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## Final Master's Portfolio

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FINAL MASTER'S PORTFOLIO

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A Final Portfolio

Submitted to the English Department of Bowling Green  
State University in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts in the field of English

August 8, 2020

Dr. Lee Nickoson, First Reader  
Ms. Kimberly Spallinger, Second Reader

## Table of Contents

<b>I.</b>	Introduction / Analytical Narrative.....	<b>2</b>
<b>II.</b>	Teaching of Writing Critical Reflection.....	<b>8</b>
<b>III.</b>	Homer’s <i>The Odyssey</i> and the Five Brush Strokes Writing Unit.....	<b>24</b>
<b>IV.</b>	Immigrant Cultural Identity as Complex and Dynamic, Not Singular (Substantive Research).....	<b>53</b>
<b>V.</b>	Learning from “Outsiders” with Literature Circles.....	<b>76</b>

### **Analytical Narrative**

The key purpose in achieving my Master of Arts in English has been to teach English better to my students. This has not changed. I have continuously wanted my students to improve their ability to write and read effectively for a variety of situations, and I knew from the moment I started the program that I would have to improve my knowledge and skills as well. The various courses I have taken allowed me the opportunity to research teaching of writing theory and pedagogy. They've allowed me to create writing units that utilize the many strategies I learned about and discussed with peers. Other courses prompted me to read and research diverse texts about the immigrant experience and Young Adolescent (YA) literature with protagonists struggling to be themselves and achieve their goals. I have found the most meaningful courses have been the ones which allowed me to read texts and create units for my students. Personally, I have wanted to diversify my curriculum and I have been able to do so by adding in modern YA books through the incorporation of a literature circle unit. The unit offers students the option of four different books with four unique protagonists for students to choose from. My students have been able to relate to some of the characters coming of age experiences while also learning about new ones.

In addition to becoming a better teacher, I pursued this MA with the intention of working on a Doctoral degree after. Though I am uncertain about when this will happen, I am certain I want to continue researching YA literature. My learning during this MA program has impacted the way I choose texts for my classroom and I'm more aware of the underrepresented students. I

want every student in my classroom to see themselves reflected in a book and I want them to be opened up to new experiences. Dr. Rudine Sims Bishop who teaches courses on children's literature at The Ohio State University is one scholar whose ideas have permeated my thoughts about books. Bishop's text, "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors," discusses how literature portrays a particular view of the world and the people in it. Dr. Bishop states, "It's also the children who always find their mirrors in the books and, therefore, get an exaggerated sense of their own self-worth and a false sense of what the world is like because it's becoming more and more colorful and diverse as time goes on." Ensuring students have an accurate view of the world, not the "world" of their small town or even city, is important; it opens up the "sliding glass door" as Bishop calls it. Students cannot be an asset to a world in which they aren't familiar with the different kinds of people living in it and this should be a main goal of teachers - to help students get an accurate picture of the many different lives people lead. I am convinced I can do this better having been exposed to books like Elizabeth Acevedo's *With Fire on High*, and Le Thi Diem Thuy's *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*.

In studying the theories and pedagogy around the teaching of writing, process pedagogy has heavily influenced the techniques I use and want to continue using to help students improve their writing. Students who view writing as a process set multiple goals and won't settle for one revision. Process pedagogy encourages students to do workshops, conference with experienced writers and peers, and work continuously. A paper is never done to an experienced writer and students will see this when they look at the multiple revisions of a paper and how it progresses. My "Teaching of Writing Critical Reflection" paper explains my journey as a writer and thoroughly discusses how I utilize the techniques of process pedagogy. The paper emphasizes the

changes process pedagogy has undergone and Chris Anson, writer of “Process Pedagogy and Its Legacy,” specifically mentions the addition of writing workshops. Writing workshops personalize learning for students as writers struggling with finding sources or explaining quotes can come together and learn. Students can support each other and the writing teacher can prepare writing exercises and examples for the techniques those students are struggling to learn. And though process pedagogy motivates many of my students to continue to workshop and write multiple revisions of papers to improve their writing, I also discuss expressive pedagogy, which at face value can be an undervalued pedagogy for teachers of writing.

Expressive pedagogy has a lack of rules and emphasizes personal expression and reflection which could come across as too easy for students. But, I discuss the many successes I have been able to have with expressive pedagogy, especially when it comes to helping students clarify their thesis and add details to their writing. The free write technique, for one, when students choose a paper topic they feel strongly about, can supply personal experiences and examples for their body paragraphs of their paper. Students don’t automatically see this at first, but are usually surprised with how quickly they generate ideas and can clearly explain their ideas. So showing students techniques like this adds to their toolbox of writing skills. When they struggle with a later writing experience they can try to perform a free write on a topic. This is my favorite part of teaching writing: showing students techniques they can use and apply when struggling. This part of teaching is so rewarding because so many young writers I teach feel they just aren’t good at putting their thoughts into words. Then, at the end of the year, students leave my classroom more confident in their writing abilities. My second paper in my portfolio was inspired by my use of process and expressive pedagogy to teach writing.

My paper “Homer’s *The Odyssey* and the Five Brush Strokes Writing Unit” abides by the idea that students need to fill their writing toolbox with techniques they can apply to any writing situation. Noden’s brush strokes encourage students to experiment with words and compose sentences in ways they wouldn’t normally or have never thought of. The experimentation results in students being able to describe their ideas with vivid details and impress readers with unique images. My rationale for the unit explains the brush stroke exercises like combining verbs associated with one activity— like cooking or football— and making descriptive phrases by matching them up with random nouns. Students will be writing and learning about the functions of certain words like strong verbs (thrust, slam, and dash) which show specific actions. Learning grammar so they can confidently experiment with their writing, rather than learning grammar to memorize rules and edit random sentences is way more effective. The lesson plans that follow the rationale really speak to Noden’s discussion of the brush strokes being a camera zoom of a specific image. Students write a narrative about their epic hero and watch clips from *The Odyssey* and see the descriptive sentences written about the clips they watched. Students continue to add brush stroke sentences to their narratives and watch their story come to life on the page. Then, students show their readers a tale about a hero worth reading because their writing creates pictures in the reader’s mind like a film shows pictures for a viewer.

The final two pieces in my portfolio focus on diverse texts. My ideas about teaching writing and how I have applied those ideas to construct units for my students is clearly demonstrated with my first two papers. But, how important it is to expose students to literature that shows them people who aren’t like them to give them an accurate picture of the world is the goal of my second two papers. My paper on immigrant texts took a lot of revision partly because

there was substantive research required for it, and though I felt I demonstrated a clear explanation of acculturative stress which can take a heavy toll on family relationships, I had isolated my examples and talked about each book one at a time. Though this organization ensured I talk equally about each book, it didn't demonstrate the many similarities and differences among the people and their experiences of immigrating to the United States. With the suggestions and support of my peers, I feel my additional sentences which introduce the books helped clarify how each character deals with acculturative stress. I also reorganized some of the examples from the books so characters with similar experiences could be discussed in the same paragraph and this allowed me to effectively communicate the struggles immigrant families face and the type of help they can benefit from. Adding headings to the paper also helped organize these ideas as I included a lot of resources to support how children and parents of immigrant families feel and deal with prejudice. The paper ends with a thorough discussion of educating young people about other cultures and how it can put a stop to prejudice and encourage appreciation and understanding. And of course, when people work together to support one another, more people can be successful.

My final piece, "Learning from 'Outsiders' with Literature Circles" also demonstrates the importance of educating young people at the family level and community level. The literature circle unit I thoroughly outline explains how teachers can implement diverse texts in the classroom so students have sliding glass doors into people unlike themselves as Dr. Bishop believes as well. This paper didn't require as many changes as my previous paper on immigrant texts, but I did add quite a bit of explanation in terms of outlining the process of creating and running the literature circles. And, I added introductions about each of the books in the unit into



my introduction section of my paper, rather than waiting until later on in the paper when I explain why I chose the four books I chose for the unit. I was able to expand on how each of the protagonists feels like outsiders and different from their peers. I think I explained how studying these characters' experiences will lead to students seeing differences as something beautiful and unique, rather than a challenge they have to overcome. And, I think each characters' confidence in accepting who they are grows in each of the books, which encourages readers to accept themselves and others as they are. My paper headings and explanations center on acceptance and appreciation of all ethnicities, cultures, and sexualities. The conclusion summarizes the student-driven discussions that naturally occur with literature circle units. Overall, students will be supported intellectually and emotionally as they educate themselves about other cultures and discuss contemporary issues about race and sexuality. So again, this paper centers on a unit that benefits students as they collaborate with each other and gain valuable communication skills.

My overall goal is to continue to use my knowledge and experiences about writing and diverse literature to create and adapt the units I use to teach my students. By learning different writing techniques and experimenting with language, students will be curious about how to improve their writing. My students will be intrigued to read about other people who are different from themselves. They will learn the power of a well written story and how readers of stories make for informed, smart, empathetic people who can contribute to the world and make it a better place. And later when I choose to go after a doctoral degree, I may well end up choosing to focus my research on writing or diverse YA literature. I may end up teaching young teachers at a college one day and help them create student-driven units to foster curiosity and empathy.

### **Teaching of Writing Critical Reflection**

A “good” teacher reflects on their lessons with the ultimate goal of helping students. As I have been critically reflecting on what “good” writing is and how teachers use specific theories and pedagogies to perfect their teaching of writing, I have come to many conclusions. One conclusion is that “good” teachers of writing, no matter what theory or pedagogy they are practicing, ask students to reflect on the writing behaviors they are learning and encourage them to transfer these ideas to different writing situations. Secondly, a “good” teacher of writing doesn’t utilize techniques from just one pedagogy. It is up to the teacher to analyze the pros and cons of different pedagogies and help students learn and apply techniques from many different ones. Lastly, a “good” teacher of writing supports students. No matter how comfortable or successful students are with writing, a “good” teacher helps students see they can always practice techniques to incorporate into their writing and improve.

The most influential pedagogies to my teaching include: process pedagogy, expressive pedagogy, and genre pedagogy. Process pedagogy is a writing strategy which favors the process of writing rather than the product. Teachers who utilize this strategy prioritize writing workshops, conferencing, and multiple revisions as students improve their writing by using these strategies. The expressive pedagogy is a writing strategy which favors providing students with opportunities to express themselves like journal writing and less structured writing. Lastly, genre pedagogy is the complete opposite of expressive pedagogy. Genre pedagogy favors focused writing strategies for specific types of writing, but it still involves the planning, writing, and

revising like the process pedagogy. Despite being taught by teachers who used all of these strategies, I feel that I have adopted and adapted certain parts of these pedagogies. I was never asked to consistently revise and reflect on my growth as a writer in high school, so I require this of my students through the use of portfolios which is a technique utilized in process pedagogy. Moreover, I utilize expressive pedagogy by incorporating free writes like one of my high school teachers; additionally, I incorporate journaling so students can reflect on their writing during a unit and practice making text to text, text to self, and text to world connections with the text we are reading and writing about. And while reading about the criticism surrounding genre pedagogies, I have been encouraged to consider the way I teach specific writing genre techniques, so to not limit my students' creativity and emphasize a narrow, one-dimensional view of how to produce a writing piece of that genre. Reflecting on these different pedagogies helps me grow as a writing teacher who hopes to teach students to become better writers with adding techniques to their writing toolbox. Specifically in my freshman creative writing class, I focus on writing as a process as I guide students through the process of developing their writing portfolio over the course of the year. I will discuss some of the strategies I use to help students view writing as a process, ways I incorporate strategies of expressive pedagogy, and explain some negative aspects of genre pedagogy which I also utilize for teaching writing.

### **Literacy Narrative Analysis**

A few writing experiences during middle school helped me understand the importance of viewing writing as a process and acquiring techniques to improve writing. In middle school, I remember learning how to do writing webs with my 6th grade language arts teacher. In the middle of the web was a circle with the topic of our paper and all the lines attached to the center

circle were the topics of our paragraphs that supported our paper topic in the middle. This was one prewriting strategy which taught me the need to organize my writing so I didn't bring up ideas that weren't related to my topic. I was realizing that I couldn't just sit down and write a perfect paper. Writing takes time and is a process that involves multiple steps. For both 7th and 8th grade I had the same teacher who was adamant about teaching us the five paragraph essay. The body paragraphs of our essay had to support our thesis and include two examples and/or quotes which I was to explain and connect to my thesis. I realized the importance of providing support for my claims. Again, I followed a very strict outline and was fearful to adapt or modify it. I wanted a good grade and I probably wouldn't receive this if one of my body paragraphs had three supporting examples instead of two. Luckily, during my one-on-one conference with my teacher, she explained that depending on the topic of the body paragraph, one could have more examples to support the idea which was fine. These conferences helped me see the importance of writing that clearly supports a claim with examples, rather than counting examples or worrying about the number of paragraphs. Chris Anson in his chapter on "Process Pedagogy and Its Legacy" discusses teaching students to learn the qualities of clear and successful writing. Anson explains, "an obvious consequence of a new focus on students' processes was to shift the orientation of learning away from expectations for a final text and toward developing the knowledge and abilities needed to produce it" (217). Had my writing teachers explained the strategies they were using to help me write, or encouraged me to adapt the outlines provided from the beginning, maybe I would have understood the qualities of clear, successful writing sooner. So process pedagogy at its beginning stages with the five-paragraph essay was being used to teach how important it was to support and organize my ideas, but as I got older, it was

limiting my ideas I wanted to discuss. I was so anxious to turn in an essay and get a good grade, I wasn't reflecting on the importance of why I was writing the way I was in the first place.

Teachers of writing need to consider how process pedagogy can fail students who get caught up with following a prescribed outline.

The writing I did in high school finally helped me see the success I could have by adapting writing techniques. My freshman English teacher, Mrs. Bailey, said essays did not have to be and shouldn't always be five paragraphs. I was scared. How could I write an essay longer than five paragraphs when pre-writing templates I had from middle school only allowed for five paragraphs? Mrs. Bailey showed us graphic organizers that could be manipulated and how to make our own outline. I was thinking outside the five boxes I usually used to plan my writing. I made my own outline and submitted my first draft of my essay only to have it returned with comments and questions written all over my paper. I failed and attended my one-on-one conference filled with shame. Mrs. Bailey explained how some of my ideas were in the wrong paragraph. I revised and had a friend look at my paper. It seemed that what I had put in my outline for one of my paragraphs had changed to a new idea. But I guess that's what writing can do; it can create new ideas or change an existing idea. I revised and discussed my paper with Mrs. Bailey and revised again before submitting a final draft. It was a long process. But I was starting to see how writing was non-linear. A writer didn't prewrite, turn in a draft, fix some grammar errors and turn in the paper. A writer might discuss a draft with a peer and revise parts of the paper, and maybe revise again after the teacher provided feedback. Multiple drafts can ensure quality writing.

