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Final Master's Portfolio

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Final Master’s Portfolio

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A Final Portfolio

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

Master of Arts in the field of English
with a specialization in
English Teaching

April 17, 2022

Dr. Lee Nickoson
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“Even when I was still an undergraduate, I was excited for graduate school”; this was the very first sentence I wrote for my first discussion board post for my first class in the Master of Art in English program at Bowling Green State University. It was August 25th, 2018, and I was starting my second year of teaching high school English at Paulding High School.

Two years before I wrote that sentence, I was still living in South Korea—the foreign country that had become my new home—and I was still planning on living there for at least several more years. In fact, I had previously considered applying to graduate schools in Korea—but to study applied linguistics, not literature or composition—in order to better qualify for positions as a college professor. Sure, I had a bachelor’s degree in education and a license to teach English language arts to grades 7-12 “back home,” but I had not planned to return to Ohio, let alone seek employment in its broken educational system. I had enjoyed my undergraduate experience, but I had heard horror stories from teachers across the state; I would not have my love of learning curdled by a culture that did not appear to value education or the professionals who implement it—and so I had resolved to remain an expat for life.

Of course, my staunch refusal to return to Ohio and join the profession in proper softened the longer I stayed in South Korea. In the fall of 2016, I had started a new job—my third in as many years—at a rather laid-back after-school academy for elementary- and middle-school students learning English as a foreign language—certainly a comfortable gig for someone new to
the country and with limited teaching experience, but I was starting to grow restless. I missed the challenge of a traditional educational setting. I missed reading, analyzing, and discussing complex novels, short stories, and poetry. I missed helping students craft cogent and eloquent essays. Simply put, I was tired of teaching the basics of functional English; I wanted more depth, more variety. I wanted to apply for positions at international schools, the ones that offer Advanced Placement courses and International Baccalaureate diplomas—but there was no chance that those schools would even ask for an interview with a candidate like me. They would see that I had zero experience teaching in the U.S. and throw my résumé in the trash. So, I needed to “bite the bullet,” as one says, and “do my time.” I just needed two years of experience teaching American-style English language arts at an accredited institution; then I could ship back out again—and yet, it has been more than five years since I returned “home.”

At the risk of sounding clichéd, I ended up falling in love with teaching sophomore English and AP English Language and Composition at Paulding High School that first year. True, the workload was enormous—to this day, I still spend many evenings and weekends planning lessons, making materials, and grading student submissions—but my craving for intellectual challenge was more than satisfied. I was finally teaching Vonnegut, Steinbeck, Bradbury, Fitzgerald—even Shakespeare! My students, despite the occasional apathy or flippancy typical of most American teenagers, were able to articulate their thoughts beyond simple constructions, able to analyze the deeper meanings and implications of the texts we studied, and express their insights with relative sophistication. My spirit was reawakened by my curricula, and that latent excitement to further my studies was beginning to bubble up again.

Thus, in the summer of 2018, after realizing that I had truly found my passion, that I had not merely survived but somehow thrived throughout my first year of teaching high school
English in Ohio, I sought to grow further. It was finally time to commit to a graduate program! Of course, I had considered an M.Ed, but most people with advanced degrees in education go on to take administrative positions, and I have no interest in that. No, my goal in pursuing a master’s degree was not so career-based. I loved the classroom, and I loved my sophomores and juniors. Sure, an MA in English would qualify me to teach more college-level classes, and furthering my education would place me higher on the salary schedule—but I mostly just wanted to learn, to engage in reading and writing again, and to expand and deepen my expertise in my content area.

And, though it has taken a bit longer than I had anticipated, I have done just that. Throughout my time at Bowling Green State University, I have learned more than I had ever hoped I would. Part of that is because I was able to consistently apply my newly discovered knowledge directly to my teaching practice each semester. For example, as my final project for the ENG 6200 Teaching Writing course, I was able to synthesize the pedagogical theories we had discussed into a syllabus for a Creative Writing elective course, which I then implemented the very next year. After a moderately successful semester teaching the class, I decided to further revise the syllabus, adding a new grammar component to the course based on what I had learned in ENG 6220 Teaching Grammar in the Context of Writing. I am currently teaching this new version of the class this semester, and it is going gratifyingly well! Unfortunately, I did not choose to include my Creative Writing syllabus as one of the four artifacts in this portfolio—there were simply too many projects to choose from—but it could serve as yet another example of not only how much I have learned throughout the years but also how I was able to incorporate my graduate studies into my daily life. Indeed, I am a better teacher for having completed this program.
The four projects that I have chosen to revise for this portfolio come from various types of classes, thus demonstrating the range of theories and methods that have informed my work, the skills I have gained, and the growth I have demonstrated throughout my time at BGSU. Rather appropriately, then, the first project in this portfolio comes from my first course in the MA program: ENG 6040 Graduate Writing with Professor Kimberly Spallinger. Having not written academically in several years, I was apprehensive about writing lengthy formal academic papers at the time, but I found the research proposal format approachable. Over the years, I have strayed away from such formulaic writing, but this project served as excellent preparation for the seminar papers I would go on to write later in the program.

