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## Finding Student Voice: Teaching as Rhetorical Act

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Finding Student Voice: Teaching as Rhetorical Act

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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 7, 2019

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

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**Introduction/Analytical Narrative**

My path to a Master's Degree in English began in 2016. Because I couldn't quit or limit the amount of time I worked as a high school English teacher, I had to find a program that allowed for flexible time and work. I am thankful that Bowling Green State University offers this program, as I was able to continue teaching while at the same time growing in my knowledge and skill as an educator. Though it was a challenge to manage my time, taking graduate courses in English while simultaneously teaching had a profound impact on my teaching, which I will elaborate on in this portfolio. My goal for students has always been to help them find their voices and therefore to become better, more confident writers. Thus, I decided to pursue an advanced degree that would help me become a more effective composition teacher and give me the credentials to teach at the collegiate level.

In my time in the Master's Program, I was most impacted by postcolonial theory and the various student-centered writing theories that focus on the writing process rather than the product. I am interested in how the individual changes: I want to help students analyze how literary characters can help them learn, and I want to teach students that writing and composing can be a way to find their own voices. As I completed my Master's degree, I gained increased confidence in my ability to connect my pedagogical choices to literary and compositional theory. Completing the program while teaching gave me valuable experience as I was able to apply my learning to my own teaching. Not only is it beneficial to have research to support the choices I make, my academic work in this program expanded my teaching skills. Now, I'm much more proficient in creating meaningful curriculum for students. Moreover, I feel well prepared to teach at the collegiate level. Ideally, this portfolio will become an artifact to show to potential employers of my skill and and stance towards teaching.

The selections included in this portfolio represent the beginning, middle, and end of my Master's career. This was important to me because I wanted this portfolio to highlight the breadth of work I did. Additionally, this portfolio also represents some of my strongest work. My first semester, a course in Graduate Writing with Dr. Riley-Mukavetz, challenged me and fully prepared me for the rigors of graduate-level work. This course impressed upon me the importance of honoring the writing process. I believe now that the writing process should be circuitous and messy in and out of the classroom. Before I took the class, I did what many high school English teachers do: I used the graphic organizers provided by the textbook curriculum. This project helped me understand that graphic organizers limit students' writing ability, especially their use of writing to explore their own thinking. Because the course made an impression on me, I wanted to include my culminating project, an academic memoir, within this portfolio.

The middle two pieces in my portfolio represent my second year of graduate school. The literary analysis I explore for *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* came out of my literary theory class, with Dr. Labbie, which I took at the beginning of my second year in the program. This class challenged me the most, and yet it also interested me the most. I am drawn to literary theory that examines the voice of subjugated people. In that examination, I found the topic for my substantive research project: an analysis of the Hegelian dialectic in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. I have taught this novel for 18 years, and I have always taught the controversy around the book more as Twain's indictment of his racist society. However, Hegel's theory allowed me to explore a more subtle complexities of the book. This was by far the hardest project of my entire career because I explored three layers: why teach about the controversy?; the

literary analysis of dialectic in Huck and Jim's relationship; and the historical realities of a white man speaking for African-Americans.

The third project, a curriculum using story to teach people about modern immigration issues, came at the end of my second year in the course, Postcolonial Literature and Film with Professor Begum. In some ways, this project is an extension of the ideas I explored in my substantive research project. Instead of analyzing how literary characters are in a dialectical dance of self-awareness, here I found that readers can also be in a dialectical relationship with others' stories. When we come to know others through their stories, we are less judgmental and more understanding of their plight. In a way, it makes sense that my second year would be book-ended by these two related ideas.

My final piece, my Citizen Rhetor project, was a product of my last course, Multimodal Composition with Dr. Jordan. This project represents a great intellectual stretch for me: to turn to non-traditional modes of composing. It is work that made me realize that students need to be taught their own voices matter, and sometimes traditional education drowns them out. Furthermore, alternate ways of composing can help unleash student voice. Completing this project and teaching it gave my valuable insights which I examine within the project itself.

#### Academic Memoir--Finding My Own Writing Voice, or Writing is Circuitous

A rich irony of my professional life, is that I have never felt very confident as a writer. The genesis of this certainly comes from the writing instruction I received in my K-12 education. Because my academic memoir comes from my first class during my first semester as a graduate student, it is appropriate to begin here. I was scared to death that I would not be able to write at the graduate level. I was worried that I was an imposter. This project helped solidify for me that the nature of writing is not a fixed mark; there is no one correct way to write. What it comes

down to is putting in the time to revisit and revise until I am satisfied with the writing. This project also helped me come to terms with my own writing process and voice. As a result, it was a powerful way to start my graduate career.

Of course, I didn't want my memoir to be self-centered navel gazing. I want my learning to have an impact on my teaching and potentially others' teaching too. In my original project, I didn't spend much time on the implications for teaching that came from my own discoveries. This became the focus of my revision. Since this was my first project of my graduate school career, the work is framed using my position as a brand new graduate student. I cannot change this framing because to change it would alter the exploration I went through as I researched and wrote about the writing process. I attempted to change this positionality and it felt wrong. My academic memoir is powerful because it shows my discovery of how to teach writing better as I reflected, researched and taught simultaneously. However, the revisions I did focus on were recommended by my two peer reviewers: transition into the graphic organizers more clearly. In the original project, I included the graphic organizers to outline my development as a writer, which I want to serve as a counterpoint to my narrative. My purpose in including these graphic organizers within the body of my narrative is to show how they limit thinking. I believe the writing process must be messy for students to truly discover their own writing voices.

The other way I revised my academic memoir, was to develop a conclusion that focused on implications for teaching. Though only a couple of paragraphs, this conclusion distills for my audience the implications for teaching writing in this new way. Writing instruction cannot be a one-size-fits-all approach, as much as we may want that. Teaching writing cannot fit into a over-systematized set of steps. To do so limits students' voices.

### **Huck Finn--The Powerless in Literature Finds a Voice**

As I referenced earlier, this research paper was quite challenging. When I first proposed the topic to Dr. Labbie, I worried that I was taking on topics that were too complicated to analyze and explain in a paper no more than 20 pages long. What prompted me to write the paper was the nagging question of, can white authors represent the black experience? After all, they have very different lived experiences, especially during the time of slavery when *Huck Finn* is set. However, Hegel's dialectic helped me to tackle the question. Whether or not the author is white, we see two characters from very different backgrounds grow in self-awareness with one another. This theory can only answer part of my original question, so I had to connect seemingly disparate ideas: representation and the Hegelian dialectic. The draft I turned in December of 2017 was not very polished. It had some organizational and grammatical problems that I fixed in this revision. However, the main task Professor Hunter and my peer readers gave to me was to incorporate more modern critics' ideas about Huck and Jim's relationship. This project took the most time as I had to go back to do more research.

For my current research, I had to go to the UC Davis library to access two books of critical essays around Mark Twain's novel. The first from 2004, is edited by Gerald Graff and James Phelan. Their book, *Mark Twain--Adventures of Huckleberry Finn: a Case Study in Critical Controversy*, provides a wide range of critical thought about the novel. I chose Toni Morrison's essay "Jim's Africanist Presence in *Huckleberry Finn*," to elaborate on my analysis of his character in the novel. Another, more widely acclaimed book was edited by Laurie Champion. Her book, *The Critical Response to Mark Twain's Huckleberry Finn* published in 1991, gave me the insights to develop my exploration of the controversy surrounding the novel.

Finally, for my substantive research project, I revised the organization for clarity. Originally, my analysis was like Russian nesting dolls, one within another. This proved to be too



confusing as Professor Hunter pointed out to me. As a result, I restructured this project to begin with the idea of why teach the controversy. Because my emphasis and interest in this topic is born from my teaching experience, I felt compelled to ground my analysis in this question. What comes next is the major part of my analysis: Huck and Jim in a dialectical relationship. Next, I put my analysis of how the dialectical relationship between Huck and Jim helps answer the question: Can a white man represent a slave's life in a historical moment? For this idea, I turned to Shelly Fisher Fishkin's book *Was Huck Black?* The premise of this book is that Huck is clearly based on Twain's contact and relationships with slaves in Hannibal, MO. She draws upon Ralph Ellison's idea that Twain's characterization of Jim, particularly how he speaks, paved a road for other African-American writers to write their own stories. So, I read Ellison's essay, "What America Would Be Like Without Blacks." This helped my argument greatly in that my position is that Twain's characterization of Jim, particularly his dialectical relationship with Huck, did give voice to the powerlessness at that historical time period. Finally, I added headings to transition the reader into each section.

#### Immigration--Letting voices bring greater understanding

Much of my intellectual curiosity turns around the voicelessness of the Other. Literary theories that help examine the subjugated and repressed in stories and in society can help us reexamine assumptions that many hold. Both of my courses with professor Begum helped me delve into those questions which is why I chose to put my unit of study about immigrants in my portfolio. One of the books we read in that class struck a chord with me: *Exit West* by Mohsin Hamid. This book illuminated the issue of immigration for me in a way that media coverage could not. The novel looks at the intricacies and intimacies of what life is like as a refugee, including their hopes, fears, and motivations. Because I was so taken with the book, I decided to

make it the core of my major project in Begum's Postcolonial Literature and Film class. In creating the unit, I realized the power of not only postcolonial theory, but of how narrative can truly help nurture understanding in an audience.

One of my greatest hurdles in creating this unit is how I was to contextualize the curriculum I was creating. My first draft, from 2017, was somewhat disorganized in my orientation to the curriculum. I began with an analysis of state approved curriculum; I moved into the obfuscation of media coverage; and finally, I wanted to point out how the United State's stance and policies on immigration violate human rights. These contextual elements are the reason why I wanted to create this curriculum. However, my biggest motivation, was an interview I completed with a former student. As a DACA recipient, he has experienced the devastating rhetoric of the current administration as well as the slow machinery of becoming a citizen. He is an excellent student, but what stung was he did not think the schools had done enough to teach about the human side of immigration. In the end, this is my true motivation for creating the curriculum.

Students like Eddie deserve to be heard. As a result, one of my main revisions in this project was to move his story to the beginning of the project so it could frame my overall work. After his story, I then included the hateful, political rhetoric we are bombarded with by incessant news coverage. And at the suggestion of Professor Hunter, I ended with the dearth of immigration stories in state approved English curriculums. That became an effective launch to introduce the curriculum I created. Because of the feedback I received from Professor Hunter and peer reviewers, I think I now have a much clearer rationale for my curriculum. I also added headings to keep the reader oriented as the paper wove through the various topics. In all, this

project represents for me a powerful growth in being able to bring literary theory to life in the work I do with students.

Citizen rhetor--Students lay claim to the rhetorical power of their own voices

As a sample from my final year as a graduate student, this project makes me proud. If I juxtapose this project with my academic memoir, I see a tremendous shift in my teaching. I still teach traditional composition, but this project helped me expand my notion of what composing entails. Students don't have to compose an essay with alphabetic text; composing takes many forms. My academic memoir explored how fixed writing strategies stifled students' writing voices; this project helped me expand my own ideas of composing as well as helping students find their own voices within their own rhetorical situations. The only thing students were limited by in this project was their own goals and motivations. As I created this unit, I was also teaching it. When it was time to submit my final project to Dr. Jordan, my students had not yet finished their projects. So, the most substantial revision I had to do was to add the results of how the projects turned out. My peer reviewers and Professor Hunter suggested that I include results from the trial run of the unit, student feedback and responses, and the value of this kind of work. This last point was also an idea Dr. Jordan thought I should add. I have made these revisions.

However, there was one suggestion Dr. Jordan had, that I thought at first was reasonable: narrow the choices of final products for students to compose. Because the project allowed them to select any subject, any target audience, and any purpose, they have free reign to decide the most effective genre to get across their arguments. For students who have not completed a multimodal argument, having an unlimited number of choices for a project could be intimidating. While I agree with this premise, I elected not to change the assignment to limit students to three choices, which was Dr. Jordan's suggestion. My rationale is this: to truly understand the nature

of the rhetorical situation people find themselves in, they have to really think about the most effective way to do that. Limiting student choice in this way would limit their experience as citizen rhetors. Furthermore, if I limited their choices, I wouldn't have had students create children's books. Two students did this in the maiden voyage of the unit. One student created a social media campaign, and yet another wrote an original song. Yet another wrote and compiled a vegan cookbook. Their creativity astonished me. As a concession, the next time I teach the unit, I will offer students who are struggling a more limited choice. Ultimately, students work on the project reminded me that writing instructors sometimes need to get out of their students' way.

### Voice and power--teaching as rhetorical

As I think about my time as a graduate student, and my representative work in this portfolio, I know that education is tied up with notions of the self. As students go through formal schooling, they should be guided in developing their own thinking, expressing their own voices, and becoming thoughtful citizens. Students expressing themselves is what makes teaching political. Rebekah J. Buchanan, a Fulbright scholar, explains that this is because

we want a literate populace that thinks critically. Public education is grounded in this belief, as educators such as John Dewey pushed for almost a century ago. Educators like Paulo Freire called for learners to be subjects in their education, actively participating and not just being passive objects filled like a vessel. Freire, like other educators, argued that education is never neutral. As teachers, we are either recreating what is in the world—a conformity—or critically evaluating the world around us and teaching children how to do just that. (1)

No longer should education be about dumping knowledge into students' brains; education should be about guiding students to a greater understanding of themselves. Both my experiences as a student and an educator inform this new understanding. This portfolio reveals not only the evolution of myself as a writer and educator; it reveals my commitment to helping students find themselves and their voices throughout their education. In so doing, students can lay claim to the power inherent in their own writing and thinking.

Works Cited

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### On the Writing Process: Coming to Terms with My Own

My academic memoir is born out of my experience of teaching high school students and the results of immersing myself into the world of academia as a newly minted graduate student. I have taught for 18 (now 21) years and that experience informs my responses in my graduate class as well as my understanding of the research I am doing. Somehow though, my years teaching high school English and much professional development, including working with the California Writing Project, scoring AP Language Exams, college board trainings, and the National Board certification process have not given me the answers I want for teaching writing.

Pressures from district expectations and my department colleagues push me to teach writing in a limited way. I have fallen into a trap: struggling writers need so much help with how to structure their language production that I tend to focus on five paragraph essay and rigid graphic organizers, ignoring the various ways essays can be constructed and written; thus I continue to teach this way because I haven't honed the skill of scaffolding writing instruction that is not formulaic. For English teachers, it is a seductive form as it is easy to grade and easy to teach. I do not begrudge us this expedient. I have used it for much of my teaching career, and it helps students improve but only in a limited way. For much of my teaching career I have wanted easy answers to the challenges of teaching writing. Now, I know that I have to resist the urge to teach only one form of writing. Teaching students one form of writing and one way to get there limits their learning and their voices. When we teach literature, we teach many genres, but we neglect this in writing. Teaching this limited form doesn't prepare students for the world of writing outside of the high school classroom. This is what I have relearned in my graduate writing class.

