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Amanda Schertzer English MA Portfolio

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Masters Portfolio

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A Final Portfolio

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

Master of Arts in the field of English
with a specialization in
Professional Writing and Rhetoric

April 22, 2021

Analytical Narrative

In the Summer of 2018, I began pursuing a Master of Arts in English with a specialization in Professional Writing and Rhetoric at Bowling Green State University. I began pursuing a specialization in Professional Writing and Rhetoric after graduating with a Bachelor of Arts with a minor in Professional Writing and Rhetoric in the Winter of 2017 from the Ohio State University. I decided to pursue a Master of Arts in English with a specialization in Professional Writing and Rhetoric to supplement the knowledge I had at the time in my professional career. I have worked as a technical writer since 2016 and decided that obtaining a Master of Arts in English with a specialization in Professional Writing and Rhetoric would help me in my current position and may help advance my career prospects. Since attending Bowling Green State University, I have taken only a part-time course load in order to work full-time as a technical writer in addition to working as a technical writing consultant for my consulting business, which I established in 2016. However, this is not a traditional approach to attending graduate school. This is not to be used as an autobiographical background, but instead, impress upon one the corporate background from whence I gained the majority of my knowledge. This non-traditional route heavily influenced my view on many topics covered within my coursework at Bowling Green State University.

The end of my time at BGSU is drawing closer, and as I reflect on my time and works, I still draw closer to the importance of understanding, no matter the topic. As mentioned above, my professional background has heavily influenced by my professional

career. This has affected my view on texts and the importance of reader perception and carried over to my coursework. The following portfolio is a combination of my favorite pieces of work at Bowling Green State University. All of my included works focus on the subject of understanding. In combination with the theories in my essays, this work effectively shows the importance of understanding in every aspect of professional writing and its associated rhetoric. Within my professional career as a technical writer, the idea of understanding is paramount (whether it is reader understanding or writer understanding). I was heavily drawn to this idea during my time spent at Bowling Green State University.

The works included herein address topics such as medical writing, infographics, expressivist pedagogies, and historical approaches to writing youth literature. Please notice that this is a wide variety of topics; however, as a technical writer, this aligns very closely with my work's nature. The field in which one may work as a technical writer can vary drastically, and as a technical writer, one is expected to adjust accordingly. My ability to adapt to new and different writing situations is clear in my field, and the coursework has also aligned accordingly.

Speaking to the first piece included in my portfolio, "Understanding, Retention, and Access as an Explanation for Absence of Medical Writing Style: Historical and Modern Perspectives", this piece originated from the English Course 6410 "Research in Professional/ Technical Writing." Within this course, technical aspects of technical writing and professional writing were heavily discussed. This first work is the substantive research

within this portfolio. This work delves into the current practices and pitfalls within medical writing. I discuss inaccuracies in published research, confusing billing, or general lack of education on medical documentation within this piece. Revisions of this work included four main points. I adjusted the presentation of arguments within this essay. I edited sentence rephrasing within this essay to foster further reader understanding, and I also worked on grammar concerns. Finally, I added supplemental information and current information within this essay's retention section. Creating, researching, and revising this piece has aided my overall understanding of medical writing and my comprehensive understanding of the critical elements within professional writing and technical writing.

The second piece included in my portfolio, "The Infographic: What is it?" this piece originated from the English Course 6460, "Professional Technical Communication and Rhetoric." Within this course, aspects of technical writing and professional writing were heavily discussed. Reader retention and understanding were pillars of our coursework. In addition to this course, infographics have played an integral role in my experience as a technical writer. I have included this essay because of their part in my career. I make infographics monthly (at the minimum), and the creation, research, and revision of this essay have honed this skill even further. Edits made to this include adding supplemental research information, current sources, and refining the essay's overall arguments.

Continuing to the third piece included in my portfolio, "Expressivist Pedagogy: An Applicable Approach?" this piece originated from the English Course 6200, "Teaching of Writing." As this is a pedagogy-based piece, I evaluate my personal philosophy of teaching

and how closely it aligns with Expressivism. Revisions made within this essay include pivoting the focus of my essay a bit. I turned more from a mixed personal narrative/literature review to an essay defining my personal philosophy on teaching writing. This choice helped refine my overall thesis, therefore presenting a well-rounded argument to the reader. The creation, research, and revision aspect of this essay have helped revive the importance of Expressivism in my personal and professional life. As I have reviewed and revised this essay, I see Expressivism as a more applicable pedagogy than ever.

Finally, the fourth piece included in my portfolio, “Historical Fiction or Historical Inaccuracy? Historical Inaccuracies within *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder”, originated from the English Course 6800 “English Seminar: American History of Youth Literature.” This course focused on historical American youth literature and heavily concentrated on the topic of youth literacy. Within this course, aspects of race, gender, and equality were also a centerpiece of discussion. Because of this, my work leaned toward the historical inaccuracies in many youth historical novels, most glaringly in historical inaccuracies throughout the course seemed to be the texts created by Laura Ingalls. Edits made within this essay include relying less on sources and refining my arguments made throughout the essay. In addition to These large-scale adjustments, I expanded my discussion of the historical inaccuracies within *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder and delved further into why the historical inaccuracies occurred. Occurred, examining whether they were because of miseducation or the aspect of a child audience. The creation, research, and revision aspect of this piece have further impressed upon me that understanding is the

paramount aspect of literacy. Throughout this portfolio, the aspect of understanding continues to be stressed for this very reason.

Reviewing the pieces within my portfolio, I have reflected on the time I have spent at Bowling Green State University. My time spent pursuing my Masters of Arts has resulted in hours of rhetorical development, reading analysis, exploring new theories once unknown to me, and developing a greater understanding of professional writing and rhetoric. During this time, I have developed my writing style and have slowly learned that many of the topics touched on; I had to painstakingly teach myself prior to my time at Bowling Green State University to fulfill my position's requirements. However, as my time at Bowling Green State University continued, I realized that though I had taught myself many theories and practices prior to this, I missed many key elements. My time pursuing my Master of Arts has filled in many of the gaps left open by my self-taught learning, and I am more than pleased with my experience and knowledge gained at Bowling Green State University.

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19 April 2020

Understanding, Retention, and Access as an Explanation for Absence of Medical Writing

Style: Historical and Modern Perspectives

In recent years medical writing has made itself the topic of several news stories, whether it has been inaccuracies in published research, confusing billing, or general lack of education on medical documentation. One thing has made itself evident amid these news stories. Medical writing lacks a consistent style. Understanding, retention, and access have become the paramount issues concerned with the lack of consistent style within medical writing. In this research, the aspects of understanding, retention, and access are discussed as a potential reason for lack of consistent style. I aim to understand why this is through a modern and historical lens.

Understanding

Through my research, I have discovered a potential reason for the lack of consistent style in medical writing. One of these issues is the base level of understanding that the medical professional has about the topic at hand. The aspect of understanding makes itself present in many ways. For example, the understanding of a language, this topic being researched many times over, presents itself as a significant part of understanding in medical

writing. According to Antic et al., One reason for lack of understanding of medical writing on the part of the medical professional may be due to a Non-Anglophone author. Antic et al. explain that “English has emerged as the main language for publication of scientific and medical research and is often used in international gatherings of specialists in biomedicine” (424). The prevalence of English as the main publishing language for medical texts can present an issue for non-native English speakers. However, Antic et al. clarifies that “This trend facilitates smoother communication between scientists and, consequently, more rapid progress in science” (424). The determination of English as the main publishing language sets some basic rules for writing practices. However, this determination may negatively affect the consistent style because of the writer's understanding of the English language.

