mrs. Oke takes on a vibrant energy when she wears the remnants of her ancestor, forming a nearly romantic relationship with him. However, as her actions continue to anger her husband, disaster is inevitable. Ultimately, the story takes a violent turn as Mrs. Oke's ghostly lover "returns from the past to [attempt to] kill the woman who has become infatuated with the memory of him" (Leighton 2).

As Lee writes in "Oke of Okehurst," "A woman who defies stereotype needs to be sorted out" (117). The idea of women defying the stereotypes and expectations of their gender plays a major role in the works of both Vernon Lee and Elizabeth Gaskell. In writings by both authors, women who do not submit to the men they encounter are considered odd, and in some cases, dangerous. After Alice Oke's husband suspects her of dishonoring him (with the ghost of her ancestor's lover), he presents his dilemma to the narrator, saying, "If only she would trust in her husband, she would be safe. But that other one won't let her" (148-149). Here, Mr. Oke recognizes the presence of a spirit who has lured his wife from him. He refuses to acknowledge that his wife would act out her desires of her own accord and, instead, is quick to blame the spirit of another man for enticing her to be emotionally unfaithful. One may assume that it is precisely this coddling that Mrs. Oke is trying to escape by taking part in a love affair with a supernatural being. She recognizes the power that she holds over her husband with this charade, but she is also full of desire for the Elizabethan spirit.

As Angela Leighton writes in “Ghosts, Aestheticism, and ‘Vernon Lee,’” Lee “uses the ghost story to express all the seduction and ambiguity of aestheticism itself...The ghost affords a pretext for cravings which, if illicit and decadent, are also ironic and witty” (2). Ultimately, Alice Oke’s obsession with a ghost from the past drives her husband mad. He shoots both his wife and himself, but he is the one who suffers as a result. Mrs. Oke has dreams that she will reunite with her ghost lover in the afterlife. Vernon Lee ensured her readers knew of Mrs. Oke’s final act of power and redemption, when she is described as follows: “Her mouth was convulsed, as if in that automatic shriek, but her wide-open white eyes seemed to smile vaguely and distantly” (Lee 152). One can only assume that Alice Oke and her lover are finally united in the spiritual realm; this image alone transforms her from the listless wife of a taciturn man into the powerful ghost-lover of a deceased Elizabethan poet.

The fact that Mrs. Oke seeks sexual gratification not from her mortal husband, but from the spirit of a dead ancestor may stem from Vernon Lee’s inability to acknowledge her own sexuality. Vernon Lee lived behind many masks; she wrote using a male pseudonym and refused to acknowledge her lesbian desires. In “The Archival Traces of Desire: Vernon Lee’s Failed Sexuality and the Interpretation of Letters in Lesbian History,” Sally Newman quotes Lee’s friend, Irene Cooper Willis, who said, “Vernon was homosexual, but she never faced up to sexual facts. She had a whole series of passions for women, but they were never correct. Physical contact she shunned. She was absolutely frustrated” (Newman 56). Because of her refusal to act upon her desires, Lee was considered a “failed lesbian” among her friends, and, by some, a prude (56). With this in mind, Alice Oke’s disinterest in her husband--both physically and emotionally--and her ability to so easily toy with his mind, might have been mirroring Lee’s feelings towards men. What better way to give her protagonist an escape than to craft an affair with a ghost from

the past? In this, as in her other ghost stories, “Vernon Lee can give us a ‘spurious’ ghost in whom, like fiction, we do not need to believe, but whose beauty is cravingly desired and pursued” (Leighton 10). If Lee had been more daring (and had lived in a different time), perhaps Mrs. Oke’s ghost lover might have been a female instead.

