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Amanda Baldwin's 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

April 23, 2021

Dr. Ethan Jordan, First Reader
Ms. Kimberly Spallinger, Second Reader

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Analytical Narrative

My journey into Bowling Green State University's graduate program began in the summer of 2019. I was just finishing up my fourth year of teaching tenth grade English and, as I turned off my classroom lights for the last time that year and started the walk towards my car, I couldn't help but feel like there was something missing in my career. Was I just going to teach the same material and the same books in the same way year after year until I retired? I was ready for a change, and I realized, also ready for the next step in my own education. This led me to sign up for BGSU's English program because rather than moving my career forward by becoming more specialized or by becoming an administrator, I knew I actually just wanted to become better at what I was already doing: teaching high school ELA.

Once I knew I wanted to begin as a student in the English program, I had to choose my specialization. I ended up choosing the "individualized path" of the English program because I wanted the freedom to choose the courses that I felt would best serve me in my current position. Under this track, I was able to choose classes not only about teaching reading and writing, but about critical theory, race and gender, fiction writing, technical communication, linguistics, and more. Throughout my time in these classes, I have become a better analytical thinker and writer and I have learned real skills that I can utilize in my classroom right now to be the best educator for my students. The pieces I have chosen to include in this portfolio reflect that new learning and growth.

The first piece, and my substantive research piece, is a course that I designed for an American Girls literature class. The course I designed was entitled, "Putting a Feminist Twist on Classic Literature," and its main focus was to illustrate the negative consequences, especially

for young girls, of primarily teaching literature from the male-dominated canon. For this reason, students who took my course would be asked to read and analyze a modern feminist text alongside its more “classic” counterpart. At the end of the class, they would also have the opportunity to rewrite, or reimagine, a piece of classic literature of their choosing. I wanted to include this piece in my portfolio because it is something that I am really proud of. I feel that it shows off my creativity, research skills, writing skills, and most importantly, my dedication to highlighting the problem of gender inequality in my teaching.

As proud as I am of this work, there were still many things that needed to be edited and revised in order to make it more polished. One of the biggest things my professor helped me work through was finding places where I needed to go more in-depth with my research, or places where I needed to add in more current research. For example, instead of just making the statement that male authors cannot fully and accurately depict the female experience, I had to dig deeper to give concrete examples of this. Another big thing we worked on in this piece was developing my voice as a writer. I had a habit of giving quotes from my sources before giving myself the space as the author to put my ideas into my own words first. I learned that I should be the guiding voice in my papers and my sources should help back me up, not the other way around.

The second piece in this portfolio is called “Teaching *Antigone* in the Modern Classroom,” which is a unit plan that I created for a teaching literature course. The goal, and the challenge, here was to figure out how to take an ancient Greek text and make it relevant and engaging to students in the 21st century. One big thing I did to help accomplish this was

centering my unit on the idea that students would examine and analyze moral questions in the play as they related to their own lives. I chose to include this project into my portfolio because it showcases my ability to solve real-world problems like increasing student participation and engagement.

There were similar issues in this project that needed work, such as going more in-depth with my ideas. Here, I really needed to explain my own ideas further rather than doing a lot more research into my sources. For example, I needed to explain why I put the unit activities in the order that I did, and what role the teacher would play in each activity. Instead of just saying, for instance, that reading the text would lead to natural discussions about gender roles, I really needed to explain how the teacher would facilitate and lead this discussion. Another issue we worked on was my introduction. I had to first make my readers care about this unit before I just started explaining all of the parts of it. In order to accomplish this, one thing I did was to go back in and add a hook that would grab my audience's attention. For this particular paper, I chose to highlight the problem of student engagement with ancient texts right at the beginning as a way to appeal to teachers who may be struggling with the same thing.

Another piece of writing in this portfolio is called "Feminism and Racial Studies in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret life of Bees*," which was written for a critical theory class. The assignment asked us to apply some of the theorists we had been studying in class to a text of our choosing. I chose to analyze *The Secret Life of Bees* because it is a novel that my 10th grade students read every year in my class. I applied theorists such as Hélène Cixous, Judith Butler, W.E.B. Dubois, and bell hooks to the novel in order to be able to more clearly view the piece

through both feminist and racial lenses. I chose to include this piece in my portfolio because I think it is so important for teachers to really examine and dissect the texts they use in their classroom to make sure that they representative all students fairly and accurately.

This was the most difficult piece for me to revise because instead of feeling like there were just certain sections that needed work, I felt like the whole project lacked focus. I knew I wanted to apply those theorists to the novel, but I didn't know if I should be trying to make a clear argument about whether the novel would be considered a feminist text and/or a good representation of African American literature. My professor helped me to take a step back and realize that I didn't necessarily need to make any bold claims; I could just discuss what these theorists can help us to understand about the complexity of the novel.

The final piece of writing I chose to include in this portfolio is my literacy narrative analysis that I wrote for the very first course I took as a graduate student: Teaching of Writing. I chose this piece because it tells the story of my own personal writing journey: how I was taught to write in high school, in college, and how I teach writing in my own classroom today. I wrote about several approaches to academic writing such as expressivism, researched writing, and critical pedagogy. This seemed like the perfect project to end a portfolio that is supposed to showcase my writing ability as well as how much I've grown academically throughout my life.

The biggest thing that needed revising here was taking my ideas even further. I talked about my past experiences with writing and how I was currently teaching writing, but I needed to also think about what I had learned and how I envisioned myself teaching or using writing in the future. There was also a section in my paper about using new media in writing, and I

realized that, while an important topic to discuss, it seemed disjointed from the rest of my paper. I had to go back in and be clearer about why I was talking about new media and how I use it in my classroom to help build not only writing skills, but 21st century skills that my students will need in the real world.

I almost think it goes without saying, but in all of these pieces, there were also smaller spelling and grammar issues that my professor helped me work through as well. For example, there were many times that I left out dashes or commas where they were needed, or times when I added spaces where they weren't needed. I even had a few more things to learn when it came to putting together the bibliographies for my works cited page. For example, I learned that I had been incorrectly citing multiple works that all came from the same anthology. Seeing these small mistakes made repeatedly over several pieces of my writing helped me to pinpoint those grammar issues that I needed to continue to work on in my journey as a life-long learner.

The process of working through each piece in this portfolio has really pushed me to become a better writer by digging deeper into my research, giving more clear and complete explanations, and being able to organize my writing in a way that gives it focus and direction. Furthermore, taking all of the required graduate courses over these past two years has pushed me to think more deeply and more critically than ever before, which has made me realize my passion for bringing awareness to problems like gender and racial inequalities. Working alongside open-minded, skillful professors and classmates helped me to accomplish the goal I set out to achieve from the very beginning: to become the best educator I can be for my students.

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May 13, 2020

Putting a Feminist Twist on Classic Literature

American literary critic Henry Louis Gates Jr. once said, “You have to have a canon so the next generation can come along and explode it” (Begley 24). In the history of education, most institutions have focused on teaching from the literary canon in their Language Arts courses. In the United States, who among us has not studied the famous works written by William Shakespeare, Ernest Hemingway, or Mark Twain? However, the problem with this lies in the fact that many of the works found in said canon are male-dominated and thus largely exclude the works and experiences of minorities, such as women authors. This leaves school-aged girls and women across the country reading books that were not written by them, for them, or representative of them. It is important for high schools in the United States to start offering more language arts courses, such as the one imagined in this paper, that teach literature that includes the female perspective in equal proportion to the male perspective.

There are so many reasons that creating more feminist literature courses is important. Obviously, the biggest advantage is that it allows teachers to cover novels from outside the literary canon. According to Lillian S. Robinson, the late professor of women’s studies at Concordia University, this is necessary because the canon is largely nothing more than a “gentleman’s agreement” about what is worthy of being read. She explains, “it is probably quite accurate to think of the canon as a gentlemanly artifact, considering how few works by non-members of that class and sex make it into the informal agglomeration of course syllabi,

anthologies, and widely commented upon ‘standard authors’ that constitutes the canon as it is generally understood” (84). In other words, when only one sex is involved in the process of determining what works will be considered classics, then those classics will likely only tell one side of the story. One concrete, modern example of this is the fact that the editorial staff of the eighth edition of *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* is only about 33% female, and less than 15% of the anthology’s pages cover works written by female authors (Gualtieri). This is not acceptable because when it comes to educational equality, it is essential that students are being exposed to literature that tells *both* sides of the story.