I am also reacquainting myself with my writing identity. In coming to know my writing self again, I am coming to know that I can embrace other methods of teaching writing. In starting my graduate writing, I am reminded that writing is messy and circular, so teaching writing will not be linear and simple. For many years I had forgotten this. Now, I realize that I should not ask students to write in a way that would never help me as a writer. I hope in exploring my own academic writing journey, I can help my students use the writing process to find their own writing voices, and I can help students tame their wild thoughts, giving them a better experience than I had in high school English.

My journey begins in the daybook exercises that require I write every day about myself and about the course material. While difficult, writing every day really helps me uncover my thinking about my own writing. In this work I have discovered something about myself as a writer, namely that I approach writing by jumping in and muddling about, until truth and beauty emerge. My writing process is aptly described by the following metaphor. I was just yesterday afternoon, creating mosaic footstones for my garden path. My piece begins with a pretty red globe of glass. I add more and a flower emerges. I set that aside and work on another piece: a panel of glass that is the bottom shelf of a plant stand. Begun in July, it has remained unfinished in the dining room. It's white, grey, and yellow eye-shape waiting to be done. Three months later I return back to this piece, and I begin adding golden glass that has black folded into it. Finally, the piece is a unified whole. I approach my writing like this. Though I want a clear target when I begin writing, there rarely is one. I have to find my purpose/focus/thesis amid the shards of my research, stories, and experiences. In my writing, like my mosaics, I have to return to the same piece working at it over time before it turns into something of interest.

Sometimes my writing begins with a quote, a quick anecdote from my classroom, or now a memory from my schooling. I go from source to source collecting bits of quotes on post-its and in the margins. I like being able to manipulate ideas by moving them around to see the various ways they fit together. These pretty pieces become the nucleus of bigger ideas. I explore each idea separately, and I recall my writing and educational past, believing that my experiences as a writer have affected my teaching practice. First I look for what those before me have said about the writing process because in high school, I was not taught a writing process. Though high school is a blur, I do remember high school English: I am parked by stoners and other miscreants who would rather flirt or make fun of the teacher. My teachers, like many secondary English teachers I have met, probably believed that assigning writing equals teaching writing. My teachers only taught that the outline came first; this forced me to know what I was going to say before I said it. I know now that I have to discover what I want to say, and an outline or other strict, inflexible format limits my writing. As the graphic organizer that follows shows, trying to fit the complexities of my experience into boxes stops my thinking, for writing is thinking.

**Personal Memoir Graphic Organizer--Topic: High School English**

Opening Sentence: I don't know what to say until I have said it, and I can't write.

Who? Me What? high school English Where? Lakewood, CA When? 1983-1985 Why? Because I had to	First: I worry about what I will write so much that I get stomach aches.
Next: I write the essay in a flurry of 'because I have to.' I write the essay then I write the outline. The outline didn't help at all.	Finally: It's returned with comments like "awkward," "wordy," and "vague." It's a sick samba sound. And, I haven't learned how to write a thing.

Closing: I hate English class.



With this memory of high school English lurking in the back of my mind, I continue my research for my memoir, finding pertinent sources about the writing process: Donald Murray's "Teach Writing as a Process not Product," and George Hillock's "The Focus on Form vs. Content in Teaching Writing." My professor suggests Cynthia Urbanski's book *Using the Workshop Approach in the High School English Classroom*. I read, annotate and reflect on these sources and many others. Frustrated at first, I don't get the quick answer I want, but I keep at it, willing a pattern to emerge, willing a unifying idea to come from the bits of research I have done. Two ideas begin to emerge adding to my thinking as a writing teacher. First, I understand that focusing on form cannot take primacy in writing instruction. When we give students the form first, their thinking stops, limiting their ability to develop their writing voices. One example of this, I have discovered, is the graphic organizer to plan what you will say. Second, before students get that organizer, they need time to write and to develop their ideas.

Gathering these thoughts, I think of my transition to Long Beach City College. My memories of "awkward," "wordy," and "vague" scrawled across my high school essays are a sick chant I taunted myself with as I enrolled in English for Dummies. This was not its formal title, but I did feel stupid, like I knew nothing about writing. As it turns out, taking this class was a very good move. Here, I gained confidence in and facility with English. I grew. Reviewing the graphic organizer below, it is easy to see that it alone cannot capture the extent of my growth.

**Personal Memoir Graphic Organizer--Topic: Long Beach Community College**

Opening Sentence: I take "dummy" English because I don't know anything about writing.

Who? Me  
 What? College English  
 Where? Long Beach, CA  
 When? 1986-1988  
 Why? Because I finally want to

First: I worry about writing, but I don't have serious essay assignments.

Next: I finally get into college level English.	Finally: I write an essay that my professor reads to the class.
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Closing: I might major in English.
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Here, once past basic grammar, I finally had professors who helped me see that there wasn't one way to get to my main point or to find my thinking. They allowed me to "cut loose" as Tom Romano advocates. In *Clearing the Way*, he argues that "[students] must write frequently in high-speed chases after meaning, adventures that will take different routes, each different from the previous one" (6). It was the first time that I was able to use writing as a process to clearer thinking, and I was able to chase down many good ideas this way. This helped my confidence as a writer, and I developed a stronger writing voice, so much that I decided to become an English major. I didn't know it then, but with my lens of teaching experience and research, I see now that the writing teachers at LBCC allowed me to explore what I was thinking through writing. With my newly-found confidence, I transferred to Humboldt State University as an English major. I was finally in love with English. However, as I pursued my English degree, I again develop the old fear of writing. Some experiences build me up while others tear me down, as I try to explain in the following graphic organizer.

**Personal Memoir Graphic Organizer--Topic: Writing as an English major**

Opening Sentence: Reader response, critical theory and learning how to write like an English major.
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Who? University professors and little ole me What? Writing and more writing Where? Founders Hall, Humboldt State University When? 1994-1997 Why? Because I'm an English major!	First: I get A's on my writing, until I don't.
Next: Professors approach writing very differently at university.	Finally: I take Practical Criticism and get my first "D" on an essay. There is nothing

	practical about this class. It's a crucible and nothing more.
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Closing: Though I lack confidence, I find something of my writing voice.
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Out of many writing experiences at Humboldt that stay with me today, one stands out clearly. I sit clicking and clacking away at the keyboard in Founders Hall. Like its name implies, this building is Humboldt State's first, standing among the redwood forests of Arcata, CA. I think of these trees as sentinels of my development as a writer. Though I never truly shed all of my anxiety around writing, when I think of my time writing near the comforting proximity of these giants, I am at ease. This one evening however, I'm writing furiously, trying to get a last minute essay done, and I'm facing off with an old MacIntosh computer. It's functional, but if I don't save often, I will lose precious writing. But this night, I kick the plug out of the socket by accident, and all my work about Shakespeare's villains is lost. After a minor break down, I go to my professor, and tell him my sob story. Instead of being chastised, this professor tells me that I will have to start over. He does comfort me though with a story of his own about losing an important piece of writing that he too had to write over again. What he learned was that this actually resulted in better writing because he already knew what he wanted to say. This was a not-so-subtle lesson: I have to sometimes write mediocre work to get better ideas, and the writing process takes patience and time. The best ideas don't always come first. It was a good reminder for me because like my students, I will stay with a draft till the very end even if it wasn't that good. Sometimes it's better to begin again when you have finally hit on a solid idea. This means that as teachers we need to provide opportunities for students to return again and again to some of their ideas.

During my undergraduate years, I was permitted to develop my writing voice through instructors who pursued different types of writing assignments, showing me that the writing

process can vary depending on the type of writing assignment I was assigned. More creative analytical writing permitted me to develop a different way of writing, one not limited by form or conventions. One example is where I took on the voice of a character from the play “Antigone.” In the form of a journal by Antigone’s sister, I could express my own thinking which helped me as a writer. This assignment was about developing a voice through a creative process. And my e cummings journal too helped me to develop my thinking because I was not focusing on a format or a specific process. I could explore ideas instead of forcing them into a box. In addition to writing many literary analysis essays, playing with writing in some of my undergraduate courses contributed to my growth as a writer overall.

Recalling my time as a college writer and researching experts in the field convince me that teaching writing is an art not an exact science. Here is the tension for me: I know that writing is exploratory and evolving; it requires time, feedback, and coaching to truly develop students’ writing skills. Yet, there are significant pressures on public school teachers to help students learn and improve rapidly. Angry school boards, anxious administrators, and seductive textbooks would have us believe that students can become better, more fluent writers by just adopting the right curriculum, or by increasing the number of district writing assessments, or by teaching the same writing form. This is how I came to use graphic organizers in such a limited way; this is how I came to focus on only two forms of writing instead of the writing process: five paragraph essays and narratives; this is how I slowly came to reject everything I knew about effective writing pedagogy. External forces demand quick results from English programs, but many English teachers know that teaching writing is complex and time consuming. So, what’s a teacher to do?

### **Personal Memoir Graphic Organizer--Topic: Developing as a Writer & Teacher**

Opening Sentence: Outlines and graphic organizers don't work for me. I have to write before I know what I'm going to say.

Who? Me, the high school English teacher What? Area 3 Writing Project Where? UC Davis When? 2000-present Why? Because I want to be a better writing teacher	First: I attend the best professional development I have ever received in terms of teaching writing.
Next: I learn about writing sprints and using journals to discover what I think and know.	Finally: Something I can teach my students.

Closing: But I don't in favor of the expedient and familiar.

I have used graphic organizers for many years thinking that they help students develop their ideas. Graphic organizers are expeditious because they give boxes for students to fill, and I think to myself, wow, look how they develop their writing. This is a limited success however. Students can fill in the graphic organizer for a given assignment, but they haven't really developed their thinking, only their organization. The graphic organizers I have included in this memoir for a personal narrative, don't do anything in developing my story, nor would they for my students. It is difficult to explore inside a box, which is my point in including them in this memoir. Furthermore, my past writing success had little to do with graphic organizers. Up to this point in my teaching career, I have always tried to stay away from the rigid, dreaded outline form. I know graphic organizers help students organize their thoughts, but if this step comes first, I fear students' thinking is cut off. So, like my high school teachers, I have limited my students' writing, even if I had good intentions.

True story: In engaging my sophomores this year in an early academic writing assignment, we first started by discussing the age young people can begin doing certain adult activities like driving, voting, and drinking legally. This lesson is engaging because teenagers

love talking about themselves, especially with edgy topics like lowering the drinking age. The anticipation guide I used asks them to guess the age young people can do these activities and to put their own reasoning about the fairness of the age distinction. We then do a two--corners activity where they get to debate each other about the age limits.

I put on the screen the statement, "The drinking age should be lowered to 18." I start with this one because it gets their attention. They are not used to topics like this; it almost feels like we are breaking the law. If they agree, they go to the left side of the room; if they disagree with the statement, they go to the right. This gives them a visual of where their classmates stand on the issue. I begin asking students why they are on one side of the room or the other. One young lady, petite as a firecracker with gold-eyeshadow snaps, "we shouldn't lower the drinking age because teenager make stupid decisions, like not doing their homework." There is noisy shifting and sniggering, and quiet talking. But I want everyone to hear, so I ask them to explain their responses. So a young man on the other side of the room replies, "But not all young people do make stupid decisions. My brother was working two jobs by the time he graduated high school."

"Yeah," says a slouched young man with a wrinkled Blink 182 t-shirt. "What about 18 year olds who fight in wars but can't legally drink a beer here in the states?"

They have much to say. I can hear their voices emerging loud and clear. We then read an op-ed piece about how our legal system sends young people mixed messages about their legal maturity. They identify quotes in the text that say important ideas. They discuss them, trying to decipher much of the text. I hoped this would spark much reflection on their part. I give them the prompt, and we create thesis statements. The thesis statements then go into the appropriate box in the graphic organizer. *Sweet, I think to myself, they have their point they want to prove, so sending them home with the graphic organizer to complete should be easy.* I feel successful.

Well, that feeling is short-lived when they come back next class meeting and most students have not completed their planning. *Well, I will show them*, I think to myself. *They have to write anyway*. I am so smug in my certainty. They write, prepared or not. It really shouldn't be a surprise that the essays I received were boring and lifeless. I am surprised and a little discouraged that only two or three of my 82 sophomores actually included something from their own lives as evidence of what they were trying to say about the age of maturity. So, I force them to revise, addressing my comments as they develop their ideas.

One student in my first period class, an eager but slow-working young man, waves me over. "Ms. Mann, what do you mean by this comment?"

I reply, "Well, I want you to connect what you are saying about how maturity happens at different ages."

"You mean, I can put myself in this essay?" he asks innocently.

"Well, yes. I asked you too in the prompt. Look. It says, 'What is the age of responsibility? That is, when should a person be considered to be an adult? Use your notes, readings, observations and experience to support your position'. When I ask you that, I want you to use your own experience, I want you to include your own story."

"Oh, well how do I do that?"

"Well look what you said here, K (first initial). Read it to me."

K reads, "Some wonder if the legal driving age, 16 is really a considerate age. Many believe that 16 is too young for teenagers to start driving at. For example, in the essay, 'What is the Age of Responsibility,' Greenblatt explains how over 400,000 teenagers between the ages of 16 and 19 were either injured or unfortunately died in motor vehicle crashes. Maybe taking time to take extra driving classes and having more knowledge can save a life."

“Okay,” I say. “Can you think of anyone you know what has driven before they were legally able? Did anything bad happen?”

“No.”

“Well, have you read anything about the graduated driver’s license in California? Aren’t you going to be learning to drive soon.”

“Oh yeah,” he says.

I would like to say that this student turned in a much better essay, but he didn’t. It was formulaic yet grammatically correct. He was not inspired to share his own thinking about gaining more responsibility as an adult, probably because no one had asked him before. The way I structured the assignment did not invite him to this exploration either. My sense is that the graphic organizer hindered his thinking about the connection to himself. This exemplifies what high school writing teachers wrestle with; I want to efficiently use my time through the use of graphic organizers, but I want my students to explore their ideas, to try them on for size and look at them from various angles. As I write, I get the sinking feeling an experienced teacher gets when discover that what they have done for a long time, and that they believed was a good bit of pedagogy, really doesn’t advance her students’ skills.

This assignment did what Tom Romano refers to as putting “manacles” on students’ writing. My students did what Romano’s daughter did when she was given an assignment that asked for “a topic sentence, three supporting details, and a concluding sentence” (3). This assignment for her caused her to “jump through the hoop, perform[ing] the ritual, and, like an assembly-line worker, collected her check” (3). When I gave my students the graphic organizer first, they went through the hoops, filling in the boxes without thinking of their own lives. They obediently filled in the boxes without fully thinking of the connections. Their “check” in this



instance was finishing to earn a good grade and to please the teacher without thinking about what they were saying, and this was a topic that they should have had much to say. What teenager hasn't argued with a parent about their freedoms or their independence? Instead, I got the boring five paragraph essay I assigned because that was what the graphic organizer demanded of them. This is an excellent example of how a conscientious teacher selects writing pedagogy that doesn't help students for their intended purpose. I am thinking now, *why on earth did I give them a graphic organizer that didn't allow room for their own personal stories that relate to the topic?* If I had wanted it, I should have asked for it. More importantly though, I would like to develop student writers who automatically put their own voices and experiences into their own writing for most assignments without asking them. I must remember that their voices are valid and their voices will not gain clarity and confidence if I only teach one method of writing.