Vernon Lee’s “Dionea” is another in her *Hauntings* series which looks to a male narrator to relate the tale; just like the narrator of “Oke of Okehurst,” he does not prove to be a truly reliable storyteller: “Seeing her [Dionea] only as an interesting but ordinary castaway, he [the narrator] fails to recognize her as a historical subject, and this misrecognition leads him to misjudge her power” (Fluhr 292). Like Alice Oke and Bridget Fitzgerald, young Dionea seeks solace in her own thoughts, which causes others alarm. Dionea’s breathtaking beauty and brazen sexuality lend her a power that ultimately proves to be evil. When she is asked to model for a sculptor, she doesn’t blink at the idea of revealing her body to a stranger: “The thought of stripping for the view of a man, which would send a shudder through our most brazen village girls, seemed not to startle her” (Lee 97). As one suspicious act after another reveals Dionea’s dangerous tendencies, the narrator of the story remains blind to her guilt. In her essay titled, “Empathy and Identify in Vernon Lee’s *Hauntings*,” Nicole Fluhr writes of the narrator’s foolish mistake, “As the body counts, his culpability in failing to recognize her identity or protect her victims grows” (292). Dionea’s beauty is part of her supernatural allure. In fact, it is what leads her sculptor to become obsessed with her physique. Yet, he makes an interesting comment as he begins to work with the young model: “The point of a woman is not her body...but her soul” (Lee 96). While Dionea’s beauty might have tricked others into thinking she must be a heavenly goddess, her dark soul led to the destruction of many in her path. Ultimately, Dionea is a witch whose sorcery results in the deaths of many, including a priest, a host, and an artist and his wife.

Her eventual disappearance is shrouded in mystery, but one sailor claims to have seen her on a boat, where “against the mast...a myrtle wreath on her head, leaned Dionea, singing words in an unknown tongue, the white pigeons circling around her” (Lee 104). In this, as in so many supernatural stories involving women, the witch has the last laugh.

In the writings of Lee and Gaskell, many ghost stories are narrated by men. In Lee’s *Hauntings*, in particular, “each of the four stories...is narrated by a male speaker. All of the narrators are writers or artists, and each produces his story at the same time as he is trying and failing to complete another work” (Fluhr 287). The men are typically writing letters to women regarding their observations, but the reader doesn’t ever get to see how those women react to the femme fatales in question. If they had been able to meet and interact with the women in question, perhaps they would have seen through the feminine wiles that so easily duped every man. Alas, readers do not get to have that satisfaction, as their only view into the lives of Alice Oak, Mary and Bridget Fitzgerald, and Dionea is through the skewed observations of a mystified man. In many cases, the male narrators find themselves drawn in a romantic way to the women they were sent to interview. Lucy’s lover in “The Poor Clare” is none other than the narrator of the story, who becomes “passionately enamored of Mistress Lucy,” and rather than taking her “shrinking avoidance” as a hint to leave her alone, he takes it as a challenge to win her over (Gaskell 13). In this character, it is evident that Gaskell wanted to show the lengths to which men will go to get what they want. Ultimately, it seems, Lucy is able to reciprocate a love for the man who has expressed so much interest, which is not the case in “Oke of Okehurst.” In Lee’s story, Alice finds herself incapable of expressing any care for either her husband or the man who has been commissioned to paint her likeness. She is described as having a personality that turns inward and a stare that extends beyond the present. She is a woman who needs to be both subdued and

aroused, for nothing can trigger any emotion. That is, no interaction with the men who have turned her into their object of study can inspire her. Alice is only fully brought to life when she inhabits the objects of the past in order to create a future for herself and her ghost lover.

Elizabeth Gaskell and Vernon Lee wrote female characters who defied cultural and social expectations in order to achieve their highest potential. Tired of traditional gender roles and expectations, Gaskell and Lee sought an escape from reality by not only writing fictional stories about strong women, but also by incorporating elements of witchcraft and the supernatural into their writing. In her essay titled, "Gaskell's Ghosts: Truths in Disguise," Carol A. Martin comments on Elizabeth Gaskell's inspiration for writing bold female characters: "Feeling, then, both rebellious and submissive, defiant of the world's opinion and yet fearing it, it is no wonder that Gaskell uses the possibilities of the ghost story to depict a powerful woman who dares to defy heaven and earth..." (38). In a very similar way, Vernon Lee's characters are wild, unpredictable, and sexual in nature. Their desires are beyond this world and cannot be met with the love of mere mortal men. The ghost stories of Elizabeth Gaskell and Vernon Lee demonstrate "a dark vision of the trap women are in," when they are viewed as 'either a great sinner or a great saint,' with not much room between" (Martin 39). The femme fatales of these two audacious writers defy the patriarchy in a way that makes them both dangerous and admirable. After all, Bridget Fitzgerald announces the departure of an evil spirit inhabiting the body of her granddaughter; Dionea haunts the waters on a fishing boat, surrounded by birds; and Alice Oak dies with a smile on her face and the hair of her ghost lover in a locket about her neck. In death, as in life, the female characters of Elizabeth Gaskell and Vernon Lee prevail.