Robinson goes on to explain that the main problem with this gentlemanly canon is that “the predominantly male authors in the canon show us the female character and relations between the sexes in a way that both reflects and contributes to sexist ideology—an aspect of these classic works about which the critical tradition remained silent for generations” (84). Male authors often include fewer female characters in their works, if any at all, and those characters tend to be minor characters as opposed to protagonists. Additionally, any female characters that *are* incorporated are going to be written from a slanted point of view, as no male could *fully* understand the female experience, and vice versa. A great example of this is J.M. Barrie’s classic story *Peter Pan*. Most of the characters in Neverland are boys, with only the mother archetype of Wendy, the jealous Tinkerbell, and the damsel-in-distress, Tiger-Lily. These stereotypes do not reflect the way that all women truly are or how they would want to portray themselves. This is the chief reason that more classes need to highlight equal works by both genders.

Many readers might be thinking that I am suggesting that a more feminist literature class should then cover works from the feminist (counter) canon. This alternative canon certainly has a lot to offer as it has been credited with “reconfigured modernism by recuperating female authors together with the voices of the gendered racial, ethnic and sexual ‘Others’” (Mihăilă 25). However, people like Rodica Mihăilă, English professor at the University of Bucharest, are quick to point out that “the future of the feminist (counter) canon is uncertain as the future of the literary canon is itself uncertain” and that America seems to be in the middle of “a slow process of decanonization of literature” (27). It is for this reason that I propose that teachers not only begin to add in more feminist texts, but that they also begin to look outside of any type of canon to find other works that are of value in perhaps a new and different way. This will help ensure the addition of more modern pieces into the curriculum and therefore, pieces that the 21st century student will be able to relate to and connect with more closely.

Another reason a more inclusive literature class is important is because it could allow for both perspectives to be studied. For example, readings of male-dominated works could still be read *alongside* of the more feminist ones. Lawrence Buell, former professor of American Literature Emeritus at Harvard University, points out that, “Essentially, the two genders’ literary experiences, like their social experiences, are inseparable; and in their inseparability they illuminate each other more often positively than negatively” (104). He uses the example of reading Annette Kolodny’s *The Land Before Her*, a novel about the life of women in the American frontier, in conjunction with “the better known tradition of male romance.” In this case, and in many other cases like it, it is only when both are read and considered equally that

readers can get the full picture of what a specific time period or experience was like for both genders. Therefore, one should note that I do not aim to throw out male-written works altogether, but instead aim to begin to show *both* perspectives more fairly and equally.

However, it should be noted that this model of literary inclusion has its limits. Namely, Buell acknowledges his fears that “directing more of the energy of gender-oriented studies to the intersection and confluence of men’s and women’s writing is that feminist scholarship might become relegated to a sort of handmaiden’s status” (105). That is to say, people need to be careful that they aren’t sending the message that women’s literature exists primarily to serve or assist the texts written by male authors. This is certainly an obstacle that any feminist course would have to overcome, perhaps in part by having students read and discuss theorists like Buell in class. Buell also adds that although this model should not necessarily become the norm, “the risk of shying away from the subjects of intersection and confluence is even greater: namely that gender-oriented studies might too parochially limit their sights to the gender-specific aspects of women’s writing and the misogynistic aspects of men’s” (105). While it is crucial that instructors eventually move beyond this narrow way of teaching women’s literature, incorporating more inclusive texts in any way is surely a step in the right direction.

Another reason female representation in literature is so important is because young girls tend to mold their sense of self around how they see girls generally being portrayed in society. Holly Anne Johnson, doctor of philosophy from the University of Arizona, clarifies that it is so imperative because “A girl's sense of place, and her sense of self comes partly from the sense of values with which a society inculcates her” (26). The television shows and movies a young girl watches as well as the magazines and books that she is reading are all influencing her

and shaping her into the person she will grow up to be. However, if this is true, then it is unfortunately also true that “girls are inundated and perhaps wrongly persuaded by numerous representations of what they should be” (Johnson 26). Taking this idea a step further, if a majority of the television shows, movies, magazines, and books are written by men, then a young girl may end up becoming a version of herself that a man has decided she should be instead of the version of herself that perhaps more experienced female adult role models would have guided her towards, or even just the version of herself that *she* wants to be. If societal influences have such a strong impact on young people, we must ensure that there are classes in place that will help them be able to seek out media that is fair, balanced, and positive.

Ultimately, perhaps the most basic reason for a class like this, and for reading outside of the canon, is that it “will give teachers and students the opportunity to attend to and appreciate the multiple perspectives and the varied discourses of a democracy that should be intent upon social justice and equity for all peoples” (Johnson 563). Also, after reading books written from multiple perspectives, students and teachers should also be discussing their feelings and ideas around what they read. Johnson explains that “dialoguing about differences using literature that represents multiple realities challenges the status quo, yet may create dissonance for many young people. It is this dissonance, however, that produces an opportunity for learning” (565). If we always read what we have always read, then we may never grow as a society into more aware and accepting human beings. It stands to reason, then, that modern literature classes should push teachers and students alike to read new texts that will show them new perspectives that are more fair and equal to all people.

Furthermore, it isn't just important that the students get a chance to read more female-centric literature, it is just as important that they write it themselves, especially when it comes to the female students. French feminist critic, theorist, novelist, and playwright Hélène Cixous explains this best in her essay entitled "The Laugh of the Medusa." In this essay, Cixous proposes that, "Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal" (Cixous 1942). Because one sex can never fully comprehend the inner lives, thoughts, and feelings of another sex, men could never give a truly accurate depiction of women in their writing. This is the reason it is so important for women to take on the challenge of portraying the full and true lives of women in their own writing, and any truly feminist literature course should help students begin to accomplish this task.

There would also be other benefits to this writing process that would be advantageous for the male students as well. Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" also points out that "there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman," and that "you can't talk about female sexuality, uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes—any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another" (Cixous 1943). In other words, when writers create fictional female characters, each one should be distinctive instead of all of them being stereotypically analogous. Just like no two women in real life are the same, neither should any two female characters be exactly the same. If more teachers incorporated this idea into their courses, and taught young people to write this way, then perhaps the next generation of authors, whether

they be male or female, would have the knowledge and skills to create the unique female characters readers need.

Finally, practicing writing would also give students a chance to find their own unique writing “voice.” Susan Sniader Lanser, Professor Emerita of English, Women's, Gender and Sexuality Studies, and Comparative Literature at Brandeis University, clarifies that there are actually two different types of voices that can give women power when used correctly. In her book, *Fictions of Authority: Women Writers and Narrative Voice*, she states that “as a narratological term, ‘voice’ attends to the specific forms of textual practice and avoids the essentializing tendencies of its more casual feminist usages. As a political term, ‘voice’ rescues textual study from a formalist isolation that often treats literary events as if they were inconsequential to human history” (5). This class would aim to help students find their political voices through research and discussion (surrounding the Robinson and Johnson texts) before then helping them to craft their narratological voice through practice (with the final narrative assignment). Lanser also speaks on overwhelming power of these types of voices when she says that “despite compelling interrogations of ‘voice’ as a humanist fiction, for the collectively and personally silenced the trope has become a term of identity and power: as Luce Irigaray suggests, to find a voice is to find a way” (3). In other words, when a course like this gives students the tools to craft their own voice, it is essentially giving those students the power they need to speak up for themselves and for others, as well as the power to make a difference in the world. Reading the classics in conjunction with the feminist texts is sure to be an eye-opening experience for many of the students that take this new kind of literature course, and it

should help push them to want to write about their thoughts and opinions in a voice that is unique to themselves and their experiences.

The more female- inclusive course I have designed is called “A Feminist Twist on Classic Literature.” In this high school-level course, the instructor would guide the students through taking a deeper look at some of the works from the literary canon that many people grow up reading, such as *Lord of the Flies* and *Moby Dick*, among others. Specifically, students would be asked to take a fresh look at these texts through a primarily feminist lens. In addition, they would also read new versions of the same stories that modern authors have put their own feminist spin on. The class would then compare and discuss many of the elements *found* in both texts, such as the characters, settings, conflicts, and themes, as well as the elements that are *absent* in order to better understand why female representation in literature is so important.

The first two texts students would read and analyze in this course would be William Golding’s *Lord of the Flies* and Rory Power’s *Wilder Girls*. Golding’s original novel, written in 1953, tells the story of a group of young boys that have to figure out how to survive without adult guidance after their plane crashes onto a remote island during wartime. It has taught high school students around the world about the dark side of human nature for decades; however, its lack of a single female character has left many readers wondering how the inclusion of young girls on the island might have impacted the story. Rory Powers’ book helps readers begin to answer that question. In this feminist version of *Lord of the Flies*, a group of students from an all-girls private school have to figure out how to survive with little adult guidance after they get infected with a deadly virus and find themselves quarantined on a remote island. When read in

conjunction with Golding's novel, students get a more inclusive picture of the human nature of all people, and not just of men.