As I revised the project, which I originally title “The Effect of Increasing Informational Texts in the High School English Language Arts Curriculum: Perceptions and Analysis of Student Engagement and Performance,” I considered each of my professor’s comments—17 in total throughout the document—and more often than not took her suggestions, which included editing the title, providing more support for certain claims, and delaying some points until later in the paper. Most notably, I removed the identifying information from the proposal section so that, should I ever decide to conduct the study and publish the results, I can use what I have written already. In the end, I believe the revised version sounds more polished than the original, and the argument is more sound. Of course, as I have taught AP Lang over the years, I have come to place greater value on informational texts as bases for analyzing rhetorical strategies, but I still believe my projected results would prevail: A decrease in assigning literary texts has contributed to a decrease in student engagement and achievement.

The second artifact in this portfolio, which I have designated as my teaching-based project, comes from ENG 6020 Composition Instructor’s Workshop, which I took in the spring
of 2020 with Dr. Ethan Jordan. As the final project for the course, we created a “final teaching portfolio,” which included a writing teacher’s snapshot, a statement of teaching philosophy, a hypothetical course syllabus, and a detailed unit plan—as well as a reflective essay. I chose to revise only my statement of teaching philosophy and my WRIT 1110 syllabus for this portfolio due to the full project’s length. Drafting my statement of teaching philosophy was a particularly valuable experience for me. I had, of course, written similar statements as part of the job-hunting process, but this one felt different; after teaching at Paulding High School and taking classes in the MA program over the past couple of years, my thinking about English education—especially teaching composition—had evolved. I was finally able to anchor my beliefs in scholarly research, which articulated what I had felt to be true all along. I also enjoyed a feeling of accomplishment after designing my very own WRIT 1110 syllabus.

I had previously revised the statement of teaching philosophy, cutting it down from two pages to one, so this time, I went back through and edited it primarily for flow, though I did also change the ending to create a stronger voice. For the WRIT 110 course syllabus, which I geared toward College Credit Plus students, I was focused on practical application. There was a time when I had deeply considered pushing for my high school to partner with BGSU so that I could implement this syllabus—I particularly like the course readings I had selected—but I have since decided that I prefer my AP English Language and Composition course (despite the difficulties my students have had earning a qualifying score on the AP exam). One of the reasons I prefer AP Lang is that it has a stronger focus on rhetoric and argument, but if I were ever to implement the WRIT 110 syllabus, I would feel impelled to include a grammar component in the curriculum; thus, I added the “Interactive Writing and Grammar Exercises” section to the syllabus and reduced the workload in other areas. However, I am sure that, if I do ever
implement this syllabus, I will need to make more adjustments and cutbacks; for now, though, experience has taught me that it is better to over-plan.

The third item that I chose to include in this portfolio, an annotated bibliography of secondary sources about George Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, could also be considered a teaching-based project, though I have not designated it as such. It was my final project for the Summer 2021 ENG 6800 seminar course titled “Dystopian Literature: The Poetics and Politics of Disaster,” taught by Dr. Erin Labbie. Although I had originally proposed to write a theory-based analytical paper as my final project for the course, as the introduction to the annotated bibliography details, I needed to improve my AP Lang course’s unit on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, and though I had not taken the dystopian literature course for that purpose—I simply found the course’s topic intriguing—I could not pass up the opportunity to apply what I was doing in graduate school directly to my teaching practice.