Again, the issue of understanding in terms of language is brought up in research. Connor’s research also argues a matter of understanding concerning the language in which the text is written: “The change of a letter in the technical communication article, however, raises several questions: did the investigator misquote her source? Did her source misprint the translation? Did the translator mistranslate the Latin? Did the translator deliberately change the sense of the Latin? Did the translator use a different edition of the Latin text? Did the 17th-century printer deliberately change the Latin? Did the printer introduce a typographical error in the Latin?” (Connor 222). Translation provides a potential hindrance to understanding. A misstep in translation can affect the understanding by the reader, and

more directly, the misunderstanding of the translator can influence the entire document being translated.

In this research, a trend has presented itself concerning the education of medical professionals. This trend of a lack of understanding, in combination with a general understanding of the English language, have become the two most prominent focal points of the understanding arm of this research. Juarez and Kenet argue that one of the main issues within medical writing is a lack of understanding brought about by a lack of education on behalf of the medical professional. Juarez and Kenet explain that “Despite its importance, scientific writing is not part of the mainstream curriculum” (Juarez 1). Seeing a problem in curriculum, Juarez and Kenet set out to research the subject to solve this issue. The study was conducted through voluntary involvement through participation in an independent studies course or summer research internship, as they note: “One strategy used to teach scientific writing is holding a journal club-style discussion of primary research literature that the students are asked to read. However, this activity can result in a passive learning experience and limit the development of trainees’ scientific writing skills.” This course of pedagogy would not be as effective as they were hoping. Juarez and Kenet proceeded to improve by stating, “In order to improve trainees’ written communication skills, we tested an exercise that involved generating a revised article describing prior research, in essence, ‘translating’ the science into basic language” (1). The intended result in the Juarez study was that of active learning. “Their first task was to read a few scientific articles.” (Juarez 1). From here, club-

style discussions began based on the participants understanding of concepts within the scientific articles.

A significant issue of this study was found to be understanding on behalf of the medical professional: “In the past, when the students read the assigned articles, they often were not able to assess the experiments’ significance because of a lack of context for the studies.” (Juarez. 2) The students did not have enough information to understand the concepts they were reading accurately. Concisely put, “Reading scientific articles requires more critical thinking than reading other types of articles. The reader needs to be able to understand the data and compare the results with previous studies.” (Juarez. 2) Again, we see that the issue of understanding is at the core of medical writing issues.

This lack of understanding in medical writing may also be due to a lack of education. Pagano and Mair researched in 1986 via a questionnaire on this topic. “A study was undertaken both to evaluate how medical students are taught to write patient records and to examine the writing done by doctors” (331). This reoccurring aspect of research makes itself even more captivating. This occurrence further stresses the argument that the researcher is compounding their cries for education concerning medical writing. Based on Pagano and Mair’s research, “A single questionnaire was sent to 84 medical school professors, 20 law school faculty, and five practicing attorneys. The questionnaire asked how medical records were used and what the legal implications were in authoring a patient record. The medical professionals were also asked how their schools taught medical writing.” The findings from

this questionnaire indicated an issue of education, as it was discovered that, according to the participants surveyed, “most medical schools teach less than ten hours of medical writing in their curricula and that patient records are not written with an understanding of the various audiences, purposes, and uses for medical documents” (Pagano and Mair 331). Throughout the study, the issue of understanding concerning the audience, purpose, and overall use become the main takeaways.

Another issue of understanding was mentioned by Sharma in their text, *Professional Medical Writing Support: The Need of the Day*: that of understanding of resources available to medical professionals. This again presents itself as an aspect of lack of education, the building block of understanding. Sharma references the findings of a questionnaire sent out by Researchers Natasha Das and Saurendra Das which was sent to 100 surgeons. The study states that there was “... a poor awareness of the fact that professional medical writing support is available and ethical to take. The respondents expressed a great deal of interest in utilizing such a service, if available locally.” (Sharma. 111) This point made by Sharma is very interesting. This issue of understanding the resources available to medical professionals may also be a reason for lack of consistent style in medical writing. The point of this is to say that the overall lack of understanding concerning medical writing is a significant gap in the medical profession.

Shindler, like many others in this body of research, voices concern over lack of education. In Shindler’s research, they pay close attention to clinical case reports. Schindler

states, "... there are hardly any publications concerned with determining the key quality features of CSRs [Case Study Reports]. This aspect is also often missing in medical writing textbooks." (Shindler. 554) The publication and information concerning clinical case reports within textbooks again points to a lack of education and therefore contributes to the overall lack of understanding about medical writing. Still, this lack of understanding plays a negative role in the development of the medical writing style. First, the medical professional must understand their document (whether that may be case notes, case studies, or research publications) before creating an exemplary version. Without education, these medical professionals are left to their own devices to learn about these documents and create these documents in ways that they assume they should be executed. The assumption should not be the driving force in document creation.

One shining light in this research, however, is that of the evolution of the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*, where a need for understanding prompted the evolution of medical writing style. Atkinson also acknowledges the changes that have occurred in medical writing since its advent by stating, "... few details are known concerning subsequent developments in scientific writing from the eighteenth century onward." (Atkinson. 337) Atkinson's research employed rhetorical and linguistic analysis of "the Edinburgh Medical Journal, the oldest continuing medical journal in English" The investigation Atkinson conducted indicated, "...that the linguistic/rhetorical evolution of medical research writing can be accounted for on the basis of the changing epistemological norms of medical knowledge, the growth of a professional medical community, and the periodic redefinition of medicine vis-a-vis the non-

medical sciences.” (*Atkinson. 337*) Again, understanding seems to be a driving force of medical writing. The need for understanding appears to have influenced the apparent change in Atkinson’s research of the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*. Conversely, a need for understanding that was not met would have resulted in the lack of style development in the *Edinburgh Medical Journal*.

Retention

As mentioned at the beginning, retention presented itself as a paramount issue in medical writing and may be one reason for the lack of consistent style in medical writing. Collier argues that one of the problems in medical writing is a careless writing style, and I believe this is due to a lack of style in medical writing. Collier states that “Not only is careless writing a barrier to publication, it makes it more difficult for peers to understand and build on other researchers’ work. Poor communication limits the impact of medical research, so clinicians and patients ultimately suffer as well.” (1407) As Collier states, careless writing practices can have dire consequences: “Vague and ambiguous clinical practice guidelines, for example, have been linked to medical errors and inconsistent interpretation.¹” (1407). Moreover, Collier argues for a higher overall quality of writing in the world of medical writing, which, as you will see throughout this research, is a constant plea.

Howes et al. provide one reason for issues of retention of medical writing, as Howes et al. use the example of scientists and their interpretations and expert opinions in investigations and court cases. Howes et al. state that “The difficulties for scientists in

explaining their findings and expert opinions to non-scientists have been recognized as a challenge [2]. ... judges and jurors have relied upon forensic scientists facilitate their comprehension of, or educate them about, the science relevant to a case, to inform their finding of fact and decision on a verdict [3]" (Howes et al. 54). Howes et. el. use the example of scientists and their interpretations and expert opinions in investigations and court cases. Howes et al. state that "The difficulties for scientists in explaining their findings and expert opinions to non-scientists have been recognized as a challenge [2]. ... judges and jurors have relied upon forensic scientists facilitate their comprehension of, or educate them about, the science relevant to a case, to inform their finding of fact and decision on a verdict [3]" (Howes et al. 54) Howes et al. continue stating that "Similarly, lawyers require sufficient understanding of the science to examine and cross-examine effectively the expert witnesses at trial [4]" (Howes et al. 54). Again, the issue of retention is a paramount issue in medical writing. The issue of retention is a marker of poor medical writing and its lack of consistent style.