Reflecting back on this lesson, I realize I gave them a comfortable, predictable way into the writing, by filling in the boxes of a graphic organizer. It's important to note that this comfort was for the students as well as for me. As I will get into soon, English teachers should find more ways to incorporate various writing strategies, not just one or two. The boxes of a graphic organizer invite filling in without much thinking. It's also easy to teach because it's uniform. I suspect that it also changes their thinking. It doesn't allow an idea to go beyond the limits of the box, so when a thought has filled the space, the thought comes to an end. The day I return their essays, I have them analyze samples from past years. Students asked me if it was okay that the sample essay had a personal example in the analysis. I was shocked. They ended up seeing a relevant prompt as another form to fill. I'm not saying there isn't a place in the writing process for graphic organizers, but I don't think the organizer should be the first prewriting step. The more I read about the writing process, the more I'm convinced of this.

This lesson also violates what writing experts say about our classroom practice. First Donald Murray argues that, “When you are talking [they aren’t] writing. And you don’t learn process by talking about it, but by doing it. Next by placing the opportunity for discovery in your student’s hands. When you give him an assignment you tell him what to say and how to say it, and thereby cheat your student of the opportunity to learn the process of discovery we call writing” (5). This means that teachers need to get out of the way, but not talking so much. Students need to engage in the writing process. This means that students must write to discover their own thoughts, just like I experienced in college. We must give them time in class to write, and to get messy and sloppy. The implications of this are manifold.

One of the main issues is time to devote to the writing process. When I think of the time I use to teach literature, vocabulary, grammar, procedures, I worry about what I will give up in class to accommodate more writing time in class. It is clear to me as I go through the writing process for my academic memoir that helping students become stronger writers requires class time. This means teachers will have to wrestle with which part of the curriculum to change or how to creatively intertwine district demands with what many writing experts believe. According to Cynthia Urbanski in *Using the Workshop Approach...*, Students need time to write, and English teachers have to create the writing space for them during class time because “there we can create a distraction-free environment. Though they may not understand their own need for sustained writing time or examination of their own reaction to literature they read at first, as they build muscle and stamina, they will come to understand the value of both” (71). Here is a glimmer of hope; we can incorporate writing practice while teaching the literature we love. She also argues that “students learn by doing, so if they are to learn to write, we must allow them to do that as often as possible” (97). We have to give students the chance to power their own

writing and their own ideas. We can show them the process, we can cheerlead from the sidelines, but in the end we have to stop talking and let them go. We have to subvert our own knowledge and expertise to theirs if they are ever to grow. Lastly, we have to be willing to accept that there are many ways to come up with a strong idea.

Reflecting on this epiphany, I remember another story: I ran into Chris, a former student, at Putah Creek Cafe. Similar to other students, when I had Chris as a student, he wanted me to tell him what to write, and that his writing was good enough. I complied by providing rigid graphic organizers and sentence frames. This harmed his thinking because he never learned to trust his inner voice. On this night, he told me how he was struggling in his English class at the local community college.

“Ms. Mann! It’s so great to see you!” he says, giving me a bear hug.

“Hey Chris! How are you? How is school going?” I say.

“It’s going pretty well. I am still having a hard time in English. But the teacher makes us do brainstorming and then she shows us how to narrow the focus for an essay. It’s hard, but it’s helping me.”

Kindly he told me that he wished we had done that in high school. Now, it troubled me that I had done a student a disservice; my intent all along was to help students become better writers. In this moment though, I came face to face with a student who felt limited by his high school English experience. The disservice I had done him was not giving him confidence and skills that he could apply to other writing situations. So, the limited writing pedagogies, while easy to fall back on and convenient for teachers, can do damage. Thinking about this anecdote now, I realize I hadn’t helped him develop writing strategies or confidence in his own academic writing voice. He never got the idea that writing was a means to explore ideas and himself, and I

do take his comment to heart now, as I sit immersed in all of this research. It reminds me of Cynthia Urbanski's idea that, "People do not often think in structured steps. Students are hurt when they are not allowed to think outside of the box. Their thoughts can never take flight if we do not open the lid. Writing is thinking on paper, and formulas and modes squelch that thinking" (14-15). That is, each student's writing process must be nurtured within the context of a class. I take this advice seriously as I have seen it in my own students' writing. Urbanski asserts how a writing form of any kind will hinder a writer's thinking, just like it did with Chris' thinking. When students are given boxes on a paper in the form of a graphic organizer, they will rush to fill them without even questioning if this is the thinking they want to explore. I know I can't change what I have done, but I have to resist the pressures to make writing instruction neat and tidy. I have to take the lid off the process, so my students' ideas and voices can take flight. Students like Chris struggle with writing, and he did not get the skills he needed in high school. This costs money and time and self-worth, and I owe students better; nothing less than helping them trust their voices and expressing what they find in the most powerful should be the standard for the high school writing classroom. If students cut loose, as Tom Romano suggests, beginning on the first day, I expect that students will trust their voices more.

**Personal Memoir Graphic Organizer--Topic: For My Students' Voices**

Opening Sentence: I want my students to develop skills and confidence in writing with a clear, authentic academic voice.
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Who? Ms. Mann's English 10 students What? A new way to approach writing Where? Winters High School When? October 2016 Why? Because I want to be a better writing teacher	First: I need to plan the lesson.
Next: I will embrace the messier part of writing instruction.	Finally: Something I can teach my students.

Closing: What am I getting myself into?
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When I'm frustrated or stuck in my own writing process, like now, I go in search of something (a distracting piece of glass?) to inspire my ideas. Quickly, I find a pdf stored on ERIC, a writing pamphlet from 1972, and the article is a teacher's narrative on writing voice. Terry Hull, the author, tells a story about how his beginning composition students don't know what writing voice is. I have honestly never gotten that far with my high school writers, but Hull confronts what many English teachers face: "...the main problem with nearly all the papers was that they were dull. There was nothing inherently dull in the subjects they chose. Most were potentially exciting. But few of the papers revealed that the writer had any genuine interest in the subject" (21). As I reflect on Hull's point about lifeless student writing, many of my students flash before me, but one scene keeps replaying in my head. Imagine 25-29 students, about half of whom are Hispanic, and of those about  $\frac{2}{3}$  are non-native English speakers. The desks, arranged so that all students have a good view of the front and easy access to each other for interactions, are in two U shapes, one inner and one outer. I do this so no student is four or five rows away from the center of class. One young man tentatively raises his hand. We are doing a timed write about literacy after having read a chapter from Malcolm X's autobiography.

A slightly chubby, Hispanic boy asks, "Ms. Mann, can you read this for me, and tell me if it's okay?"

To ease his tension, I read it. Then, I ask him a question like, "What do you mean by \_\_\_\_\_?" I resist the urge to tell him what to write because that is what he wants, the easy way out. He wants me to tell him what to say because he hasn't developed his own writing voice. As Hull defines voice, it is "honesty in writing. Honesty is caring about the subject and having it show in your writing. Honesty is knowing your subject thoroughly" (22). Clearly this student I

worked with doesn't know his subject thoroughly, or else he wouldn't need my constant feedback during the first draft stage. Furthermore, though he cares about getting a good grade, I'm not sure he cares about the subject of literacy. The teacher's challenge then is to use topics for writing that students care about. I readily acknowledge that this can be problematic as there are so many demands on class time, but I think the potential motivation for student writers is great if writing curriculum reflects more choice.

Scenes like this have been a regular occurrence in my 18 years of teaching high school English. It's a variation on another vignette: when students have begun to write in class, often some stare into space, tap their pencils, check their phones, lay their heads on the tables, anything but write. I walk over and ask, "is everything okay?" They usually respond with a beleaguered "I'm stuck" or "I don't know what to write." Or, I will be called over for a student to ask, "can you read this and tell me what to write next?" These questions all have one thing in common: these students don't have confidence in their own voices to weigh in on a topic, even one that they should have something to say about like literacy. This bothers me. I want students to be confident writers, so I will have to change my practice to encourage this. I want to implement strategies that reflect Urbanski's point that "[teachers] can watch them explore the gold mine of their own ideas and experience the beauty of ideas around them. We get to demonstrate the power of words and, by learning to experiment with words, the power they themselves possess. We can help discover flight" (7). In order to have students mine their experiences for valuable ideas to write about, they must write more. This can help them see that writing is thinking, and not some summative assessment. There are district and state demands that I must get students ready for, but using a rigid writing process and focusing on form is not the answer.

I now remember becoming involved with Area 3 Writing Project, the northern valley's arm of the California Writing Project. I have many great stories from my time working with these talented individuals, but one of the most powerful strategies I have used with my students is called writing sprints, an idea I got from Edna Shoemaker. It's a form of quick writing that helps writers unclog their writing brain. Writing sprints, like running sprints, require quick, focused spurts of energy. I tell my students that "it gets your internal editor to shut up." For the most part, they accept this reasoning. The next step is to go back to those sprints to determine if there are ideas that the students like or that they can use for their prompt. Here is my confession: I have only really used this strategy with my advanced students. And it is only my AP seniors who have really benefited from using writing sprints as an invention device. I use it to prepare them for their college personal statements. It is one of those times where students are given a prompt that is broad enough to pick any subject, and more importantly, their selves are at the center of this writing. Here is where outlining and one rigid process will not help young writers complete a writing task. The Common App asks questions like: "Some students have a background, identity, interest, or talent that is so meaningful they believe their application would be incomplete without it. If this sounds like you, then please share your story." This prompt invites a variety of responses, and how can students tackle it if they only know one way to write? If students are not given an opportunity to "explore the gold mine of their ideas" (Urbanski 7), then they will surely face anxiety over a writing demand like this, and the limits and sterility of a graphic organizer won't help either.

So, it dawns on me that to reserve this kind of writing instruction only for AP students is a damaging practice. I remember that we, as an English department, wanted to help our struggling writers, so we developed an arsenal of graphic organizers to battle their inability to

develop their thinking. To our naive way of thinking, graphic organizers would make them more proficient writers. This maybe gave them access to the dry, uninteresting academic voice that so many high school teachers want to teach students, but I believe we have it all wrong. The struggling students, the students in most need of gaining access to the powers of academic writing, need to know that their way of knowing is also important. They need choices for writing topics that will, as Urbanski says, stir them up: “Most of all, we must give our students real and meaningful experiences that make them want to write. We have to get them stirred up over something more than a grade if we ever expect them to take risks and grow. We must coach them” (8). Like all good coaches, we take students from where they are, and teach them new skills. This will look different for different students, and that is what we teachers need to remember. Most importantly, it will be messy. I and my colleagues need to shed the belief that there is any one easy way to get students to be better writers. To improve, they must write. I’m ready for this challenge. As I search for answers anew, I am also coming to know myself.

### **Next Steps--or, What’s an English Teacher to Do?**

The implications of what I have learned about the writing process are staggering. First and foremost, I must allow time for in-class writing. Within this time, students will also need time to develop invention strategies. I envision teaching students various ways to come up with and develop ideas, with the ultimate goal being helping them find the method that works best for them. With the focus on developing student agency in the writing process, I will strive to create lessons and curriculum that gives them power over what to write about and how to go about that work. If curriculum demands students write to a prompt, which it often does, then at the very least students should be given freedom to explore with writing in a very messy way. For example, if students are responding to an AP prompt, they might employ one of many strategies,



from outlining to brainstorming to freewriting, before they begin crafting their arguments. Above all, teachers must strive to avoid doing the writing for them by supplying excessive scaffolding with sentence frames or graphic organizers. It should be as Donald Murray argues: learning the process of writing is learning the process of discovery (5). For me, this project helped shift my teaching philosophy about writing. Student voice and agency should be the central focus of any writing curriculum.

I will end with a brief teaching anecdote: in my second course with Dr. Riley-Mukovetz we focused on teaching writing and composition theory. As a result of my new learning from this memoir and research on composition theory, I approached my sophomores' essay writing in a drastically different way. First, students brainstormed what they thought were important topics from *Lord of the Flies*. From there, I helped them generate thesis statements, not from a teacher-generated prompt, but from their own interests. Then, I gave them different tools to plan what their arguments. Though this process took more class time, and it was harder for me to teach, students got more out of the writing assignment. When I gave them pre and post surveys about the writing process, they felt much more confident about their knowledge of the writing process after having experienced an essay lesson like this. It now informs the way I approach most formal writing assignments. It is important to remember that students will not develop their writing skill by filling in blanks and boxes. They need to take the reins of their own words, and it is teachers who have to hand them over.

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Substantive Research Project: Representation and the Hegelian Dialectic in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*

**Why Teach the Controversy**

Volumes have been written on the controversy surrounding Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. "The 'Early Responses' are largely concerned with the book's style and lack of decorum" (Fertig 77). Because the main character and narrator used improper language, ditched school, and blasphemed God, among other perceived negative qualities in the mid to late 1800s, Huck was an inappropriate character to emulate for young audiences. It was banned from public libraries for its lack of propriety. However, the controversy shifts in the 1950s when the Supreme Court decision, *Brown v. Board of Education* integrated classrooms around the country. Now, with African-American students in class with white peers for the first time, Twain's use of the N-word 213 times, takes on a hurtful tone. John Wallace, in his essay "Huck Finn is Offensive," argues that "[the book] ridicules blacks. This kind of ridicule is extremely difficult for black youngsters to handle. I maintain that it constitutes mental cruelty, harassment and outright racial intimidation to force black students to sit in a classroom to read this kind of literature about themselves" (Champion 143). As an African American who suffered through the book in his own high school career, Wallace believes the book abuses the African-American students forced to read it. Wallace's claim cannot be ignored; no educator would want to inflict suffering to their students. And yet, the novel does offer powerful lessons. To me, the power comes from the ever-shifting relationship between Huck and Jim.

It is the two sides of this controversy that have kept me committed to teaching the novel for my 20-year career. The question of whether Twain's masterpiece is racist or not, is powerful, and gives students something to discuss and think about as they grapple with difficult colloquialisms and old-timey feel of Twain's novel, and it is through critical theory that students

can perhaps see the novel as relevant to their own lives. Gerald Graff, in “Disliking Books at an Early Age,” published in *Lingua Franca* in 1992, makes a powerful argument for how theory and the critical issues they raise can bring a reader to a greater appreciation of the craft. He argues that students brought into a critical discussion first might find it more worthwhile to see whether Jim reflects a capitulation to or a resistance against slavery for example. Graff writes that “having [critical] issues to look out for made it possible not only to concentrate, as I had not been able to do earlier, but to put myself into the text--to read with a sense of personal engagement that I had not felt before” (qtd. in Richter 43). For Graff, learning what critics said about a literary work helped him have a personal investment in fiction taught in school; it helped him see why the literature mattered. Theory can also aid students in seeing Jim, in *Huckleberry Finn*, as an actual person and not the oversimplified stereotype that some critics claim.