Two other novels worthy of closer analysis would be Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* and Kit De Waal's *Becoming Dinah*. Written in 1851, Melville's novel tells the narrative of Ahab, a whaling captain who becomes obsessed with getting his revenge on Moby Dick, a giant white whale that bit off his leg on a previous journey. This book contains many important themes worthy of discussion, but a story that ultimately centers around Ahab's mission to reclaim his manhood leaves a lot to be desired when it comes to a more diverse audience. De Waal takes on the challenge of telling the other side of the story in *Becoming Dinah*, the story of a mixed-raced female protagonist who finds herself on a somewhat obsessive journey of her own—out of the restrictive religious order that she was raised in and into self-discovery. This new version of an old favorite helps send the message to young readers that the adventures and journeys of women are just as important as the ones of men.

The final two texts that one could incorporate into this class are Hans Christian Andersen's *The Little Mermaid* and Louise O'Neill's *The Surface Breaks*. Andersen's original version of this world-renowned story, written in 1837, involves a young mermaid who is willing to sacrifice everything in order to be with the man that she loves. Some modern readers worry that this sends the wrong message to little girls about putting their own dreams and ambitions aside in order to focus solely on finding a husband. However, in O'Neill's version, the mermaid main character, Gaia, grows up in what can only be described as an underwater patriarchy where women are denied an education and are exploited for male pleasure. In the end, Gaia has to learn to fight back and escape this inequality if she wants to live the life she has always

dreamed of. This newer version of the classic fairy tale helps to bring the complexity of women's desires to light for a whole new generation of readers.

In addition to the reading requirements for this course, students would also complete writing assignments; some being analytical essays and some being more creative pieces of fiction. For example, during the first three quarters of the class, after reading each classic novel along with its feminist counterpart, students would be responsible for taking what they learned and applying it in a comparative analysis paper. In order to write these papers, students would need to conduct further research into what experts in the literary world have to say and cite those experts to back up their own opinions. This research might lead them to read articles about the literary canon, female representation, society's influence on young girls, female authorship, creating voice through writing, as well as many other topics. These analysis essays would assist students in understanding feminist issues on a deeper level while also allowing the instructor to assess whether each student is thinking critically about the texts and drawing conclusions that reflect that deeper understanding.

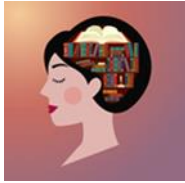
At the end of the course, students would also have the opportunity to choose a classic novel of their own to reimagine as a more modern and inclusive text. For example, one could turn the story of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* into a narrative in which young Juliet does not choose to end her life over a boy that she has essentially just met. In addition to changing the decisions made by female characters, students might also consider adding *more* female characters, showing them from a different point of view, updating offensive dialogue, or countless other creative choices. The role of the teacher during this exercise would be to support students in sharpening their narrative-writing skills as well as supporting them in

finding their own unique voice as authors. In the end, this would serve the greater purpose of preparing the next generation of fiction writers to practice creating characters and themes that take the experiences of both genders into consideration.

In summary, I am proposing a four-quarter course entitled “A Feminist Twist on Classic Literature.” During this course, teachers would guide students through a journey of re-reading the beloved classics through a new lens, reading the feminist versions of those classics for the first time, and finally re-writing a favorite story of their own. Along the way, teachers and students will discuss and research a variety of diverse topics related to these novels such as the history of the literary canon, female representation, society’s influence on young girls, female authorship, and creating voice through writing. All of these elements of the class would serve the greater purpose of helping students to answer the ultimate question: why is female representation in literature so important, and what can we do to ensure that the next generation has the opportunity to read literature that is fairer and more equal to all?

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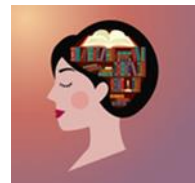
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A Feminist Twist on Classic Literature

Ms. Amanda Baldwin

Syllabus



An Introduction: The purpose of this course is to ultimately answer the question, “Why is female representation in literature so important?” In order to work to answer this question, students will be examining what is present and what is absent in the classic male dominated texts versus the more modern female-centric texts. Below, you will find a brief glance of the schedule for this class followed by a more in-depth look at some of our assignments and novels.

Schedule Breakdown:

Quarter 1:

- **Read** *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding
- **Read** *Wilder Girls* by Rory Power
- **Write** comparative analysis paper

Quarter 2:

- **Read** *Moby Dick* by Herman Melville
- **Read** *Becoming Dinah* by Kit De Waal
- **Write** comparative analysis paper

Quarter 3:

- **Read** *The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen
- **Read** *The Surface Breaks* by Louise O'Neill
- **Write** comparative analysis paper

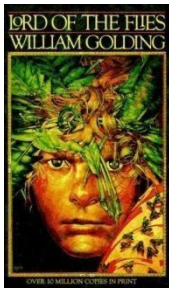
Quarter 4:

- **Read** “Treason Our Text: Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon” by Lillian S. Robinson
- **Read** “Reading the personal and the political: Exploring female representation in realistic fiction with adolescent girls” by Holly Anne Johnson
- **Write** final project narrative

Comparative Analysis Papers: During the first three quarters, students will be asked to write papers in which they compare the characters, settings, conflicts, and themes of the two novels assigned for that quarter- one which will be a more classic male-dominated story and one which will be a more modern female-centric story. Papers are always due by midnight on the last day of the quarter and should be MLA format, two pages in length, double spaced, and no larger than size 12 font.

Final Project Narrative: At the end of the course, students will be asked to move from reader to writer when they choose a classic novel of their own to rewrite as a modern feminist text. This might include changing some of the literary elements of the original such as characters, conflicts, plot and themes. Your narrative is due on the last day of quarter four and, while it does not need to be in a specific format, it should have a creative title, page numbers on every page, double spaced, and no larger than size 12 font. Be creative and have fun with this one!

Reading Selections



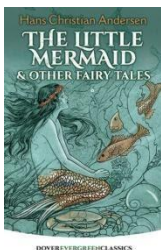
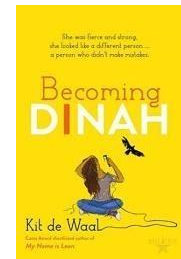
***Lord of the Flies* by William Golding-** This classic novel, written in 1953, tells the story of a group of young boys that have to figure out how to survive without adult guidance after their plane crashes onto a remote island during wartime. It has taught high school students around the world about the dark side of human nature for decades; however, its lack of a single female character has left some modern readers with more questions than answers....

***Wilder Girls* by Rory Power-** In this feminist version of *Lord of the Flies*, a group of students from an all-girls private school have to figure out how to survive with little adult guidance after they get infected with a deadly virus and find themselves quarantined on a remote island. When read in conjunction with Golding's novel, we can begin to answer questions about how both genders may differently, or similarly, handle the power needed to overcome crisis situations.



***Moby Dick* by Herman Melville-** Written in 1851, this novel tells the narrative of Ahab, a whaling captain who becomes obsessed with getting his revenge on Moby Dick, a giant white whale that bit off his leg on a previous journey. This book contains many important themes worthy of discussion, but a story that ultimately centers around Ahab's mission to reclaim his manhood leaves a lot to be desired when it comes to a more diverse audience.

***Becoming Dinah* by Kit De Waal-** This female reimagining of *Moby Dick* was written because the source material "contains only two passing references to women, never elevating them to character status." This time, De Waal gives us a mixed-race female protagonist, Dinah, who finds herself on a somewhat obsessive journey of her own – out of the restrictive religious order that she was raised in and into self-discovery.



***The Little Mermaid* by Hans Christian Andersen-** Andersen's original version of this world-renowned story, written in 1837, involves a young mermaid who is willing to sacrifice everything in order to be with the man that she loves. Some modern readers worry that this sends the wrong message to little girls about putting their own dreams and ambitions aside in order to focus solely on finding a husband.

***The Surface Breaks* by Louise O'Neill-** In O'Neill's version of *The Little Mermaid*, our mermaid main character, Gaia, grows up in what can only be described as an underwater patriarchy where women are denied an education and are exploited for male pleasure. In the end, Gaia has to learn to fight back and escape this inequality if she wants to live the life she has always dreamed of.



Comparative Analysis Papers
Assignment Sheet

Directions: During the first three quarters, you will be asked to write papers in which you compare the characters, conflicts, plot, and themes of the two novels assigned for that quarter- one which will be a more classic male-dominated story and one which will be a more modern female-centric story. Papers are always due by midnight on the last day of the quarter and should be MLA format, two pages in length, double spaced, and no larger than size 12 font. 50 points per essay.