The downfall of relying on perfect reader retention in cases like these is that "In most court cases, forensic scientists are not summonsed to appear, and therefore, are not present to explain their reports [5]." (Howes. 54) A fatal lack of retention can even occur in a wrongful conviction. Howes et al. continue with the clarification that "Therefore, enhancing the readability of expert reports is important as part of an approach that aims to address the issue of communicating expert opinion to non-scientists. Readability has been defined as the ease

with which a text can be read because of the style of writing [7] or the functionality of a document for its audience in the context of its use [8].” (Howes. 54) Again, researchers are making a plea for the development of consistent readability in medical writing. This increased readability will influence the overall style and address the issue of retention that is being encountered here.

Concerning retention, Jackson conducted a study of how technical language affected 95 readers/participants' cognitive satisfaction, comprehension, and ability to recall information; these three points are most interesting for our research. (Jackson. 198) However, the study also focused on the perception of the speaker's credibility and reported intent to comply with advice. Retention in tandem with medical students' education has made itself present in the research world. Many researchers have noted this need. For example, we again see a researcher focuses on medical writing retention by students. Jackson's research focused on "Four cluster samples of university students each viewed a different videotaped message about mononucleosis, a disease this population is at risk for contracting. In each videotape, the independent variables were manipulated." Jackson explains, "... the results indicate that (a) cognitive satisfaction, comprehension, and recall scores were substantially lower in the technical conditions than in the nontechnical conditions” (197). Jackson's second point: “(b) technical and nontechnical conditions did not distinguish subjects' reported intent to comply or perception of the speaker's credibility; and (c) amount of information was not related significantly to any of the five dependent

variables." (197). Jackson's study all funnels into the idea that the role of a medical professional is to discern information to colleagues and patients. The study was specifically composed to simulate the patient-doctor interaction and relationship according to information. Jackson rationalizes the design of their research by stating, "Actual patients and healthy volunteers do not differ in their ability to recall medical information" (200).

Concerning the issue of retention once more, Jackson provided shocking information that "In one study, after as few as 5 min following a consultation, 20 general practice patients had forgotten 50% of the information they had received (Ley, Bradshaw, Eaves, & Walker, 1973)" (201). However, this information was contextualized by the supplemental information that "This rate is consistent with the rate of forgetting verbal information under general circumstances. People listening to a message generally grasp only 50% of what they hear unless specific efforts are made to remember the information (Steil, Barker, & Watson, 1983, p. 38)." (Jackson. 201) Jackson sums up the need to retention by stating that "Recall, or the ability to remember information, is a necessary but insufficient condition for patients to follow medical advice. For this reason, recall is a variable of tremendous importance concerning medical communication." (Jackson. 201) Retention is incredibly crucial on the part of the medical professional because not only must they understand this information, but they must then relay the information learned onto patients and within the writing. The lower the retention of information on the part of the medical professional, the lower retention on the part of the reader/patient.

Access

Lastly, access as mentioned at the beginning, access has presented itself as a paramount issue in medical writing and may be one reason for the lack of consistent style in medical writing, as De Vos noted in her research, “European Materia Medica in Historical Texts: Longevity of a Tradition and Implications for Future use”, points to an issue of access because of the longtime use of oral transference of knowledge. This is a potential reason that there is a lack of style in medical writing. De Vos notes, “there is a sense of urgency among researchers to record this information, largely because there is substantial evidence that these knowledge traditions, which are usually communicated orally, are quickly eroding” (3). The practice of writing such things down was not common practice. De Vos continues by adding that “oral traditions run the risk of being lost due to the disinterest and absence from traditional village life of younger generations under the influence of modern education systems and the pressures of industrialization, urbanization and the inculcation of western values” (3). The tradition of oral information transfer, as opposed to written, could be a potential reason for lack of style in writing because this practice wasn’t developed until later. Again, access is called into question here.

The historical issue of access may be a potential link to the lack of consistent style in medical writing. Rauch, in their article, “The Accreditation of Hildegard von Bingen as Medieval Female Technical Writer”, presents their findings on Hildegard von Bingen. Rauch observes that “although scholars have acknowledged technical texts written during the

Middle-Ages, there is no mention of ‘technical writer’ as a profession except for Geoffrey Chaucer, and historically absent is the accreditation of medieval female writers who pioneered the field of medical-technical communication.” (Rauch. 392) However, according to the research conducted by Rauch, Hildegard von Bingen produced many medical texts and contributed to medical writing at the time. Because Hildegard von Bingen was not noted to be a technical writer in medieval times and her writing was often discounted because a woman had produced it, her texts did not reach popularity. Rauch’s argument is only further proven by the argument in Malone’s research, which argued that “Little documented (except for midwifery) are the areas of medical care in which women played a substantial role—nursing, hospital care, and general practice among the poor.” (Malone. 336) This lack of access presents itself as a clear gap in medical writing and subsequently negatively influences the development of a standard style in medical writing. However, according to Rauch, “Only in recent history have Hildegard’s technological and medical texts gained popular interest in the medical community. Her texts *Physica* and *Causae Curae*, written in the style of modern-day medical handbooks, resemble current patient history and physicals, outline patient symptoms, causes, and effects, preceded by a treatment plan.” (Rauch. 398). The texts that Hildegard von Bingen produced closely align with the style of modern handbooks and medical records. If Hildegard von Bingen’s work was widely acknowledged at the time of creation, a style in medical writing may have been developed sooner as more people would have access to the texts created.

Moreover, access to these texts could have helped with the development of a consistent style in medical writing. Just as greater access to information provides a more rounded view, the same is true of medical writing. Greater access to other bodies of medical writing would provide increased overall bodies of text to refer to and build. Without access to these bodies of work, we risk marginalization and an inaccurate view of medical writing and its subsequent style development as a whole.

Conclusions: Recommendations for Style Improvement

The nature of this topic is still vast, and little research has been done concerning the investigation of the evolution of medical writing and, therefore, the style used within. Atkinson argues this sentiment in their research, saying, “While such limitations are understandable given the deep interest in and historical importance of certain periods and types of science, much work remains to be done before an adequate description of the evolution of modern scientific writing is possible.” (Atkinson. 338) Again, we see that little research has been done on this topic, and evolution has been poorly investigated.

Collier in their article, “A Call for Clarity and Quality in Medical Writing”, provided little reason or recommendations to solve the issue of style by saying, “It is beyond the scope of this editorial to provide detailed instructions on how to write well. Researchers would be wise to seek out examples of excellent medical writing and learn by imitation.” (Collier. 1407) Though very little explanation as to what to do to solve this issue is presented, Collier does mention that the writer should seek excellent medical writing and imitate it. However,

Collier offers no explanation of what exemplifies excellent medical writing but further points to the need.

Taking all aspects investigated into consideration, greater understanding from the medical professional, higher retention on the part of the medical professional, and higher overall access to medical texts could present the medical community with a greater ability to develop a consistent style. It appears through research that a consistent style has never been developed in order to fill all of the gaps left in medical writing, or perhaps medical writing has never addressed these glaring gaps and has subsequently stifled its own evolution.

Whatever the case may be, unaddressed understanding, retention, and access are the culprits for the lack of style within medical writing. With this in mind there is an apparent need within the field of medical writing that needs to be not only addressed but solved.

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The Infographic: What is it?