My first step in revising this third project was to, once again, refer to my original professor’s comments, particularly her suggestion to revise the introduction for formality. As I read through my original submission, I did indeed notice language that was a bit too informal for an academic audience. My classmates and my portfolio advisor, Dr. Lee Nickoson, were also very helpful in pointing out phrases that warranted replacement. Overall, though, after spending significant time combing through my annotations, I had grown quite satisfied with the final product. Through my research, I had gained a deeper understanding of and greater appreciation for Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; the experience ended up having a great impact on my teaching, too, as I implemented the materials included in the appendix for the first time this past fall. My students at the time were overwhelmed by the added task of reading and responding to secondary sources, and we ended up running out of time in class to discuss them effectively, but
now I am better prepared and will plan accordingly next year so that students can truly benefit from the improved unit.

The fourth and final artifact that I have chosen to include in this portfolio is actually the last project that I completed for the last class that I needed to take in order to complete the MA in English program: ENG 6070 Introduction to Critical Theory. Dr. Piya Pal-Lapinski instructed my section of the course. I had previously begun taking the class with a different professor in the summer of 2019, but after sustaining serious injuries in a motorcycle accident after the first week of classes, I had to withdraw my enrollment and take a leave of absence from BGSU. I will admit to having avoided re-registering for the class, too–repeatedly choosing other course options instead–as I was not confident in my critical analysis abilities. After my undergraduate coursework and years of teaching AP Lang, I could fairly claim that grammar and rhetoric were in my wheelhouse; literary theory, on the other hand, was not. However, I was excited to challenge myself, and with this being my last course in the program, I was finally ready to give it my all.

Dare I say it, but I believe that my final project for ENG 6070, which I have designated as evidence of my “substantive research and analysis on a focused topic,” might be the best paper I have ever written. I was tasked with analyzing “a film, literary text or social, political, or cultural issue… via the lens of whichever theorist(s)” I desired–so naturally, I chose one of the novels that I assign to my sophomores: Fahrenheit 451. In fact, I had brought the book up in my discussion board posts about the various theorists we had read throughout the course several times already. Instead of limiting myself to just one theoretical lens, though, I decided to tie two theories together in my analysis of the acclaimed novel—a “smart and ambitious” endeavor, as Dr. Pal-Lapinski commented. I had already spent significant time polishing this essay, titled
“Predicting Philosophy: Agamben’s Theory of the State of Exception and Baudrillard’s Hyperreality in Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451,*” before submitting the original final draft, so the portfolio version did not require as much revision as the previous projects had. My work on this essay has inspired me, though–I want to read more of Agamben’s work, particularly *Homo Sacer,* this summer–and has helped me gain much more confidence in teaching literature. Most of the course material was new to me, so I was grateful for the opportunity not only to increase my knowledge of critical theory but also to consider how I can foster such deep, intellectual discussions in my high school English classes.

Indeed, every reading and every assignment that I have completed throughout the MA in English program at BGSU has been valuable to me in some way. Not only am I a better teacher for having completed this program, but I also feel much more personally enriched. It is rather bittersweet for me, actually, to graduate with this master’s degree; I will miss engaging in the coursework–but the time has finally come; it can be delayed no longer. Only one question remains, then: What will I do now? Will I finally go back overseas as I had originally planned? Or will I continue to teach my beloved sophomores and juniors at Paulding High School, perhaps going on to pursue a Ph.D next? Your guess is as good as mine.
INTRODUCTION

It is a truth universally acknowledged that adults of the twenty-first century face more economic, political, and social challenges that demand advanced literacy skills than previous generations; thus, in order to be successful by the time they graduate high school, today’s students need to have not only acquired but also mastered "the ability to use reading to gain access to the world of knowledge, to synthesize information from different sources, to evaluate arguments, and to learn totally new subjects" (Murnane et al. 3). Unfortunately, students are not demonstrating such essential skills on a mass scale; in fact, according to a 2006 ACT report, only half of our nation’s high school graduates are likely to enter college or the workforce and succeed without remediation at their current reading ability (1). With the intent to remedy this problematic situation, then, the National Governors Association partnered with the Council of Chief State School Officers in 2009 to launch the Common Core State Standards Initiative (Baima 13). Drawing from expert research, international models, and public input, the group crafted a set of College and Career Readiness standards in reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language for students in kindergarten through twelfth grade (NGA & CCSSO 3)--and by August 2014, the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) had been adopted by thirty-seven states1 (Bidwell). Nevertheless, there was and continues to be much

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1 Four states had reviewed/revised the standards, four had previously adopted but later repealed, and five had never adopted.
controversy over their implementation, concern over their realistic achievement, and speculation as to their effectiveness (Baima 12).