Due Dates:

Comparative Analysis #1: Friday, October 30th

Comparative Analysis #2: Friday, January 15th

Comparative Analysis #3: Friday, March 26th

Rubric:

	10-9	8-7	6-5	4-3	2-0
Characters/ conflicts	Thoroughly explores the characters/ conflicts in both texts and how they affect the perspective.	Discusses the characters/ conflicts, but does not go into enough depth.	Discusses the characters/ conflicts, but does not include how they affect perspective.	Briefly mentions characters and/or conflicts.	Does not explore the characters/ conflicts in both texts and how they affect the perspective.
Plot	Thoroughly explores the plot in both texts and how they affect the perspective.	Discusses the plot, but does not go into enough depth.	Discusses the plot, but does not include how it affects perspective.	Briefly mentions the plots.	Does not explore the plot in both texts and how they affect the perspective.
Themes	Thoroughly explores the themes in both texts and how they affect the perspective.	Discusses the themes, but does not go into enough depth.	Discusses the themes, but not does include how it affects perspective.	Briefly mentions the themes.	Does not explore the themes in both texts and how they affect the perspective.
Format	Follows all the format requirements outlined in the directions.	Follows 4 of the format requirements outlined in the directions.	Follows 3 of the format requirements outlined in the directions.	Follows only 1 or 2 of the format requirements outlined in the directions.	Does not follow any of the format requirements outlined in the directions.
Spelling/ grammar	0-1 spelling/ grammar mistakes present.	2-3 spelling/ grammar mistakes present.	4-5 spelling/ grammar mistakes present.	6-7 spelling/ grammar mistakes present.	More than 7 spelling/ grammar mistakes present.

Final Project Narrative
Assignment Sheet

Directions: For this assignment, you will be moving from reader to writer as you choose a classic novel of your own to rewrite as a more modern, more feminist text! This might include changing some of the literary elements of the original such as characters, settings, conflicts or themes. Your narrative is due on the last day of quarter four and, while it does not need to be in a specific format, it should be at least two pages in length, have a creative title, page numbers on every page, double spaced, and no larger than size 12 font. Be creative and have fun with this one! 50 points total.

Due Dates:

Brainstorming: Monday, May 24th

Outline: Wednesday, May 26th

Rough Draft: Friday, May 28th

Peer Editing Sheet: Tuesday, June 1st

Final Copy: Thursday, June 3rd

Rubric:

	10-9	8-7	6-5	4-3	2-0
Perspective	Shows the female perspective and includes a variety of dynamic female characters.	Shows the female perspective, but from a limited number of similar characters.	Attempts to show the female perspective, but some female characters are stereotypical.	Attempts to show the female perspective, but only includes one female character	Does not show the female perspective or have female characters.
Elements of Plot	Has clear exposition, climax, and resolution. Includes a clear theme.	Is missing 1 part of the plot diagram OR has an unclear theme.	Is missing 2 parts of the plot diagram OR has an unclear theme.	Somewhat follows the plot diagram. Theme unclear.	Does not follow the plot diagram. Does not include a theme.
Voice	Clear and unique writer's voice is present throughout	Clear and unique writer's voice is present, but may be inconsistent.	Writer's voice is not always clear.	Writer's voice mimics the source author's voice and is not unique.	Writer's voice is not clear or unique.
Format	Follows all the format requirements outlined in the directions.	Follows 4 of the format requirements outlined in the directions.	Follows 3 of the format requirements outlined in the directions.	Follows only 1 or 2 of the format requirements outlined in the directions.	Does not follow any of the format requirements outlined in the directions.
Spelling/grammar	0-1 spelling/grammar mistakes present.	2-3 spelling/grammar mistakes present.	4-5 spelling/grammar mistakes present.	6-7 spelling/grammar mistakes present.	More than 7 spelling/grammar mistakes present.

Amanda Baldwin

Professor Lapinski

English 6090

July 1, 2020

Teaching *Antigone* in the Modern Classroom

One of the hardest jobs an English teacher has is figuring out how to make texts that are decades or even centuries old seem relevant to their students sitting in the modern classroom. For example, how does one present Sophocles' play *Antigone*, written in 441 B.C., in an engaging way to students in the 21st century? The following fifteen-day unit plan I have created attempts to answer this very question. To create this unit, I used many teaching techniques accrued over my five-year teaching career as well as insight from respected philosophers, theorists, professors, and educators. During the course of these lessons, students will work on mastery of many of the Common Core State Standards for Language Arts, such as participating in collaborative discussions, acquiring domain-specific vocabulary words, reading and comprehending dramatic literature, writing arguments to support claims, and more. In addition to covering the standards, students will also use the text to evaluate their own moral values when it comes to topics presented in the play, such as government, leadership, resistance, kinship, and gender roles.

Antigone, a Greek tragedy written by the famous philosopher Sophocles, centers around the conflict between a young woman named Antigone and her uncle, Creon, the new ruler of Thebes. Antigone's two brothers, Eteocles and Polynices, have both just died in battle, and while Eteocles is granted an honorable burial, Creon orders that no one is to give Polynices a

burial at all (due to the fact that he fought for the opposing side during the war and is seen as a traitor). Antigone ultimately decides to follow the law of the gods (and her family) versus the law of the state and buries him anyway, a decision that causes Creon to sentence her to the punishment of death. In the end, Creon's leadership decisions cause him to lose everything (Antigone, his son, and his wife) in a series of tragic events brought on by his cold nature and severe retributions.

This unit plan was created based on the notion that the themes presented in this play should first and foremost help students to evaluate their own moral values. To do this, the unit begins with an anticipation guide asking students to examine their own answers to common moral dilemmas, and the unit ends with students choosing one of their answers to develop further in an argumentative essay. In her Master's thesis for Dayton University, Leslie Ann Reinhart explains about her own use of the play that "by using Louise Rosenblatt's Reader-Response Theory to approach four moral questions regarding family, state, love, and fate students will learn about their own concept of ethics and morality in relation to both modern film and the classical, universal text of Antigone" (iii). It is for this reason that I propose the use of the reader-response technique throughout the unit as students explore these themes and moral questions both during the play and during the viewing of the modern movie version during the last week of the unit.

Developed in the 1960's, Rosenblatt's reader-response theory can be described as "an effort to provide a generalized account of what happens when human beings engage in a process they call 'reading.' Such accounts are warranted in any of the several disciplines-psychoanalysis, linguistics, semiotics, phenomenology, etc." (Harkin 411). To put it plainly, this

theory puts more of an emphasis on the reader's response to a text, rather than on the text itself. In the case of *Antigone*, this would mean that the instructor's main focus would be to help her students not only understand the basic literary elements of the play, but to use the themes in the play to begin to examine their own beliefs and morals. The purpose here is to make texts more meaningful to readers and to their lives by teaching them that "Readers make meaning: readers-and not only authors- engage in an active process of production-in-use in which texts of all kinds... are received by their audiences not as a repository of stable meaning but as an invitation to make it" (Harkin 413).

One of the moral questions students will examine is, "What are the qualities that make someone a good leader and why?" This question was written based on the ideas of author and professor Kimberly Cowell-Meyers, who points out that "*Antigone* has rich commentary on the nature of leadership and legitimacy, what good law looks like, how citizens should behave, and how they ought to live together" (347). In other words, students can draw conclusions about leadership by studying Creon's rise to power, the decisions he makes, his relationship with the citizens of Thebes, and the consequences that befall him. They can then compare this to the leadership style of local, state, and federal leaders in modern America.

Another set of questions for students to consider are: "Should we follow our government's laws or God's law and why?", "Is it more important to be loyal to our country or our family and why?", and "What should we do when we disagree with the government and why?" These questions were created based on the ideas explored in *Antigone's Claim*, a book written by philosopher and theorist Judith Butler. Here, Butler addresses Antigone's struggle between being loyal to her country or being loyal to her family (in this case, specifically her

brother). She observes that “Antigone comes to represent kinship and its dissolution, and Creon comes to represent an emergent ethical order and state authority based on principles of universality” (Butler 3). This situation can push students to consider whether their own loyalties lie with their country or with their own kinships/affiliations based on race, gender, religion, etc., along with the consequences that may come along with each loyalty. Often times, this will require teachers to help push their students to examine their own belief systems through activities like class discussions or journaling.

The last question posed to students throughout this unit that was inspired by Butler’s analysis is, “Should men and women follow traditional gender roles—why or why not?” Butler claims, “Creon himself assumes his sovereignty only by virtue of the kinship line that enables that succession, how he becomes, as it were, unmanned by Antigone’s defiance” (6). Simply put, Creon becomes a leader because only males were seen as fit to rule, and yet it was a woman who was able to stand up to his unfair laws and show him the errors of his ways. This literary situation should naturally lead teachers to engage students in class discussions about gender roles both then and now, women’s rights, and what citizens here in the 21st century can do to ensure a more fair and equitable future for everyone—in both the private and public realms.