In recent years the infographic has become very popular. I have seen it pop up anywhere from shareholder meetings, doctors' offices, airports, schools, and even the bureau of motor vehicles. Infographics are everywhere one could imagine. When I graduated with my bachelor's degree, I even sent out an infographic announcement to all of my family members that I could not keep in touch with as often as I would like. This included a timeline and some brief highlights from my time during my undergraduate studies. Graphics and visual communications are a large part of technical writing, but I have yet to hear or read much scholarship about infographics. Let us dig in a little deeper to find what lay at the heart of an infographic. Herein we will discuss infographics with a focus on their importance in the field of technical writing and the workplace. Some questions that I seek to answer are: What are infographics, what are they used for, and in which situations can they best be used? Often, infographics are seen as a new phenomenon in technical communication and graphic design. Because of this, infographics are easily dismissed as unimportant and inefficient.

In the book *Infographics: The Power of Visual Storytelling*, they describe the three reasons they propose that infographic is so useful in technical writing. According to Lankow, et al. the three reasons are appeal, comprehension, and retention. Within *Infographics: The Power of Visual Storytelling* they reason that the appeal of infographics is based on the proposed thought that “communication should engage a voluntary audience” (Lankow 1). They also reason that the ease of comprehension of infographics is because “Communication should effectively provide knowledge that enables a clear understanding of the information” (1). The purpose of infographics is to inform and educate the viewer. Pontis and Babwahsingh in their research, “Improving Information Design Practice: A Closer Look at Conceptual Design Methods,” surveyed 19 undergraduate students and 5 professionals regarding infographics. In their research Pontis and Babwahsingh found that “most of them [the 19 undergraduate students] indicated “understanding problem”, “defining problem,” “gathering knowledge” and “testing” as key steps” (252). From this finding, we can assume that the purpose of infographics is understanding, defining a problem, and gathering information. This assumption goes hand-in-hand with Lankow’s statement that the understanding of information is a key pillar in infographic creation.

Finally, Lankow proposes that the more successful retention of infographics is because “Communication should impart memorable knowledge” (1). This lends itself to the consistent idea that infographics fill a gap in viewer knowledge. As there has not been much scholarship on infographics, the definition may be in a grey area. However, in the book, *The Power of Infographics: Using Pictures to Communicate and Connect with Your Audiences*

by Mark Smiciklas, he describes it as “An infographic (short for information graphic) is a type of picture that blends data with design, helping individuals and organizations concisely communicate messages to their audiences (see Figure 1.1)” (3). Smiciklas continues to say, “More formally, an infographic is defined as a visualization of data or ideas that tries to convey complex information to an audience in a manner that can be quickly consumed and easily understood” (1). This plays into the high skim factor that is evident in all infographics. As any infographic works, the viewer is presented with an image and then assumes they must assess the information therein. This happens quickly and is referred to as a skim value.

To condense information concise enough for the viewer to quickly skim an infographic. The creator must first have a strong understanding of the information pertaining to the infographic being made. Pontis and Babwahsingh reinforces this concept, stating that “As a large part of an information designer’s job involves making sense of raw data, disorganized information and unstructured situations, having a strong initial focus on figuring out the design problem is essential to making well-supported decisions and effectively creating meaning” (252). Effectively creating meaning to the viewer first starts with the infographic’s creator.

Dusenberry et al. states that there is a specific technique that all infographic creators must aim: “Adaptable communicators must be both technical and humanistic mediators. As technical mediators, they are savvy selectors of media. They act as filters and remixers of information, using modes and media dynamically to shape their message” (307). Again, we see that technical communicators who create these infographics are the gatekeepers to

information being presented to the viewer. This lends itself to the quick understanding and retention of topics that infographics produce. Dusenberry et al. continues, “As humanistic mediators, they must be willing to engage as problem solvers individually and in teams and to effectively develop empathy for their audiences. This empathy allows communicators to make more effective rhetorical choices, create reader-centered deliverables, and become better collaborators” (307). Often, we look at technical communicators as merely synthesizers of information and not as empathetic creators. However, empathy is needed to address several topics that may be difficult to address. In health care specifically, empathetic document or graphic creation (such as infographics) is needed.

In the article “Infographics” by Waralak V Siricharoen, the author discusses the far more significant role infographics play in the field of healthcare. He says, for example, that “In the healthcare informatics research [21], it is found that a rich interactive infographic capable of showing far more digestible information at a glance than conventional, tabular representations [5].”(171) Infographics are filling a gap that was once filled with a time-consuming deciphering of data at the expense of the patient. Infographics are now streamlining the process of data comprehension and making things simpler for the health care providers as well as the patients. Siricharoen continues to explain that this is because “A graphical symbol or icon is defined as the smallest graphical unit that carries meaningful information [22]” (171). The use of symbols is a unique solution for a unique situation. In the introductory pages of the book *Infographics: The Power of Visual Storytelling*, Siricharoen describe under their “How to use this book” section that, “There are countless applications

for information design and visualization in the business world today. However, the needs of each company are unique, so it is necessary to create custom solutions to solve communication problems” (171). This is very true; often a client will ask for something that is unique to their business and the particular communication circumstance for which they need a document, and one would be hard pressed to find anything else that will fill this information gap on the internet. This is where an infographic comes to the rescue.

The benefits of infographics go further beyond the world of health care. Siricharoen explains that “Businesses that publish infographics raise their website traffic an average of 12% more than those that don’t [29].” Infographics are growing in popularity, giving businesses a rich way to communicate their important messages to clients, customers, suppliers, and investors” (172). Again, the use of infographics to increase marketing and website traffic is another area in which infographics are filling a gap.

Stephen Gamble speaks about the development of infographics in a similar yet more complex way than Infographics: *The Power of Visual Storytelling*. In *Visual Content Marketing: Leveraging Infographics, Video, and Interactive Media to Attract and Engage Customers*, they explain that “The graphic designer is typically challenged to come up with a layout in a pre-designated format leveraging static copy and images against a client’s pre-approved branding guidelines or come up with those branding guidelines organically” (38). This is a norm of the technical writing community and also the copywriting community. Specific branding and copyright images or colors need to be used to create consistency in the brand or organization. This is typical with say letterhead or brochures, and select colors must

be used to keep every document in the organization cohesive. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that infographics in the world of business would have to adhere to these norms as well.

Gamble further explains that, “The information designer does not take the data and the tables and the content as pre-existing static unit cast in stone, but thinks about how to structure it in terms of hierarchies and display it and possibly replace or supplement data and charts with visuals. Perhaps a dense concept might be unpacked with a new infographic” (38). This again is similar to typical technical writing. The use of graphs and data explanation in technical writing is prevalent.

At times, a creator must work hard to make the reader or audience understand what is being presented. A creator uses a graph to support your findings; however, a creator can only rely on the graph. Dusenberry et al. stresses this exact sentiment: “Excellent technical and humanistic mediators, then, also need to have “the ability to sense a problem, diagnose what forces within a context are causing the problem, and develop and implement a change within the context that addresses the problem” (307) Once more, it is seen that technical communicators have a need to bridge multiple areas of concern. Dusenberry et al. clarifies that “This ability to envision the audience’s needs and to contextually create change requires both technical expertise and a savvy understanding of stakeholders and their diverse contexts” (307) With an infographic, a creator has both the information that they are trying to transmit and the data. It indeed is a match made in heaven for the technical writing community who wants to have the reader understand as much as possible, with as little confusion as possible, in a short amount of time.

In the article, “Infographics as a Business Communication Tool: An Empirical Investigation of User Preference, Comprehension, & Efficiency”, Amy M. Young also explains how, “As concise writing with ‘high skim value’ is the hallmark of good business writing (Munter, 2011), it is logical that infographics would be welcomed tools in the business setting” (4). Again, this even further emphasizes the point of a match made in heaven for the technical writing community that wants to have the reader understand as much as possible, with as little confusion as possible, in a short amount of time through the use of infographics.