My experience with process pedagogy started as a more teacher-centered approach with an emphasis on the 5-paragraph essay. Then, it changed to a student-centered approach with an emphasis on small group workshops, peer review, and revision. Author of "Process Pedagogy and Its Legacy," Anson did extensive research on process pedagogy and explains how the changes of techniques adds to process pedagogy and how it benefits teachers. "Curiosity about the composing process fit well with the cognitivist orientation that was also dominating work in educational psychology" (220). Workshops are just one technique added to process pedagogy that focus on ways students can improve parts of their writing like an introduction paragraph or transition sentences. The workshops among other added techniques encourage students to be curious about how they are writing and what will successfully communicate their ideas. Recent research on accomplished authors has helped add techniques to process pedagogy. Researchers began to study writing behaviors of novice writers and accomplished adult writers like those discussed in Sommers's "Revision Strategies of Student Writers and Experienced Adult Writers". In Sommers's study, she discusses how "The experienced writers describe their primary objective when revising as finding the form or shape of their argument" (866). Novice writers reflect on these experienced writers' goals of revising their argument in their paper and make that their goal too. So the teacher as the experienced writer should write and discuss their goals with their students, the novices. Teachers can talk through their thinking as they read and revise by saying things like "Did I explain this clearly?" or "Do I need another example here?" By putting into practice what they observed from the teacher, the revision is more successful because the novice writers work on creating or clarifying their argument and not simply fixing grammar errors or changing individual words. The students' time spent prioritizing these

higher-order skills of writing like argumentation and analysis make their revised writing much clearer and successful. Students would not be able to learn this revision goal without reflecting on writing skills and collaborating with experienced writers. This push to study writing itself and help students create and apply writing behaviors was what Mrs. Bailey helped me do and what all writing teachers should do.

After my essay, Mrs. Bailey started a short story unit. We did free writes every day, and Mrs. Bailey sat at a desk in the front of the room and wrote too. She wrote fast and furiously with a pen and in perfectly slanted cursive. So I did too. I wrote about topics I liked and described them vividly because I had nothing else to do for five minutes. It was the practice I needed to incorporate details into my writing so I could show the reader what I meant instead of just telling them. For Chris Burnham and Rebecca Powell in their chapter “Expressive Pedagogy,” they explain that expressive writing acts “as a link between the private and personal and the public and social, as the language of association and connection, expressive language is the language of learning,” (117). Despite a lack of rules, expressive writing values ideas and reflection. Mrs. Bailey realized that as novice writers, myself and my peers needed to understand that a key part of writing is expressing one’s thoughts and as novice writers, we did not have a lot of practice just writing down our ideas. I was connecting writing with the sharing of my ideas which were valuable. The free writes jump-started my imagination when we were assigned to write a short story. I experimented with flashbacks, symbolism, and point of view. It was clear to me that there wasn’t just one way to write an essay, a short story, or any type of writing. Demonstrating free writes and having my students practice utilizing this expressive pedagogy technique would be a key writing strategy I wanted to share with my own students one day.

The lack of structure with free writes is what makes this technique of expressive pedagogy so successful and simple for students to use. When spelling and grammar is left behind, students have the opportunity to clarify their thoughts, ideas, and add vivid details. Consequently, the writing from free writes can often be easily modified to serve as essential ideas for their papers. Many students are surprised by how easy it can be to construct a thesis statement once they have performed a free write on a topic. The free write helps students clarify their opinion about a topic which helps them figure out what they want to discuss with readers. And, free writes often contain personal experiences which can serve as support for their opinion in body paragraphs. Though expressive pedagogy techniques may seem simple, they can have so many positive effects on student writing. From helping them generate ideas, clarify explanations, and think of examples to incorporate into their writing, the benefits are endless.

### **Teaching Philosophy Analysis**

Due to the simple, effective techniques of expressive pedagogy used by my teacher, my teaching practices involve strategies from expressive pedagogy like free writes and journaling because I remember how helpful these writing exercises were to me as a young writer. Peter Elbow in his article, "Toward A Phenomenology Of Freewriting," comments how "...freewriting has come to establish for me a directness of tone, sound, style, and diction that I realize I often try to emulate in my careful writing" (61). When students engage in a free write that is private and written with the purpose of helping themselves get started writing about a topic, their authentic voice is revealed. Students think about ideas in their minds all day, but to share these ideas through words is a different act. Elbow concludes his article by stating, "I would argue that it helps us do in writing what we can already do perfectly well in our minds" (69). Students are



nervous to share the ideas cycling through their minds. Students worry about using perfect grammar and having a reader read those thoughts without reviewing and reflecting on them first. So freewriting and journaling are writing behaviors which help students establish their voice and thoughts so they can be confident enough to express themselves with others. This also relates to my emphasis on collaborative writing. A key part of writing is understanding that it is a meaning-making process that occurs among people. Collaborative writing encourages the discussion of ideas and the requirements of a collaborative writing project call for strategies like methods and management of the group. Collaborative digital writing is still influencing how I teach writing. Applications like Google Docs allow teachers to have students work on a text collaboratively and at the same time. Students can see who is typing and work together to discuss ideas and review other group members' writing. Giving students opportunities to think and discuss how they are writing makes them reflect on what makes "good" writing.

Students will begin to understand what makes this "good," clear, and understandable writing when their teacher and peers ask questions and provide feedback. Students will see writing is a process that cannot be perfected, the more times a piece of writing is reviewed, especially by multiple people, the more likely it is to be understood by its audience. What seems clear to a writer, may not be clear to a reader. And as we continue to explore writing strategies to help students comprehend the purpose of writing and perfect their ability to write effectively, the world of digital collaborative writing seems to be an experience students should participate in because it allows students to understand writing is a conversation that is to be read, discussed, revised, and revised again to help make the writing clear for the reader.

I do a collaborative writing unit every year with my freshman students which allows them to share feedback with each other so they can successfully share their ideas. Students research a decade of their choice and what life was like during that time. The unit begins with students freewriting about how life has changed in the United States. Students start writing ideas they are interested in and usually use phrases like “roaring 20s” and the “groovy 70s” By providing student choice they are invested in the project because they are interested in the topic and chose it themselves. It’s important to let students express their ideas and individualize instruction when possible. John Schell agrees in his thesis “Blending rhetorics: An examination of expressivist and epistemic rhetoric.” Schell states “Ultimately, however, expressivism contains an invaluable perspective regarding the affirmation of individual perspective that should be included in a writing classroom” (8). The collaborative strategy and the free writing from the expressive pedagogy encourages students to clearly express and refine their perspective on their topic. While students base their research on facts from the decade, they get to choose what to highlight, whether it’s the rising economy or society’s desire for change in political leadership with the loss of lives post war. The free write helps students collaborate better having established their ideas. After a five minute free write where a student focuses on the large amount of research they found on the fashion from the 70s, students gain confidence in sharing their findings and writing so when they collaborate on a group project they will speak their thoughts and share feedback they have about other group member’s work. Clarifying ideas and accepting feedback to improve their writing are just two positive outcomes for students when using collaborative writing in the classroom.

Collaborative writing also helps students learn how to successfully work together with a collaboration strategy. After the free write students are placed in a group of other people who are interested in the same decade they are. Then, I let the students choose how their group will collaborate and most groups choose hierarchal collaboration, but still help group members with their part of the assignment since they chose the decade they are researching. Lunsford and Ede describe the benefits of two types of collaborations in their book, *Singular Texts/Plural Authors: Perspectives Collaborative Writing*. Dialogical collaboration involves all group members working on all parts of the project and is more centered on group discussion. While hierarchical collaboration can be just as effective, it is more about dividing the parts of the project up among group members and is more efficient and timely (Lunsford and Ede, 133-34). So as students work together with either type of collaboration, there is a need to manage how the work will get done and how they will review each other's writing in the project together once completed. These skills will be useful to students in their future career as well. Deveci states in his study on collaborative writing, "Much of writing in real life (in the work-place in particular) is done in this fashion. This has become even more possible thanks to advances in computer technology such as Google Docs which allows several individuals to work on the same draft simultaneously" (730). If writing in students' future careers is going to be collaborative, so should the writing in the classroom. As students prepare their research presentation, all group members are required to review their project together. This can create problems because students may make suggestions another group member doesn't like, but the students discuss the suggestions and ultimately democratically decide what they feel is best. Collaborative writing like this makes students' ability to clearly express their ideas and affirm or build on each other is so important. In Deveci's

study he showed that “There were remarks related to conflict resolution and leadership skills. These are particularly important to note since they clearly prepare students for cooperation and negotiation skills they will need in their workplaces upon graduation” (729). Deveci’s findings solidify that collaborative writing projects teach skills beyond that of writing. During the final preparations for the decade presentations, students discuss with me both positive and constructive feedback they received from fellow group members. Students learn to see what they do well and where they can improve with their writing. It doesn’t happen often, but if students disagree with constructive feedback I usually discuss the comment with them and encourage them to see how it could make the ideas clearer for the readers. Discussing revisions this way helps students see how it’s about improving and not finding things they did badly. For students planning to enter the workforce, collaborative writing projects prepare students for life outside of the classroom. As a high school teacher, I have the responsibility to use collaborative writing to help students improve their writing and teach social skills to prepare my students to thrive in the college classroom or the workforce.

### **Curriculum Section**

The summative portfolio assignment I use in all my classes is a technique from process pedagogy. However, it allows students to reflect and compare on the unique genre techniques learned and applied to each paper. Amy Devitt argues in her chapter, “Genre Pedagogies” about how “teachers of particular genres must bring a larger metacognitive awareness and a critical stance on existing, dominant discourses” (159). In other words, teachers who teach the genre of the essay, for example, need to be wary of teaching one structure for writing an essay. Or, the teacher needs to make it clear that students can adapt the structure when necessary. After all,

who wants to read 100 essays structured the exact same way? It may make it easier to grade if a teacher knows each paragraph will have two supporting examples in each, but depending on the topic and writer, it could be necessary for them to have three examples or maybe just one example to elaborate on and explain. The five paragraph essay with two examples per body paragraph doesn't work for every essay. Devitt quotes another researcher who supports her warnings against genre pedagogy because it could encourage a formulaic writing style like that of the five paragraph essay. Devitt explains Freedman's view of genre pedagogy of how it can be dangerous "if the students are ones who overgeneralize or focus too heavily on form" (157). Students won't be creative or feel free to adapt a structure when provided by the teacher who is grading the assignment. There may be pressure to create the writing assignment in the one way they are shown exists. I feel that I combat this danger by showing students a variety of examples when we focus on a particular genre and explicitly encouraging adaptation. For example, when my students write their nature blogs, I provide students examples of the conversational writing which is specific to the blog genre. Students can then read about and examine examples of the specific organizational structures used by bloggers like list format and how-to format. Initially, most students see the formats as helpful strategies to organize their thoughts and pick a random format. But, I model for the students what can happen if the format is chosen before the topic. Students immediately begin to discuss how the how-to format would be more appropriate when I begin to use the list format for the topic of how to reuse and recycle. I usually do a less obvious example too so we can discuss the benefits of certain topics with specific formats to create an effective and entertaining blog.

Whether it's prewriting, writing, or revising, students surprise me with innovative ways to use strategies from all genres of writing. The danger is providing students one structured example to follow. And, if students end up simply mimicking a structure provided, a good question for their portfolio could involve asking them why they did this and encourage them to discuss a way to change or veer away from the structure they followed. The portfolio makes them think about why they write how they do, strategies used, and how they can continue to improve. It will absolutely shed light on students who want or simply prefer formulaic writing and it can make them critically think about ways to be more creative.

In support of this explicit genre-based instruction, Devitt discusses how strategies for specific writing genres can be applied to authentic writing experiences. She explains how useful it is when "embedding the writing in meaningful tasks, not just classroom exercises; and not dominating during modeling, and collaborative composing," (150). So to be effective, demonstrating situations outside of the classroom where the genre is used is important. While teachers can't always provide authentic writing situations with an authentic audience, I think it's important to at least explain these situations to students. One authentic writing experience students participate in is writing a children's book for a second grader. Each student is partnered with a second grader who helps them create a character and a story about that character. The students not only worry about their grade, but they have an authentic audience who they are writing the book for and will read it to them. The students participate in peer review and closely consider the tone and audience as they review each other's books. The students grow as writers during this unit as they have a reason to study the genre and understand the use of repetition, onomatopoeia, and rhyme to name a few devices. Students then have the opportunity to utilize

these same writing techniques used for writing children's books and utilize them in writing poetry.

During our poetry unit, students again work to understand the use of repetition, rhyme, and other types of figurative language and practice incorporating it into their writing. At the end of our poetry unit, students create an advertisement for their poetry and showcase three of their best poems. They also submit their poetry journal where they engaged in self-reflection about specific choices they made in their poetry. At the end of the unit, I ask the students to reflect on why a writing device like repetition can be used in children's books, poetry, advertising, etc. Students are able to understand repetition, among other literary devices we read in different texts and use when we are writing is a tool that can be applied in a variety of writing situations. Devitt warns, "Even if teachers can successfully teach students a genre that might be useful in the future, what they can teach will differ from what students need to learn" (157). While I understand Devitt's argument, I feel that combining genre pedagogies with expressive pedagogy helps students transfer knowledge and skills from one genre to another. Students can reflect on how and express why certain strategies are useful and learn how to use them when they deem it necessary no matter what kind of writing they are doing. When students can discuss how a literary device like repetition can be used differently depending on the situation, students are encouraged to understand all writing tools and behaviors in that way. Devitt ends her discussion with Anne Beaufort, author of *College Writing and Beyond: A New Framework for University Writing Instruction* and her principles which seek to encourage the transfer of writing behaviors. One of Beaufort's principles states, "Teach learners to frame specific problems and learnings into more abstract principles that can be applied to new situations" (177). I feel that my

creative writing class is set up to encourage just that. By the end of the semester, students have compiled a number of prewriting assignments, drafts, and final drafts with rationales explaining their writing knowledge, skills, and experience gained. Each piece of writing has a rationale paragraph explaining what the assignment taught them about writing, the process they used to write, and a discussion of what aspects they struggled with and excelled at in the assignment. Before submitting the portfolio with all the writing pieces and rationales, students write a reflective paper discussing the writing strategies/behaviors they used and draw connections between assignments from different genres that used similar writing techniques.