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20 February 2018

In the Silence, Words Speak

F. Scott Fitzgerald once wrote this about the beauty of literature: “You discover that your longings are universal longings, that you're not lonely and isolated from anyone. You belong.” Many teachers of English experienced this sense of belonging at a young age, which developed into a lifelong passion for the English language. While for many, this passion was inspired by a voracious love of characters and their stories, some young children latch onto literature as a means of escape from reality. Roald Dahl’s *Matilda* comes to mind as a prime example of a child seeking solace in the pages of a book. Just as Miss Honey provided Matilda with the comfort of literary characters as a means of escape from her dysfunctional home life, many English teachers find that they are called upon to introduce words of healing during times of trial. When the world is in turmoil, people turn to words to gain solace, and it is in these moments that teachers of literature, more so than any other subject, come to the rescue to help students read, write, and process literature.

Literature provides an escape for readers who need to step away from reality for a time. Stories can both draw readers into a fictional world and also help them process their own. In her essay titled, “The Literary Imagination,” Martha Nussbaum writes about the impact of literature on society: “...good literature is disturbing in a way that history and social science writing frequently are not. Because it summons powerful emotions, it disconcerts and puzzles” (359). Because it evokes such a powerful response in its readers, literature draws its readers in,

especially in times of pain or difficulty. Literature can force readers to encounter topics that may be difficult to broach in other circumstances, and it can provide a springboard for difficult, necessary class discussion. Literary critic Helen Vendler also comments on the power of literature in her essay, titled, “What We Have Loved, Others Will Love”: “The adolescent young are much more likely to find the solace, insight, and truth they have a right to expect from us as ‘humanists’ in poems, plays, stories, fables, and tales than they are to find these gifts in the exercises and models of elementary classes in composition and language” (33). Literature provides students with a world that is vastly different from their own--one in which they can immerse themselves in the protagonist’s story arc and which serves as a means of escape and a safe haven for readers who are hurting in some way.

As students move to secondary school and college, teachers find themselves with the responsibilities of selecting thought-provoking texts and effectively leading discussions regarding those texts. These responsibilities can seem overwhelming, especially when teachers also find themselves in pain. Yet the texts that teachers select do not necessarily have to align completely with the issues at hand. Teaching *Night*, by Elie Wiesel, can open up the lines of discussion regarding all sorts of persecution and pain. Although Wiesel’s memoir focuses on the horrors of the Holocaust, it also brings to light the idea of loyalty to family or even to a belief system. Additionally, readers are able to see just how thin the line between loyalty and betrayal really is. Unearthing the difficult ideas posed in literature can be a less invasive way of helping students digest issues of today.

Aside from being a means of escape, literature also has a way of teaching readers about themselves. In her book, *Teaching Literature*, Elaine Showalter discusses the role of literature in moments of distress. In those situations when the pain is raw and unspoken, how do teachers put