Young explains how infographics are not a new phenomenon in technical writing: “The most elementary form of infographics, which have been in existence for centuries, take the form of maps, graphs, or illustrations. Starting in the 1970s, they could often be found in newspapers such as the Sunday New York Times and USA Today” (3). This continuing occurrence of infographics in media is a fascinating and essential fact to validate their use in our modern age. Often infographics are dismissed because of a distaste for a new and unnecessary graphic. This is easily dismissible however because infographics has a long-standing history and use within newspapers, most notably started in the 1970’s. Dusenberry et al. reiterates the withstanding presence that infographics have had since the mid 20th century stating, “Local and global transformations in workplace structure, function, and organization are predicted to continue intensifying through the 21st century as is the importance of workers being able to maintain professional relationships in linguistically and

culturally diverse environments” (301). The consistent use of infographics in the workplace is evidence enough to prove that infographics are not a new and unnecessary graphic.

Graphics and visual communications are a large part of technical writing. We found an accurate definition of what infographics are and what their uses may be. Some of the most significant situations for infographics seemed to be with large groups of data that may be easily understood and broken down by the use of symbols or other graphics. This can be found in the corporate workplace, nonprofits, community organizations, and healthcare. We found that infographics are not a new phenomenon, in fact, they have been widely used since before the 1970's, further validating the importance and its use in technical writing. The consistent use of infographics by technical communicators further expresses that infographics are not a new phenomenon in graphic design to be easily dismissed or viewed as inefficient. Instead, we see that infographics have been serving a very real purpose since the mid-20th century.

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Expressivist Pedagogy: An Applicable Approach?

Throughout this semester, I saw the opportunity to look at several different pedagogies as well as examining my own and my own philosophy. As I have little teaching experience, apart from the private tutoring children I have helped throughout the years and a volunteer writing workshop or two, my philosophy is mainly conceptual. Throughout the semester and its readings, I have leaned on fellow classmates who were seasoned educators and the texts of the semester. One approach stuck with me: Expressivism. Never had I heard of a more enlightening and exciting approach to teaching. It was everything and more than I wanted in a pedagogy. This discovery not only excited my imagination, but also excited me for a future in education where I could actually see myself. I will dig into Expressivism and give readers a taste of what excites me, worries me, and what I still do not understand. I aim to find out if Expressivism is actually an applicable pedagogy or if it is just a nice theory. I also intend to find out if Expressivism indeed encourages and creates a byproduct of self-advocacy or if I have only dreamed up this happy coincidence.

I had a great professor during my first year of my undergrad. At the time of taking this course with my professor, I was the first person in my family to have gone to college, the second woman in my family to have graduated from high school, and the first to not be married with children by the age of 20. I was in uncharted territory. I didn't know what I was doing in higher education. "People like me aren't meant to be here," I thought. I wanted just to fit in and do what I thought was expected of me. Coming from a relatively cookie-cutter public school, I had felt the impression that what was expected is a style of writing that is not for show. You get in, you answer the questions, you restate your thesis, and you are out of there.

This wasn't the writing style I liked, but it was what I thought professors expected. I did not feel comfortable speaking or writing about my home life because others around me did not have the same experiences. This professor changed my life. She made a point to make everyone feel welcome, wanted, and encouraged to write in their voice. After this, my whole writing style changed, I felt more confident, and I eagerly did the assignments. The answer was Expressivism. This opened everything up. If only more of the classes I had taken throughout my life had included an expressivist pedagogy!

The Expressive Pedagogy chapter "Expressive Pedagogy: Practice/ Theory, Theory/ Practice" by Chris Burnham and Rebecca Powell in our textbook *A Guide to Composition Pedagogy* by Tate et al. heavily influenced my newfound interest and its possible real-world usage. This textbook defines Expressivism as, "[placing] 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” (Burnham and Powell 113). This was what I had wanted my entire life. It sounds a bit overstated, but it wasn’t if I had taught with a mostly expressivist pedagogy, there is no idea how comfortable or empowered I would have been in my classes and in my life as well. Some may say that this is not the job of a teacher. However, I think that encouraging and helping students is always to be expected from a teacher.

Burnham and Powell also mentioned that Expressivism encourages students to use their own language instead of “the academic language of schools” (114). This was what I was experiencing as mentioned in the scenario above. I had never encountered Expressivism, and I felt the impression that I must always write in a way that is still recognizable as academic. I thought that I must always write in a voice that was not my own.

Burnham and Powell also mentioned that Expressivism “... pedagogy attended to invention, the discovery of ideas, and encouraged students and teacher to keep journals as a reflective exercise for documenting individual experience and personal development” (114). This was another form of encouragement that I had received that altered my career in higher education.

The textbook also mentions that “Specifically Browyn Williams’s *Shimmering Literacies: Popular Culture and Reading and Writing Online* (2009) finds students using their writings on popular culture as an outlet for self-expression and identity construction.” (Burnham Powell 112). Before I had the great experience with a professor who implemented Expressivism, I had, I had always been writing. I was continually blogging and writing

whatever and however to my heart's content. However, this was not the voice I used in any of my academic writing. Browyn Williams also mentions that this was a form of identity construction for me. Most students write, blog, repost, tweet, pin in their spare time. This in itself is identity construction and the development of voice. This is expressivist.

France mentions in his article that, "Yet most would agree that writing effectively—jumping the communicative gap between self and others—requires both a sense of self as traditionally understood and a sense of how, at this moment, both this self and those others have been structured by culture" (France 149). This seems to be an inherently political notion. I do believe that any self-advocacy in education is political and culturally structured, as France describes.

France draws on Fleming's work and makes a point to mention that, "Inquiry into the processes that structure both personality and discourse can help our students understand the nature of the constraints on and opportunities for agency?" (France 149). Again, self-advocacy is at the heart of any successful education and at the heart of Expressivism in fact?

Expressivism not only inspires self-agency but also encourages emotional wellness in the contexts of academics. Expressivism, as I see it, will always inspire emotional wellness. Cantice G. Payton in *Writing and Wellness, Emotion and Women: Highlighting the Contemporary Uses of Expressive Writing in the Service of Students* mentions that, "It suggests that the uses of expressive writing should be expanded and explored by students and professors of composition and that each should become familiar with the link between writing and emotional wellness" (Payton 2). I really do believe this statement because I have

seen this firsthand. When writing, I feel better, my emotions are elevated, and I become happier. I have also seen this in the students that I have worked with at writing workshops; Students are more satisfied when writing, especially in an open and accepting environment.

Matthew Sumpter's Article "Emerging Voices: Shared Frequency: Expressivism, Social Constructionism, and the Linked Creative Writing-Composition Class" helped me rethink what I thought I had already known. I loved this article not only because it gave me information that I had not previously known, but it made me encounter and rethink certain aspects of Expressivism that I had taken for granted. Sumpter uses two schools of thought: "Expressivism and social constructionism" (341). Sumpter qualifies this usage of theories by saying that, "While their origins in composition studies might suggest I am using a biased lens, I believe these two theories address such encompassing questions about the role of the teacher, the student, the author, the text, and social criticism within the writing classroom" (Sumpter 341). The two fields of study seem to ebb and flow into and out of one another, according to Sumpter. Social criticism and Expressivism was a combination of pedagogies that I had not encountered together. I had never thought that a dual inclusion would work so great in the classroom. However, throughout Sumpter's article, I see that this inclusion is necessary and needed. Social criticism not only sets up a student to be a critical thinker in the classroom and their course work but also the real-world.