Before students can even begin to think about these questions posed by the play, they must first be able to read and comprehend the play itself. In order to achieve this, the play will be read aloud as a whole group with some students taking on the role of “actor” while the rest take on the role of “director.” This strategy was proposed by Joanne Brown, author of the paper “Teaching Drama: Text and Performance,” which was presented at the Annual Meeting

of the National Council of Teachers of English. She asserts that these “two related techniques can help students engage their imaginations in this way: they can study the text as an actor and explore the role of a particular character or they can position themselves as the director, whose main job is to clear a space in which actors can liberate their imaginations” (Brown 4-5).

To complete this activity, directors would be tasked with reading a short summary of each act the night before the act was to be read in class. The next day, each actor would be put in a group with directors who would inform the actor about the scene and what happens to the character in the scene. All students in the group would work together to answer guided questions that will help them make acting choices about the scene. This guided worksheet would include questions such as, “What do you know about the personality traits of this character?”, “What is this character’s relationship to the other characters?”, and “What are some specific things the actor could do to help this character come alive for the audience?” This one activity would encourage collaborative group work, critical thinking, and would help ensure that all students are equally involved in the unit.

Finally, in order for students to fully understand each of the main characters from *Antigone*, this unit plan employs a “writing to learn” approach. Duane H. Roen, professor of English at Arizona State University, explains that this technique “encourages readers to respond individually and privately before choosing how to respond publicly, particularly in a classroom filled with peers” (226). Specifically, he suggests that students create Bio Poems for each character in which students would analyze the character’s physical traits, familial relationships, and even inner desires. Undoubtedly, taking the time to gain this deeper insight into each character would be the first step to understanding the plot as a whole for many students.

There are other activities within this unit that also employ the “writing to learn” approach. For instance, before reading the play, students will be asked to sketch their own family tree in their journals before the teacher will show them what Antigone’s family tree looks like. Another journal prompt asks them to reflect on a time when they have disagreed with a parent and how they ended up handling the situation. Both of these examples should help students make connections between the play and their own lives while also giving them an opportunity to think about the ideas in the story before sharing them in a whole group discussion.

Ironically, this ancient Greek play proves to be a valuable resource for teachers to begin preparing their students to be thoughtful and responsible citizens of the modern world. This *Antigone* unit, put together with the state standards and insight from a variety of experts in mind, should help guide students through the process of not only reading and understanding Sophocles’ famous play, but of digging deeper to use the text to examine their own moral values.

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Antigone Unit Plan

Week 1

Day 1:

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.9-10.1

Objective: I can respectfully participate in collaborative discussions with my teacher and peers about moral issues present in *Antigone*.

Activities:

1. Bellringer: Students will answer anticipation guide questions in their journal.
2. Students will discuss anticipation guide questions in small groups.
3. Small groups will share their thoughts during whole group discussion.

Day 2:

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.9-10.1

Objective: I can use textual evidence from informational articles to learn more about Sophocles and complete Oedipus' family tree.

Activities:

1. Bellringer: Students will sketch their own family tree in their journal.
2. Students will read an informational article on the story of Oedipus.
3. Students will work with their small group to create Oedipus' family tree on poster paper at their station.

Day 3:

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.L.9-10.6

Objective: I can acquire and use accurately unknown or important words necessary for understanding *Antigone*.

Activities:

1. Bellringer: Students will use context clues to predict what five of our vocab words mean when used in a sentence.
2. Students will use online dictionaries to complete the LINC'S vocabulary worksheet (includes term, reminding word, linking story, linking picture, and definition).

Day 4:

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10

Objective: I can use my close reading techniques to comprehend a scene from *Antigone* and make acting and directing choices about it.

Activities:

1. Bellringer: The teacher will "introduce" characters to the class and assign roles.
2. Students will complete a close reading activity of one beginning scene from *Antigone*.
3. "Actors" will meet with "directors" to discuss acting choices for tomorrow.

Day 5:

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10

Objective: I can proficiently read and comprehend the prologue and scene 1 of *Antigone*.

Activities:

1. Bellringer: Students will preview 5 comprehension questions to listen for during today's reading.
2. Whole group reading of the prologue and scene 1 of *Antigone*.
3. Exit ticket: Students answer the 5 comprehension questions in their journal.

Week 2

Day 6:

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3

Objective: I can analyze how the complex characters in *Antigone* develop over the course of the text by creating a Bio Poem.

Activities:

1. Bellringer: Students write a Bio Poem about themselves in their journal.
2. Students write character Bio Poems with their small groups (There will be four groups: Antigone, Ismene, Creon, and Haemon).
3. One person from each group reads their Bio Poem aloud to the class.

Day 7:

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10

Objective: I can use my close reading techniques to comprehend a scene from *Antigone* and make acting and directing choices about it.

Activities:

1. Bellringer: Teacher will "introduce" any new upcoming characters and assign new roles.
2. Students will complete a close reading activity of one middle scene from *Antigone*.
3. "Actors" will meet with "directors" to discuss acting choices for tomorrow.

Day 8:

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10

Objective: I can proficiently read and comprehend scenes 2 and 3 of *Antigone*.

Activities:

1. Bellringer: Students will preview 5 comprehension questions to listen for during today's reading.
2. Whole group reading of the scenes 2 and 3 of *Antigone*.
3. Exit ticket: Students answer the 5 comprehension questions in their journal.

Day 9:

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10

Objective: I can use my close reading techniques to comprehend a scene from *Antigone* and make acting and directing choices about it.

Activities:

1. Bellringer: Teacher will “introduce” any new upcoming characters and assign new roles.
2. Students will complete a close reading activity of one ending scene from *Antigone*.
3. “Actors” will meet with “directors” to discuss acting choices for tomorrow.

Day 10:

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.10

Objective: I can proficiently read and comprehend scenes 4 and 5 of *Antigone* as well as the exodus.

Activities:

1. Bellringer: Students will preview 5 comprehension questions to listen for during today’s reading.
2. Whole group reading of scenes 4 and 5 of *Antigone* as well as the exodus.
3. Exit ticket: Students answer the 5 comprehension questions in their journal.

Week 3**Day 11:**

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2

Objective: I can further analyze the themes in *Antigone* by examining two important quotes from former US presidents.

Activities:

1. Bellringer: Students will respond to the following prompt in their journal: Have you ever disagreed with a decision made by a parent? How did you handle it? Was that the right way to handle it? Why or why not?
2. Students will complete “Two Presidents, Two Quotes” activity about resistance to government with a partner.

Day 12:

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7

Objective: I can analyze the representation of moral themes in both the play and the movie of *Antigone*.

Activities:

1. Students will watch the first half of the 2019 movie version of *Antigone*, which is a modern adaptation.
2. They will answer questions that help them to compare and contrast the characters, themes, acting choices, directing choices, and moral depictions in the play versus the movie.

Day 13:

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.7

Objective: I can analyze the representation of moral themes in both the play and the movie of *Antigone*.

Activities:

1. Students will watch the second half of the 2019 movie version of *Antigone*, which is a modern adaptation.
2. They will answer questions that help them to compare and contrast the characters, themes, acting choices, directing choices, and moral depictions in the play versus the movie.

Day 14:

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1

Objective: I can write an argumentative essay about a moral question raised in *Antigone*. I can use valid reasoning and relevant evidence to support my claim.

Activities:

1. The teacher will have 4 moral questions on the board when students come in on the topics of government, leadership, resistance, kinship, and gender roles.
2. Students will choose 1 of the 4 prompts and begin brainstorming/ prewriting. They are working to answer their question in a 5-paragraph essay with evidence from the play.

Day 15:

CCSS: CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.9-10.1

Objective: I can write an argumentative essay about a moral question raised in *Antigone*. I can use valid reasoning and relevant evidence to support my claim.

Activities:

1. Teacher should check that each student has finished the brainstorming/ prewriting work from yesterday.
2. Students will begin writing their essays with teacher guidance.
3. Students should finish writing over the weekend as finished essays are due on Monday.

Antigone Unit

Example Journal Prompts

Day 1: Reflect on the following ANTICIPATION QUESTIONS in your journal and then write at least a two sentence response for each:

- What are the qualities that make someone a good leader and why?
- Should we follow our government's laws or God's law and why?
- Is it more important to be loyal to our country or our family and why?
- What should we do when we disagree with the government and why?
- Should men and women follow traditional gender roles – why or why not?

Day 2: Show me how much you know about your own family by sketching as much of your FAMILY TREE as you can in your journal today! Later we will compare this to the family tree of the main character in our new play.