their trust in literature? When a freshman student has taken his life, and his open desk is a screaming reminder of his sudden and heartbreaking absence, how does the class go on? Showalter writes, “These are the times that test our claims that literature teaches us how to be human, simple, and kind” (135). In those painful moments that leave us reeling, there will always be words that will numb the pain. They will not eliminate that pain, but they may help to understand it. Showalter goes on to acknowledge this enigma: “Literature both seems irrelevant in tragedy and crucial in its power to console and illuminate” (133). Teachers might fail to acknowledge the power they have in these moments; it may be tempting for a teacher to continue on with the syllabus during difficult times, but there is also great freedom in the idea that teachers could throw out the plan and present a lesson that is relevant to current events. When presented with such an idea, scholars James M. Banner and Harold Cannon suggest that “in teaching, ethics means putting the satisfaction of the needs and good of students before those of anyone else” (qtd. in Showalter 132). They imply that teachers have a responsibility to step up and deal with an uncomfortable situation rather than attempt to escape it. Because they acknowledge the power of words, English teachers are inclined to do as Banner and Cannon recommend.

Some may say that literature is merely words, and those words could not possibly bring comfort in times of trial. However, words have power, and with that power comes the possibility for growth and change. Teachers should help students become aware that they have the power to not only read the words of others but also to paint pictures with their own words through writing. Henry Wordsworth writes of this power in *The Prelude*, which Helen Vendler quotes in her essay, “What We Have Loved, Others Will Love”: “Visionary power/ Attends the motions of the viewless winds/ Embodied in the mystery of words/ There, darkness makes abode, and all the

host/ Of shadowy things work endless changes there” (*The Prelude* V. 595-99). For students who have those “shadowy things” in their lives, writing can be a means of reflecting upon dark times. In English classes, students may reveal heart wrenching truths about their lives; many of them have lived through tragedy and despair. Journaling about those moments can help them process what they have experienced. A student may reveal that she has had a miscarriage; another may reveal that his father hits him; another may admit that she has considered taking her life. Yes, these admissions come with added responsibility for the instructor, but there will inevitably be healing for the students who are able to express their turmoil through writing. Even if they aren’t acutely aware of the healing nature of processing thoughts through writing, students will benefit from using writing as some sort of emotional outlet for themselves. Teachers can vary their expectations depending on the situation at hand. Sometimes, a Free Write Friday may be just what students need in order to feel truly free to write in a way that feels comfortable to them. This writing may not look like a substantial rhetorical contribution; it may be a comic strip or thought bubbles or a story told through an imaginary character. Teachers can guide this writing by prefacing it with strong mentor texts to which students can respond in their own way.

In *Writing with Mentors*, Allison Marchetti and Rebekah O’Dell mention how the mentor texts that a teacher might bring into his or her classroom can impact student writers: “The world is full of writers who are alive and interacting with the world. Writers are not *just* novelists and journalists. They are people like you and me, who love to watch television--or play video games, or go to art galleries, or commune with nature--and write about it” (17). It may be tempting to hide from the world when tragedy strikes, but reading and writing can be a lifeline to some semblance of human connection. Teaching with mentor texts can be a way to hook the students’ attention and then get them to respond in writing. This idea can be especially beneficial

when students are grappling with troubling current events. News articles and blog posts can provide a stepping stone to student journal responses, and ultimately, a substantial class discussion regarding topics that may be difficult to digest. An idea that may work in order to get students interested in current events is to have them do a quick Google search of news that focuses on a certain topic. For example, a teacher may introduce *To Kill a Mockingbird* by having students look up current examples of prejudice in the world today. Although the novel was set in the Great Depression, the issues that the novel explores regarding racism, discrimination, prejudice, and a loss of innocence are still relevant themes in today's world. A lesson based on the sharing and discussion of current situations in which these topics arise is a sure way to get even the most reserved students writing and talking. This not only serves as an attention-getting tactic to help preview the novel, but also helps ensure students are aware of the world around them.

When tragedy strikes, it is not the science or math teachers who are called upon to help bring about emotional healing. Readers don't seek solace from those realms in moments of pain; instead, they look to literature--poetry and prose--to speak when they cannot. Many English teachers innately seek out texts to help their students process traumatic events. They are aware of the healing nature of words--for many, it is what lured them into a profession based on a love of language. Perhaps words are a resting place for humanity's dark moments; perhaps they will bring humanity into the light. Whatever the need, literature can offer its readers some semblance of comfort when few other things can.

Works Cited

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