We should not avoid the controversy; instead we should find ways to teach it that will guide students into the world of literary studies. We can use literary theory to look at Jim Huck’s complex relationship. There is a relationship that constantly changes and shifts and is more easily understood using the concept of Friedrich Hegel’s master/slave dialectic. Huck as the master, has much of the privilege in the relationship because of his skin color, which gives him control over Jim, as a slave, both at the beginning of the text and when they are with others. However, that power relationship shifts as Jim grows into a father figure for Huck, becoming a “master” in his own right. I am interested in this shifting relationship because modern criticism of Jim claims that he is merely a minstrel stereotype, however, this view of Jim is an oversimplification. As a counterpoint, Toni Morrison argues that “the contemplation of black presence [in literature] is central to any understanding of our national literature and should not be

permitted to hover at the margins of the literary imagination” (305). We cannot ignore Jim’s presence in the novel, and so I propose that one way to view him as a master in his own right.

### **Jim and Huck in a Master/Slave Dialectic**

Hegel outlined a theory of how we develop our own sense of self through our power relations with the Other. Indeed, Hegel’s question is: “how does a human being come to consciousness of itself as a self...[and] Hegel assumes that humans are not born with this sense” (Eds. Norton 626). This leads to the idea that selfhood is a “social act” where “selves are not born but made, in a dialectical social process of interrelationships” (Eds. Norton 627). Therefore, when it comes to a power differential like that between a master and slave, or like the complex relationship between Jim and Huck, the self is made in connection with and in conflict with the other. One aspect of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic at its simplest and most profound is an expression of the power relation in a shifting landscape of two individuals’ consociation. The master takes power that the slave willingly gives. However, the power that is ceded gives the slave power over the master. The Norton editors say, “The master’s access to his own selfhood is mediated through his relationship to the slave; and since that slave is ‘not an independent consciousness, but a dependent one,’ the Master ‘is therefore, not certain of being-for-self as the truth of himself’” (627). This means that the master’s consciousness can only be obtained through a relationship to a person of lesser power. The master needs the slave’s willingness to be in the relationship in order to have the power; this gives power to the slave. When analyzed with this lens of Hegel’s master/slave dialectic, Twain’s characterization of Jim and Huck’s relationship as they travel down the river provides a nuanced view of Jim’s perceived and actual powerlessness.

At the beginning of this relationship, the power Huck holds is social and societally based; his schooling, his father, and his church all taught him that slaves are not human. And so, Twain presents us at the beginning of the book with a main character, Jim, who is a slave in a very real sense of the word. He is running away and meets Huck on Jackson's Island, at which point Huck chooses to take responsibility for Jim by not turning him in. When he learns that Jim is being hunted for the reward, Huck exclaims to Jim, "Get up and hump yourself, Jim! There ain't a minute to lose They're after us! (Twain 63). And because Jim, as the other half of a dialectic is not an independent self, rather a self that must recognize the socially constructed authority, he accepts Huck and his help. This is one instance of where Huck has the role of master in the dialectic exchange.

Huck's power comes from being a white person at that time. He can at any time turn Jim in and claim the \$800 reward for his own. He chooses not to; in fact, he does the opposite, which then makes Jim beholden to him and engages them both in the dialectic of self, where "Self-consciousness exists in and for itself when and by the fact that it so exists for another; that is, it exists only in being acknowledged" (Hegel 630). Huck's self-conscious is an evolving thing. Early in their journey, Huck begins to worry about his choice to help Jim. One day on the river, Jim begins discussing how he will work to get his family free, and Huck thinks, "this is what comes of my not thinking. Here was this nigger which I had as good as helped run away, coming right out flat-footed and saying he would steal his children" (Twain 89). Huck, as a child conditioned to the social beliefs of white people, thinks he should not help Jim. Huck's conscience forces him to believe Jim is inhuman, and someone else's property. So for a time, Huck commits himself to turning Jim in. This is the first time Huck's moral dilemma torments him, and he intends to turn Jim in to free his conscience. As Huck paddles away "all in a sweat to

tell on him” (Twain 90), Jim says, “Pooty soon I’ll be a-shoutin’ for joy, en I’ll say, it’s all on accounts o’Huck; I’s a free man, en I couldn’t ever ben free ef it hadn’ ben for Huck...Jim won’t ever forgit you, Huck; you’s de bes’ fren’ Jim’s ever had; en you’s de only fren’ Jim’s got now” (Twain 90). Because of the social training he has had, Huck would be “right” to turn Jim in; at least that is what his society has instructed him to believe. However, in this scene, it is Jim’s humanity and connection with Huck that prompts Huck to save Jim from two white strangers who paddle up to see if he’s seen any “runaway niggers.” In an elaborate lie, Huck saves Jim from capture. Reflecting on what he had done to save Jim, Huck reflects to himself that “s’pose you’d a done right and give Jim up; would you felt better than what you do now”? (Twain 92). Huck cannot exercise this power over Jim without ending the relationship between them. And he is incapable of that because of the state that comes about because of his developing consciousness vis-a-vis Jim. Huck needs Jim, both to run the river physically, and to provide him with a purpose beyond simply running away from Pap. Moreover, Huck needs Jim to develop this new self, one that will risk social ostracization to help a friend.

Using Hegel’s language to describe Huck’s dilemma can be understood in this way: “The lord puts himself into relation with both of these moments, to a thing as such, the object of desire, and to the consciousness for which thinghood is the essential characteristic” (633). In this case, the thing is the river as a means for Jim’s and Huck’s freedom--their independent selves, “since [the master] is the power over this thing and this again is the power over the other [the bondsman], it follows that he holds the other in subjection” (633). Huck holds the power over Jim’s freedom and thus over Jim himself, but Jim as the bondsman also has power over the lord. He becomes a consciousness who must accept the relationship for the lord to find his consciousness. Huck and Jim need each other. Hegel goes on to write, “Equally, the lord relates

himself mediately to the thing through the bondsman; the bondsman qua self-consciousness in general, also relates himself negatively to the thing, and takes away its independence” (633).

Huck makes a conscious choice to bind himself to Jim, not just in the metaphorical sense that Hegel suggests. Twain makes sure the reader understands that Huck has bound himself in the real sense that he is helping a slave to escape. For Huck and the way he was raised, this is a sin, a consequence he accepts when he says, “All right, then, I’ll go to hell” (Twain 215). He decides here that his friendship with Jim, and by extension what he has learned about slaves, is more important than the backwards, racist attitudes he is heir to. As he ponders over their trip down the river he says, “I see Jim before me, all the time, in the day, and in the night-time...and I couldn’t seem to strike no places to harden me against him, but only the other kind” (Twain 215). He accepts responsibility for his decision in helping Jim to his freedom at a great social cost because they have become friends. However, Jim does similar, as Hegel writes, “but at the same time the thing is independent vis-a-vis the bondsman, whose negating of it, therefore cannot go to the length of being altogether done with it to the point of annihilation” (633). Just as Huck can’t forsake Jim, Jim cannot quit the raft because of his runaway status. But there is a greater reason: Jim knows Huck’s dad is dead, so he stays with Huck to protect him. As he did with Huck, Twain offers us a physical manifestation of the dialectical state of being, when Jim tries to leave and complete his journey, a fog develops, the banks of the river are obscured and the relation of the two is bound more tightly together.

As the two move through their developing consciousness, they both develop an awareness of their self vis-a-vis the other. This represents what Professor Erica Labbie calls “Good Hegel.” She writes, “The Good Hegel reveals how the positions of the master and the slave are interdependent and dialectically necessary such that the slave has ultimate control over



the master, rendering the slave the master and the master the slave in the circulation of dialectical exchange” (Labbie 1). In this way, Jim has power over Huck, which he wields in a paternal way; Jim stays with Huck because Huck needs him. Thus, Huck’s and Jim’s evolving selves show a circular, dialectical exchange. Huck, an outcast in many ways, grows in his understanding of slaves by knowing Jim. There are two key scenes where this happens: One is when Huck learns that Jim actually misses his family. His comment to the reader is “[Jim] was thinking about his wife and children, away up yonder, and he was low and homesick; because he hadn’t ever been away from home before in his life; and I do believe he cared just as much for his people as white folks does for their’n” (Twain 157). Huck, as a white person, has the societally-granted position to say this about Jim. He has been taught all manner of absurdities about slaves, so his consciousness grows as he has experiences with Jim. In this scene, he learns that Jim is a proper father, unlike his own. This is ironic given that Huck’s dad is a miserable excuse for a father. That a slave could be a better father than a white man has profound implications. If whites are morally, physically, and intellectually superior, then it stands to reason they should also be better at passing on those higher traits to their offspring and society in general. Twain, however turns this notion on its head. Jim, as a black man, has more emotional connection to his own children than does Huck’s father for him.

Moreover, Jim has made a specific decision to stay with Huck early in the novel when Jim sees the dead body in the floating house that is actually Huck’s dead father. Jim chooses to stay with Huck in spite of the danger to his own freedom. This is the ultimate paternal sacrifice, to put a child’s needs before his own. Of course, Huck doesn’t see this. Instead, readers view this ironic contrast through Huck’s innocent and ignorant view of the world. In both scenes, the Hegelian dialectic reveals a young man coming to a realization and a state of self-consciousness

about the Other. The Norton editors describe the process with a question, “How then do we acquire self-consciousness? Only in meeting with something that is not the self, according to Hegel. Confrontations with my limits, with the not-self, enables me to identify what is self, what belongs to me” (626-627). In this way, Jim has power over Huck’s development. Huck is learning that African-American slaves are human beings. This is something that perhaps only a white author could have published at the time. Through a white boy’s vernacular speech, which would have been a powerful bit of realism for the readers of the time, we see a young man’s sense of self evolve to a more well-rounded understanding of the world through his interactions with the paternal Jim.

Another instance of Jim of assuming the master’s role in the dialectic is during one of the most powerful stories that shows Jim’s love and remorse for his family. He tells Huck about how he beat his daughter, Elizabeth. The story is about one day when he told Elizabeth to close the door and she didn’t. This made him furious, so he hit her. He goes on to say,

en when I come back, dah was dat do’ a-stannin’ open yit, en dat chile stannin’ mos’ right in it, a-lookin’ down en mournin’, en de tears runnin’ down. My, but I wuz mad. I was agwyne for de chile, but jis’ den-it was a do’ dat open innerds-jis’ den, ‘long come de wind en slam it to, behine de chile, ker-blam!-en my lan’, de chile never move’! My breff mo’ hop outer me; en I feel so -so- I doan’ know how I feel. I crope out, all a-tremblin’, en crope aroun’ en open do do’ easy en slow, en poke my head in behine de chile, sof’ en still, en all uv a sudden I says pow! jis’ as loud as I could yell. She never budge! Oh, Huck, I bust out a-cryin’ en grab her up in my arms en say, ‘Oh do po’ little thing! de Lord God Amighty forgive po’ ole Jim, kaze he never gwyne to fogive hissself

as long's he live! Oh, she was plumb deaf en dumb, Huck, plumb deaf and dumb--en I'd been treat'n her so! (158)

This scene illustrates what many parents would regret: treating their children horribly because of a misunderstanding. Here is someone from the slave class sharing a powerful story with someone from the master class, but it is Jim's story that has power to change Huck's white view of African-Americans. Jim teaches Huck, and by extension the reader, that a black man is capable of deep humility, sorrow, and regret. In his remorse, he shows the capacity to admit wrongdoing and the ability to learn from his mistakes. Most parents, regardless of race, can see some echo of themselves in Jim's tragic lament.

More striking however, is contrasting Jim's role of father with Huck's worthless, biological father, Pap Finn. This man actually kidnaps his own son in addition to being a raging alcoholic and an abusive parent. Huck even says, "Pap he hadn't been seen for more than a year, and that was comfortable for me; I didn't want to see him no more. He used to always whale me when he was sober and could get his hands on me; though I used to take to the woods most of the time when he was around" (Twain 11-12). Huck explains how his biological father's treatment alienates him from the father/son bond. Jim is clearly the better father, a significant challenge to the common belief at the time, that even the lowliest white man was superior in every way to a slave. Pap is sickening in his treatment of his son. Among many insults, Pap says to Huck about his new life with the Widow Douglas: "Now looky here; you stop that putting on frills. I won't have it I'll lay for you, my smarty; and if I catch you about that school I'll tan you good. First you know you'll get religion too. I never see such a son" (Twain 20). The rich irony of this scene points out how despicable Huck's father is; any parent would want a better life for his child, but all Pap can worry about is whether his son is putting on airs. It is as if Pap wants to keep Huck in

this deprived state because it was good enough for him and his mother. Huck's inheritance then is the racist, intolerant, and judgmental ideas espoused by his father, showing Huck how hypocritical and asinine nature of his society: a society that has molded Huck's self and is being undone by his relationship to Jim.

The second example when Huck experiences a developing consciousness through the master/slave dialectic is when Jim tells him off after playing a cruel trick on him. Having been tutored by the very cruel Tom Sawyer, Huck knows how to play a mean trick. In one scene, Huck pretends that Jim was dreaming when they had actually been separated in the fog. His lie is presented to Jim in all the cockiness of his supposed station as lord in the Hegelian sense: "Hello Jim, have I been asleep? Why didn't you stir me up?" (Twain 84). He presents the reality of their separation as a dream, expecting that Jim will fall for the ruse, and he does for a time. At this point in the story, Huck does not see Jim as an essential being. Huck is "the consciousness that exists for itself... whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another" (Hegel 663). And Jim, in this scene, disabuses Huck of that consciousness. When Huck reveals his trick by asking Jim what all the river detritus on the raft means, Jim understands he's been fooled and responds:

What do dey stan' for? I'se gwyne to tell you. When I got all wore out wid work, en wid de callin' for you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos' broke bekase you wuz los', en I didn' k'yer no' mo' what become er me en de raf'. En when I wake up en fine you back ag'in, all safe en soun', de tears come, en I could 'a' got down on my knees en kiss yo' foot, I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole Jim wid a lie. Dat truck dah is *trash*; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed. (Twain 86)

Jim calls Huck white trash and this chastisement puts Huck in his place, strengthening the shift of power from resting with Huck as a racist society's heir to resting with Jim as a father-figure. Jim takes the role of master, showing Huck how to be a better person thus giving Jim power over Huck. Huck's learning is on full display when he admits "it was fifteen minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger--but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way" (Twain 87). Huck admits his own ignorance in this scene: he didn't know that slaves have feelings, revealing the sound heart that he possesses. Jim teaches Huck that slaves, as fellow human beings, are worthy of respect, just as whites are. And this exchange, as another outward manifestation of the internal relationship they are in is meant to extend to audiences as well.