By reflecting on my literacy journey, I found that my most effective writing teacher emphasized process pedagogy. I learned that writing is a process which can continually be improved upon with the learning and application of writing techniques. These techniques can be used in any genre of writing and they can be adapted to help the writer most effectively communicate their ideas. A blog format can be used as a prewriting activity for an essay and journal entry can inspire the topic of a children's book. The more writing behaviors students use and experiment with, the more effective they will be as writers. The most shocking part of reflecting on my literacy journey, is the realization that process pedagogy is still used and being modified in today's classrooms. I even use the adapted version of process pedagogy as it has changed to emphasize the processes and strategies students can use and apply to any kind of writing. Ultimately, teachers of writing need to consider the many benefits of teaching different writing strategies and behaviours from many writing pedagogies and theories and encourage students to transfer this knowledge and use these skills when their writing can benefit from it.



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### **Homer's *The Odyssey* and the Five Brush Strokes Writing Unit**

Rationale:

A man went on a journey and battled supernatural monsters. The story of Odysseus would have been much less exciting had the storytellers who passed down the tale not shown us what happened. The **old** man, **tired and disheartened**, arrived at a quiet island with his crew. Hoping to barter with a caveman, they soon met a cyclops, **an inhospitable foe**. **Staring in disbelief**, Odysseus watched helplessly as two of his men were **snatched up** by the giant. **Bones crunching**, Odysseus turned his head away. In a matter of seconds, the men's bodies disappeared into the cyclop's mouth.

After reading Harry Noden's chapter one titled, "The Writer As Artist: Basic Brush Strokes", it's clear that descriptive writing involves more than telling students to add description. It's important to show students the many ways to add description. Noden's brush strokes go beyond adding adjectives before nouns which most young writers use. Noden explains, "The qualities of a writer's images — the details, colors, shapes, movement— derive from visual perception" (3). The images writers can create in a reader's mind will allow readers to engage with the text. Instead of being told Odysseus is horrified as his men are eaten by the cyclops, readers can infer how he is feeling for themselves.

During my teaching of *The Odyssey*, I would like to begin by teaching the concept of “showing versus telling” with sensory details which will help students review adjectives and strong verbs which will add description to their writing. Then, I will transition into Noden’s five brush strokes. Students will have the opportunity to analyze the way these brush strokes evoke emotion from readers and experiment with the brush strokes to add details to their writing. Noden comments on the power of brush strokes, “As students begin to play with these painting techniques, interesting image experiments emerge” (14). All the examples throughout Noden’s book prove how the “brush strokes” can evoke action, amplify images, and energize images students create in the writing. I loved Noden’s comparison of the “brush strokes” being like a camera zoom (7). Since the main goal of using the brush strokes is to add details to one’s writing, it only makes sense to show students detailed images in film and see if they can translate those images onto a page. This will work well with *The Odyssey* film version I have to show students as we read the epic. Noden’s transition of comparing writing to painting and then shooting a film will help students connect the brush strokes to strong images and action. Again, most people associate film with action, sound, and more details than just a picture or painting, so showing film clips and having students describe them will be an effective exercise in helping them recognize the goal of improving their writing by learning how to use the brush strokes. Most importantly, Noden included an explanation of how detailed writing influences the reader aside from helping create images or a film out of the words. Noden explains, “Dialogue can build conflict, pique curiosity, shape character, or enhance the writing in a hundred ways...” (41). This gives my students a reason to learn and apply these writing strategies. Studying grammar and experimenting with language to ensure one’s writing has a particular effect on people when it is

read provides students with power. For example, students will have the opportunity to think about how writing “the man crumpled to the ground” can evoke more or less emotion compared to writing “the man fell to the ground”. This shows students how strong verbs can impact how their writing is interpreted. It gives them the power to evoke specific emotions from their readers.

While I will be using a few of Noden’s exercises, one exercise that stood out was “adding details with specific verbs” (32). This exercise will connect well with *The Odyssey* because of the frequent use of action verbs used during battle scenes. Again, I think it goes back to how specific verbs create more lively pictures in a reader’s mind and I think my freshman struggle to experiment with different kinds of verbs with their limited vocabulary. By folding a piece of paper in half and writing random nouns on one side and verbs related to a specific activity, students can create unique sentences. For example, students can challenge themselves to write a sentence about a lamp by incorporating a verb associated with football. Playing with unique noun and verb combinations will encourage students to use unconventional word combinations. The verb image created by a cooking verb and the random noun dinosaur was very unique. The first example: “Dinosaurs marinate in the earth” was unusual, but fitting (33). And as Noden goes on to comment, some writers become too confident with their knowledge and understanding of adjectives and verbs. It then creates lazy writing. Writers don’t take time to experiment. The verb and noun combination exercise seems like a perfect technique to help writers get out of their comfort zone and use words they may not be used to using.

Teaching Context:

This unit will be taught at Northwood High School in a ninth grade English course. The school sits on the outskirts of the city of Toledo, Ohio and is quite diverse racially. More than 60% of students are on free or reduced lunch and less than half of the students set a future goal of attending college. Many students plan on going directly into the workforce and the school's partnership with Penta Career Center means many students leave the school for their junior and senior years. No matter what future a student has plans for, all students will benefit from expanding their vocabulary and becoming better writers and speakers. A key idea from teaching grammar in the context of writing that shapes this unit is that students should have the opportunity to experiment with language and not focus on fixing "errors". Crovitz and Devereaux reference Shaughnessy's book *Errors and Expectations* which questioned the "deficit view" of language (6). This argument encourages the idea that grammar should focus on effective writing. Crovitz and Devereaux begin chapter one of their book by stating, "Crazy as it may sound, grammar is really about understanding, not about "correctness""(2). And teaching grammar in a way that focuses on correctness leaves students with a negative attitude toward grammar and their knowledge of it. Weaver supports this idea in her book by explaining, "Good writing is not, however, produced by mere grammar study, as research has shown again and again" (23). When we teach students to understand the way words function and encourage them to learn the structural features of language, we are teaching them what they already know. With the brush strokes, students will have the opportunity to experiment with participial phrases, adjectives, and more to learn how the placement of them in a sentence can emphasize certain details in their writing. Students will learn how to write and use words clearly and vividly which

will help them convey meaning accurately. And, this will be a skill all students can use in their future, whether they are communicating with people in their personal life or at their workplace.

The main learning outcome for this unit includes students being able to write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences. My current students struggle with varying sentence structure and adding in descriptive details. When students do add details, they are usually sight details added before the main nouns in their sentences. For example: “**The big forest was only a mile away.**” Students will be able to practice adding adjectives out of order and adding appositives after nouns to describe them in ways that create images in readers’ minds. This specific technique can help a writer surprise readers with a specific detail about an object after they’ve introduced it. The unit will begin with students creating an epic hero and writing a narrative about their hero’s journey. With the introduction of each brush stroke, students will engage in a practice activity to experiment with incorporating the brush stroke into their writing. Then, students will add each brush stroke to their narrative about their epic hero. I will perform weekly journal checks as they write which will act as a formative assessment to ensure they are using the brush strokes in their writing. The summative assessment of finishing their narrative and a brief brush stroke quiz with examples from *The Odyssey* will ensure they have successfully learned the brush stroke techniques and written a narrative developed from imagined events with details.

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WEEK 1				
Journal: Describe an obstacle you've had to overcome in your life. How did you overcome it? Discussion: Chances are you didn't include details. Sensory details and parts of speech review lesson.	Introduction to epics: epic hero, heightened language, long journey Brush stroke #4: Adjectives Out of Order	Journal:– Create your own epic hero who has to go on a journey. Begin writing and include adjectives out of order. Swap stories: Partner highlights use of brush stroke  Reading: Intro and Book 9 (Land of the Cyclops)	Review reading Brush stroke #5: Action verbs and Verb phrases  Watch Odyssey movie clip: List verbs and looking back through the text make a list of the best verbs and verb phrases on half a sheet of paper. On the other half make a list of nouns.	Journal: Add verbs and verb phrases to your epic. Swap stories: Partner highlights use of brush stroke  Reading: Book 10 (Hall of Circe)
Week 2				
Watch "Training of Diana" /Wonder Woman clip	Review the Greek gods and goddesses and match them to the correct description.	Journal: Add appositives to epic Brush stroke #3: Participles Show students	Review participles Brush stroke #1: Absolutes-combining a noun with a participle	Return to journal: Add participles and absolutes  Swap with

<p>• Think, Pair, Share– Traits of a Hero</p> <p>Watch the clip again, half of the class write descriptive phrases using brush stroke 4 and the other brush stroke 5</p> <p>Brush stroke #2: Appositives</p>	<p>Write an appositive for each.</p> <p>Review book 10 and identify appositives used as epithets</p> <p>Reading: Book 12 -Sea Perils and Defeat</p>	<p>models and have them imitate</p> <p>Watch Odyssey movie clip: have them write participles and review how they begin with <i>ing</i> verbs</p>	<p>Search the internet for action shots of superheroes. Swap photos with a partner and write 3 sentences with an absolute in each</p> <p>Review absolutes and participles with a Kahoot</p>	<p>partner and highlight these brush strokes</p> <p>Finish epic story with a final challenge your hero beats before making it home</p> <p>Brush Strokes Quiz: identifying brush strokes from examples in the <i>The Odyssey</i></p>
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### Lesson Plans: Odyssey-Day 1

Lesson Plan Name: Introduction to Epics and the brush strokes

Lesson Preparation

Use/level of technology: Laptop, Clevertouch

Course Learning Outcome(s) to which this lesson adheres/supports:

CCR: 9-10.W.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

Lesson Plan

Purpose: Discuss sensory details and the effect description has on a narrative.

Materials and Technology Needed: Notebooks for journaling, Showing vs. Telling Worksheet

Student Objectives: To practice using precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.



The number of class sessions needed: 1

Descriptions & Sequence of activities:

-Journal: Describe an obstacle you've had to overcome in your life. How did you overcome it?

-Discussion: Chances are you didn't include details. Sensory details involve showing a reader images which is important in narrative writing. Since we are going to be reading a long narrative poem (known as an epic), we will be learning some effective writing techniques to add a description to your writing.

-Review the Showing vs. Telling Worksheet, highlight the examples and independently have students do the practice part of the assignment.

Describe this lesson's assessment strategies

Type(s) of assessment: Formative

Tool(s) used for assessment: Whole-class discussion, Showing vs. Telling Worksheet

### **Lesson Plans: The Odyssey-Day 2**

Lesson Plan Name: Showing versus Telling with sensory details and Brush Stroke #4

-Adjectives Out of Order

Lesson Preparation

Use/level of technology: Laptop, Clevertouch

Course Learning Outcome(s) to which this lesson adheres/supports:

CCR: 9-10.W.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Lesson Plan

Purpose: Understand the characteristics of an epic and how the brush strokes can help a writer generate vivid images in the reader and evoke specific emotions.

Materials and Technology Needed: Introduction to Epic PowerPoint, Brush Strokes

#4-Adjectives out of order

Student Objectives: To practice using precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

The number of class sessions needed: 2

Descriptions & Sequence of activities:

-Introduction to Epics PowerPoint: epic hero, long journey, heightened language

-Discuss Noden's Brush Strokes which are writing techniques to add imagery into writing

-Brush stroke #4: Adjectives Out of Order

Describe this lesson's assessment strategies

Type(s) of assessment: Formative

Tool(s) used for assessment: Brush Stroke #4- Adjectives Out of Order

### **Lesson Plans: The Odyssey-Day 3**

Lesson Plan Name: Using Adjectives Out of Order and *The Odyssey* Intro -Book 9

Lesson Preparation

Use/level of technology: Laptop, Clevertouch

Course Learning Outcome(s) to which this lesson adheres/supports:

CCR: 9-10.W.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCR: 9-10.W.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

## Lesson Plan

Purpose: Practice incorporating adjectives out of order technique in your own writing about an epic hero.

Materials and Technology Needed: Notebooks for journaling, Book 1 and 9 *The Odyssey*

Student Objectives: To practice using precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

The number of class sessions needed: 1

Descriptions & Sequence of activities:

-Journal: Create your own epic hero who has to go on a journey. Begin writing and include adjectives out of order as you introduce your epic hero.

- Swap stories: Partner highlights use of brush stroke

-Reading: Intro and Book 9 (Land of the Cyclops)

Describe this lesson's assessment strategies

Type(s) of assessment: Formative

Tool(s) used for assessment: Journaling, Partner highlighting of adjectives

### **Lesson Plans: The Odyssey-Day 4**

Lesson Plan Name: Using Verbs and Verb Phrases

Lesson Preparation

Use/level of technology: Laptop, Clevertouch

Course Learning Outcome(s) to which this lesson adheres/supports:

CCR: 9-10.W.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCR: 9-10.W.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Lesson Plan

Purpose: Practice incorporating verbs and verb phrases technique in your own writing.

Materials and Technology Needed: Book 9 *The Odyssey* film clip, Brush Stroke #5

Student Objectives: To practice using precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

The number of class sessions needed: 1

Descriptions & Sequence of activities:

-Review reading

-Brush stroke #5: Action verbs and Verb phrases

-Watch Odyssey movie clip: List verbs and looking back through the text make a list of the best verbs and verb phrases on half a sheet of paper. On the other half make a list of random nouns and try to incorporate these noun and verb combinations into your story

Describe this lesson's assessment strategies

Type(s) of assessment: Formative

Tool(s) used for assessment: Brush Stroke #5- Action verbs and Verb phrases and Practice

Activity

### **Lesson Plans: The Odyssey-Day 5**

Lesson Plan Name: Using Verbs and Verb Phrases and *The Odyssey* Book 10

Lesson Preparation

Use/level of technology: Laptop, Clevertouch

Course Learning Outcome(s) to which this lesson adheres/supports:

CCR: 9-10.W.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCR: 9-10.W.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

### Lesson Plan

Purpose: Practice incorporating verbs and verb phrases technique in your own writing about an epic hero.

Materials and Technology Needed: Notebooks for journaling, Book 10 *The Odyssey*

Student Objectives: To practice using precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

The number of class sessions needed: 1

Descriptions & Sequence of activities:

-Journal: Add verbs and verb phrases to your epic.

-Swap stories: Partner highlights use of brush stroke

-Reading: Book 10 (Hall of Circe)

Describe this lesson's assessment strategies

Type(s) of assessment: Formative

Tool(s) used for assessment: Journaling, Partner highlighting of verbs

### **Lesson Plans: The Odyssey-Day 6**

Lesson Plan Name: Reviewing epic hero traits and Brush Stroke #2 -Appositives

Lesson Preparation

Use/level of technology: Laptop, Clevertouch

Course Learning Outcome(s) to which this lesson adheres/supports:

CCR: 9-10.W.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCR: 9-10.W.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Lesson Plan

Purpose: Review epic hero traits and practice incorporating appositives technique in your own writing.