Day 6: Using the following guidelines, write a BIO POEM for one of the three main characters from the play (Antigone, Ismene, or Creon).

Bio Poem Format:

First Name

Four adjectives to describe this person

Brother/ sister of... (Or Son/ daughter of...)

Lover of... (People or ideas)

Who feels... (What is important to them?)

Who needs... (2-3 things)

Who gives... (What do they give to those around them?)

Who fears... (1-3 things)

Who would like to see... (a place, an item, or a person)

Resident of... (Where do they live?)

Last Name

Day 11: Have you ever disagreed with a decision made by a parent? How did you handle it? Was that the right way to handle it? Why or why not?



Antigone Unit

Example Actor/Director Discussion Sheet



Directions: Today each actor will be meeting with one or more directors. Use the following questions to facilitate the discussion within your group. Each group member will be responsible for turning in a separate sheet.

1. What character has your group been assigned to focus on? Who will play this character?
2. What do we know about the physical description of this character?
3. What do we know about the personality traits of this character? What are their fears/hopes/dreams?
4. What role will this character play in Act 1? Think about their relationship to other characters as well as how they drive the plot or develop the theme.
5. Write down two specific things that the actor can do to make this character come to life for the audience. Is there a certain way they should speak, stand, dress, or act?

Antigone Unit Argumentative Essay Guidelines

Directions: For your final assessment in our *Antigone* unit, each student will choose one of the questions below to answer in a five-paragraph argumentative essay. These are the questions we have discussed in your anticipation guide and throughout this unit. Make sure that you can support your answer to the question with EVIDENCE from the text. Essays should be written using MLA format.

Question Options:

- What are the qualities that make someone a good leader and why?
- Should we follow our government's laws or God's law and why?
- Is it more important to be loyal to our country or our family and why?
- What should we do when we disagree with the government and why?
- Should men and women follow traditional gender roles – why or why not?

Prewriting: Use the following outline to begin planning your essay.

Introduction:

- Hook-
- Transition-
- Thesis- (Answer the question and list 3 reasons)

Body paragraph 1: (Reason #1)

- Evidence-
- Explanation-

Body paragraph 2: (Reason #2)

- Evidence-
- Explanation-

Body Paragraph 3: (Reason #3)

- Evidence-
- Explanation-

Conclusion:

- Restate thesis-
- Closing-

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December 13, 2019

Feminism and Racial Studies in Sue Monk Kidd's *The Secret Life of Bees*

“She liked to tell everybody that women made the best beekeepers, ‘cause they have a special ability built into them to love creatures that sting” (Kidd 143). This line from Sue Monk Kidd's novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*, delivers a strong feminist message and is spoken from the mouth of a strong, African American female character. At first glance, this novel might seem like any typical coming of age story about a young girl, but in order to fully understand *The Secret Life of Bees*, one must analyze the author, the characters, and the setting through both a feminist and racial lens. One can begin to do this by consulting expert theorists in these fields such as feminist theorists Hélène Cixous and Judith Butler and racial theorists W.E.B. Dubois and bell hooks, who argued that women and African Americans were far more nuanced and complex than they were being depicted.

Originally published in 2001, *The Secret Life of Bees* revolves around its main character, Lily Owens, whose mother was killed in an accident with a firearm when Lily was only four years old. This leaves Lily living with her abusive father, T-Ray, and her African American nanny, Rosaleen, in the novel's exposition. However, after a scuffle with the law, Lily and Rosaleen soon decide to run away to Tiburon, South Carolina, a place they chose after finding an address on the back of an old honey jar once belonging to Lily's mother. Here, they end up finding solace while living with three African American beekeepers, May, June, and August, who teach

them about love, family, religion, and even about the secret behind Lily's mother's death. Set in the south during the 1960's, it is easy to see how issues like feminism and race might come to play a part in Lily's coming of age story.

Before beginning to analyze the book itself, one should first look at the woman who wrote it: Sue Monk Kidd. Kidd grew up in a small town in Georgia during the 1960s, a piece of her past that she says greatly influenced her first novel, *The Secret Life of Bees*. She explains, "I vividly remember the summer of 1964 with its voter registration drives, boiling racial tensions, and the erupting awareness of the cruelty of racism" ("The Secret Life of Bees- Reading Group Guide"). She also had bees that lived in her walls, a black nanny, and wanted to be a writer just like her main character, Lily. Other than that, she claims that she and Lily are more different than they are alike. Finally, she says she wrote this novel because she was "compelled because it was a genuine impulse from deep within and had a lot of passion attached to it" ("The Secret Life of Bees- Reading Group Guide"). Kidd almost felt duty-bound to write a story about the South, about segregation, and about sisterhood.

Since women are so central to this novel, one theorist that may help readers view this piece through a feminist lens is French feminist critic, theorist, novelist, and playwright Hélène Cixous, and her essay entitled "The Laugh of the Medusa." In this essay, Cixous proposes that, "Woman must write her self: must write about women and bring women to writing, from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies—for the same reasons, by the same law, with the same fatal goal" (Cixous 1942). For centuries, women's voices have been suppressed, having to take a backseat to the renowned male writers of their time. However, one sex can never fully comprehend the inner lives, thoughts, and feelings of another sex and

thus, men could never give a truly accurate depiction of women in their writing. This is the reason it is so important for women to take on the challenge of portraying the full and true lives of women in their own writing, a challenge that Kidd has accepted.

Sue Monk Kidd, as a female author, brought women to her writing by making not one but five female characters the centerpiece of her novel. Kidd did this knowingly and purposefully, as highlighted on her website when she clarifies that "...down deep I wanted a way to write about the strength, wisdom, and bonds of women." She also adds that "when women bond together in a community in such a way that 'sisterhood' is created, it gives them an accepting and intimate forum to tell their stories and have them heard and validated by others" ("The Secret Life of Bees—Reading Group Guide"). She chose to highlight both the individual, inner lives of women as well as the intimate relationships between women, a topic that only a female author would have the full ability and knowledge to write about. This insight into the mind of the author makes it plausible to classify this novel as a feminist text in many ways.

When writers create fictional female characters, each one should be distinctive instead of all of them being stereotypically analogous. Just like no two women in real life are the same, neither should any two female characters be exactly the same. Cixous's "The Laugh of the Medusa" points out that "there is, at this time, no general woman, no one typical woman," and that "you can't talk about female sexuality, uniform, homogenous, classifiable into codes—any more than you can talk about one unconscious resembling another" (Cixous 1943).

Impressively, Kidd was able to achieve this exclusivity in the portrayal of all of her female characters.

Despite some of the things they have in common, all of the female characters in *The Secret Life of Bees* also have their own unique characteristics. For example, Lily is a fourteen year old Caucasian teen who is still trying to figure out the world, while Rosaleen is an uneducated but hard-working black woman who has strong convictions and stands up for what she believes in. Even the three African American beekeeping sisters have very unique personalities. August is wise and matriarchal (seen many times throughout the book as she gives advice to Lily), June is strong and stubborn (as seen when she refuses to marry her longtime boyfriend), and May is optimistic and naive (as depicted through her childlike personality). None of them are quintessentially feminine, that is to say none of them are playing the part of a typical 1960's housewife, and yet all of them paint their own distinctive picture of what a real woman looks like.

Another theorist who brings her own distinctive ideas to the feminist discussion is American philosopher and gender theorist Judith Butler, and her essay entitled "Gender Trouble." In this essay, Butler suggests that gender is merely a social construct and that "...acts, gestures, enactments, generally construed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means" (Butler 2548). Namely, when it comes to women, they tend take on certain roles, acts, and appearances based on reinforced societal paradigms rather than acting out their true internal personality. However, a proper feminist text would possess the ability to address this issue and to create plot and characters that challenge this notion and rise above the norms of society, which is exactly what Sue Monk Kidd's novel is able to do through at least two of its main characters.

One character in *The Secret Life of Bees* that seems to understand, and reject, her performative gender role is June Boatwright. Instead of accepting the typical role of dutiful wife, she continually refuses to marry her boyfriend, Neil, despite repeated proposals. When he asks her to marry him, she responds by asking, "Why does it always come back to this? Get this through your head: I'm not getting married. Not yesterday, not today, not next year!" (Kidd 132). Clearly, June does not prescribe to the idea that all women need to get married and become housewives in order to find happiness. June is also an accomplished musician who finds fulfillment through her music and through the relationship she has with her sisters, which serves to highlight her willingness to step outside of her gender norms.