Twain is able to bring the relation full circle so that despite being white, Huck is the dependent when Jim and Huck are alone on the river; he is at once separate from Jim, while at the same time being part of a duality with him. This relationship extends Hegel's point that "the master's access to his own selfhood is mediated through his relationship to the slave; and since that Slave is 'not an independent consciousness, but a dependent one,' the Master 'is therefore, not certain of being-for-self as the truth of himself'" (627). Twain has created a true role reversal from the societally-dictated relationship as white/black or master/slave. When they are alone on the river, Jim is a stand-in father for Huck. This parent/child relationship is as much an example of this Hegelian dialectic as the white/black relationship of slavery is. In the human decision that Jim makes to stay with Huck, he accepts the responsibility for his safety, gaining power over Huck. However, roles reverse when they are in society. Tragically, Huck often has to take the role of white master when they encounter people along the river. Huck saves Jim numerous times

from slave hunters, and they can't float during the daytime because Huck couldn't explain why a child had a slave with him on the river. Hegel's point that self-consciousness is socially constructed is very much at play here. Huck finds himself as two beings in the sense of being constructed by Jim's otherness.

With the lens of the Hegelian dialectic, it becomes easier to understand Huck and Jim's relationship. More importantly, it also lends a kind of structure to a depiction of a complex friendship that was taboo at the time of the writing and even more interesting, the shattering of a stereotype perpetuated minstrel shows, newspapers, and the white publishers who controlled what Americans read. Jim, a black man from the South, taught Huck, a white boy, about the concept of family and how to be a better human.

### **Why Twain's Representation of the Slave Jim Matters**

One of the main controversies around this novel is Jim's characterization, as I have discussed earlier. Modern readers view him as stereotypical, minstrel-like black man. Nowhere is this clearer during the controversial last chapters when Huck finds Jim at the Phelps plantation where Jim becomes the "submissive and all-suffering Jim" (Robinson 207). But the assessment of Jim as a simple minstrel stereotype dismisses all of the profound development Jim and Huck go through as they travel down the river. Therefore, readers must contend with "this doubleness in Jim [that] that is a testimony to 'Twain's complexity,' and to the complexity of the tradition of representation within which he worked" (Robinson 208). It is modern readers who grapple with the nature of Jim's character in such a manner; however, as Forrest Robinson suggests, Twain had a "tradition of representation" that he had to work within. I contend that the complex nature of Jim's characterization, though problematic for modern audiences, was groundbreaking at the time, given when Twain was writing.

African-American writers have contemplated the notion of representation of black characters and why it matters for decades, including W. E. B. Du Bois and Zora Neal Hurston. Du Bois' comments about the responsibility of black authors to portray the real intelligence and life of African Americans needs to be seen as being a part of and reaction to racist depictions. Du Bois criticizes white publishers that are “catering to white folks [who] would say, ‘it is not interesting’ - to white folk, naturally not. They want Uncle Toms, Topsyies, good ‘darkies’ and clowns” (Du Bois 985). This brings up a conundrum: whites wouldn’t read anything with black characters unless they are presented as buffoons along the lines of the minstrel shows that were popular during the Jim Crow era. White publishers want to give their paying audiences what they want to see, but this serves to perpetuate insidious stereotypes of real African Americans.

However, the reverse can also be true; innovative white publishers could help reverse the perceptions by representing a wider range of African American characters. In Du Bois’ time, this idea was revolutionary. The Norton editors posit that “[some] might propose that Du Bois’ real concern is as much with a work’s reception as with its production: How does the work of art affect the general American perception of African Americans? What will be the impact of the text on the social and political attitudes of the readers?” (978). Giving white audience what they desire in their reading only perpetuates their firmly held, racist attitudes. If white publishers present works that illustrate the complexities of African Americans’ very human lives, like Twain does with Jim, then the white audiences could change their perceptions. Here, the Norton editors raise an interesting argument. *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, published in 1884, was at the beginning of the Jim Crow era. Though the Civil War was over, the rights of African Americans were far from won. That whites viewed them as sub-humans contributed to the continuation of racist laws that separated them from more privileged whites. But Twain’s novel

was one of the first pieces of art that depicted the life of African Americans in their own words. In essence, what white publishers didn't do, Twain as a white author was able to do. This was a thing so unusual and groundbreaking that he mentioned it specifically: "In this book a number of dialects are used, to wit: the Missouri negro dialect; the extremest form of the backwoods Southwestern dialect; the ordinary 'Pike County' dialect; and four modified varieties of this last. The shadings have not been done in a haphazard fashion, or by guesswork; but painstakingly, and with the trustworthy guidance and support of personal familiarity with these several forms of speech....I make this explanation for the reason that without it many readers would suppose that all these characters were trying to talk alike and not succeeding (Twain I). Twain's admonition alerts the reader to the importance of what he is doing: he is illustrating how real people speak in real dialogue with one another. In part, it is Jim's own words, in his own dialect, that reveal a complex human soul.

For white audiences, Twain's novel gives a first glimpse into an African American's life in their own words. Zora Neal Hurston makes the point in "What White Publishers Won't Print," that white authors can broaden the views of white readers because they can "create curiosity even when it aroused skepticism. It made folks want to know" (1162). Though Hurston is speaking of Carl Van Vechten's *Nigger Heaven*, the point is valid for Twain's audience as well. White's perspectives can be influenced by what white publishers print, and to expand white's views of the Other, a white author is better situated to "[open] the wedge for better understanding" (Hurston 1162). This has clear political implications. For, if white readers can learn more about the human side of slave life their opinions might shift, or at least they will have a harder time defending the practice slavery to themselves. When we see the Other as a human being, as Huck does, with similar hopes and dreams and concerns, no matter how different the



Other's life is, we can find a shared human connection. If slaves/African Americans are seen as humans by whites, it becomes increasingly untenable that to treat them as property and second class citizens.

Amid the controversy Twain's novel inspires, it is important to remember that Twain gave an early, literary voice to African Americans. Ralph Ellison argued that "a black man is co-creator of the language the Mark Twain raised to the level of literary eloquence, [while] Jim's condition as American and Huck's commitment to freedom are at the moral center of the novel" (5-6). So, Twain's art celebrates and elevates Jim's voice, giving audiences a more complex view of African Americans. This idea can exist within the larger controversy we see today because it reminds us that the social and political context giving rise to this novel is much different than the social and political context today. Furthermore, "Twain, in turn, would help make that language available as a literary option to both white and black writers who came after him" (Fishkin 4). Thus, Twain's representation of Jim provides a path over which future African-American writers would travel.

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Understanding Through Story: Immigration as curriculum in a small rural high school  
A Lesson Plan

*I dedicate this work to my once and future students who live under the shadow of deportation or the stigma of being an immigrant in this country.*

**One Student's Story**

I was motivated to create this curriculum in part because of one student's experiences. As part of the unit, I have included an interview with one student who I know well. I had the pleasure of being this student's English teacher when he was a freshmen and again as a senior in my AP Language class. Eddie (his name has been changed to protect his privacy) is a cheerful, hard-working student who strives for excellence in spite of many obstacles. He was brought to the US from a violence-ridden town in Mexico when he was four years old. He struggled to learn English as a young child, but once he mastered English, he became immersed in reading and writing. Eddie does not fit the ugly stereotype of immigrants. He focuses on his studies, and he currently has the goal of becoming a university history professor. At school he got along with teachers and classmates alike. He was involved in ASB and volunteered with Interact while holding down a job with RISE, Inc., an organization that helps underserved Latino communities in Yolo County.

With all of his positive contributions to our community, he still had the desire and ability to earn good grades. He did all this while gaining DACA status, and in spite of all the good he does, that status will run out in another year and a half. He told me he is worried about his fate as a DACA recipient because of Donald Trump's policies and the potential for Supreme Court nominee Kavanaugh to shift the Supreme Court even further to the right. There is a distinct chance that he might have to leave the only home he has ever known. When I asked him if he considered himself American, he said yes. "I wouldn't say I'm a citizen because I am not, but I feel American," he added happily.

A few years ago, he lost his DACA status because when he reapplied, he sent in a form that was one month out of date. In the interim, he accrued five months of unlawful status. The penalty for that he said would be a fine. Eddie noted, with no hint of drama, “if you have money, immigrating to the US is easy.” In another instance, Eddie explained how one of his client’s applications for residency was denied because he filled out the wrong form. This is because “the immigration system is set up to make applicants fail,” Eddie stated.

At twenty years old, he has had many experiences with and about immigration. As a DACA recipient, he knows immigration on a very personal level. However, he has also worked with a non-profit organization known as Catholic Charities, where he did outreach for immigrants. This entailed working with adults and teenagers to help them fill out immigration paperwork, which is tricky and detail-oriented. To prepare for this work, he received lots of training with consultants and lawyers. Now, one of his jobs is to go out to farms around our rural area and educate farm workers about their health care rights.

The above story is what compelled me to reach out to Eddie for my exploration of curriculum in our small school system and community. I asked Eddie to estimate how many of the farm workers in Winters, CA are undocumented, and he said close to 60%. As a rural community with many nut and fruit farms, there is a great need for immigrant labor. A complicating factor in thinking about curriculum around immigration is that we have students like Eddie, who are DACA or undocumented, sitting in classes with the farm owners’ children. With the advent of Donald Trump’s campaign and presidency, some antagonisms surfaced within our school. When I had Eddie as a senior, the 2015-2016 school year, there were a few times when students would come into class discussing these issues. Eddie told me about how a fellow student, the son of a well-known farmer in our community, felt more free to bad mouth

and criticize immigrants, the very ones his family employed, because of Trump's egregious and racist comments about Latino immigrants. In class, I missed a valuable opportunity to help guide students' understanding and learning about immigration, and the curriculum I want to develop for our community's students is an attempt to rectify the lack of understanding about current immigration issues our students face. I asked Eddie, "Do you feel the issue of immigration was effectively discussed or explored in your high school career?"

"No," he answered emphatically.

This is a travesty given the current political climate around immigration. He also believes that schools should do more to teach students about immigration and immigrants. First, he suggests just presenting the facts: what does it take to immigrate to the US? What is on the citizenship test? He also admitted that books about immigration would help us better understand his experiences. Though much of our community is Latino and white, we have recently welcomed immigrants from Iraq. I have not had these students in class, but it shows that even our little community is touched by immigration from different places. Given Eddie's status and efforts to help our community, and given that close to 10% of our students are undocumented, it's important to address the issue of immigration in a humane and empathetic way.

### **Why (So, What?)**

Working with students like Eddie remind me why the issue of immigration is so important to our communities' immediate concerns. We need greater empathy in our community because immigrants live among us, and they are productive members of society who are more like us than we are led to believe. With two novels, *Exit West* by Moshin Hamid and *The Distance Between Us* by Reyna Grande and supplementary readings, I have set out to help students come to a greater understanding of the nuances of modern immigration issues. With

news coverage and social media doing little to help Americans empathize with immigrants, I believe schools have a role and responsibility to help students comprehend this modern issue in all its nuances. Thus, I have set out to teach students about immigrants' stories because teachers need to help students see beyond their worlds.

### **Immigration is a Timely Issue**

Students need to learn about modern immigration because we live in a media environment that reports on some immigration issues, but they do little to clarify them. Much of the immigration news these days is breathless coverage about President Donald Trump's wall, or the despicable and controversial separation of children from their parents. Before that, the news of the Supreme Court's decision to uphold the Trump administration's Muslim travel ban dominated the news cycle. Unless a reader really wants to research the issues in more depth independently, they will not understand the subtleties of immigrants' stories.

Muslims represent a specific group who are targeted in our modern political discourse, and beliefs about Muslim immigrants and refugees grow in a fertile garden of misunderstanding. It begins with the seeds of language, like calling Muslim immigrants "radical Islamic terrorists." President Trump has a long history of using this terminology. For example, he uses a story of "The Snake," to warn against the perils of allowing Muslim immigrants into our country. *The Washington Post* writers, Jenna Johnson and Abigail Hauslohner, in a list of Trump's comments about Muslim immigrants, note that "At a rally in Iowa, Trump shared his suspicions about Syrian refugees as he read the lyrics to Al Wilson's 1968 song "The Snake," the story of a "tender woman" who nursed a sickly snake back to health but then was attacked by the snake. Trump often read these lyrics at rallies" (1). Like much of the rhetoric around immigrants from certain countries, referring to Muslim refugees and immigrants as snakes is clearly

dehumanizing. The story of the snake, in its fable-like moralizing, oversimplifies why Muslim immigrants come to the US.

Muslims are not the only target of deceitful language like this; Latino immigrants are also characterized in this way. As late as June 2018, Trump used dehumanizing language about Latinos, as seen in one of Trump's Tweets: "Democrats are the problem...They don't care about crime and want illegal immigrants, no matter how bad they may be, to pour into and infest our Country, like MS-13. They can't win on their terrible policies, so they view them as potential voters!" (Klein and Liptak 1). To dehumanize and stereotype groups of people by suggesting they are insects or vermin is despicable as it opens up new pathways to hate. When a group is dehumanized with language, it is easy to dismiss their plight because the language forces us to view them as not fully human. As a result, it is easier to accept zero-tolerance policies of the Trump Administration. It makes it easier to rally behind policies like Trump's travel ban against Muslim refugees or immigrants. My unit plan seeks to provide an alternate narrative to the stories that are peddled in mainstream media in order to dispel these dehumanizing stereotypes.

### **Our Immigration Policies Violate Human Rights**

Not only is Immigration a real-world issue that students have some strong ideas about, it is one of the biggest human rights issues of our time. Under US Immigration policy, "Federal immigration enforcement policies, including border enforcement measures by Customs and Border Protection (CBP), have led to an increase in racial profiling, border killings, and denial of due process rights. Immigrant workers are often abused, exploited, and have become scapegoats and victims of racism and stereotyping" ("Human Rights and Immigration" 1). Government actions like this show how they view Latino immigrants as expendable and unworthy of basic human dignity. Since much of our students' knowledge of immigrants comes from coverage of



the president's actions, they too may adopt the beliefs supported by dehumanizing language which results in a collective shrug from the masses when they hear of these awful events at the border.

In addition to these violation of human rights, US policy has begun separating children as young as six months old from their parents as soon as they land on US soil. Currently, thousands of children remain separated from their parents. For the US, this is supposed to send a message of deterrence, but the damage done to actual human lives is despicable. First, many psychologists agree that separating children from parents can cause irreversible trauma, harming their development. According to Claire McCarthy MD, "Taking children away from their parents at the border and putting them into detention centers or foster care isn't just sad. It can cause harm that lasts forever, even if they are ultimately reunited with their parents. It can change their future — and shorten their lives. That goes beyond sad: it is cruel" (1). US policy has consigned them to lives of struggle and misery. Second, there have been recent stories of abuse at detention centers. Although the ACLU documents instances of abuse at detention centers going as far back as 2007 ("Sexual Abuse in Immigration Detention" 1), the stories published currently are shocking. One includes the story of a six-year old girl who "was sexually abused while at an Arizona detention facility run by Southwest Key Programs. The child was then made to sign a form acknowledging that she was told to maintain her distance from her alleged abuser, who is an older child being held at the same detention facility" (Honarvar 1). These traumas will haunt and harm this young girl's entire life. Stories like these (and the ones in this unit) will humanize immigrants' plight, helping students empathize more. As a result, it is my hope and goal that they will understand and even question their own ideas that impact immigrants.