Materials and Technology Needed: “Training of Diana” Wonder Woman clip, Brush Stroke #2

Student Objectives: To practice using precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

The number of class sessions needed: 1

Descriptions & Sequence of activities:

-Watch “Training of Diana” /Wonder Woman clip

-Think, Pair, Share– Traits of a Hero

-Watch the clip again, half of the class write descriptive phrases using brush stroke 4 and the other brush stroke 5

-Brush stroke #2- Appositives

Describe this lesson’s assessment strategies

Type(s) of assessment: Formative

Tool(s) used for assessment: Think, Pair, Share discussion, Brush Stroke #2 -Appositives

**Lesson Plans: The Odyssey-Day 7**

Lesson Plan Name: Using Appositives and *The Odyssey* Book 12

Lesson Preparation

Use/level of technology: Laptop, Clevertouch

Course Learning Outcome(s) to which this lesson adheres/supports:

CCR: 9-10.W.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCR: 9-10.W.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Lesson Plan

Purpose: Practice incorporating appositive technique in your own writing.

Materials and Technology Needed: Greek God and Goddesses Handout, Book 12 *Odyssey*

Student Objectives: To practice using precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

The number of class sessions needed: 1

Descriptions & Sequence of activities:

- Review the Greek gods and goddess and write Appositives for each one on the handout
- Review the epithets (descriptive phrases which act as a quick aid to characterization) which describe Odysseus and Circe in Book 10. Discuss why an epithet is like an appositive.
- Read Book 12- Sea Perils and Defeat

Describe this lesson's assessment strategies

Type(s) of assessment: Formative

Tool(s) used for assessment: Greek gods and goddesses Handout, Whole class discussion

### Lesson Plans: The Odyssey-Day 8

Lesson Plan Name: Using Participles

Lesson Preparation

Use/level of technology: Laptop, Clevertouch

Course Learning Outcome(s) to which this lesson adheres/supports:

CCR: 9-10.W.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCR: 9-10.W.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Lesson Plan

Purpose: Practice incorporating participles technique in your own writing.

Materials and Technology Needed: Book 12 *The Odyssey* film clip, Brush Stroke #3

Student Objectives: To practice using precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

The number of class sessions needed: 1

Descriptions & Sequence of activities:

-Journal: Add appositives to epic

-Swap stories with a partner and highlight appositives

-Brush stroke #3: Participles

-Show students models and have them imitate

-Watch Odyssey Book 12 film clip and have students write down participles they see portrayed on screen



Describe this lesson's assessment strategies

Type(s) of assessment: Formative

Tool(s) used for assessment: Brush Stroke #3- Participles and practice writing with them

### **Lesson Plans: The Odyssey-Day 9**

Lesson Plan Name: Using Absolutes with action photos of super heroes

Lesson Preparation

Use/level of technology: Laptop, Clevertouch

Course Learning Outcome(s) to which this lesson adheres/supports:

CCR: 9-10.W.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCR: 9-10.W.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Lesson Plan

Purpose: Practice incorporating absolutes technique in your own writing.

Materials and Technology Needed: iPads to search for super hero action shots, Brush Stroke #1

Student Objectives: To practice using precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

The number of class sessions needed: 1

Descriptions & Sequence of activities:

-Review participles

-Brush stroke #1: Absolutes-combining a noun with a participle

-Search the internet for action shots of superheroes. Swap photos with a partner and write three sentences about the photo with one absolute in each sentence.

-Review absolutes and participles with Kahoot

Describe this lesson's assessment strategies

Type(s) of assessment: Formative

Tool(s) used for assessment: Brush Stroke #1- Absolutes and action shots, Kahoot quiz

### **Lesson Plans: The Odyssey-Day 10**

Lesson Plan Name: Using Participles and Absolutes to finish your narrative

Lesson Preparation

Use/level of technology: Laptop, Clevertouch

Course Learning Outcome(s) to which this lesson adheres/supports:

CCR: 9-10.W.4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCR: 9-10.W.3. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Lesson Plan

Purpose: Practice incorporating participles and absolutes technique in your own writing about an epic hero.

Materials and Technology Needed: Notebooks for journaling, Brush Strokes Quiz

Student Objectives: To practice using precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters.

The number of class sessions needed: 1

Descriptions & Sequence of activities:

-Return To journal and add in participle/participial phrases and absolutes

-Swap with a partner and have them highlight your brush strokes

-Finish your narrative of your epic hero with a final challenge your hero beats before making it home

Describe this lesson's assessment strategies

Type(s) of assessment: Summative

Tool(s) used for assessment: Epic Hero Narrative (with incorporation of all 5 Brush strokes),

Brush Strokes Quiz

### **Showing vs. Telling Worksheet**

“Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.” - Anton Chekhov

If you want to engage the reader's heart, mind, and imagination, show with vivid details that generate the emotions you want to express. Rather than classify and list all the emotions that you feel, use specific details that give the reader a reason to feel those emotions.

*(<http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/creative1/showing/#specific>)*

Telling	Showing
I was nervous.	My palms were sweaty. I popped my knuckles. I looked in my backpack three times for no reason. My leg kept shaking, and I turned my head to look at the clock every few seconds.
She was angry.	She kicked open the screen door, letting it slam against the wall as she dashed outside. Down the steps and into the yard she flew.

	Grabbing the first rock in her path, she hurled it back toward the house. It crashed through the living room window with an explosion of shattered glass.
I'm a competitive ping-pong player.	He's drenched in sweat, his knuckles are white, he's on the other side of the ping-pong table, and I'm about to bring him down.
She is a talented singer.  Use the questions to fill out the <i>showing</i> side of the table: What does a talented singer look like? What does the crowd look like as they watch them perform?	

(<http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/creative1/showing/>)

### How to “Show,” not “Tell”

- Use descriptive details. (Think about your five senses: sight, hearing, taste, smell, touch.)
- Use action. (Strong verbs!)

### Practice Turning “Telling” into “Showing”

Using the tips above, add more description to turn these “telling” statements into

“showing” statements.

Telling	Showing
1. Jessica dresses unusually.	
2. The movie was boring.	
3. My room needed cleaning.	

4. Alex was forgetful.	
5. The roller coaster ride was scary.	
6. Gabriel's cooking was not great.	

*(examples from "Show, Don't Tell," <http://www.suzanne-williams.com/show.htm>)*

### **Examples of Effective "Showing"**

*Read these examples of descriptions that create images and generate emotions in the reader.*

*Underline any sensory details and strong verbs.* Think about the main ideas, emotions, and impressions that you get from these descriptions.

"Whenever puppies in the pet store window distracted me from our walk, Fido flattened his scruffy ears, growling. But he always forgave me. As his sight faded, the smell of fresh air and the feel of grass would make him try to caper. Eventually, at the sound of my voice, his tail thumped weakly on the ground. This morning, I filled his water bowl all the way to the top—just the way he likes it—before I remembered."

"When the recess bell rang, I grabbed my chess set and dashed to freedom, eager to win the daily tournament of outcasts. I didn't look, but I knew Lucinda was watching. I could feel her curly locks swaying as her head tracked me. Of course, I tripped in the doorway. Tennis shoes and sandals stepped around me as I scrambled after pawns and bishops. And there was Lucinda,

waiting for me to notice her. She smiled, lifted her shiny patent-leather shoe, and slowly, carefully ground her heel right on the head of my white queen.”

*(examples from Jerz’s Literacy Weblog, <http://jerz.setonhill.edu/writing/creative1/showing/>)*

#### **Brush Stroke #4: Adjectives Out of Order**

Adjectives are words that describe nouns. Does the word “dog” create a picture in your mind?

(“dog” is a noun). What if you read “a big, ferocious, black dog”?

Does that change (modify) the picture in your mind? “Big” is an adjective. So is “ferocious”.

“Black” is an adjective too. Here are some more adjectives:

- Ferocious, timid, beautiful, silent, ordinary, careful, outrageous, intelligent, educated, courageous

Adjectives can be put in many places in a sentence:

The **red** bird perched on the branch. The bird on the branch was **red**.

You can string adjectives together before a noun, but lots of people get confused about when to separate them with commas. [

**Two small black** shapes moved toward the sleeping infant.

He was a **loving, warm, gentle** man.

In English adjectives usually come before the noun they modify (Crafty George handed me the contract.) – unless they come after the correct form of the verb “to be”. (George was crafty).

Shifting the adjectives out of order is a writer’s technique to add more images to a sentence while adding a professional rhythm – without confusing comma exceptions. (George, crafty and calculating, handed me the contract.)

*EXAMPLES:*

The blue water, clear and sparkling, beckoned the athletic swimmers.

The stony mountain, lofty and forbidding, stood before us.

The old house, decayed and abandoned, surrendered to the fire.

The shrewd businessman, calculating but optimistic, considered the opportunity.

You can put one adjective in front of the noun. Leaving one adjective in front of a noun and placing two adjectives following it (set off by commas) is a technique used by many fiction writers. Harry Noden in *Image Grammar: Using Grammatical Structures to Teach Writing* calls this technique “Adjectives Shifted out of Order”. Using this technique (sparingly) can add rhythm and music to your sentences while also providing interesting details and images. The comma rule is very easy.

Original Sentence: The cat slept by the window.

With adjectives shifted out of order: The old cat, scarred and flea-bitten, slept by the window.

Use “adjectives shifted out of order” to liven up the following simple sentences.

Original: Time seemed to drag.

With adjectives shifted: Dreary time, endless and empty, seemed to drag.

Original: The rains filled the rivers.

With adjectives shifted: The thunderous rains, unceasing and merciless, filled the rivers.

Original: Stars appeared in the sky.

With adjectives shifted: Tiny stars, gentle and twinkling, appeared in the sky.

Use “adjectives shifted out of order” to liven up the following simple sentences.

The man took my money.

---

The sun rose in the eastern sky.

---

She rested her hands on the book.

---

Dust covered the window.

---

Her voice called out to me.

---

Silence filled the room.

---

His eyes stared through me.

---

The trees swayed in the wind.

---

A situation confronted us.

---

The moon floated over the moors.

---

Sunlight filled the yard.

---



<http://www.vhstigers.org/ourpages/auto/2006/6/20/1150832524918/Brushstrokes%20Adjectives%20Shifted%20Out%20of%20Order>

### **Brush Stroke #5: Verbs and Verb Phrases**

“Painting [writing] with action verbs gives writers another effective image tool. By eliminating passive voice and reducing *being* verbs, writers can energize action images.”

Strong action verbs that replace being verbs or passive verb structures.

Examples: Being verb: The gravel road **was** on the left side of the barn.

Action verb: The gravel road **curled** around the left side of the barn.

Being verb and passive structure: Rockwell **was** a beautiful canyon and families **were** often seen there.

Action verb: Rockwell Canyon **echoed** with the sounds of children and families picnicking along its many trails.

Action verbs replace weak verbs, create movement, and drive the text forward. They are a critical component of strong sentences, the key to effective writing.

Not only can you try these brush strokes in your own writing, but you can become more aware of them in your reading, noting how and when the writer uses them to produce dramatic effects on readers.

Noden, Harry R. (1999). *Image Grammar*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann.

### Practice Activity

-Fold a sheet of paper in half lengthwise. On one side, write a list of verbs that all relate to the same activity. Examples: cooking verbs, football verbs, music verbs, things a dog does, etc. On the other side, write a list of random nouns. This activity can help you create new noun and verb combinations that haven't been overused.

In class:

-While watching the *The Odyssey* movie clip, list verbs and verb phrases to describe the action you see on screen on half a sheet of paper. On the other half make a list of random nouns and try to incorporate these noun and verb combinations into your writing.

### Brush Stroke #2 - Appositives

Appositive: a noun or noun phrase that adds a second image to a noun named just in front of it.

Original Sentence:

The raccoon enjoys eating turtle eggs.

Revised Sentence:

The raccoon, a scavenger, enjoys eating turtle eggs.

**Appositive Exercise: Rewrite each of the following sentences by adding an appositive after the noun/subject:**

1. The volcano spewed forth lava and ash across the mountain.
2. The old Navajo woman stared blankly.
3. The waterfall poured the fresh, pure spray into the creek.
4. The fish felt the alligator's giant teeth sinking into his scales as he struggled to get away.

(<https://www.fcusd.org/cms/lib03/CA01001934/Centricity/Domain/1169/brush%20strokes%20practice%20pages%20CGH>)

### Greek gods and goddesses Handout

From the myths and fairy tales that you've read, the movies and TV shows you've watched you have probably picked up a lot of information about a Greek gods and goddesses. Several gods and goddesses make appearances in the *Odyssey*. Some of these didn't acquire the reputation you may know about until after people Homer told stories about them.

Match each of the names on the left with the description on the right. Conduct some internet searches to verify your choices. Then, write an appositive in the middle column for each one.

Name	Appositive	Description
1. Zeus	all mighty ruler	___ god of war
2. Amphitrite		___ supreme god of the Greeks
3. Apollo		___ goddess of the sea
4. Poseidon		___ god of archery, music, and poetry
5. Ares		___ goddess of wisdom
6. Aphrodite		___ lame god of metal-working
7. Artemis		___ god of sea and earthquakes
8. Hermes		___ goddess of hunting
9. Athena		___ goddess of love and beauty
10. Hephaestus		___ messenger of the gods
11. Helios		___ queen of the kingdom of the dead
12. Persephone		___ sun god

### Brush Stroke #3 - Participles

Participles/Participial Phrases: an *-ing* form of a verb, acting like an adjective, tagged on to the beginning or end of a sentence or interrupting the main subject and verb.

Original Sentence:

The diamond-scaled snakes attacked their prey.

Revised Sentences:

**Hissing, slithering, and coiling**, the diamond-scaled snakes attacked their prey.

A series of single participles adds more detail and suggests rapid movement:

**Flicking their forked red tongues and coiling their cold bodies**, the diamond-scaled snakes attacked their prey.

\*Participial phrases add more detail at a slower but intense pace

**Participles/Participial Phrases Exercise:** Take the following stems and create some participles/participial phrases.

1. Melody froze
2. The Olympic long jumper thrust the weight of his whole body forward
3. The clown smiled
4. The rhino looked for freedom.
5. I glanced at my clock.
6. The kitten yawned
7. The driver peered once more at the specimen.

### Brush a Stroke #1- Absolutes

Absolutes (noun + participle) and absolute phrases placed before or after the noun being modified

Examples: a) The snake, tail rattling, fangs glistening, attacked its prey.

- b) Hands striking the giant twelve, the clock chimed midnight.
- c) Chad Miller showed me his Navy jacket, its pockets pinned with numerous medals depicting his many accomplishments.

Absolutes zoom in on an image much like a telescopic lens, creating detail by focusing narrowly on specific parts of an image.