According to Sumpter, "Expressivism as Elbow conceives it, then, functions as a sort of necessary fiction, giving students the sensation of being at the center of the world of discourse so they may, someday, have the confidence to appreciate and function within their

actual, more complicated position” (Sumpter 342). This is what I want in my classroom. I want my students to be given “the sensation of being at the center of the world of discourse.” This is such a powerful thought. If every student who entered a classroom left feeling this empowered, they would be unstoppable. I think that the inclusion of having a student at the center of discourse would result in the amount of class collaboration and active discussions increasing exponentially. And thus, as Sumpter mentions, students will feel confident (and prepared) “... to appreciate and function within their actual, more complicated position [in the world of discourse]” (Sumpter 342). Again, we circle back to the importance of the student being at the center of discourse. This is a large feature of Expressivism.

Sumpter mentions in his article also that, “In contrast, David Bartholomae posits that such fictions cause more harm than good. Instead of focusing on the life and voice of the writer, Bartholomae emphasizes the importance of students learning the world of discourse they exist within”(Sumpter 342). I desire this type of positioning of students in the classroom. However, I do not see this as encouragement to the student. If instructors want a student to understand their position by “students learning the world of discourse they exist within,” this theory by Bartholomae seems less encouraging to the students than Elbow’s theory.

However, Sumpter does agree with this theory presented by Bartholomae. Sumpter explains that “To offer academic writing as something else is to keep this knowledge from our students, to keep them from confronting the power politics of discursive practice, or to keep them from confronting the particular representations of power, tradition and authority

reproduced whenever one writes” (Sumpter 342). This is an interesting perspective to the theory that Bartholomae presented. This is where my assumptions begin to flip or at least nudge. Is Bartholomae’s theory inherently less encouraging, or does it in fact incite change and self-advocacy, which is the very definition of encouragement? I would have to say so.

Sumpter clears the confusion and assumptions somewhat by saying that, “... while Elbow centers the writer, Bartholomae places the writer within a larger cultural context. Further, he claims a writer cannot write original work without an awareness of this context, for the context itself is ‘reproduced’ whenever one writes” (Sumpter 342). This is an interesting concept. I feel that both Elbow and Bartholomae have important theories that just like social constructivism and Expressivism need to be combined to provide a student with a more well-rounded and fulfilling learning and writing experience.

However, Nathan Crick in his article “Composition as Experience: John Dewey on Creative Expression and the Origins of ‘Mind’” further mentions Bartholomae’s view and says, “That is to say, individual writers don't just speak through their own voices, but "through the voice of the community" (521). The discourse of this community, then, replaces the autonomous mind as the motivator of human thoughts and feeling” (Crick 262). This is something that I am not sure if I agree. Can discourse truly replace one’s own thoughts. Is the autonomosness of the mind truly without value. I have to disagree with Crick on their view of Expressivism. However, I do still stand by my original thought that I feel that both Elbow and Bartholomae have essential theories that, just like social constructivism and

Expressivism, need to be combined to provide a student with a more well-rounded and fulfilling learning and writing experience.

Sumpter in his article also speaks to the inherently political nature of self-advocacy and giving students a voice. He mentions that "... while social constructionism might posit that a lack of critical engagement with issues of power and authority in the classroom would stifle originality and reproduce social systems and discourses of inequality" (Sumpter 343). He shoots down this notion and instead presents to us that, "Lensmire shows how students' lives—their diverse voices—fight against those dominant systems and discourses through expressivist sharing that both centers the student and is, implicitly, socially critical" (Sumpter 343). Again, self-advocacy is tied to its political justice kin. Any empowerment of the student, it seems, will and can be presented as a political topic.

Chris Burnham and Rebecca Powell also note how Expressivism can "produce ethically, politically, and socially aware personal writing" through assignments as simple as self-assessment, which "ask[s] students to think about what they do when they write" (Burnham and Powell 121). This inclusion of ethically, politically, and socially aware personal writing is a style of writing that I see as inherently self-advocating. I feel that expressivist, no matter the application in the classroom, will always be self-advocating for the student. While I have not taught using Expressivism yet, it seems that my teaching philosophy will be based in its basic principles. Further the real-world applications of Expressivism in the writing classroom will only improve upon this theory.

Another assumption that I had going into this was that Expressivism was all about the student. Everything in this pedagogy is to benefit the student, and this is true. However, it also, as a byproduct, helps the teacher. Sumpter mentions in his article that, “Peter Elbow himself says, “[T]he classroom publication of student writing also helps me . . . find moments where I can invite students to be more aware of the positions from which they write—as men or women—as members of a race or class, or as having a sexual orientation” (Sumpter 344). Not only is Expressivism for the student: it is for the teacher as well. The teacher can then see the change and issues within their students and also be an advocate for an impact within the classroom. The malleable nature of Expressivism lets the teacher address classroom concerns more readily than traditional rigid pedagogies. Sumpter agrees with this notion by saying that, “Expressivism, then, can be critical not by emphasizing criticism, but by emphasizing a thoughtful exploration of the social origins and positions of students in the class” (343). Expressivism is based in social atmospheres and social learning, but it is also incredibly personal. Through this combination, it seems to help students encounter specific topics with encouragement and even with confidence, as it is an open and social environment of learning.

As I previously mentioned, social constructionism and Expressivism should be combined to help and benefit the student. Sumpter seems to agree and also says that, “Social constructionism has also begun to search for balance, for a way of maintaining its focus on critical awareness while also finding new ways of helping students feel confident and centered enough in the classroom to begin the process of engaging in discourse” (344). A

balance of social constructionism and Expressivism is needed in the classroom to engage and encourage students. This also, again, draws back to the idea of self-advocacy.

Sumpter also brought to my attention in his article that, “In addition to taking some of the burden of authorial responsibility from students, Haake also notes how the decentered, constructed position of the author might actually resonate more strongly with underrepresented students whose lives are already lived on the margins, constructed and other-ed by hegemonic discourse” (344). This was precisely what I had been feeling in my education. Haake’s notes on the encouragement of underrepresented students are very real. For this reason, and that of my own experience, I wish to include the expressivist pedagogy in my classroom.

Sumpter also mentioned that Haake speaks about the underrepresented not recognizing themselves in texts and in discourse included into a class. Sumpter agrees with this sentiment noting that “[T]hose of us who have also had difficulty recognizing ourselves in that education and reading will adapt more readily to the notion of author as function” (344). He continues on to say that, “From there to the idea that the self we aspire to express is not natural, singular, and constant, but rather constructed, multiple, and fluid, it is not so far at all, and it is easy” (Sumpter 344). Identity construction is not easy as mentioned; however, the support and inclusion from a teacher and peers as well as self-expression are easy according to Sumpter and Haake.

Through my research of Expressivism, I have found that it reaches far and wide in the teaching community. The teaching forum *Teachers College Records: The Voice of*

Scholarship in Education (<http://tcrecord.org>) has touches of Expressivism everywhere.

There are thousands of posts about freewriting, journaling, and creative writing (all practices in teaching that are inherently expressivist). One example of this is an article by Susan R. Meyer on the site that wrote about “Journaling and Transformative Learning”. She writes about life history and focused journaling serves as the basis for a life planning workshop for women. There seem to be so many great resources online for the use of Expressivism in the writing classroom. I am discovering that Expressivism is more than just a theory that I have attached to and fallen in love with, it is a real practice that is applicable and beneficially to include in the classroom, just as I had hoped.