**California's State Approved Curriculum are Largely Silent on Modern Immigrant Issues**

Houghton Mifflin Harcourt is a well-known publisher in our state. I analyzed their junior and senior level texts to determine how much the curriculum dealt with modern immigration issues. Unfortunately, under 1% of the readings dealt with immigration, and none of those were modern immigration issues. For example, the 11th grade level textbook, while including 73 texts, had only four texts that dealt indirectly with immigrant issues. Richard Rodriguez's essay, "Blaxicans," "describes his assimilation into the majority culture" (87). While clearly an essay that examines the issue of race and postcolonial topics of power and culture, this essay doesn't directly deal with the effects of immigration policy. This anthology also includes the African view of coming to America as slaves, from the likes of Phyllis Wheatly. The senior level textbook from Harcourt has a little more promise, but not much with only .02% of 50 texts written by people of color, and only one of those texts comes close to modern immigration issues. Written by Juan Rulfo, the piece "Tell Them Not to Kill Me" chronicles his life in Mexico in the 1920s. According to the introductory material in the textbook, "Rulfo's childhood and family life were disrupted by political conflict that wracked Mexico in the 1920s. This short story could begin to reveal the picture of why Mexicans immigrate to the US, but this doesn't address the modern reasons why Central Americans are coming to the US.

The curriculum we ultimately chose to implement in the 2019-2020 school year was Springboard, edited and published by the College Board. Though this curriculum gets closer to including voices from varied cultures, it still doesn't include much in the way of modern immigration stories. Both the junior and senior year curriculum is organized by theme. The number of texts in the junior level curriculum dealing with immigration are few; of the 80 texts, only three deal with immigration. This includes powerful immigrant voices like that of Anzia Yezierska, an Eastern European immigrant. This essay could set the stage for a discussion of the

power of immigrant voices, but her essay is from 1923. Though these texts represent an improvement over the Houghton Mifflin Harcourt text, Springboard still neglects immigration issues that our modern situation demands.

Springboard's senior curriculum is organized into five units all having to do with perception. For example, Unit 1 is titled "Perception is Everything," and Unit 5 is "Multiple Perspectives" to name two. What is promising in the senior year's curriculum is in Unit 1 and Unit 5. Unit 1 introduces imperialism and includes "The White Man's Burden," by Rudyard Kipling (Duva et al., 61). This would be the perfect place to introduce postcolonial theory, as students are asked to "read your assigned poem, underline words and phrases that reveal the speaker's perspective on imperialism and colonialism" (Duva et al., 59). Here once again, we see an older text that could be used to set up discussions around how our culture treats immigrants. The most promising text to deal with immigration is in the last unit, "Multiple Perspectives." The main text is a graphic novel, "The Arrival," by Shaun Tan. I admit, I had never heard of this text until analyzing the Springboard curriculum. In an NPR review, Ruta Sepetys asserts that "*The Arrival* is an immigrant story, but in a more universal sense it conveys the feeling that we've all had at some point of being lost, frightened or confused in an unfamiliar environment. It reminds us that new beginnings can be scary, and the spirit of patience and hospitality are always a welcome port in a storm" (1).

The idea that arriving to a new place can be frightening connects solidly with the themes of Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*, a key text in my unit plan, whose main characters are adrift as refugees/immigrants in a world hostile to them. A crucial idea from Hamid's novel that I want to convey to my students is that we all are from or could easily be immigrants or refugees. And we are all more alike than we can know because "we are all immigrants through time" (Hamid 209).

As the two main characters land in their last destination, the narrator in *Exit West* reflects that “every man and woman and boy and girl” will experience loss, “and this loss unites humanity, unites every human being...the heartache we each carry and yet too often refuse to acknowledge in one another” (Hamid 202-203). Hamid seeks to persuade us that we share so much with immigrants because of our mutual humanity, from loss to hope. In a sense, Hamid’s novel asks us to consider the immigrant as a metaphorical mirror so that we can see ourselves in others. Ultimately, the job of an educator is to help students see the world beyond themselves. In learning about immigrants’ experiences, students can come to see some of themselves in others’ lives.

I am not so naive as to believe that the curriculum I created here is going to completely do this topic justice. However, as an educator, I do have some control over what and how my students learn. There are crucial current events that students need help in processing. Many need help understanding that other students in our school, some sitting next to them in my class, are dealing directly with the ramifications of US immigration policy. They must also remember that

the United States of America has long been the icon of freedom for people overseas. They have arrived on our shores looking for the opportunities they could not find in their home countries. As the country has become more diverse, it is increasingly important that a mutual understanding exists between those who have immigrated to this country and those whose ancestors came here long ago. (Tichenor 1)

As Americans, we are a nation of immigrants, which is a fact that is particularly true in any public institution like a school as well as a fact that seems to get lost in the public rhetoric.

Schools have the power to teach “global literacy in the United States” (Tichenor 1), which is the purpose of this lesson.

### Learning Objectives

- Students will understand the reasons immigrants leave their countries.
- Students will analyze the causes of immigration.
- Students will understand what seeking asylum means as it relates to immigration.

- Students will develop a greater understanding of the immigrant experience with the goal of gaining more empathy.
- Students will gain an understanding of Postcolonial theory: specifically, the questions it seeks to answer within a text.
- Students will develop this understanding by evaluating the stories of two immigrant experiences: one is a memoir, *The Distance Between Us*, by Reyna Grande, and a novel, *Exit West*, by Moshin Hamid.
- Students will keep response journals to track their evolving understanding of immigrants' lives.
- Students will appreciate how personal stories, whether fictitious or real, can help clarify the issues around immigration.

### How

<p>Week 1 (At my school, I see students three times a week: Monday for 55 minutes, then Tue/Wed. for 90 minutes, and Thurs/Fri. for 90 minutes.) I have selected readings and writing activities that can be accommodated in this time frame, including homework reading.)</p>	<p>Introductory Video: <a href="http://prezi.com/alwvkcyjro_x/?utm_campaign=share&amp;utm_medium=copy">http://prezi.com/alwvkcyjro_x/?utm_campaign=share&amp;utm_medium=copy</a></p> <p><u>Reading tasks:</u> Read each of these articles in preparation for class discussion: <a href="https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2011/ten-myths-about-immigration">https://www.tolerance.org/magazine/spring-2011/ten-myths-about-immigration</a> <a href="https://www.sacbee.com/news/state/california/article214626840.html">https://www.sacbee.com/news/state/california/article214626840.html</a> <a href="https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/world-refugee-day-fleeing-cameroon-mexico-border-corpses-180616131149367.html">https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/world-refugee-day-fleeing-cameroon-mexico-border-corpses-180616131149367.html</a></p> <p><i>The Distance Between Us</i>--chapters 1- 4</p> <p><u>Writing tasks:</u> For each of the above articles and the memoir reading, students will write a summary and reaction in their journals. These should connect issues and concepts from the introductory video to the reading.</p>
<p>Week 2</p>	<p><u>Reading tasks:</u> <i>The Distance Between Us</i>--chapters 5-9 View: TEDx talk by Jose Vargas called, "Actions are Illegal: Never People"</p> <p><u>Writing tasks:</u> Students will continue to summarize and react to the chapters in their journals. In addition, they will connect what they see in Vargas' TEDx talk with what they have read so far.</p>
<p>Week 3</p>	<p><u>Reading tasks:</u></p>

	<p><i>The Distance Between Us</i>--chapters 10-14</p> <p>Emily Style's essay, "Curriculum as Window and Mirror"</p> <p><a href="http://www.nationalseedproject.org/images/documents/Curriculum_As_Window_and_Mirror.pdf">http://www.nationalseedproject.org/images/documents/Curriculum_As_Window_and_Mirror.pdf</a></p> <p><u>Writing tasks:</u></p> <p>Continue to summarize and react to each chapter of the memoir.</p> <p>Explore how Grande's memoir reveals the ideas in Style's essay. This will be in journals.</p>
Week 4	<p><u>Reading tasks:</u></p> <p><i>The Distance Between Us</i>--chapters 15-19</p> <p>View a limpia ceremony:</p> <p><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoJUzuo0BF4">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoJUzuo0BF4</a></p> <p><u>Writing tasks:</u></p> <p>Continue to summarize and react to each chapter of the memoir.</p> <p>Connect the content of the video to your reading of Rudolfo Anaya's <i>Bless Me, Ultima</i> from last year.</p>
Week 5	<p><u>Reading tasks:</u></p> <p><i>The Distance Between Us</i>--chapters 20-24</p> <p><u>Writing task:</u></p> <p>Continue to summarize and react to each chapter in their journals.</p> <p>Students pick one of these topics to write on for their final essay:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Devise a list of Reyna's impressive accomplishments outlined in the epilogue. What are her hopes and dreams for the future?</li> <li>2) According to Reyna, poverty is the reason for the cycle of leaving children behind. What can be done to keep children together with their parents?</li> <li>3) Reyna provides us with a list of updates on her family. Were there any surprises? What other questions would you ask her after reading the book?</li> <li>4) What is the role of forgiveness? How is this different from acceptance? As an adult, how do we understand the ambivalence we may feel towards our parents if they made mistakes? Is it better to forgive or accept? How important is it to process these feelings before our parents pass on? Has Reyna fully processed her feelings? If so, how can you tell? If not, how can you tell?</li> <li>5) How do you feel after reading this book? Has it changed your understanding of immigration? Of Mexico? Of the relationship with</li> </ol>

	<p>your own parents? Siblings? Self? 6) Who should read this book and why?</p> <p>(**These questions are taken from:  <a href="https://www.monroeccc.edu/onebook/2014/CRP%20Grande%20Discussion%20Guide.pdf">https://www.monroeccc.edu/onebook/2014/CRP%20Grande%20Discussion%20Guide.pdf</a>)</p>
Week 6	<p>Using the second part of the video: Introduce Muslim/Pakistan/India partition background</p> <p>*Explain how this history connects to current Muslim refugee issues and as background for Mohsin Hamid's life.  <a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKMI3gG47QY">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QKMI3gG47QY</a></p> <p><u>Readings tasks:</u>  <a href="https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/70-years-later-survivors-recall-the-horrors-of-india-pakistan-partition/2017/08/14/3b8c58e4-7de9-11e7-9026-4a0a64977c92_story.html?noredirect=on&amp;utm_term=.f0d2ad494ee2">https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/asia-pacific/70-years-later-survivors-recall-the-horrors-of-india-pakistan-partition/2017/08/14/3b8c58e4-7de9-11e7-9026-4a0a64977c92_story.html?noredirect=on&amp;utm_term=.f0d2ad494ee2</a></p> <p><i>Exit West</i> (EW) pages 1-38</p> <p><u>Writing tasks:</u>  Record your reactions to what you saw from the survivors of India's partition.</p> <p>For the first week, record a summary of each chapter within the pages read, and write one reaction for the entire section of reading.</p>
Week 7	<p><u>Reading tasks:</u>  Read pages 39-98 in EW first.</p> <p>Introduce Postcolonial Theory; students will read "Postcolonial Theory" from Lois Tyson's <i>Critical Theory today: A User-Friendly Guide</i>.</p> <p>*Select 5 questions that postcolonial theory seeks to answer, and apply them to what we have read so far in <i>Exit West</i>.</p> <p><u>Writing tasks:</u>  Continue recording a summary of each chapter within the pages read, and write one reaction for the entire section of reading.</p> <p>Write a summary of what postcolonial theory does, and then explain why it's important in our day and age.</p> <p>Write extended answers to the questions selected, and students will share their answers in group discussions.</p>

Week 8	<p><u>Reading tasks:</u> Read pages 101-156 in EW.</p> <p>Read this essay by Mohsin Hamid: <a href="http://time.com/4527253/2016-election-refugees/">http://time.com/4527253/2016-election-refugees/</a></p> <p><u>Writing tasks:</u> Continue recording a summary of each chapter within the pages read, and write one reaction for the entire section of reading.</p> <p>Summarize his main argument in “Refugees: Overcoming our Fear.” Then explain how the novel <i>Exit West</i> reveals this argument. Again, this is preparation for discussion.</p>
Week 9	<p><u>Reading tasks:</u> Read 157-189 in EW</p> <p><u>Read one of three short stories:</u> “A Beheading” by Mohsin Hamid <a href="https://granta.com/a-beheading/">https://granta.com/a-beheading/</a></p> <p>“Terminator: Attack of the Drone by Mohsin Hamid <a href="https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/nov/07/short-story-mohsin-hamid">https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/nov/07/short-story-mohsin-hamid</a></p> <p>“The Third Born” by Mohsin Hamid <a href="https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/09/24/the-third-born">https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2012/09/24/the-third-born</a></p> <p><u>Writing tasks:</u> Continue recording a summary of each chapter within the pages read, and write one reaction for the entire section of reading.</p> <p>Write a reaction to the story he/she chose in preparation for a discussion. Then write an informal compare and contrast reaction between the novel and the short story. This will prepare them for either an online or in class discussion.</p>
Week 10	<p><u>Reading tasks:</u> Finish reading <i>Exit West</i></p> <p>Read this <i>New York Times</i> review of <i>Exit West</i> <a href="https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/27/books/review-exit-west-mohsin-hamid.html">https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/27/books/review-exit-west-mohsin-hamid.html</a></p> <p><u>Writing tasks:</u> Continue recording a summary of each chapter within the pages read, and write one reaction for the entire section of reading.</p>



	<p>Each student writes their own personal review of the book.</p> <p><b>OR</b></p> <p>They may choose to write a letter to Mohsin Hamid to explain to him what they learned about refugees and immigration from his book.</p>
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### Reflection

First, I should acknowledge that the timeline and work for each week will probably change as students' abilities and interests dictate what we discuss. Though I have set this unit up in a ten-week time frame, I often have to adjust time for a unit as students' learning needs dictate. I want this unit to be heavy in reading, writing, and discussion. Though I haven't planned a creative way to culminate this unit, it would be interesting and powerful to have students create something that they could publish to help educate others about immigrant and refugee issues. This could be a letter to the editor, a class blog, a social media campaign, or perhaps students could volunteer with organizations that help refugees and immigrants.

I have selected Reyna Grande's book, *The Distance Between Us* because it offers a powerful story. Hector Tobar, an *LA Times* columnist, argues that "[Grande's] memoir is in many ways a ground-breaking addition to the literature of the Latino immigrant experience. 'The Distance Between' Us is a book that deserves to be celebrated for its candor and for the courage of the woman who overcame so many obstacles to write it" (1). Her trials as she lives without her parents for some years and then her trek to the US four separate times will resonate with many of my students, for if they haven't come over like Grande did, they likely have immediate family members who have. Many of my students know all too well what it means to live in a world where they are stuck between the personal world of Mexico and the Spanish language and the public, Caucasian world of English. Many navigate this borderland adroitly, but others don't. The majority of students we send to our district's continuation high school are Latino which

points out that our school is failing Latino somehow. Perhaps more literature that represents their experiences might give them more to care about in school.