Ex: Wonder Woman's chest and arm muscles flexing, she runs straight at the enemy.

Ex: Nothing could stop her as she ran across the battlefield, bits of rock and dust flying through the air.



### **Exercise: Absolutes and Action Shots**

Search the internet for action shots of superheroes. After you find a photo, swap with a partner and write three sentences (one absolute in each) describing the photo.

### **Brush Strokes Quiz**

Identify the brush stroke techniques used in *The Odyssey*. Options: 1) Absolute 2) Appositive 3) Participle/Participial phrase 4) Adjectives Out of Order 5) Verb/Verb phrase

\_\_\_ “Odysseus, raider of cities, took your eye: Laertes’ son whose home’s on Ithaca.”

\_\_\_ “clutched”

\_\_\_ “Even as he spoke, he reeled and tumbled backward, his great head lolling to one side.”

\_\_\_ “gaping and crunching like a mountain lion”

\_\_\_ “Clawing his face,he tugged the bloody spike out of his eye, threw it away, and his wild hands went groping.”

\_\_\_ “...she wove ambrosial fabric sheer and bright...”

\_\_\_ “scattered fast”

\_\_\_ “deep rumble”

\_\_\_ “seized and drained the bowl”

\_\_\_ “dribbled streams of liquor and bits of men”

### **Immigrant Cultural Identity as Complex and Dynamic, Not Singular**

A girl travels across the sea with her father to a new world, but never expects the strangeness of having been born in one country and raised in another. She waits for her mother to join them, yearns for her brother who drowned before they left, and hopes to find a place she belongs so she can achieve happiness. This girl is a character from lê thi diem thúy's book *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*. In this novel, lê is able to share one Vietnamese immigrant family's experience of moving to America for safety. The reader is encouraged to understand the struggles of immigrant families and the stress of balancing an identity constructed from two different cultures. Acculturative stress is defined by Julie and David Smart in their research about the experiences of Hispanic immigrants. They define acculturative stress as "the psychological impact of adaptation to a new culture" (Smart). This stress stems from anyone moving to America and is intensified by society's expectations and resistance to learn and appreciate a culture unlike their own. And adversely, first generation immigrants who feel pressure to adopt American culture, may transfer these expectations to their children. Parents enforce the pressure to adopt American culture with the loving intentions of wanting their children to be successful in America and not feel ostracized by society for their differences. This is notably demonstrated in Sandra Cisneros's book *The House on Mango Street*. Esperanza recalls pivotal experiences of growing up in her poor, Mexican neighborhood in Chicago, but explains her hopes of getting away and achieving more. Unlike Esperanza, Ichiro's character

from John Okada's book *No-No Boy* doesn't have the support of a small neighborhood nor his parents. Ichiro has the additional stress of being a Japanese American immigrant who refused to renounce his Japanese culture and refused to fight against Japan in WWII.

These books share immigrant families' unique experiences and teach the majority of white Americans about the struggles of leaving a familiar world. Moreover, these stories encourage empathy and understanding of these families, parents and their children, who feel torn between their native culture and American culture. Immigrants with strong ties to their native country's culture or possibly a desire to return to their native country post war or post acquiring a specific amount of wealth, are more likely to have children with acculturative stress and a need to separate from their parents and/or their parent's native culture. American society should strive to alleviate acculturative stress for immigrant families by teaching acceptance and encouraging the learning about all cultures in schools, and individual families making purposeful attempts to learn and appreciate all cultures.

### **US VERSUS THEM: USING SKIN COLOR TO GET AHEAD**

Majority of white America struggles to welcome immigrant families as they fear their lives will be negatively affected. An entire new way of life begins as immigrant families move into a new community, look for a job, and enroll their children into American schools. Some of these children do not speak English as their first language. There is an us versus them mentality because they don't look exactly the same and this creates an unnecessary fear and competitiveness. Esperanza's character recognizes the ignorance of fearing another person's skin color in Cisneros's book. She explains, "All brown all around, we are safe. But watch us drive



into a neighborhood of another color and our knees fo shakity-shake... (Cisneros, 28). To combat these prejudicial attitudes, schools can be an influential factor as teachers strive to educate students about all races and cultures. In his lecture "Race –The Floating Signifier" Stuart Hall discusses how classifications of racial groups is how the world is separated into superiors and inferiors. Hall states, "Everything is kind of inscribed in their species being, they're very being because of their race" (Hall, *Race - the Floating Signifier*). When people of a specific race have been classified as inferior like black people have in our nation's history, they face years of oppression and systemic discrimination. America's politics has to change to combat the laws and regulations that have provided privilege and opportunity to the majority of white people. Schools can expedite the change of these laws by encouraging students to analyze unjust laws and regulations that have negatively affected many minority groups in our nation's history. Teaching history truthfully will prove to students the importance of participating in the democratic process and electing leaders that support equality. The inferior classification of immigrants entering America has occurred for years even if it is out of fear of Americans' lives during a time of war. This is the case for the girl in *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*. The family didn't want to leave their native country to come steal a high-paying job from a white American. During the communist invasion of Southern Vietnam, the families fled for their safety and most parents had hopes to return after the violence stopped. David Mehegan discusses in his essay about lê thi diem thúy how her mother, like many immigrants, didn't want to leave their country. Mehegan recounts what lê thi diem thúy stated about her mother and that "She never took to being here and was always wanting to go back. I felt enormous pressure to get her back there somehow." Immigrants do not come to America because they are "bad" people looking to cause harm. On

the contrary, most people are looking to avoid harm. And this causes an enormous amount of pressure and stress as parents leave a country where they were born and raised. Schools can help eradicate some of the acculturative stress by educating students about all cultures and offering students opportunities to share and be proud of their cultures. America should be supporting all people who come here wanting to make a life and contribute to society. Schools can be one place where immigrant children don't feel pressure to change or worry about being judged.

### **FEELINGS OF SEPARATION: ENDURING THEIR PARENTS CHALLENGES**

Acculturative stress can also lead to more conflicts between parents and children. Lisa Kiang performed a study of immigrant parents and focused primarily on how Asian American and Latino/a parents deal with acculturation conflict and their perceived parenting competence. King found how different Asian Americans and Latino/as parenting experiences are because of the unique immigration histories based on how majority white Americans viewed and treated them (Kiang, 947). In the study, it was also discovered that more, Latino/a parents had a lower income than Asian American parents and 86% of them were born in America whereas only 55% of Asian American parents were born in America (951). "In all path models, more acculturation conflict was linked to lower perceived general parenting competence" (Kiang, 954). So the more struggle there is surrounding families and their adoption of another culture, the chances are the parents will not feel confident in their ability to provide guidance to their children. Identifying the parenting stressors for immigrant families will help communities to create better support systems. Kiang explains the importance of recognizing these stressors since the acculturation conflicts have "direct implications for parenting attitudes among immigrant and ethnic minority

parents" (955). Recognizing these stressors would allow parents to feel stronger in their parenting choices.

Conflict at home can encourage children to want to separate from their parents and native culture. When parents realize the stress they are putting on their children to either accept or reject American culture and values, they may seek help. Having free or reduced pricing for family counseling available to immigrant families is another way to alleviate acculturative stress and conflict. Parents cannot expect their children to turn out just like themselves especially when their immigrant experiences are bound to be different from one another. Parents may also need help locating resources to help their children in school, especially if there is a language barrier. Affordable counseling centers can be another essential factor in alleviating acculturative stress.

Community members need to advocate for resources in their community that will help immigrant families. If not, immigrant families can be driven out of specific neighborhoods. The girl narrator in *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* sees firsthand how her immigrant parents are treated as inferior when they are evicted from their house/community. Her parents are notified that their house is going to be demolished, among others, to "build better housing for the community" (96). Knowing the majority of the residents are Vietnamese-Americans and may not speak English well, one would think someone would come and talk to them in person to make sure they understand. Instead, they just received eviction notices and all their possessions were confiscated when they were not out on time. The narrator laments, "We stand on the edge of the chain link fence, sniffing the air for the scent of lemongrass, scanning this flat world for our blue sea. A wrecking ball dances madly though our house" (99). They are pushed out of the neighborhood for not being wealthy. Like many of their neighbors, they weren't able to afford

the new houses being built. Esperanza's character in *The House on Mango Street* and many of her Mexican neighbors are living in an old, rundown community in Chicago because it is the only housing they can afford. Policies should be put in place so that cities have to prioritize funding to fixing up neighborhoods that need it without evicting residents. Community members should want to help each other after all and ultimately live in a place where everyone can sleep peacefully without fear of eviction.

So minority races are classified as inferior and people are then pushed out of neighborhoods so majority of white people can thrive. The struggle to find a suitable home, community, job, and provide for children is just the struggle for survival that immigrants face. The mere struggle to survive, prevents parents from coping with and understanding their child's unique identity and experiences which is partly shaped from their heritage culture and aspects of American culture. Parents who struggle with this acceptance the most are parents who spent most of their lives in their native country and it causes them to have a very different identity than their children who are American born. Immigrant children then struggle to understand their identity as it is different from their parents and this generational gap encourages separation. As children see how their parents were pushed out of communities and treated differently, they don't want to experience this and try to fully assimilate to American culture with the hope of avoiding struggles their parents experienced. Again, a society that demonstrates acceptance and seeks to learn and appreciate all cultures can help eradicate these feelings of inferiority that immigrants and their children feel. Communities can then offer support to immigrant families so they can achieve success and contribute to the community or give back so to speak. This is the goal of free schooling too. A school income tax provides money to the school in the community

where one lives with the hopes of those children graduating and becoming a contributing member of that community. Immigrant families certainly want and will contribute if given the opportunity.

Another Vietnamese family, the Phans from Jersey, reveal the struggles of acculturative stress in the documentary, *Phans of Jersey City*. The Phans left behind a thriving life in Vietnam. Their father was of high class and held wealth which they had to give up in order to seek safety in America. The Phan's older sister Lan seemed to vocalize her struggle the most out of all the children. Toward the end of the film she reported that she was sad and unhappy several times. Lan stated, "I got nothing now...when I left my country" (*Phans of Jersey City*). Her sisters being younger than her, seemed more optimistic and spent time going to school and educating themselves. Lan felt she didn't have that kind of time, but still wanted a husband and to have children. Similar to lê thi diem thúy's mother in *The Gangster We Are All Looking For*, Lan was struggling to make a happy life for herself since she spent most of her life in Vietnam. If Lan were to have children, they would have an easier time learning English and adopting aspects of American culture compared to their mother. It's easier for a person to understand their identity when the majority of who they are is explainable based on the country they have lived in for their life. Vietnamese Americans are not the only immigrants who struggle to create their identity and feel separation from their parents and their parent's culture. Japanese Americans like Ichiro's character in *No-No Boy* struggled to make something of himself and find a job in America after WWII. He didn't fight in the war and faced prejudice and discrimination from Americans of all ethnicities and even fellow Japanese Americans in his community. A friendship with Kenji, a Japanese American who fought in the war and lost most of his leg, teaches him that everyone

makes sacrifices. Whether it was losing a body part or losing the respect of fellow community members, many Japanese Americans lost something during the war. But, losing something doesn't mean you have to lose everything. As Ichiro's character is eventually exposed to people who don't judge him for his choice to not enlist, he is offered jobs and provided support. Communities all over America need to work on supporting all kinds of immigrants and people from all cultures who need it.

### **THE FEAR OF LOSING THEIR CHILDREN TO AMERICA**

Parental fear of children denouncing their culture and completely Americanizing is one effect of acculturative stress. However, negative attitudes about American culture can actually encourage children to explore and adopt more aspects of American culture. Just as author Lê recounts her mother's wish to return to Vietnam, many other immigrants feel this nostalgia for their birth country. In the book *No-No Boy*, Ichiro Yamada is a boy who rejoins his family after serving a two-year prison sentence for refusing to renounce allegiance to his parent birth country of Japan and fight for America during WWII. While they lived in America, the Yamadas still had family in Japan and a strong connection to their culture. Ichiro, however, having been raised and spent most of his life in America, along with his brother Taro, doesn't have a strong connection to Japan like his mother. Throughout the novel Ichiro's resentment of his parents, as well as his brother, leaves their family divided. Ichiro believes his life is ruined because of his response to the loyalty questionnaire. A lot of Ichiro's resentment is directed toward his mother who struggles to even believe Japan lost WWII. Mrs. Yamada won't even send money and food to her relatives who write to her about the devastation they've experienced because doing so would be

admitting Japan lost the war. Despite this, Ichiro does seem to recognize he couldn't possibly understand what his mother is going through as an Issei (Japanese-born immigrant). Ichiro admits, "he could not know what it was to be a Japanese who breathed the air of America and yet had never lifted a foot from the land that was Japan" (Okada, 12). So Ichiro can't understand the pride his mother has for Japan when she has lived in America for so long and raised both her sons in America. In a way, Ichiro sees his mother's rejection of America as a rejection of her sons who are both Americanized. This is one reason why children of immigrants may feel a need to separate themselves from their parents and their parents' native culture. When children see their parents refusing to allow American music and food and other parts of American culture into their home, they are refusing to accept parts of their children, who were raised in America and have adopted parts of American culture. Bic Ngo studied the cultural differences between immigrant parents and children in his study and explains the results in his article "Beyond 'Culture Clash' Understandings of Immigrant Experiences". One of the children questioned about their culture was a female student named Mindy with one parent who is Lao and another parent who is Vietnamese. When questioned about how her parents felt about her adoption of American culture, Mindy explained her parents' fear.

“Mindy: Like I would talk American, English at home a lot. They [parents] be like “Don't talk American, you're going to forget your own race, you're going to be American” and stuff like that” (Ngo, 9).

Mindy's parents' rejection of her identity only creates conflict in their family because Mindy's Americanized identity is at odds with her parent's expectations. When parents don't accept that

their children's culture is going to be different from their own, they can encourage the rejection of their native culture instead of just adding in parts American culture. Ngo's study explains how "The culture and identity of immigrant students and families thus cannot be conceptualized simply as something that is static, passed from one generation to the next" (Ngo, 9). Stuart Hall agrees with this view that a cultural identity is not singular and unchanging. Hall is a theorist who rejects a singular definition of a culture shared by people with a common history. Thus, it's important to learn the ways in which immigrants often create a unique cultural identity made up of aspects of their heritage culture and their new country's culture (Hall, *Cultural identity and diaspora*). Immigrants who raise a child in America can experience fear of their child becoming Americanized and losing ties to their native country's culture. Society's understanding of this fear is essential in helping immigrant families combat this fear and reduce acculturative conflict between parents and children. Encouraging teachers to adopt teaching strategies which allow students to showcase parts of their culture and teaching diverse texts is the just beginning of communities supporting immigrant families. At the individual family level, parents can prioritize learning and appreciating all cultures. Watching films that weren't made in America, trying a culture's cuisine and listening to that culture's traditional music all support tolerance and acceptance.