As I have addressed and researched several different pedagogies as well as examining my own and my own philosophy, I have ultimately landed on Expressivism as the most applicable pedagogy. As I have little teaching experience, apart from the private tutoring children I have helped throughout the years and a volunteer writing workshop or two, my philosophy is still mostly conceptual. Never had I heard of a more enlightening and exciting approach to teaching. It was everything and more than I wanted in a pedagogy. This discovery not only excited my imagination but excited me for a future in education that I could actually see myself in. As I dug into Expressivism discovered more of what excites me, worries me, and what I still do not understand, I also found that Expressivism is, in fact, applicable in the classroom! Also, upon research, I was again impressed with the idea that Expressivism encourages self-advocacy, something that I feel every teacher should strive to

do in their classroom. I am joyously surprised that Expressivism is, in fact, applicable in the classroom and is such a strong advocate for self-advocacy.

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Historical Fiction or Historical Inaccuracy?

Historical Inaccuracies within *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder

When does historical fiction become historical inaccuracy? Should historical fiction be avoided for the very purpose of inaccuracy? This question seems to be the most debated question in the field of historical fiction. Historical fiction is made for a number of reasons. This could be to help the reader understand a certain time period more, help the reader resonate with a historical figure, help the reader understand complex societal issues, and for reader enjoyment. However, in an aim to fill these purposes, historical inaccuracies occur in historical fiction texts this occurs in a variety of ways. Under/over-exaggerating the time period, inaccurately attribute accomplishments to a historical figure, and underrepresenting groups of people are some of the historical inaccuracies that occur in the historical fiction genre. A great example of historical fiction riddled with historical inaccuracy is the series *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder. When reviewing *Little House on the Prairie*, it is evident that many historical errors are present in the youth historical fiction

series, especially in the case of representation of Native Americans. This children's book series underrepresents Native Americans and inaccurately portrays Native Americans to a shocking level.

Before delving into the historical inaccuracies within *Little House on the Prairie*, the genre's purpose must be known. Historical accuracy is of paramount importance when reading historical fiction, especially when being read by children. Readers are influenced by what they read and understand the world around them as such. Reading inaccurate statements/histories might influence young readers to understand the world as such. With this thought in mind, why would anyone take a chance to read historical fiction and inaccurately understand history? Why read historical fiction?

In Joanne Brown's article, "Historical Fiction or Fictionalized History?", Brown states a clear issue with historical fiction: The problems associated with writing historical fiction are also our problems when we teach historical fiction because they affect how we and our students respond to and interpret these novels"(1). Brown supplements this statement by saying, " The problems involve matters of definition, the 'truth' of historical fiction, the question of balance between historical details and fictional elements, the demand for authenticity and accuracy, and the issue of provenance" (1). These issues of historical inaccuracy, or truth as Brown refers to it, is an issue that is a constant strain not only in this research but in the genre of historical fiction.

However, avoiding historical nonfiction is not the answer, either. In Joe Sutliff Sander's article "A Literature of Questions," he mentions the purpose of historical nonfiction

and its need for a basis of facts, as Sanders notes, “Her [Myra Zarnowski’s] point is that good nonfiction must, of course, be built on facts, but it can also be well written.” (Sanders 33).

Sanders supplements by saying that “In Penny Peck’s advice on evaluating biographies, she explains that one must ‘consider several criteria,’ and the first of those is the factual nature of the books: ‘Of course,’ she says, rightly assuming that what she is about to say hardly needs to be said, ‘look for authenticity’” (Sanders 33). Sanders goes on to mention several more colleagues within the field that agree with this statement. Sanders takes issue and states that “If nonfiction is, as so many voices insist, primarily a genre characterized by authenticity, truth telling, and sticking to the facts, then its ability to invite critical engagement is necessarily limited” (33). This statement is very true. Reader engagement is only possible to a certain degree with historical nonfiction. Historical nonfiction is essential. To truly understand the past, we must resonate with it in some way. This happens through imagining historical figures day-to-day lives and reliving what might have happened.

However, Sanders expresses a belief that reliance on historical nonfiction does not give the reader a full perspective. Sanders states this by saying, “For that reason, the dominant perception of children’s nonfiction indicates that this is a genre not only poorly suited to a search for invitations to critical engagement but diametrically opposed to them. (33-34). However you take Sanders’ opinion view of historical nonfiction, It is important to see that nonfiction is stressed again and again to be inappropriately suited for young readers. It is important to mention that historical fiction has a very real purpose and creates a deeper

level of understanding and critical engagement from the reader. Hope is not lost for historical fiction.

The most significant issue with *Little House on the Prairie* by Laura Ingalls Wilder is the overexaggerating and the morphing of the truth throughout the book series. Sharon Smudlers in her article, “‘The Only Good Indian’: History Race and Representation in Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Little House on the Prairie*,” specifically takes issue with the historical inaccuracies of *Little House on the Prairie* as well. Smudlers mentions on that while “Celebrating the achievements of the pioneering movement while questioning its assumptions, Wilder presents the Indian in this work as both good and bad, attractive and repulsive, and thereby exposes to critical attention 'the metaphysics of Indian-hating' (191). While this does lead to a discussion about the treatment of Native Americans at this time, it does lead to a fruitful discussion within the series.

Smudlers continues on saying that “despite its seeming authenticity, *Little House on the Prairie* ultimately denies the real experience of aboriginal Americans in order to validate the assimilation of the American landscape to the civilizing project of frontier settlement” (191). Unfortunately, the rhetoric and overall narrative we see in *Little House on the Prairie* shows not only a disservice to Native Americans but a wildly inaccurate portrayal of the time period.

It is important to note, however, that Laura Ingalls Wilder did not intentionally misrepresent Native Americans. Within Smudlers’ article, they present a quote from Wilder about her intentions in creating the *Little House on the Prairie* series. She states,

“I began to think what a wonderful childhood I had had. How I had seen the whole frontier, the woods, the Indian country of the great plains, the frontier towns, the building of railroads in wild, unsettled country, homesteading and farmers coming in to take possession.” Wilder continues, “...Then I understood that in my own life I represented a whole period of American History.... I wanted the children now to understand more about the beginnings of things, to know what is behind the things they see—what it is that made America as they know it.” (Smudlers 191).

It was then that Wilder conceived the idea to create the series. In an aim to show children the history and resonate with the historical time period, Wilder also creates historical inaccuracies when referring to the experience of Native Americans at this time. Notice that within the statement made by Wilder, she never mentions Native Americans. Her one stated intention was to portray her childhood. It remains to be debated whether a lack of intent of the misrepresentation of Native Americans on the part of Wilder could be interpreted as intended, but it is clear that her representation of Native Americans is flawed?

Smudlers makes the apt observation that "devoted to a view of the frontier as the site of nascent democratic principles wilder's project thus inevitably inclines toward myth which has, as Anita Clair Fellman notes, a 'tendency... .to distill and simplify and deny history'" (Smudlers 191-192). This simplification thus created historical inaccuracies within Wilder's

text. Again, the intent is unknown. However, simplification of the historical time period nonetheless has led to historical inaccuracies. Smudlers mentions that "Contending that "every story in this [multi-volume] novel, all the circumstances, each incident are true," Wilder nevertheless admitted that she had told less than 'the whole truth' (Smudlers 192). This shocking claim leads us to believe that Wilder intended to create historical inaccuracies in her texts. However, I do not believe the intent was malicious by any means. Smudlers backs up this statement by mentioning, "These omissions and alterations, avowedly made to protect childish sensibilities, distill and deny history in order to advance the aesthetic and ideological premises for the series." (Smudlers. 192). Wilder created historical inaccuracies in her novels. However, the intent behind these inaccuracies are still not know. Wilder's intent may have been, as Smudlers stated, to protect their 'childish sensibilities.' Why would Wilder purposefully create historical inaccuracies within her texts to protect 'childish sensibilities?' Wilder may have thought that Native American were too harsh to be accurately represented to children. But why? The reasoning behind the intent we have established rests upon bigotry and not protecting children.