Arguably, the character of August Boatwright breaks away from the traditional gender roles even more clearly and more purposefully than June. First off, August was extremely independent and found her own career, as she explains, "I studied at a Negro teacher's college in Maryland...Eventually I got a job teaching history" (Kidd 145). When it comes to her relationship with men, she also explains that, "I decided against marrying altogether. There were enough restrictions in my life without someone expecting me to wait on him hand and foot" (Kidd 145). Both of these sentiments show the reader that August values her freedom more than she values her role as someone's wife. Even though society might be sending her the message that she needs to be a wife and mother to be fulfilled, she rejects that stereotypical gender role and opts for an education and career instead. Adding characters like June and August into her novel was a great way for Kidd to show young readers that people do not have to accept the gender role prescribed to them by society.

Besides viewing *The Secret Life of Bees* through a feminist lens, one must also view it through a racial lens in order to more fully analyze and understand it. For this task, one can refer to American sociologist, historian, civil rights activist, and author W. E. B. DuBois and his essay entitled "Criteria of Negro Art." DuBois asks his readers to "Suppose the only Negro who survived some centuries hence was the Negro painted by white Americans in the novels and essays they have written. What would people a hundred years ago say of black Americans?" (DuBois 874). Just like Cixous's suggestions that women needed to write about women, DuBois suggests that there is a need for people of color to write about people of color. Only an African American writer would be capable of painting a full and accurate portrait of what life is like for an African American person—even if it is just a fictional one. Unfortunately, this is where *The Secret Life of Bees* seems to fall short.

Although Sue Monk Kidd made a worthy attempt at highlighting multiple African American viewpoints in this novel, she is still a white author trying to imagine and create black characters. On her website, Kidd explains where the inspiration behind her black characters came from saying, "I, too, had an African American caretaker" and "I inadvertently stumbled upon an array of mysterious black-skinned Madonnas" ("The Secret Life of Bees- Reading Group Guide"). Both experiences help to explain why she had an interest in writing about black women, but neither experience gives her the insight needed to be able to write from a black woman's point of view. For example, the novel ends with this great realization for Lily, that she has more mother figures than most girls, but Kidd does not show this ending from the African American perspective. This almost gives readers the sense that the black characters were only

minor characters in the story, or that they just existed to help Lily, the white main character, through her coming-of-age journey.

Dubois continues explaining his argument, pointing out the reasons why it is so important for black writers to be the ones writing about black people. He explains that all art, including writing, is used for propaganda. He claims, "I do not care a damn for any art that is not used for propaganda. But I do care when propaganda is confined to one side while the other is stripped and silent" (Dubois 875). Dubois is pointing out here that if one side (the white side) is putting out biased information in order to persuade the public to think or behave a certain way, it is only just that the other side (the black side) be given the same voice, or the same opportunity. Regrettably, this opportunity was never given in Kidd's novel.

In relation to *The Secret Life of Bees*, it can be said that only the white, female perspective was heard and therefore, only the white female perspective had the opportunity to employ its propaganda techniques. Readers got to see black characters the way in which a white woman wanted them to be seen, in alignment with her own views and experiences, not necessarily in alignment with reality, or the way in which people of color would want readers to view them. In chapter one, Rosaleen, an African American character, steals a fan from a church and pours the spit from her chewing tobacco on a man's shoes. If an African American author had written this, they may not have wanted readers to think that all people of color were confrontational individuals who broke the law. While it is safe to say that Dubois would not consider this text to be a good representation of African American literature, this doesn't mean that the characters can't reinforce stereotypes.

Finally, one can look to American professor, civil rights activist, and feminist author bell hooks and her essay entitled "Postmodern Blackness" to better view *The Secret Life of Bees* through a racial lens. Hooks takes issue "with the way in which the focus on 'Otherness and difference' that is often alluded to in these works seems to have little concrete impact as an analysis or standpoint that might change the nature and direction of postmodernist theory" (hooks 2510). She is asking, why emphasize the differences between whites and blacks, instead of their similarities, if it is not going to help black writers and theorists make strides in postmodern theory? Why should black people, especially black women, be considered the exception instead of the rule? She is also pointing out that if "otherness" is going to be emphasized, then this politics of difference "should incorporate the voices of displaced, marginalized, exploited, and oppressed black people" (hooks 2511). This book, as has already been addressed, only incorporates the voice of one white author, who grew up with many privileges in life, instead of the oppressed voices of any minority writers.

Unfortunately, *The Secret Life of Bees* does seem to highlight the "otherness" of its African American characters. This can be seen when the main character, Lily Owens, admits to some of the prejudiced ideas that she had been taught by her father. She says, "T. Ray did not think colored women were smart...I thought they could be smart, but not as smart as me, me being white" (Kidd 78). This shows that not only did Lily see all people of color as "other" from herself, but in some ways, she even saw them as inferior. Additionally, when Zach is arrested for being part of the group of kids that threw a glass bottle, Lily is not arrested even though she was part of the same group. Again, this is showing that Zach is being treated as "other" from Lily because of his skin color. These examples are effective in illustrating some of the attitudes

of people during this time period, but they are not effective in illustrating the human qualities that all people possess that make them all part of the same human race. This information can be added to the mounting pile of evidence that proves that this text cannot be considered a good representation of African American literature.

Furthermore, this is not the only time that this novel points out stark differences between its black characters and its white ones. For example, at least two of the women of color in *The Secret Life of Bees* previously worked as housekeepers or caregivers for white families. The character of Rosaleen works for T. Ray as Lily's nanny at the beginning of the story after previously working for the Owens family in their peach grove. And in chapter twelve, August reveals to Lily, "You remember how I told you I worked as a housekeeper back in Richmond, before I got my teaching job? Well, that was in your mother's house" (Kidd 236). Creating characters that hold this occupation, an occupation of inferiority, creates an even wider rift between the two races, making the reader more aware of the contrast between light and dark, rich and poor, privileged and oppressed.

On the other hand, by the end of the novel, Lily *does* come to understand that these black women are not as different from her as she once thought. After getting to know August, Lily realizes, "All I could think *was August is so intelligent, so cultured*, and I was surprised by this. That's what let me know I had some prejudice buried inside me" (Kidd 78). In many ways she even comes to view them as mother figures to her. On the very last page of the book, Lily looks at the women on the porch and gushes, "And there they were. All these mothers. I have more mothers than any eight girls off the street" (Kidd 302). Lily finally does come to the realization that she and August may have more in common than she once thought; that they

are both part of the same human race. She even comes to view August as a member of her family, despite her skin color. While this fact alone does not make the novel qualify as African American literature, it does show an attempt by Kidd to allow a variety of voices and opinions to be heard in her work.

Ultimately, analyzing texts through multiple lenses can help readers begin to get a clearer, more complete understanding of the novel's complexity. When it comes to *The Secret Life of Bees*, Cixous and Butler helped us view the story through a feminist lens, which allowed us to appreciate that this was a novel written by a woman about a group of strong, unique women who not only understand their prescribed gender roles, but often reject them. On the other hand, Dubois and Butler helped us view the story through a racial lens to see that although it features women of color, it is still a story written from a white point of view, and it is still a story that seems to highlight the "otherness" of the black characters. In this instance, it appears that Kidd has achieved her goal of writing a meaning text about the bonds of women while not being able to fully and accurately represent the African American experience.

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Literacy Narrative Analysis

Aristotle once said that to write well, one must express themselves like the common people but think like a wise man. This one sentence hints at his approach to writing, but there are many other different ways one might choose to write or to teach others to write in academic contexts. When I was in high school, I was taught writing in a way that differs greatly from the way I teach it today, or even the ideal way that I *would* teach it in a perfect world. This is because as the time and place of writing changes, the purposes change along with it. Ultimately, no one way of teaching writing is the correct way, it just all depends on the purpose. This paper serves to highlight the writing pedagogies that helped develop my own writing literacy, the pedagogies that inform my teaching philosophy and course design today, and the pedagogies I hope to employ in the future.

When I was a freshman in high school, I remember having a composition notebook that I carried around and wrote in every day. At the beginning of every English period, there would be a creative writing prompt on the board that allowed us to respond in whatever way we wanted; the only requirement was that we wrote for all five minutes. If our mind was focused on something else, maybe something we were struggling with at home, we could ignore the prompt and write about that instead. Anything went, as long as we were putting pencil to paper every single day.

Obviously, this teacher's style would fall under the category of expressive writing. Chris Burnham, co-author of the expressive pedagogy chapter of *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* explains that "Expressivism places the writer at the center of its theory, and pedagogy, assigning highest value to the writer's imaginative, psychological, social, and spiritual development and how that development influences individual consciousness and social behavior" (113). In other words, my freshman English teacher was using this type of writing to help her young students to find their own creative voice and become familiar with their own thoughts and feelings.