Children rejecting their parents' native culture due to fear of society's prejudice is demonstrated in the documentary of *Rabbit in the Moon*. Japanese Americans had their rights as citizens taken away when they were forced in concentration camps during WWII. Yet, so many Niseis (American born whose parents were born in Japan) volunteered for the US army out of the concentration camps into segregated units to fight for democracy. The American government's



policies physically separated families and caused cultural divides. When moving to America they are naturally part of another culture and having to refuse their native country and culture is impossible as it already makes up part of their identity. One cannot simply forget the language they spoke, food they ate, and traditions they adhered to from their native country. As America's Statue of Liberty acts as a symbol of hope and prosperity for all people who come to America, society needs to continue to learn and appreciate all cultures. In the documentary *Honor and Sacrifice*, Roy Matsumoto definitely showed his loyalty by bravely fighting for America while still holding on to his Japanese culture. His knowledge of the Japanese language and different dialects was imperative during the war. Matsumoto is one example of how an immigrant can be bicultural. He came to America to make wealth and support his family, yet holding on to his Japanese culture helped keep him and his comrades alive during the war. America requesting that Japanese Americans reject their native country and swear loyalty to America was not only unfair as they weren't being treated as citizens, it was another factor which separated immigrant parents from their children.

Emiko Omori discusses her separation from her family in the concentration camps created for Japanese Americans. The camps made it possible for Omori and her sisters to get away from their parents and spend most of their time with peers. This time they spent apart seemed to divide the family as did individual responses to the questionnaire. Emiko Omori viewed her mother who was educated in Japan with strong ties to Japanese culture and traditions as weak and didn't want to become her mother. She discussed a negative view she had of her mother, and most Japanese women, as she describes her as a woman who "Walks three paces behind her husband and eyes cast to the ground...putting herself last" (*Rabbit in the Moon*).

Would she have viewed her mother this way if she would have been able to spend more time with her as a teenager? The camps prevented Omori and her sisters from spending valuable time with their parents and with war they were taught to be ashamed of their Japanese culture. In some ways, this was easier for immigrant children because instead of having to understand their bicultural identity, they could forget about their Japanese culture and completely assimilate to American culture. This seems to be Mr. Yamada's wishes in the book *No-No Boy* as he tries to explain to his wife that Japan lost the war. But, Mr. Yamada doesn't really understand what his wife is going through. He sees her loyalty to Japan as a weakness. In chapter 5 Mr. Yamada states, "A woman does not have the strength of a man, so it is I who must make her see the truth. She will be alright" (96). He cannot help her balance her loyalty and love of Japan with her appreciation of America where they have raised their Japanese-American sons. When Mrs. Yamada finally comes to terms with the fact that Japan lost the war she commits suicide. In one interpretation, this symbolizes her rejection of American culture and her sons. Had Mrs. Yamada come to terms with the fact that she can hold on to Japanese culture and accept that her sons' identities may have more aspects of American culture than Japanese, their family may have endured less conflict. In another interpretation, Mrs. Yamada's suicide symbolizes her rejection of having to choose between being Japanese or American. Forcing Japanese Americans to renounce part of their identity is like asking them to kill part of what makes them who they are and never should have happened. American society's negative attitudes and harsh treatment of Japanese immigrants didn't help Mrs. Yamada's feelings regarding America and American culture. All immigrants and their cultural identity is going to be complex. Each person's individual journey to understanding and accepting this can be a challenge for immigrant families,

but society's negative attitude and discriminatory acts against immigrants only stifles this journey. America needs to continue to advocate for complex identities and help people understand they can be more than one thing. A person can hold on to Japanese culture and adopt parts of American culture.

## **COMBATING PREJUDICE AND PRIORITIZING EDUCATION AND APPRECIATION**

Just as Vietnamese and Japanese immigrants were treated differently and struggled to create and understand their identity, currently, people from South America have been classified as inferior. As President Trump supports building a wall along the United States border, many white Americans view South Americans as illegals who just want to sneak into our country and steal jobs and wealth. These negative attitudes are formed to perpetuate the idea that South Americans are inferior and preserve education and higher paying jobs for white people. People can condone building a wall and keeping them out of our country if they are "bad" people crossing the border and committing crimes. This is obviously not the case for immigrants escaping violence or war. And even if immigrants are coming for opportunity and wealth, why is this a problem? Every human deserves to pursue happiness and no one has control over where they are born. For white European Americans who have been in America longer than other immigrants, they have simply used their similarities to justify their rights to thrive and prosper for fear that some people have to lose for them to win. But the truth is that there is an abundance of resources on the planet if people leave within their means and utilize what they need. Sandra Cisneros discusses one Mexican American experience as Esperanza and her family live in a poor

Hispanic neighborhood in Chicago. Esperanza's family, her mother especially, encourages her to separate from them so she can get an education and live a prosperous life. This is opposite of the main characters from *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* and *No-No Boy*.

In *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza explains the stress of looking different because of her race. In the vignette, "those who don't know" Esperanza recognizes the prejudice all people feel which shapes the perceptions of "us" and "them". The vignette comments how a lot of people's prejudice is founded in a lack of knowledge about people who are different from themselves. Esperanza's family is no exception as her parents are first-generation immigrants from Mexico. Esperanza discusses her recognition of this as she explains, "But we aren't afraid. We know the guy with the crooked eye is Davey the Baby's brother," (28). Esperanza knows she isn't afraid of people in her neighborhood because she knows who they are and they share the same skin color as her. There is comfort in similarity. People feel more safe when they see part of themselves in other people and/or have encountered those people before. White Americans experience this prejudice with immigrants who look and act differently than they are used to and don't understand the impact it has on how immigrants look at themselves. It causes acculturative stress and encourages them to Americanize and forget their native country and culture, especially the children of immigrants. White Americans can combat their prejudice by recognizing it and understanding their fear of people they have never met and look exactly like them. Fear or anxiety can occur when encountering people who are different and that's okay, but it doesn't mean any preconceived ideas about them are true. As Esperanza's character states, "They are stupid people..." (28). Prejudice is stupid because it is founded in a lack of knowledge and understanding it can encourage a love of all people. Bell Hooks discusses the use of love as a

way to rid the world of racism in her essay, "Love as the Practice of Freedom". Hooks points out Martin Luther King Jr.'s emphasis on encouraging people to love in order to prevent prejudice from turning into discrimination and racism and hate.

"...we struggle for justice, all the while realizing that we are always more than our race, class, or sex. When I look back at the civil rights movement which was in many ways limited because it was a reformist effort, I see that it had the power to move masses of people to act in the interest of racial justice—and because it was profoundly rooted in a love ethic" (2).

So, even though prejudice is often the result of a lack of knowledge, it's important to recognize it is a lack of love for all people. A government that encourages its citizens to learn and understand all people, especially immigrants who may look different and have a bicultural identity because they weren't born in America, is a government that encourages peace and love and not hate and violence as Hooks recommends.

So while children of immigrants may have an advantage of having shared prejudicial experiences with people in their community and their parents, it is still a struggle for them to stay close to their family. The generational gap encourages and almost requires separation for children to succeed. Most immigrants can't thrive if they aren't fluent in English and willing to get an education to get a high-paying job. Esperanza's mother realizes this and pushes her to move away from her family even if that means not living in a neighborhood of people who look like her and share and appreciate her Mexican culture. Esperanza explains,

“I could’ve been somebody, you know? my mother says and sighs. She has lived in this city her whole life. She can speak two languages. She can sing an opera. She knows how to fix a T.V. But she doesn’t know which subway train to take to get downtown. I hold her hand very tight while we wait for the right train to arrive” (90).

Her mother’s understanding of her bicultural identity allows her to see the positives and negatives of having not been born and raised in America. Esperanza will have that advantage and her bicultural identity will allow her more opportunity in America yet she will still have knowledge of Mexican culture shared with her from her parents and Hispanic people in her neighborhood. Esperanza states her mother’s regret and hopes for her, “I could’ve been somebody, you know? Esperanza, you got to school. Study hard” (91). Her mother’s support encourages her goal of having a better life for herself away from her family and neighborhood she has grown up in. So despite experiencing the stress her parents endured as immigrants and witnessing their struggles, Esperanza has a better shot of achieving her goals because she is bicultural. In a study by Christmas and Barker, it was found that second generation immigrants who were born and/or spent most of their childhood in America with only indirect exposure to their parent’s native culture are more likely to be bicultural and have high rates of intercultural sensitivity. “The second-generation Latino immigrants in this study scored higher on biculturalism, which indicates that since most of them were born in the US, they have had significant exposure to a Latin culture, presumably at home” (Christmas and Barker, 250). So Esperanza is more likely to hold on to her Mexican culture since her parents aren’t rejecting her adoption of American culture yet exposing her to Mexican culture as well. In a way, her parents pressuring her to better herself and move away helps Esperanza recognize the opportunities her

parents have provided for her. This is supported in the study as “A lack of money, education, and—in some cases—citizenship is a confounding variable that likely impacts the language acquisition and acculturation experience of Latino immigrants” (Christmas and Barker, 251). Many first generation immigrants struggle to assimilate into American culture because of money, language, citizenship, and/or loyalty to the culture that made them the person with the values and principles they hold. So second generation immigrants arguably have a higher chance of being bicultural and are more sensitive and accepting of different cultures being bicultural themselves. However, parental support and acceptance from society are two important factors that can impact their self-esteem and how accepting they are of different cultures.

The generational gap between immigrant parents and children is wider and more complex than the gap between non-immigrant parents and children. The gap causes children to see the struggles their parents experience with attempting to thrive in America yet having strong ties to their native country and can encourage separation. The narrator in *The Gangster We Are All Looking For* witnesses her family lose their home and sees her mother’s longing for Vietnam. The author recalls a similar experience with her mother’s strong ties to Vietnam and ends up moving across the country for school and to start her life as a Vietnamese American. Ichiro Yamada in *No-No Boy* experiences rejection from his mother who doesn’t want him listening to American music and was proud of him for refusing to fight for America, thus against Japan during WWII. And Ichiro sees his mother commit suicide over her inability to cope with her native country’s loss to America in the war. Moreover, he is ostracized by people in the community who know he didn’t fight for America in the war. Both the narrator and Ichiro see their parents’ rejection of American culture which is a part of their cultural identity having

grown up in America. This rejection of their cultural identity can encourage them to separate from their parents' rejection/disapproval and further adopt aspects of American culture. America and Americans' rejection/disapproval of immigrants' native culture is partially responsible for immigrant's rejection of American culture. This rejection is acknowledged in Christmas and Barker's study who explain "When immigrants perceive that they are not welcome or that their cultural identity is threatened by pressure to assimilate, they are more likely to employ an acculturation strategy of separation" (Christmas and Barker, 251). So immigrants are encouraged to reject America since their native culture isn't accepted and they pressure their children to do the same. But, their children can grow up in a more accepting and diverse America which appreciates all cultures when American society chooses to prioritize multicultural education and promote appreciation for all cultures. Society cannot change over night though, and individual families have to take action to support all families in their communities and create more positive experiences for immigrants.

### **SUPPORTING IMMIGRANT PARENTS WITH COMMUNITY SUPPORTS**

To prevent children from feeling a need to separate, immigrant parents should be supportive of the many aspects of their complex child's identity whether majority aspects of their identity stems from their culture of heritage or from American culture. Lisa Kiang's study of immigrants' parenting struggles supports Christmas and Barker's study by discussing the added challenge of raising a child in a country that's not their native country. "Above and beyond normative parenting demands, challenges for parents with a history of immigrant experiences include pressure to adapt to the mainstream environment while considering what heritage



identity and values to retain and pass down to their children” (Kiang, 943). It’s stressful for parents to assimilate to American culture in order to support their children because American culture is not the culture they were raised with which helped them construct their values and principles. And as a parent, there is a natural want to pass on values and principles to your children. So there is a balance of exposing your children to their culture of heritage and accepting the parts of American culture they will adopt.

One’s cultural identity is in fact a complex part of who they are and it’s even more complex for immigrants. Not only should non-immigrants make a point to understand immigrants' struggles of identity, but they should help to create support systems for them in their community. All people struggle to create their identity based on their parents, peers, exposure to popular culture and media, but immigrants and their children have even more of a struggle. Immigrants who raise their children in America will understand the aspects of their child’s identity which stems from their heritage culture, but may not understand the aspects which come from American culture and their peers. Theorist Bhabha explains the complexity of culture and states “we should remember that it is the ‘inter’— the cutting edge of translation and negotiation, the in-between space—that carries the burden of the meaning of culture” (Bhabha, 38). Immigrants may feel the burden of negotiating between two cultures, but they can help their children experience this as well. Parents will need to be sensitive to the fact that their children may also feel this culture burden when they are exposed to their culture of heritage at home and adopt aspects of American culture when they go to school and spend time with friends outside their home.

In *No-No Boy*, Ichiro feels the burden of having shown loyalty to his Japanese culture of heritage but is ostracized from people in his community since he lives in America, the country he was not willing to fight for during the war. Similarly, in *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza feels the burden loving and being loyal to her Mexican culture and neighborhood. Since his fellow Americans are ostracizing him, it would be acceptable if he rejected America and American culture, and Esperanza could reject most of American culture by staying confined to her neighborhood. But, Ichiro's mother's rejection of America specifically is stressful as he yearns to be accepted by society and he discusses the relief he feels after she kills herself. And at the end of the novel, there is hope that his mother who symbolized Japan and Japanese culture is dead. It's almost like Ichiro is now free to adopt aspects of American culture which are part of his true identity which his mother rejected. He states, "He walked along, thinking, searching, thinking and probing, and, in the darkness of the alley of the community that was a tiny bit of America, he chased that faint and elusive insinuation of promise as it continued to take shape in mind and in heart" (210). This hope Ichiro has is present in Esperanza's character as well. However, Esperanza's mother is supportive of her and she is excited to take her books and paper and leave Mango street to fulfill her dreams, even if this results in her exploring America and adopting more parts of American culture. Exploring America and separating from their parents may just be a traditional part of achieving success for all teenagers. Esperanza recognizes she won't be able to become a writer without moving away to attend a good college. And, maybe Ichiro wouldn't have been able to accept the parts of him that are American without his mother's death, and in a way, the death of his mother was the "death" of his complete loyalty to only his Japanese culture of heritage. So just as Ichiro and Esperanza realize they need to set out and

explore America and American culture, American society needs to realize they still have parts of their identity which aren't American. Americans need to support and appreciate all people whether they are bicultural or multicultural as anyone can contribute and be a positive asset to our society. A Mexican American could discover the cure for cancer, a Vietnamese American could come out with the next hit song that brings people together during a summer party, or a Japanese American could be the next teacher which educates hundreds and motivates them to achieve their goals and give back to their community.