In order to keep the overall rhetoric, aesthetic, and ideological themes within the series, Wilder made a choice to portray the time period and the Native American people inaccurately. One explanation made on behalf of Wilder that Smudlers mentions is, "In this respect, it relies, more than the other volumes in the series, on imagination rather than memory, for Wilder—only three years old when her family lived in Indian Territory—could recall little of events that occurred before her fourth birthday (Zochert 49-50)" (Smudlers

192). I, however, do not believe that this excuse is a license to portray history inaccurately. Wilder continued to create her series based on the inaccuracies to keep the overall aesthetic of the series, thus continuing a snowball effect of historical inaccuracies throughout the series. Smudlers mentions that within the aesthetic used, "At the same time, they rely upon the myth of the un-American Indian that Wilder enables to authorize her vision of western expansionism in *Little House on the Prairie*" (Smudlers. 192). Smudlers makes this evident that "Most forcefully and hyperbolically distilled in the fourth of July oration featured in *Little Town on the Prairie* (1941), this myth situates natives, understood as Indians, in opposition to settlers and farmers, understood as Americans" (Smudlers. 192). At the creation of our nation, Native Americans were viewed as less than human, which Laura Ingalls Wilder painfully continues (knowingly or not) throughout the *Little House on the Prairie* series.

Inaccuracies continue, this time in the form of overexaggerating and the misrepresentation of Native Americans. Smudlers brings up the inaccuracy of the actual location of Laura Ingalls Wilder's childhood home. Smudlers notes that "Living forty miles from Independence and "three miles over the line into Indian Territory" (316), the Ingalls's are not only isolated in their struggle to build a home but are also imposed upon in their interactions with the Indians" (Smudlers192). The exaggeration, though made for a matter of effect, is still laughable when compared to actual mileage versus the mileage stated in the book: "Yet the isolation of the Ingalls's by placing them forty miles from Independence, she minimizes the degree of trespass by situating them only three miles over the line" (Smudlers

192). Here we see that Wilder create historical inaccuracies in order to convenience herself and her family.

Smudlers continues to note the glaring inaccuracies: "In fact, when Charles Ingalls moved his family some thirteen miles southwest of Independence and more than twenty miles over the line, he was one of several thousand settlers who, in the years following the Civil War, took illegal possession of land deep within the Osage Diminished Reserve, which occupied an area thirty miles wide across southern Kansas" (Smudlers. 192-193). It no longer seems as though the aesthetic choices made by Wilder were made lightly and without much implication, as she had previously implied. Smudlers notes the time period and the decision thinking put into by people like Wilder's father: "Expecting that native title to the land would soon be extinguished, these squatters aggressively protected their stake in Indian Territory against the Osage who, for their part, sometimes attempted eviction, sometimes exacted tribute, but most often bore the loss of their lodges, their corn, their horses, their timber, and their game with remarkable stoicism" (Smudlers. 193). The decision to brush over this fact in a series of children's books could be seen in three ways.

First, it could be argued that Wilder avoided the facts of native issues in order to spare the children on discussing a difficult subject. In Joanne Brown's Article "Historical Fiction, or Fictionalized History?" Brown acknowledges this writing tactic, as Brown states that "Strict adherence to historical accuracy can pose a problem if 'accuracy' involves brutal or immoral behavior. What is the writer's option when the intended readers are young adults,

an audience for whom some readers may desire a subdued version of historic events?" (2).

This creates an argument for the purpose of a "subdued version of historic events." However, this still results in historical inaccuracies and should be noted. If a reader prefers to read inaccurate accounts of history, they should be able to. Again, however, would this be considered historical nonfiction? This leads back to the greater question of whether historical fiction should include historical inaccuracies.

Second, Wilder may be trying to purposely brush over the illegal act made by Wilder's father. Smudlers presents the third reasoning for this, which is to stick with the aesthetic perniciously created in the series. Smudlers states, "To protect the myth of pioneering enterprise, Wilder, therefore, diverts responsibility for conflict away from the squatters and toward impersonal government forces" (Smudlers 193). All explanations are valid as history may be relative to many.

Again, we see issues of misrepresentation of Native Americans within the *Little House on the Prairie* Series. "Laura asks, "What is a papoose?" (6). Obliging, Pa answers, "A papoose is a little, brown, Indian baby" (6). Derived from Narragansett, an Algonquian language already extinct at the beginning of the nineteenth century, "papoose" is not unlike the misnomer "Indian": a white ideological construct delimiting the native as deficient, generic, and static" (Smudlers 193). Using an incorrect language to refer to a group of people who do not use that language is wildly inappropriate and lumps groups of people together to consider them ethnically one (again, wildly incorrect). Smudlers interprets this as a deliberate act in speech: "Deceivingly pseudo-authentic, words like "papoose" homogenize all

indigenous peoples, irrespective of vast differences in language, culture, history, and geography

while distinguishing them as not-white. In so doing, terms such as these mystify the native as other. (Smudlers.193). Again, we see misrepresentation and historical inaccuracies within *Little House on the Prairie*.

As we have seen, *Little House on the Prairie* does not present the most accurate version of the time period or the representation of Native Americans. As Smudlers mentioned, "... omissions and alterations, avowedly made to protect childish sensibilities, distill and deny history in order to advance the aesthetic and ideological premises for the series" (Smudlers. 192). In an effort to stay within the rhetoric and overall aesthetic that Wilder created within the *Little House on the Prairie* series. Wilder thus created a new and inaccurate representation of history that brushes over the atrocities and genocide that happened to and the incalculable number of Native Americans. I understand that *Little House on the Prairie* is a quant and idealized retelling of a certain time period. However, I cannot, in good conscience, see this as an excuse. These historical inaccuracies are too large and too many to ignore. *Little House on the Prairie* is not the most accurate and, according to some, should be avoided when looking for an accurate read, and I agree with this statement.

The inclusion of books that more accurately represent the time period or the lives/cultures of Native Americans is a more appropriate option. Some of these books might include *Through Dakota Eyes: Narrative Accounts of the Minnesota Indian War of 1862* by

Gary Clayton Anderson and Alan R. Woolworth *or Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee: an Indian History of the American West* by Dee Brown, or even a picture book such as *Fry Bread* by Kevin Noble Maillard.

When concluding, one may ask, what level of historical inaccuracies are acceptable within historical fiction? At what point is the story no longer historical fiction and just simply fiction? Under/over-exaggerating the time period, inaccurately attributing accomplishments to a historical figure, and underrepresenting groups of people are some of the historical inaccuracies that occur in the historical fiction genre. I believe that historical inaccuracy that misrepresents underrepresented groups (like Native Americans mentioned in *Little House on the Prairie*), under/over-exaggerating the time period, inaccurately attributing accomplishments to a historical figure should be included into the genre of historical fiction under very cautious circumstances. In an effort to stay within the rhetoric and overall aesthetic that Wilder created within the *Little House on the Prairie* series, Wilder thus created a new and inaccurate representation of history that brushes over the atrocities and genocide that happened to and an incalculable number of Native Americans. As mentioned previously in this research, historical fiction is important and does serve a purpose. Historical fiction should not be dismissed on the basis of minor inaccuracies. However, major historical inaccuracies dealing with major issues of misrepresentation should be at the very least be learned from in order to move on and create progress.

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