There are many studies that suggest that expressive writing could have other benefits as well. Researchers and medical experts at Cambridge University Press claim in their article entitled "Emotional and Physical Health Benefits of Expressive Writing" that "writing about traumatic, stressful or emotional events has been found to result in improvements in both physical and psychological health, in non-clinical and clinical populations" (Baikie and Wilhelm 338). Some of those improvements even include working memory, social and linguistic behavior, and grade point average. Consequently, even though some teachers may think they are simply using expressive writing as a stepping stone to more academic types of writing, they may actually be helping their students become better at managing stress and focusing on their school work.

As I got further along in high school, the focus shifted from creative, expressivist writing to the kind of writing that was supposed to prepare me for the high expectations of college. Almost all of these assignments were formatted in the same way: the teacher would give us guidelines, help us choose a topic, and then walk us down to the school library to look up

information, either in books or online, about our topic. For example, I can recall one assignment where we had to write a ten-page biography for someone that influenced American history. I chose Walt Disney, and I spent weeks reading various books about him and compiling important information about his life on numbered notecards. Then, my teacher demonstrated how to correctly format our essay and gave us in-class time to work on it with her guidance.

Now I know that this theory of writing is known as researched writing. Rebecca Moore Howard and Sandra Jamieson, co-authors of the researched writing chapter of *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, clarify that “the research paper was originally assigned to help students learn research skills and practice incorporating sources in an extended, often argument- driven, paper” (232). My teachers knew that instead of the creative writing I had done as a freshman, I would most likely be doing much more structured, academic writing in college that would require prior knowledge and experience. I would need to know how to correctly look up and cite my sources in order to back up what I was saying in my essays, and they were building a foundation to help me be able to do that.

What I was not taught, however, and what I wish I was taught, is how to understand and paraphrase a source instead of unintentionally plagiarizing from it. Studies have shown that many students simply pull individual sentences from a source without fully understanding the context of the source as a whole. Researchers from the *Writing and Pedagogy* journal explain that “writing from individual sentences places writers in constant jeopardy of working too closely with the language of the source and thus inadvertently plagiarizing; and it also does not compel the writer to understand the source” (Howard et al. 177). Looking back, I know that I was doing this exact thing in high school, and even in the beginning of college, without realizing

that what I was doing was wrong. I hope that today I am doing a better job of taking the time to teach my students about the correct way of citing sources in a research paper.

Teaching Philosophy Analysis

It has been thirteen years since I was in high school, and now I am on the other side of the desk, no longer as the writer, but as the teacher of writing. One thing that I really try to focus on is helping my students understand the world that they live in, think critically about it, and respond to it after they have formed their *own* opinions. These opinions might be about politics, religion, gun control, sexuality, gender, or any number of other controversial issues that are, or may become, relevant to their lives. When it comes to how I teach writing, this way of thinking falls under the category of the critical pedagogy.

Critical pedagogy focuses on guiding students into becoming both serious and free-thinking citizens of the world. Ann George, author of the critical pedagogies chapter of *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies* textbook, describes it like this: “Critical pedagogies envision a society not simply pledged to, but successfully enacting, the principles of freedom and social justice” (77). She also quotes Brazilian educator Paulo Freire who proposed that the goal was to give students “the ability to define, analyze, and problematize the economic, political, and cultural forces that shape their lives” (78). In other words, our students should be moving from a passive group that follows instructions to more active, individual participants in their own educational journey.

My students inspired one piece of critical writing that we did last year when they all stood in silence around the front of our school to protest the lack of gun control in the United

States. I could tell this was a relevant issue that they were opinionated about, but when discussing the issue with some of them in casual conversation, I could also tell that they were not as informed on the matter as I had thought. So, I gathered up several recent articles on both sides of the debate, and we educated ourselves. Then we discussed what we had read as we brainstormed the argumentative essay that would come out of this. We wrote our essays in the form of a letter to the president, making sure to bring up each counterargument that he might make before refuting it with evidence from the articles we read. This assignment, more than any that year, grabbed the students' attention and made learning seem like something that they could actually use in the real world and not just at school.

This type of writing is important because it turns writing into a powerful tool for students to use in the future. Their words could be the words to change an influential politician's mind, or their words could be used in a speech that helps them to become that influential leader themselves. They are no longer writing just for the purpose of meeting the requirements of an assignment in order to receive a grade. They are now writing for a much larger purpose, and hopefully, a purpose that actually matters to them and that can enact a positive change. Mike Wallace and Alison Wray, authors of *Critical Reading and Writing for Postgraduates*, take it a step further and add that "critical reading and self-critical writing are highly transferable skills, crucial to effective professional academic publications, presentations, and research grants proposals" (section xi). Whether they go on to use critical writing in their personal or professional lives, it is clear that this is at least one skill that they can use far beyond the high school classroom.

Curriculum

The class I have taught for the majority of my career is a sophomore English course. When I think about the syllabus that we cover in this class, the biggest writing pedagogy I see evidenced is the literature and composition pedagogy. Basically, this is the idea of thinking critically about, and responding to, the literature that we read, or, as Peter Elbow puts it in his article, “Literature and composition people need to get off those diverging escalators and join forces. Not just learn from each other, but live with each other” (544). My English 10, high school level course, aims to marry the two together in a way that gives context to everything that we learn.

In the textbook, *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, Christine Farris highlights the two opposing schools of thought on this theory of writing in her chapter called Literature and Composition. She explains that while some are “making the case for reading and writing as mutual acts of interpretation,” others claim that “the return of literary interpretation comes at the expense of attention to students’ writing processes and production of texts” (164- 165). For me, the choice is easy because I teach a course that is not exclusively a writing course, but an English course designed to cover reading, writing, grammar, vocabulary, and more. For me, it is like killing two birds with one stone to use the literature we are already working with as the context to our informational and argumentative essays. In fact, I typically use the novel we are reading as the basis for most of what I teach, including vocabulary and grammar.

In each of our four quarters, there is at least one writing assignment in which students are asked to respond to a novel or play that we have covered during the quarter. For example,

during the fourth quarter of the school year, students read John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*. After thoroughly reading and discussing the novel, students are assigned a five-paragraph essay in which they explain what they think is the theme of the book and why, giving evidence for each reason. This assignment is easily differentiated because higher-level students are able to choose any theme that they can justify, middle-level students brainstorm possible themes with teacher guidance, and lower-level students are given the theme of "loneliness" to identify examples. In the end, every student is given the opportunity to practice responding critically to the literature in some way.

Besides the pedagogies we employ when teaching writing, it is also important for teachers to consider the best tools to use with these pedagogies. For example, another aspect of writing that I tend to focus on in this sophomore level English class is new media. According to Robert Logan, author of *Understanding New Media*, new media refers to "those digital media that are interactive, incorporate two-way communication, and involve some form of computing" (4). He goes on to say that it is also "very easily processed, stored, transformed, retrieved, hyperlinked and, perhaps most radical of all, easily searched for and accessed" (7). All of my students are using new media in the form of computers, cell phones, internet, social media, and more in their everyday lives. Additionally, they will most likely be expected to know how to use it effectively in their future careers. It is for this purpose that it is important for teachers to use new media in the classroom as much as possible.

Most teachers try to use technology in the form of using laptops for internet research and typing up essays, as do I. Moreover, all of my students also use Google classroom to access

assignments and collaborate in real time with peer group members. One of the most creative ways that we use new media in the classroom is when I teach characterization for Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar*. One year during this unit, students were put into groups and given the task of creating Facebook pages for the five main characters. This required them to think about basic character traits such as name, hometown, birthday, and occupation, but it also required them to think about more in-depth traits such as what the character valued and would spend his/ her time posting about if they had a social media page. Watching my students' humor and creativity come out during this activity helped me to realize that using new media in the classroom "can be a positive source of experimentation and innovation" (Brooke 180).

In the future, I actually hope to expand the way I teach writing to include many more of the pedagogies discussed in this paper. For example, I would love to incorporate more of the expressive writing that I practiced in high school with my own students in order to help them find their own voice, be creative, and deal with emotional stress and anxiety. I tend to focus most on the kind of writing that they will have to do on their state test when I should really be finding a balance between the skills they need to be successful in school and the skills they need to be successful in life. Consequently, my goal for the future is to branch out and start experimenting with more of a variety of writing pedagogies.

Writing this paper has helped me to reflect on many different aspects of my own writing journey, including how my past writing has influenced the way I currently teach and how my writing philosophy differs from how I am actually teaching. In the future, I know that the most

important thing to continuously ask myself is, "What is the *purpose* of this piece of writing?"

Answering this question is the key to figuring out the best way in which to teach my students how to become stronger writers, and at the end of the day, this is also how I may become a better writer as well.

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