Reading about individual immigrant experiences and struggles of cultural identity can help immigrants, but arguably it can help non-immigrants the most. As America is a country of immigrants, white Americans who are of mostly European American heritage can empathize with and offer support to immigrants coming from Latin America and all other countries. For too long, white Americans have associated their heritage with power. Hall discusses this association of power with identities. It comes back to the idea that using race to oppress certain people and provide opportunities to others, only encourages people to see differences and promotes exclusion (Hall, *Introduction: Who needs 'identity'?*, 4). As a society, people should want to unify and come together to help each other. Schools, counseling centers, and individual families can support immigrant families and encourage the idea that one person's success can benefit more people. This can happen at the family level, community level, state level, country level, and world level. People of all cultures can work together to achieve a common goal. But, that common goal cannot be one population of people succeeding while others struggle. Only people who read, learn, and seek to understand immigrant experiences will be able to acknowledge the unfair privilege they have had. Together Americans can grow as a country with people who

strive to empathize and work together. America can be a place where people born in any country can come and live, start a family, and create a unique cultural identity knowing they, their children, and their children's children will be accepted for years to come.

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### Learning from “Outsiders” with Literature Circles

Books can help readers affirm who they are and open them up to different human experiences they haven't encountered with which they can't relate. One book that comes to mind is Pam Muñoz Ryan's, *Esperanza Rising*. In middle school, I remember reading Ryan's book about a young girl and her mother having to flee Mexico after the death of her father and loss of their property and wealth to their uncle. Esperanza and her mother end up finding work in the United States as Mexican immigrants and I learned a lot about the many different challenges people can have in life. Of course, readers need to see themselves in books too so they know they can be who they are and understand that they have value. When readers learn about other cultures and traditions, they can compare them to their own, and they just might find all humans are more similar than different. And when readers find differences, they can learn to appreciate them and understand the beauty and value in these differences. Literature circle units are specifically designed to provide students with the choice of reading a book with a character who may be different from themselves. And students are encouraged to appreciate the character's culture and differences by finding ways to relate to their experiences. All of the YA books included in this literature circle unit highlight diverse characters who have so many differences, but they all have dreams. One of the books is Elizabeth Acevedo's *With Fire on High* with the protagonist Emoni wants to be a chef. Next is Matt de la Peña's *Mexican Whiteboy* with protagonist Danny who wants to play baseball. Then, there's Sabina Khan's *Love and Lies of*

*Rukhsana Ali* with protagonist Rukhsana who wants to be an engineer. Lastly, there's Angelo Sarmiento's *The Dangerous Art of Blending In* with protagonist Evan who is an artist. All the characters offer windows into different cultures, whether it's Puerto Rican cooking and language or Bengali traditions and beliefs. Scholar Rudine Bishop discusses the importance of young people seeing themselves and others in literature. Bishop's text, "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors," justifies exposure to unique experiences which persuade readers to accept themselves and others. Literature circles with these diverse texts pair well with research projects that demonstrate the value of many cultures represented by the protagonists and encourage discussions about each culture's food, language, religion, rites of passage, etc. This will truly open students up to the life experienced by the character and group members are provided with plenty of choices on a topic to research that relates to the culture of the protagonist from their book. And a great ending to this unit could involve a whole class discussion of all four literature circle groups coming together to discuss their book and what they learned from reading about the experiences of their protagonist (see pages 17-20).

For this unit, an outsider is defined as a character who has chosen to not live according to society's accepted rules or expectations. In each book, this choice by the character may result in feelings of isolation as they are not like the majority of their peers around them. Acevedo's character Emoni is a teen mom and Khan's character Rukhsana is hiding her sexuality from her parents. Emoni and Rukhsana's situations may not be as common among teens, but their feelings of being different and struggling to be accepted are certainly common. By having students read about literary outsiders, students will be encouraged to relate and empathize with these characters. In Coats's "Thinking Theoretically about Children's and Young Adult Literature,"

it's explained the important effect literature can have on teenagers going against the norm. "We also need to be alert to texts that persuasively present counternarratives that actively resist dominant ideologies so that children and teens know, even if they question or even reject the counternarratives in those texts, that they have wiggle room to perform resistant readings in whatever direction they choose" (Coats, 96). So, though it's important for students to learn about the diverse lives of people and characters, it's even more important to not try and merely replace the current dominant ideology with another. One group of people exerting power and benefiting from privileges only leads to more discrimination against anyone who is unlike the dominant group. So the dominant ideology that should be spread is everyone is different and there should not be one group of people dominant over everyone else. People can seek to understand and appreciate each other's differences. The purpose of a literature circle unit with diverse characters is to teach acceptance and encourage students to understand the perspectives of diverse characters which accurately portray the diverse world we live in. For example, Emoni's character in Elizabeth Acevedo's *With Fire on High* is African American and Puerto Rican. More and more young people are of mixed ethnicity as people marry and have children with people whom they love and accept even if they are different than themselves. It's beneficial to teach people to not assume anyone's ethnicity and foster acceptance and appreciation for the ways in which families celebrate and combine different cultures. Students will come to the realization that they can prevent people from being labeled outsiders by being part of a society which doesn't assume and label people.

Coats' chapter specifically focuses on the strong impact diverse literature has on young readers and ways that theoretical paradigms allow them to critically analyze texts. She discusses



how narratives which go against dominant ideas held by society can encourage readers to call into question ideas. By creating counternarratives that go against dominant ideas, society can then work on eradicating dominant ideas. For example, white characters will always dominate literature if white authors continue to dominate the field. Promoting authors of all races and ethnicities fosters equal representation and appreciation of all people. Writers and teachers need to help students understand how texts and readers' criticism of a text influence who they are and how they view the world. The world is made up of diverse people of all cultures and backgrounds, and this is reflected in America too. All four of the Young Adolescent (YA) books in the literature circle unit feature diverse characters of all cultures and backgrounds from which students get to learn about and develop an appreciation for. For one example, Acevedo's character, Emoni, has a child before finishing high school and before getting married. Students will be able to see society's view of how people should live their life may have its advantages, but that individuals can still reach their goals by not following society's expected path. And, in many cases, individuals are simply presented with valuable experiences earlier in life like the responsibility and love that comes with parenthood. In Emoni's case, she matures rapidly and learns about the characteristics of positive relationships while raising her child with her 'Buela (grandma). This encourages students to accept changes in their own lives and discern how all paths in life offer new opportunities for growth.

Offering students choice in selecting their book for the literature circle unit with diverse characters will increase the likelihood of students choosing books with characters who can act as mirrors for themselves and inspire them to be who they are unapologetically. In Dr. Bishop's "Mirrors, Windows, and Sliding Glass Doors", she also explains how "Books can also introduce

readers to the history and traditions that are important to any one cultural group, and which invite comparisons to their own" (Bishop, 2). The books chosen for this literature circle unit, which focus on characters with complex identities, will purposely be used to help students explore how people, who may be viewed as outsiders in a majority white, heterosexual society, are actually becoming the majority. And, all people, whether they fall into the majority or minority, are presented with many of the same challenges and goals in life. The literature circle group discussions will evolve around what makes these characters outsiders according to a non-diverse society and how they have developed confidence and chosen to take risks to succeed.

### **UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION FOR ALL ETHNICITIES**

The first two books students will have the option to choose between include Elizabeth Acevedo's *With Fire on High* and Matt de la Peña's *Mexican Whiteboy*. Both protagonists are of mixed ethnicity, but Acevedo's character, Emoni, is much more confident and proud of being African American and Puerto Rican. Emoni recognizes the advantages of being exposed to more than one culture. She then is able to demonstrate the many cultures which influence her through her innovative cooking skills she has acquired, many of which she learned from her 'Buela. Emoni shows her pride in her culture as she puts her own spin on Puerto Rican dishes and at times combines it with inspiration from South Philly cuisine and recipes her Aunt Sarah sends her from North Carolina. Additionally, when she meets new people who assume she is just Spanish because her last name is Santiago, she corrects them. "My father is Puerto Rican and he's darker than my mom was, and her whole family is straight-from-the Carolinas Black. And her hair was just as curly as mine. Not all Black women, and Latinas, look the same" (Acevedo, 66). Moreover, she still has plans of graduating and goes after her goals of being a chef so she

can provide for her daughter- Emma. Being a teen mom presents challenges, but never stops Emoni from wanting to create a better life for herself and Babygirl (aka, Emma). Scholar Ebony Thomas emphasizes the importance of showing diverse characters in her article “Research & Policy: Stories ‘Still’ Matter: Rethinking the Role of Diverse Children's Literature Today.” Like Emoni, many Americans are becoming more diverse and aren’t simply white or black. Thomas discusses a lack of representation of minority groups and problematic stereotyping or inaccurate portrayals of minority characters when they are included in children’s literature. Thomas explains, "If today's children grow up with literature that is multicultural, diverse, and decolonized, we can begin the work of healing our nation and world through humanizing stories" (Thomas, 115). Too many of our American history textbooks continue to focus on the power and domination that the majority white population used to exercise in order to steal and take advantage of others. People’s differences should not be used as a reason to give one group of people privileges. The “melting pot” analogy used to explain how our diverse nation fought for equal rights for everyone to live peacefully with the same opportunities has been proved incorrect. Though, we cannot undo the past, we can learn to not make the same mistake again of using a person’s diversity or differences as a reason to oppress them.

De la Peña’s character, Danny, is much different from Emoni in that he is less confident and proud of his culture. Danny doesn’t feel he belongs anywhere since he spent most of his life with his white mother. He feels like an outsider because he is half Mexican and half American. He is shy and afraid to speak out. “I’m a white boy among Mexicans, and a Mexican among white boys” (Peña, 90). Danny can’t speak Spanish since his dad, who gave him his brown skin, went back to Mexico after his birth. And he’s not sure he wants to continue his passion for

baseball since his dad inspired him to play as well, but abandoned him. Danny's character asks readers to let go of assumptions and think about how we can pursue our dreams without the support of our biological parents in our lives. Luckily, Danny's cousins accept him for who is and his new friend Uno encourages him to stand up for himself. Uno and Danny spend the summer improving Danny's pitching skills and earning money so Uno can move away and live with his dad. In the end, Danny learns to appreciate the time he gets with people. He reflects at the end of the book, "And his and Uno's lives will continue on in different directions. To different schools in different cities (Peña, 247). The wisdom Danny gained from making the most out of experiences he is offered while staying with his dad's family for the summer and being the best version of himself, even if he's different from those around him, is invaluable.

Making a point to learn about cultures which differ from one's own demonstrates a respect for all people. Part of learning about other cultures involves using the appropriate terminology. Young people need to learn the difference between race, ethnicity, and nationality to understand their identity and others. Many people of mixed heritage like Emoni and Danny have their ethnicity assumed by others. Despite Emoni being confident in correcting others, not all adolescents portray this same confidence. This makes it necessary to intentionally teach how important it is not to assume and question someone you hardly know as if their heritage is "too confusing" and to imply they are "not normal". "This population is also troubled by questions of belonging or ownership over their identities because of the dual or mixed nature of their parentage" (Rhodes, 2). Danny's character, specifically, struggles to cope with not being just like his Mexican father or American mother. He is torn between not really "fitting in" anywhere. Luckily, when he is accepted by his father's family and makes friends with someone like him

who stands up for him, he becomes comfortable with who he is. He learns it's okay that he has brown skin but can't speak Spanish. And, it's okay that his father isn't there to support him as he goes after his dream to play baseball. Coming to terms with who one's parents are and oneself is a common coming of age challenge for any adolescent, especially those who look up to their parents. But Danny and Emoni's characters show the additional experiences they have with their mixed ethnicity.

With more and more American families having the privilege of both parents of different ethnicities getting to share their culture with their children, Americans should take time to appreciate and learn about more cultures. Chaidhri and Teale's article, "Stories of multiracial experiences in literature for children, ages 9-14" reflects on research by Regina Carter about today's teens' experiences changing due to today's families being so diverse. More diverse families increases the demand for more YA books to feature minority and mixed race characters. Carter's research reflects on how the 21st century census of the U.S. in 2000 for the first time allowed citizens to identify themselves as biracial or multiracial. "Nine million Americans indicated in the 2010 Census that they identified as multiracial, and the range of mixes is vast. Our findings indicate that only a small section of mixed race America 370 *Children's Literature in Education* (2013) 44:359–376 123 is represented in contemporary realistic and historical fiction" (Chaidhri and Teale, 370-71). Given that it is now 10 years post this study, it's fair to assume even more families continue to have more than one culture under the same roof. It isn't very realistic for YA literature labeled realistic fiction to feature protagonists who are white when clearly the American population is more diverse. For example, this same principle can be applied to when assigning books with characters who are heterosexual. It is this precise reason

why the other two books in the literature circle unit include a female and male character who are gay.

### **UNDERSTANDING AND SUPPORT FOR ALL SEXUALITIES**

The final two books students will choose between in the literature circle will be Sabina Khan's *Love and Lies of Rukhsana Ali* and Angelo Surmelis's *The Dangerous Art of Blending In*. Unlike Acevedo's and Peña's books which focus on race and ethnicity, these two books focus on sexuality. Khan's main character is Rukhsana who is Bengali-American with conservative Muslim parents who hope to marry her off to a Muslim man after they find her kissing her girlfriend- Ariana. Rukhsana is torn because she loves and practices her Muslim religion, but knows homosexuality is not accepted among their conservative community. She keeps her sexuality hidden to prevent her family from being disgraced, but she drives away Ariana since they can't be together like a normal teenage couple. Her parent's refusal to accept that she is lesbian results in them forcibly keeping her from finishing her senior year so she can go off to college and accomplish her dream of becoming an engineer. She finds solace in her Bengali cousin who is less conservative and accepts her sexuality. She even attempts to help Rukhsana get out of her arranged marriage and back to the United States. When Rukhsana meets her betrothed and he admits he is gay and only marrying to appease his parents, they work together to create the perfect escape plan. They almost make it to the Bangladesh airport together, but a horrendous hate-crime causes Rukhsana to board the plane alone. Rukhsana's experiences require her to be confident in who she is and take action to live the life she wants despite a lack of support. In her article on outsiders in literature, Kaherine Bell references Jacqueline Bach who comments on the LGBTQ texts which include a core feature of "protagonists who -whether on

account of their queer identity or not- ‘don’t fit in,’ and remain as ‘outsiders without adult support’” (Bell, 75). Despite not having the support of her parents, Rukhsana learns to make her own choices and luckily has the support of other family members and friends. Surprisingly, even her grandmother, who one would assume to be more conservative, encourages her to not let her mother determine what her life will look like. Nani states, “You have to fight to take back control of your life. Sometimes you will hurt the ones you love the most. But in the end, it will always have to be your choice” (Khan, 181). Rukhsana promises to fight and she certainly does. When her parents return from Bangladesh, it takes some reflection, especially on her mother’s part, but they eventually see through their daughter’s desperate actions how wrongly they treated her. Her mother apologizes in chapter 38, ““You know, Rukhsana, I thought I was being a good Muslim, stopping you from committing a grave sin. But that night, I realized I was the real sinner. In the eyes of Allah, I was doing wrong. To hate someone because of who they love—that is the worst thing I could do as a Muslim, as a human being, but mostly as a mother” (Khan, 309). Not only does Rukhsana’s mother acknowledge her wrongdoings as a mother who should unconditionally love their child, but she even questions her conservative views she has as a Muslim who don’t accept gay people. Many American teenagers can relate to the challenge of having different views than their parents. Rukhsana’s parents demonstrate how difficult it can be to alter the traditions and values of a culture you have accepted and practiced your whole life. But, they prove acceptance is possible and oftentimes it simply involves looking at experiences through another person’s eyes. So Rukhsana’s mother especially shows teenagers to not give up on people.