The other book I chose for this unit is Moshin Hamid's book, *Exit West*. Though it doesn't directly reflect a large portion of our students' population, it is a compelling story. As I noted earlier, there is much in the current news about immigrants and refugees from the Middle East region that our students need to know more about. The dominant symbol or image in this work is the magical doors that take people to other lands. At first, they are only used to leave war-torn homelands to find safety in another country. However, over time, many people begin to make use of these. This gets readers to consider why and how they might take to the road for a better life. In a PBS interview, Hamid states, "in the novel, billions of people begin to move and the whole world starts to change" (Brown 1). This positive message hints that this could be the wave of the future, the world's population on the move, searching for a better life, including Americans. More importantly, this speaks to the notion that the novel carries throughout: we are more alike with refugees than we are different. Later in the same interview, Hamid continues this idea:

we have become so focused on the story of how somebody crosses the border--oh, how did you come over? on a boat from the Mediterranean. Or, how did you cross the Mexican border? crawling underneath the barbed wire--and we think the people who have done that are different than us. It makes us imagine that that's all their life consisted of and that's very different from us. But once you take out that part of their story, you are left with people who are just like us. (Brown 1)

In a word, refugees and immigrants are complex humans, not a headline reducible to the one story of crossing a border. If I can come away from this lesson having imparted this theme to my students, I will be successful. Students, and many adults, live in isolated worlds, even on the internet. We surround ourselves with like-minded people, never really coming to terms with

those who are different than us. We get caught in echo chambers that reflect back our own beliefs, and Hamid's' novel breaks through the media noise about Muslim immigrants.

Additionally, Hamid's book does an effective job of actually clarifying the very human issues many of us will face whether we are immigrants or refugees: loss, love, exile, fear and hope for the future.

For the texts I have selected, I will employ the metaphor of curriculum/literature as a window and a mirror: when literature is a window, it helps us see others; when it is a mirror, it helps us see ourselves (Style 1). Working with this metaphor, the teacher helps the “student to look through window frames in order to see the realities of others and into mirrors in order to see her/his own reality reflected. Knowledge of both types of framing is basic to a balanced education which is committed to affirming the essential dialectic between the self and the world” (Style 1). This is precisely what I intend to do by including this reading for the students while also using it to inform how we navigate the readings together. Also, this metaphor helps me achieve my objective: “students will develop greater understanding of the immigrant experience with the goal of gaining more empathy”; and “students will appreciate how personal stories...can help clarify the issues around immigration.” I decided to introduce the window/mirror metaphor in week 3 of the lesson sequence because I didn't want to overburden the beginning of Grande's memoir with too much introductory material. Besides, introducing the concept of literature as a window and a mirror after they have done some reading will give the students something to reflect on from the book. Though I will vary activities throughout the unit, this metaphor will be the guiding principle as we read both stories for “The delightful truth is that sometimes when we hear another out, glancing through the window of their humanity, we can see our own image reflected in the glass of their window. The window becomes a mirror! And it is the shared

humanity of our conversation that most impresses us even as we attend to our different frames of reference” (Style 1).

For each novel, I have included supplementary readings to expand students’ understanding of colonial policies responsible for why people migrate or become refugees. These sources are current and engaging. For example, before we begin reading Grande’s book, I want students to read “Ten Myths About Immigration,” from Teaching Tolerance. I want students to consider what they currently know about immigration may be false. I included the *Sacramento Bee* article because it is local, and it presents the specific story of immigrants coming from Central America. Additionally, I have chosen a few TED talks and one video to supplement our reading of *The Distance Between Us*, to add background knowledge and to present additional viewpoints. Adding non-traditional texts to a unit study also helps expand students’ idea of what a text is, a theme I thread throughout my teaching.

The additional texts I included for *Exit West*, shift somewhat. I discovered some powerful short stories by Mohsin Hamid, and I thought it would be powerful to compare and contrast how the novel treats refugee issues and how short stories reflect those same ideas. I have included an essay by Hamid titled “Refugees: Overcoming our Fear.” In it Hamid asserts “Fear is potent. Fear can make it difficult to behave decently, to do the right thing, to take in desperate refugees. Fear can warp a society, change its values, transform it into something monstrous. Fear must be resisted. The most potent anti-terrorism defense in the world costs nothing and is available to all. It is courage” (1). This alone could provide students the opportunity to explore how fear affects our view of refugees.

Finally, throughout my studies of Postcolonial theory and the reading of immigrant and refugee stories in this course, I have come to appreciate the power of narrative to clarify issues

and concerns around immigration and refugees. Lois Tyson argues that colonialist ideology...was based on the colonizers' assumption of their own superiority, which they contrasted with the alleged inferiority of native (indigenous) peoples..." (419). It's important that students come to terms with the fact that our views of immigrants come out of this ideology. Also, it is important for them to examine some of the economic and political power structures that drive immigration and refugees. Though it may be a little challenging to get into great detail about postcolonial theory in this unit, it's important to help students see theory as a way to talk about literature. Gerald Graff argues that "It is the average-to-poor student who suffers most from the established curriculum's poverty of theory, for such a student lacks command of the conceptual contexts that make it possible to integrate perceptions and generalize from them" (2060). Thus, bringing in theory, as the Springboard curriculum has done, will give students a framework to discuss some of the issues the texts in the lesson bring up. Of course, I will have to scaffold students' learning of theory at first, but it's worth it because, according to Graff, "our ability to read well depends more than we think on our ability to talk well about what we read" (Richter 45).

### Conclusion:

Literature has the impact to not only expand our understanding, but it can develop our empathy as well. In creating this unit, I want students to become more well-rounded citizens with a greater knowledge of the immigrant experience, like Eddie's, Grande's, and Hamid's. More than learning about immigration in the context of social science classes, according to Martha C. Nussbaum, "literary works typically invite their readers to put themselves in the place of people of many different kinds and to take on their experiences..." (Richter 359). This connects well with using literature as a mirror of our own lives, but it also gives us a window into the lives of others. Ultimately, it would be powerful and necessary to lead students further, through doors that could invite action and changes in beliefs. To conclude, Martha C. Nussbaum, in her essay

“The Literary Imagination,” asserts that “Literary works that promote identification and emotional reaction cut through those self-protective stratagems, requiring us to see and to respond to many things that may be difficult to confront” (Richter 359).

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<sup>1</sup> I have included sources from my prezi/film in the Works Cited, but they may not be quoted within the narrative.

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## Citizen Rhetor in a Digital Age--A Teaching Plan

### **Teaching Context**

Situated equidistant from San Francisco and Sacramento, Winters, CA is a small rural town of about 7,000 people. In spite of this, we have fast, effective, and reliable access to the Internet across most of our community. However, those students who live on farms and or further from the town's center do have inconsistent access to the internet. Many of them have to rely solely on the school's student Wi-Fi access or the library's free Wi-Fi access. In addition to the technological infrastructure of the town, it is a beautiful farming community surrounded by mountains and fruit and nut orchards. My worst drive to work is when I get stuck behind a tractor.

Winters High School has existed since the late 1800s, so it has a long history in this town, with a student population of approximately 475. Naturally, much of the fall is centered around the football games and Friday night lights. Currently, we are going through a growth boom; we have 400 new homes coming to Winters; we are getting a hotel; and I will soon be teaching in a brand new high school. Having taught at this school for 20 years, I have seen many changes. When I first began, my greatest technology tool was an overhead projector. Flash forward to today: our district is one-to-one, so every student has a Chromebook to use both in and out of class. This has had a drastic impact on our teaching. Much of the curriculum now has a significant online component. Additionally, we use the Google suite of apps for all classroom business: Classroom, Drive, Docs, Sheets, etc. This benefits us because it facilitates online learning and activities. Another factor that impacts teaching and designing meaningful lessons is the California Common Core Standards (CCCS). In looking at the [CCCS for writing at the 11-12th grade level](#), there is scant requirement for students to create multimodal compositions.

According to the standards, students should “use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information” (“English Language Arts...” 1). The CCSS doesn’t delineate multimodal compositions within its framework and emphasizes “writing products,” so with so much pressure on our time in terms of the other content standards we need to teach, it is challenging to consider incorporating multimodal compositions.

### **My Students**

I’m fortunate enough to have 40 seniors in my two AP Language classes, which is the class for whom I designed this lesson. (This is almost half of the seniors in our school.) Of the 40 students, 17 are Hispanic, and these students are all English language learners. I have two African-American students, and the rest are Anglo. This demographic represents our overall school population fairly well, though the overall school population is 64% Hispanic. Additionally, in spite of being in an AP class, these students have a wide range of ability. Only a few came to class with strong writing skills. It has taken all year to develop their writing to be clear, concise, and engaging. Additionally, a few of my students are dealing with serious personal issues. In spite of some of their difficulties, my students work very hard to succeed. During their entire career at high school, they have worked on alphabetic writing. Indeed, the demands of the AP Language & Composition curriculum keeps us focused on composing various types of essays throughout the year. This emphasis makes sense, since they need so much work with their writing. In addition to guiding them through rigorous research and personal statements, we spend most of our time on various composing strategies. This course is really an entry-level college composition course, so my primary focus is to prepare them for the rigors of college work and writing. Because of this, giving time to a multimodal composition

assignment makes me a little nervous. I hesitate to take time away from preparing for the exam that they take on May 15. It could have potentially beneficial consequences for them: they can earn college credits for doing well on the test. In short, I feel a great amount of pressure to constantly have my students composing in alphabetic texts. As I develop this unit, however, I see how valuable composing in a multimodal form can be. They can use assignments like this to find their voices and leverage their strengths. And with varied options for topics and products, students can learn how they can engage with their communities. This unit plan “[presents] students with ongoing opportunities to demonstrate their increasing rhetorical awareness and communicative flexibility and to articulate both why and how the goals they set and the rhetorical, material, and methodological choices they make in service of those goals allow them to accomplish something that the adoption of other goals or choices might not have afforded” (Shipka 359). And it is this rhetorical awareness that is a key component of the AP curriculum I teach.

### **The Teaching Plan--On becoming a Citizen Rhetor**

Our school has a modified block schedule, so I see my AP students three times a week: on Monday for 50 minutes, and on Tuesday and Thursday for 90 minutes. This unit plan will reflect that. (Since I was teaching other skills when I started teaching the Citizen Rhetor Project, I had to diverge from these steps a little. I’m putting it in this format so it’s easier to follow.) Furthermore, this plan reflects the course content as it requires students to show their understanding of rhetorical awareness. Indeed, my students have been analyzing and using rhetoric the entire school year, though much of the focus has been on alphabetic text. For example, we spend about four weeks on Ad analysis which is very eye-opening for them, but currently that assignment is far removed from the Citizen Rhetor Project I have created for this

<p><b>Monday</b> Goal: to introduce the assignment; to brainstorm potential topics.</p>	<p>Handouts: <a href="#">Citizen Rhetor Assignment</a> Activities: After we review the assignment, students complete this <a href="#">journal prompt</a>. We then share out as an entire class. This is a brainstorm step, so students can see the wide range of ideas this assignment could include.</p> <p>Homework: Come to class the next period with a topic chosen.</p>
<p><b>Tuesday:</b> Goal 1 : to use the rhetorical context to narrow their topic, purpose and audience.</p> <p>Goal 2: Create a proposal to begin making choices of best how to address the target audience</p>	<p>Step 1: I will give them a handout of the <a href="#">rhetorical triangle</a> to help them think through their audience and purpose. I want them to see how a different audience will have to be approached differently, both in terms of rhetorical strategies but also in terms of the product or genre they create.</p> <p>Step 2: They will get the <a href="#">Citizen Rhetor Proposal</a> next. These questions will allow them to navigate the interaction between the choices they make for their intended audience. It is a rough, rough draft.</p>
<p><b>Thursday:</b> Goal: to analyze a mini-documentary, a TED talk, and a Podcast so students can see how multimodal compositions are created.</p>	<p>Before they create their mockups/outlines/storyboards, I want them to see some examples of multimodal arguments. Though these don't cover all of what a student could choose to do, I think it will help them to see how an argument could go beyond an essay. <a href="#">Handout for the analysis activity</a></p>

Goal: Students will determine how this analysis will help them with their own projects.	<u>Activities:</u> Students will watch/listen to two or three examples and determine how the creator used visuals, text and sound to achieve his/her purpose. They will determine if that was effective or not.
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Week 2:

<p><b>Monday</b> Goal: Teach about fair use for images</p>	<p><a href="#"><u>Reading for Fair Use lesson</u></a><sup>2</sup> Since many students will need to turn to the internet to find images, I need to teach them about the criteria around fair use, and how to find images that fall under the fair use label. (I have not taught this part yet, but it is a crucial step.) Activities: We will complete this reading and discussion to give students a better understanding of copyright issues as they apply to their work. (linked above)</p>
<p><b>Tuesday:</b> Goal 1: mock up/outline/storyboard Statement of goals</p>	<p><a href="#"><u>Explanation of the drafting stage</u></a> Activities: I will explain that this step is much like a rough draft or outline of an academic essay. I will model first how I will put together my own project to show them my thinking. In this step, I will clarify how the different ways to draft can apply to their products. I will explain how the outline, mock up and storyboard are different. After they are done with their draft, <a href="#"><u>they will write a statement of goals for each part of the plan</u></a>. These goals will show how the elements of their project will help their overall purpose. This assignment is a significant step.</p>
<p><b>Thursday:</b> Peer sharing/feedback</p>	<p>Homework: From here on out, students will work on their projects for homework.</p> <p>I might extend their drafting stage into this class period. If they do this step right, the drafting stage (creating their mock-up, etc) could take longer than I am anticipating. However, students will meet with partners to get feedback on their projects.</p> <p><a href="#"><u>Peer Feedback Form</u></a>--Students will need a good 15 minutes (or more) to explain their projects to each other,</p>

<sup>2</sup> "Copyright and Fair Use Lesson Plans." *Media Education Lab*, University of Rhode Island, 2019, 8 May 2019, Online.



	and to get feedback on the effectiveness of their strategies.
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**Week 3:**

<b>Monday</b> Goal: drafting/creating  <b>Tuesday:</b> drafting/creating Goal  <b>Thursday:</b> Self-Evaluation/Rubric and presentations	This entire week will be spent producing, polishing, and finishing their work. I will give them class time to film, conduct interviews, draw, record, etc.  In order to support their individual work, I will set individual appointments during and outside of class to work alongside them and to answer any guiding, technical, practical, or content questions. Because the products are all so different, I won't be able to craft whole-class lessons to address certain pitfalls.  Before students present their arguments, they will complete the <a href="#">self-reflection form</a> . This will be a major part of their grade for this project.
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I realize this timeline might be a little tight. Next year when I do this unit, I will begin at least two-three weeks earlier, and I will allow for more than three weeks to complete the projects. We will be spending a significant amount of class time on the drafting and production of their products. Our students each have Chromebooks and we have consistent Wi-Fi capabilities on campus, so they will be able to utilize class time on their work. Also, because of constraints with the AP exam, I had to put off introducing this assignment.