Surmelis's character, Evan, is in the process of discovering his sexuality. He kisses one boy over the summer, and like Rukhsana, he becomes frightened of coming out to his parents. When his traditional Greek mother discovers his sexuality by reading one of his journals, she is convinced he needs God. Evan is not accepted and undergoes physical and mental abuse by his mother while his father is too busy to notice. He finds solace in drawing. But his mother continues to try and change him. "You should hang out with the girl. She's pretty. Very pretty, even though she's not Greek and Presbyterian" (Surmelis, 184). His mother doesn't accept Evan and views his sexuality as a problem that God and their church can help solve. It's hurtful and Evan grows to be resentful of his father's lack of action to defend him. Eventually, Evan is kissed by his best friend Henry and it seems Evan's long-time affection and love he has felt for the guy who inspired so much of his artwork is returned. Evan is hesitant to pursue a relationship with his disapproving mother breathing down his neck and anxiety about Henry's true feelings since Henry has had relationships with girls in the past as well, nevertheless they are together at last. Henry assuages Evan's worries and helps him fall in love with himself just as he has fallen in love with him. Evan develops confidence and finds his voice to stand up for himself and his relationship with Henry. Someone records him at school defending Henry and announcing his love for him. Evan finally realizes that he doesn't care what the school, his mother, or anyone thinks about who he wants to love. "Maybe I'm not so ugly after all. Maybe no one is really ugly, and maybe no one has the right to call someone that or tell them that they are. Maybe the only real ugliness is what lives inside some people" (Surmelis, 254). The realization that other people's hatred of his sexuality is the problem, and not his love for Henry, is the climactic point of the book.



Another unique aspect of the book is the addition of Principal Balderini making a point to talk to Evan after he and Henry are bullied at school as he feels personally responsible for any hate and pain caused under his watch. Principal Balderini apologizes, “I’m sorry if I or anyone else here at this school has made you feel misunderstood or unsafe” (Surmelis, 289). Adults and respected authority figures advocating for acceptance for all students is another important aspect of Surmelis’s book. Schools specifically need to be one of the first places in a society (after one’s family) where students are taught that everyone deserves to feel safe and accepted. There needs to be zero tolerance for bullying and any discrimination needs to be taken seriously. Instead of just punishing children, discussions and multiple follow up meetings with the counselor can show students how dedicated their school is to eradicating discrimination. Evan’s character’s experience is very much based on the author’s painful childhood of abuse and his own personal struggle to come out as gay. Angelo Surmelis reflects on this in his “Author’s Note” and lists a range of LGBTQ organizations to help those who need support. Surmelis reminds his readers, “Please know that there are people and organizations that are there to support you. They want to help. Let them. Reach out and show the world who you truly are” (Surmelis, 299). My hope is that all of the characters, including Evan, teach students to support each other and reach out for support. Finding yourself and being that person unapologetically is when a person truly starts living as Evan teaches us.

Since Khan’s and Surmelis’s books deal with a lot of parental abuse, violence, and sexuality, the mature content needs to be introduced and discussed. Both characters of Rukhsana and Evan, despite abuse and violence from family members, grow confidence and stand up for their homosexuality. Their stories share challenging experiences endured by many people who

are part of the LGBTQ community and demonstrate the importance of standing up for oneself and social activism. Young adolescents who grow up in a small town lacking diversity, will have the opportunity to see the perspectives of diverse characters and can reflect on the hate and discrimination they face. What is it about people who are different than us which encourages fear and hate? How do we acknowledge prejudice and not let it promote social injustice? These are just a couple important discussions that shouldn't be censored from a classroom and can't happen without the proper book.

The NCTE guidelines discourage censorship and advocate for including books with mature content. "One way rapport and respect can be developed is through encouraging the students themselves to explore and engage with texts of their own selection" (Chang). Literature circles with diverse protagonists offer students choice so they become invested in their own learning. This authentic learning has to involve authentic experiences. Students can appreciate a teacher's willingness to let them explore titles that portray authentic adolescents like themselves and their peers. Some students may even be comfortable asking difficult questions and opening up about their personal experiences. Most teachers don't give students credit for the mature material they are exposed to on a daily basis via social media and this is why not censoring these types of texts with literature circles is so necessary.

### **ORGANIZING A LITERATURE CIRCLE UNIT TO FOSTER ACCEPTANCE**

This type of unit will lend itself well to a diverse selection of books for this unit as students will have the option to pick a book with a character they may relate to or find particularly unique and different than themselves. A good method for introducing the books is allowing students to read the synopsis of the book and provide a mini presentation about the four

protagonists. Students can rank the books by which one they are most interested in and depending on available copies you can try to provide each student with their number one or number two choice. After books are chosen, teachers should have students practice the five roles they will be performing each week so they understand the different ways they will be analyzing the text. Each week, a student takes a turn performing one of the five roles to help them focus on different aspects of the text. The roles include a discussion leader who comes up with thought-provoking questions about the key events and ideas. The next role is the diction detective who looks for important words, phrases, or passages to analyze and discuss. There is a bridge builder who finds ways to connect the text to themselves, current events, or ideas from other texts. Then, there is a reporter who summarizes key points and details. Lastly, there is an artist who creates an illustration to relate to the text. These roles help students practice analyzing the text in different ways and fosters independence. It also provides students the support of group members when they may not be as confident performing certain roles. A plus side for teachers is there is no need to formally assess students and/or simply grade them on their ability to comprehend the text. The culminating assessment is each student's ability to interact with the text. As at the end of each week, they will be asked to present their role to the group and discuss the pages they read. DaLie explains in chapter 7 of Ericson's book the many advantages to using literature circle roles which she has successfully implemented into her classroom. The learning is completely student-centered as students have choices as to what they read and they are the driving forces for taking notes, asking questions, and sharing their thoughts within their literature circle group. "Writing book reports and taking multiple-choice tests at the end of a good novel are not part of an adult's reading experience. In contrast, the behaviors and practices that

literature circles encourage are much more authentic. Students are invited to read, think, imagine, question, laugh, and talk” (DaLie, 98). Books that teach students authentic lessons should be assessed authentically and small group discussion enable this to happen with this type of unit. For example, a student performing the role of bridge builder may bring up a connection about the character experiencing a lack of parent support and relate it to a time they didn’t feel supported by their parents. This can lead to a valuable discussion about the importance of having a strong support system and how this influences young people’s lives.

Literature circle discussions that focus on diverse characters offer students opportunities to share observations about identity, race, sexuality, and how societal expectations have oppressed people who don’t fall into the majority. Thus, students will understand how the diverse characters in the texts aren’t actually outsiders, but society has constructed them to think this as a reason to yield power. This epiphany and many more are sure to come out of meaningful discussions about these books in a well-organized literature circle unit. It only involves the teacher giving more power and independence to the students.

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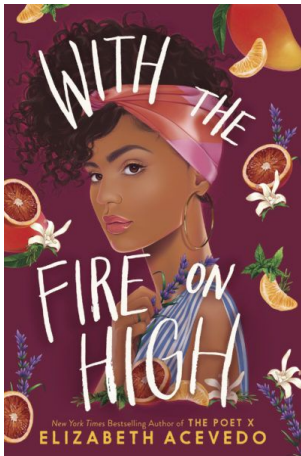
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Literature Circle Unit Discussion Questions

Elizabeth Acevedo's *With Fire on High* and Matt de la Peña's *Mexican Whiteboy*



- **Why could you consider Emoni an “outsider”? Consider what makes her different from her typical teenage peers.**

Points of consideration: Teen mom, Afro-Latina ethnicity

- **Why could you consider Danny an “outsider”? Consider what makes him different from his typical teenage peers.**

Points of consideration: Extremely shy, practically mute even around close family, Mexican-American ethnicity

- **What are the most interesting aspects you noticed of each protagonist’s identity?**

Points of consideration: Emoni has professional cooking skills,

Danny pitches as fast as professional baseball players

- **In what ways does each character’s ethnicity influence their actions and/or other character’s actions?**

Points of consideration: Emoni’s inspires her cooking,

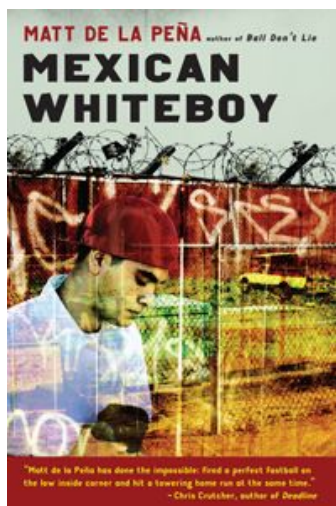
Danny’s encourages him to learn more about his father’s family

Points of consideration: Emoni’s mother died when she was young, lives with her grandma (father’s mom), father visits every so often,

Danny lives with his mother who divorced his father and consistently has new boyfriends, his father is supposedly in Mexico, but later finds out he’s in prison

- **Which protagonist seems more confident? Consider why this is?**

Points of consideration: Emoni, but the chef in her cooking class challenges her. She had to mature quickly when she became a mom to advocate and support her child



- **What kind of risks does each character take and why?**

Points of consideration: Emoni puts a lot of time and money into a trip to Spain, away from her daughter, to expand her cooking abilities,

Danny takes a risk of spending a summer with his father's family, none of which he really knows, he even risks violence and ridicule in a pitching bet to help his friend raise money

- **How does each character grow or develop throughout the book?**

Points of consideration: Emoni learns a lot about balancing personal life, school, and work,

Danny grows to accept the parts of his Mexican culture he has absorbed and the parts he hasn't

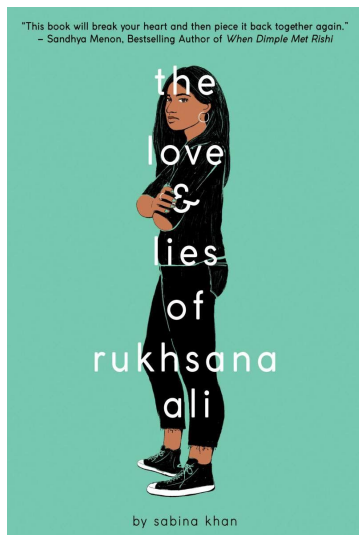
- **Discuss one lesson you feel each protagonist learns and a key event that influenced the learning of this lesson.**

Emoni- Being your best self and going after your own dreams will set your children up for a better life

Danny- Your parents don't define who you become, but remember they are people too and make mistakes

Sabina Khan's *Love and Lies of Rukhsana Ali* and Angelo Surmelis's *The Dangerous Art of*

**Blending In**



- **Why could you consider Rukhsana an “outsider”? Consider what makes her different from her typical teenage peers.**

Points of consideration: Bengali-American ethnicity, Muslim, Lesbian

- **Why could you consider Evan an “outsider”? Consider what makes him different from his typical teenage peers.**

Points of consideration: Greek-American ethnicity, Presbyterian, Gay

- **What are the most interesting aspects you noticed of each protagonist’s identity?**

Points of consideration: Rukhsana is passionate about her religion and

becoming an engineer one day,

Evan is a talented artist and determined uses his journals to cope with the abuse he endures

- **In what ways does each character’s sexuality influence their actions and/or other character’s actions.**

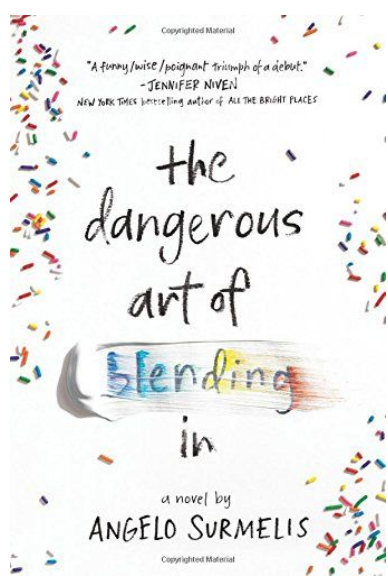
Points of consideration: Rukhsana tries to keep her sexuality hidden to prevent backlash from her parents and prejudice from her community, but when her parents fly her to Bangladesh and try to marry her off to “change” her, she is forced to figure a way out of it,

Evan also tries to keep his sexuality secret, but when he and his friend are bullied he comes out in front of the whole school and tells everyone he is gay, accepting the backlash from his mother who is outraged when she sees the video of his coming out



- **Compare and contrast the family system and dynamics for Rukhsana and Evan.**

Points of consideration: Rukhsana's parents are together and their marriage was arranged, but found compatibility and fell in love with each other, Rukhsana's parents don't support her sexuality, especially her mother,



Evan's parents are together, but his mother exhibits majority of power and there doesn't seem to be a lot of love between them, Evan's father supports him, but neglects to defend him against his mother's constant physical and mental abuse

- **Which protagonist seems more confident? Consider why this is?**

Points of consideration: TIE! Rukhsana's confidence grows once she get help and support from her Bengali grandmother, cousin, and other family members,

Evan's confidence also grows with the support of his loving boyfriend

- **What kind of risks does each character take and why?**

Points of consideration: Rukhsana fights back against her mother's disapproval of her sexuality and escapes her arranged marriage to a guy,

Evan speaks out about being gay in front of the whole school

- **How does each character grow or develop throughout the book?**

Points of consideration: Both characters become comfortable with their sexuality and coming out publicly

- **Discuss one lesson you feel each protagonist learns and a key event that influenced the learning of this lesson.**

Rukhsana and Evan- Love yourself, love whomever you want, and don't let other people control your life