**Rationale—Week 1**

Foremost, I wanted students to create an argument that went beyond another written academic essay for a teacher. Since we have spent most of the year on the academic essay, I wanted to give them some experience with composing for authentic purposes. Therefore, I called my unit plan, the “Citizen Rhetor Assignment.” I wanted my students to see themselves as individuals with communicative agency, the ability to speak, act, or write in the interest of change, about something they cared about. Additionally, I wanted them “to produce [‘texts’] with deliberate rhetorical aims in mind” (Murray 331). That is, I want them to be able to engage

in a rhetorical situation where they have to make all the choices about audience, purpose, and effective methods given the situation. I want them to experience a rhetorical situation “which calls [their] discourse into existence” (Bitzer 2). Most students don’t see how writing has a direct impact on their role as citizens because they only respond to assignments that have been dictated by teachers. More than writing good essays, I want them to find their voices because so much of school has quieted or negated their own ideas. Furthermore, I wanted them “to use their out-of-school literacies expertise, [and have] a choice in the topic and/or format, recognizing an audience outside of the classroom” (Bruce 427). I forget to do this regularly; my usual thought is, *“you are already good at creating videos; you need to improve your writing skill.”* But I have rethought this traditional position. Using their literacies to build up to what they don’t know how to do would be a more effective way to make students feel more successful.

To start this project, we began with a brainstorm journal and whole-class discussion because there is no one prompt for this assignment, I engaged them in a brainstorming activity. I did this step because I sensed that if they didn’t have a prompt, just having them pick, a topic out of thin air would have led to chaos. The journal prompt for brainstorming required that they list ideas and topics that they cared deeply about. We then shared as a whole class to generate a bigger list. The purpose was to get them to see the varied possibilities. After we went through the brainstorming step, I used a few of their examples to help them narrow their topics. Many students listed things like veganism, racism, and bullying as potential topics for this assignment. These, after all, are the topics that they care about. To help them think about their rhetorical situation more, I gave them a handout with the rhetorical triangle on it. I was trying to help them see how their chosen target audience would affect not only their purpose, but the mode or genre they would choose to present their argument. For example, I had one young woman who wanted

to encourage her classmates to use less single-use plastic. Initially, she chose a PowerPoint as her genre, but I tried to convince her that this might not be the best mode to address her audience.

When she came with her mockup done, she had changed to a poster campaign, a genre that would work more effectively with her target audience. On her final reflection, she wrote, “understanding my audience helped me figure out the best way to capture attention. Teens and young adults have short attention spans, so I needed to grab their attention quickly and make my poster, short and sweet and very direct.” The implications for the future of work like this is that planning products is key. To slow down and examine how audience affects all of the choices a rhetor makes is important.

The next step was for students to create a proposal. The questions on the proposal are designed so that I can intervene through questioning to help them think more deeply about what their intentions are. This is an effective step in the process because I was able to catch some weak and vague thinking. For example, many students were still vague on who their target audience was as well as what genre would be best for that target audience. Also, as mentioned above with student’s poster campaign, taking this time helps students think more clearly about what will work best for their target audience. Based on their responses in this stage, I believe we need to spend more time on genre study during the school year in order to “extend existing traditions and practices of literacy pedagogy” (Kalantzis and Cope 240). To do this, I could take my writing assignments and turn them into a situated practice, which Cope and Kalantzis explain as “knowledge [being] made through immersion in ‘hands-on’ experience” (240). The project as a whole requires that students immerse themselves in the world outside the classroom. For example, one young woman, a police cadet, interviewed Winters police officers and did ride alongs to incorporate into her video project about the difficult work police officers do. These

examples show that in completing their proposals, students are encouraged to think of ways to gather information in a hands-on manner. In this case, I define “hands-on” as going into the world to talk with people, either in video or audio interviews or surveys. This takes the classroom learning and resituates it into real life situations. This is a benefit because they are so experienced with essays, it’s hard for them to think of any other method of communicating. Thus, in their proposals, they are asked to outline their assumptions about the audience as well as how they will best address the audience’s needs and what method will best get across this message. This is in line with what Lee Odell and Susan M. Katz discuss. They state that “...current work on assessment provides at least two other means of identifying students’ perspectives: viewing that work in terms of its rhetorical context, i.e., the purposes students hope to achieve and the audience they hope to reach, and considering students’ assessment of their own work” (W201). For a non-traditional text such as this assignment, I have to rely on the students’ self-reflection to assess their learning and application of the skills. For example, one student wrote a children’s book about saving bees. Though the book didn’t possess professional qualities, her reflection showed an understanding of rhetorical situations. She wrote on her reflection that “kids like bright imagery as opposed to a thick paragraph of words they may or may not understand. So by understanding what children want and what they expect, I was able to create a more cohesive product.” Their proposals aid them in coming to an understanding of rhetorical situations.

And the last step for this week of the unit, is for them to analyze three different arguments. I chose a podcast, a TED Talk, and a video essay I found through *New York Times* Learning Network. Before they create their mockups, storyboard, or outlines, I wanted them to see some products that we can analyze for their rhetorical effectiveness. I created a handout to

guide us through this discussion, but I really want them thinking about HOW the creators of these genres developed their arguments. This will cause us to focus on sound, music, and image as well as text or words. I also wanted to show them these examples before they started drafting so that they could change their minds about their products if it is rhetorically appropriate. This analysis is situated here in the lesson sequence for two reasons: 1) as I have said before, I want them to grapple with their chosen rhetorical situation in order to make a choice independent of a model; and 2) only after they have done this thinking, they are ready for an example. Showing examples first may prejudice their rhetorical decisions.

## **Week 2**

The focus this week will be on their mockups/storyboards/outlines. I will explain to them that it is like a rough draft of an essay. Before they commit to making their product, this step is crucial. As Arola et al note, “You don't want to start composing the project itself if you're not sure it will suit the rhetorical situation. It's much easier to change a mock-up or storyboard than to change a finished multimodal project, so take advantage of your feedback loop” (100). Students need to try out different visual layouts, for example, to see if it works for his or her particular rhetorical situation. This is where multimodal compositions share similarities with writing: students always have a first or second draft to get feedback on before revising the final draft. Therefore, this step in the lesson sequence provides crucial teacher comments. More importantly, with a storyboard or mockup students can evaluate more clearly how well they are meeting the needs of the rhetorical situation. This could be done with feedback from both the teacher and their peers, and it will give them time to make adjustments before they commit to a final product.

Before they finish their mockups/outlines/storyboards, I will have spent a 50-minute block of time to help my students better understand the issues around fair use of internet content, which is necessary because they have not learned it. According to De Voss et al, “writing teachers are not expected to be lawyers, but understanding some of the implications of copyright in digital space--especially when we ask students to create multimodal or multigenre work--is an important part of a healthy digital ecology” (76). One project alone can’t teach important lessons in fair use, so like teaching ways to avoid plagiarism, teaching students what is fair and legal to use in digital spaces should be incorporated throughout the year.

### **Week 3**

As part of their self-reflection which they will do as part of their final grade for the project, I want them to revisit their statement of goals and choices

to ensure [they] are attending to the ways the goals they adopt for their work and the various choices they make in support of those goals simultaneously afford and constrain potentials for knowledge, participation, and (re)action, students are required to compose a statement of goals and choices for each of the texts they produce. These highly detailed texts provide students with the opportunity to communicate to me how, why, and under what conditions they made the rhetorical choices they did. (Shipka 359)

This process will show me their thinking as well as strengthen their understanding of themselves as citizen rhetors. In thinking about their own strategies, they will see how they used rhetoric to employ the BEST (emphasis mine) available means to present their message.

### **Reflection**

In taking this course, “Multimodal Composing: Theory and Practice,” I now realize the importance of multimodal composing. My AP Language & Composition seniors spend a lot of time and energy writing /composing texts that “do not resemble many of the documents we now see in digital environments that use multiple modalities to convey meaning--moving and still images, sounds, music, color, words, and animations--and that are distributed primarily...via

digital media” (Takayoshi and Selfe 1). That’s understandable, in part because we are bound to a large degree by the curriculum to prepare for the AP exam; we therefore must focus on composing various genres of academic essays. Furthermore, many of my students lack college level writing skills, so it takes the better part of a school year to prepare them for the rigors of the composing work they will do on the exam and in college. However, creating this unit plan and completing the reading for this course has shown me that students’ experiences with multimodal composing will be more motivating and engaging. The challenge for me will be to teach multimodal skills throughout my AP course in such a way that I can connect those skills with elements of traditional rhetoric and rhetorical analysis. Even with the emphasis on text, much of my course should be “[grounded] in rhetorical theory: making sure that all students are taught how to use *all available means* to communicate in productive ways and that they are provided a range of strategies and techniques for reaching different audiences, achieving a variety of purposes, and using accepted genres effectively” (Takayoshi and Selfe 8). The thing I neglect most is the visual and aural components of rhetoric. My focus on text does not take into account ALL (emphasis mine) available means of communicating as much as I would like. Moreover, in italicizing “all available means” in the above quote, Takayoshi and Selfe imply that any teaching of rhetorical practice should include any mode of communicating that BEST meets an audience's expectations. I realize I give lip service to this, but up until I wrote this unit, I haven’t done much with multimodal composing. We do spend about four weeks on analyzing advertisements, but the thrust of the assignment is analyzing images, not producing them. As I have begun teaching this unit, I can see the holes in the course that have left my students unprepared for work like this.

I have students who have chosen to create a range of multimodal works: from a child's book on cliques in school to podcasts about gun rights. Instead of writing to a prompt, which they are very good at, my students have risen to the occasion and taken on the challenge of picking their own topic. Joddy Murray argues that "this agency is a goal for all compositionists, and by bringing multiliteracies into the composition classroom, the full complexity--rather than a reductionism or simplicity--of writing rhetorically become more available to students" (327).

### **Student Agency**

A large component of the work students did was to immerse them in a rhetorical situation that they care about. Student agency is a key part of that, as Joddy Murray notes above. Allowing them to incorporate multiple literacies gave them complete control over the topics and the products. The first question students had to answer on the self-reflection (evaluation) form was, "what led you to choose the topic?" Unequivocally, students chose topics relevant to their lives. For example, one student, NH, writes that "as I've spent most of my senior year applying for financial aid and scholarships, it's been a constant stressor in my life. Constant talks about how my family will afford to pay for college makes me feel guilty and disappointed that we don't receive much help. I wanted to do this topic to bring an insight on the struggle middle income families go through economically." We can hear an urgency in her need to speak about the need for families to afford college. In the end, she created a poster urging greater state funding for help with middle class families' college costs. Her final product needed more work as she could not execute some of the technical and artistry aspects to make the product more professional. However, the assignment allowed her the agency to compose more rhetorically. It also allowed her the space to bring a personal matter into the academic setting which leads to greater engagement.



## **Rhetorical Awareness**

Situating students in the world as citizens with a voice is a key component of this entire unit. Students can be trained to answer many academic writing prompts, but to turn their critical and persuasive gaze towards the world is the ultimate goal of education. As a citizen rhetor, it becomes the student's responsibility to use their education for matters in the real world and issues that concern them. In another example, another student with the initials NH, opted to write an original song about materialism. A committed musician, this young man also cares deeply about social and environmental issues. So, in answer to the question, "who is your audience?" he wrote, "people 15-30 who are into this kind of music. Materialistic people." Though his reflection is underdeveloped, his knowledge of his audience helps him craft his song. In answer to the question, "How did understanding your audience help you to determine the BEST possible means of setting up your argument?" he says, "I made the lyrics easier to understand than I normally would." This reveals his knowledge of how rhetors make choices to appeal to their audience. He wanted his audience to get the message that materialism will leave us hollow as well as destroy the environment. In his own words, he writes, "I'm trying to appeal to fear and sadness. The idea that in the end all the things people care about won't matter." This was his answer to the question, "What values, ideas, and emotions are you trying to appeal to in your argument?" Thus, this assignment allowed this usually quiet student to find his voice, literally and figuratively.

A third student, TA, engaged with the assignment from a more professional standpoint. This student was active in the Future Farmers of America (FFA), and her father owns a trucking company. Because of this personal link, TA chose to create an infographic about ELD, the Electronic Logging Device that truck drivers use to "electronically record [their] Record of Duty

Status.” Even in my most creative moment, I would never have thought of this topic. This assignment gave the student permission to delve into an issue that impacted her family’s finances. As a trucking company owner, her father has to comply with these rules, which could impact his profits. When asked, “Who is your target audience?”, TA wrote, “My audience is the trucking companies who fall into this category and have to comply with the new laws. There is a lot of hostility because companies think it is violating their company.” This topic/issue/concern/idea/argument would have never surfaced within the regular AP curriculum, but it is significant nonetheless. She is employing the strategies that we have analyzed in others’ work all year long. A major component of the AP curriculum is rhetorical analysis: explaining, analyzing, and evaluating how writers and speakers appeal to specific audiences. In this unit, they apply that knowledge. In answer to the question about understanding her target audience, she responded with “by reading about the interstate hauling laws and about what they have to be in compliance with already [sic]. I also had to use websites that reflect on the mandate and the companies who already follow these laws and provide testimonies.” My comment to her on her reflection form was: “and that shows that you know what you’re talking about.” I wanted her to see that her credibility was essential for a successful message. Taken together, these students showed a sophisticated understanding of what it means to be a citizen rhetor.

### **Multimodality**

Most students chose a non-traditional product to create for this assignment. By that I mean 8 students out of 40 elected to write an alphabetic composition. The products mentioned above, a poster, an original song, and an infographic, all demonstrate how multimodalities can enhance students’ rhetorical awareness. For example, NH’s song had a slow and somber melody and rhythm. TA’s infographic was predominantly red so as to be attention-getting. Within it, she

also included white images of statistics and data in order to draw her audience's eye. Lastly, a pair of students chose to create a podcast to explore the topic of the origins of the universe. Both are religious, so they attempted to show their evolving ideas around God's creation of the universe and how that can exist within a society that values science. For the final product, they used many of the conventions of a podcast: it was conversational in tone; they recorded themselves speaking; they used sound effects for transitions; they added music; they even had featured guests. And though it wasn't as polished as a professional podcast, they were able to see how audio elements could help them "respect everyone's values regarding this topic," which they stated in their final reflection.

Engaging with multimodal texts can lead students to see themselves as powerful rhetors. To do this they have to know that creating an arguments or message can be as powerful in a social media campaign or YouTube video as it can in an academic essay. Ultimately, I have learned that "Our view of mind, society, and learning is based on the assumption that the human mind is embodied, situated, and social. That is, human knowledge is embedded in social, cultural, and material contexts" (New London Group 30). That is, rhetoric is not practiced in a vacuum.

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