The CCSS, acting in accordance with the "2009 reading framework of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)," calls for a "high and increasing proportion of informational text [...] as students advance through the grades," as well as an increase in text complexity and academic rigor (NGA & CCSSO 4); however, there has been much confusion as to the definition of informational text and the placement of responsibility for its corresponding instruction. According to Maloch and Bomer, in many cases, administrators, teachers, and researchers consider informational text synonymous with nonfiction, using both as umbrella terms to include "all texts that present factual information" (207). Additionally, while the introduction to the CCSS explicitly states that responsibility for literacy development must be shared among all content areas (4), many administrators—as well as teachers—have interpreted the directive as applying only to the English Language Arts curriculum, which they have since adapted to include more nonfiction than fiction (Baima 41). According to Alsup, the perceived requirement to increase the amount of nonfiction in high school English classes is leading to a devaluation of fictional literature (181), to the point where some teachers are cutting significant literary experiences from their curriculum in order to accommodate more student experience with interdisciplinary, expository texts (182).

A significant portion of current literature expounds on the need for students to study informational texts as part of the language arts curriculum in order to cultivate the literacy skills necessary for college- and career-readiness, and innumerable articles suggest ways to incorporate more nonfiction into ELA classrooms across all grade levels (Heller; Maloch and Bomer; Murnane et al). However, one recent study investigating the effect on student performance of increasing informational texts in middle school language art curriculum finds that “introduction of more
complex informational texts into the seventh- and eighth-grade curriculum did not improve student reading comprehension test scores” (Baima 2). Previous research also extensively examines the merits of teaching fiction (Barton; Ostenson and Wadham); indeed, as Janet Alsup declares in “Teaching Literature in an Age of Text Complexity,” teaching literary fiction “can result not only in critical thinking, close reading, and analytical writing but also in personal enjoyment, cognitive engagement, and an increased ability to empathize or relate to others” (182). Nevertheless, current literature does not directly address the possible effects of decreasing the amount of literary fiction taught in ELA classrooms, a consequence of the CCSS Initiative's special emphasis on informational texts. If English teachers are bypassing fiction to accommodate more nonfiction, at what cost are they doing so? This study aims to investigate the effects on student engagement and performance as they relate to the recent push for more informational texts in the high school English Language Arts classroom. After determining the amount of fiction taught in an individual classroom, the study will explore any perceived effects of a lack of literature in young adults' education. The study is expected to reveal that a decrease in the amount of fiction read in the ELA curriculum correlates to a decrease in student motivation and performance.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Student Reading Performance and CCSS. According to the ACT report titled "Reading Between the Lines," in 2006, student performance on the reading portion of the ACT was at "its lowest point in more than a decade" (3). The number of students deemed ready for college-level reading had been increasing, but performance peaked in 1999 at 55 percent and subsequently declined to 51 percent by 2006. Interestingly, 62 percent of eighth-graders were reading at grade level at the time, so students seemed to be losing momentum particularly in high school, especially after the tenth grade. The ACT report indicates that high school students were not being held to high expectations in their
English classes (3) and non-ELA teachers were not teaching strategies to read complex texts in other content areas (4).

The CCSS Initiative addressed the decline in student reading performance primarily by creating specific, rigorous standards and emphasizing the inclusion of complex, informational texts in the ELA curriculum (NGA & CCSSO 3): By the twelfth grade, student reading across the grade is expected to consist of 70 percent informational texts and 30 percent literary texts (5). This seems appropriate since, after fourth grade, students use reading as the primary tool to acquire knowledge in nearly all non-ELA classes (Maloch and Bomer 205; Murnane et al. 9), and in order to aid students in mastering other subjects, they need more exposure to complex texts in all classes (ACT 7); however, the literacy skills needed to comprehend texts in one course are often quite different from those needed to gain information in other subjects. Unfortunately, students are rarely, if ever, taught how to read texts in non-ELA courses, often because those non-ELA "teachers are unaware of the degree to which the literacy demands of their texts deviate from" the fictional literature, drama, and poetry typically studied in English classes, but also because those non-ELA teachers "do not know how to teach reading" (Murnane et al. 9). Thus, the responsibility for improving the skills of struggling readers, despite the area of weakness, is usually heaped onto English teachers, but doing so overcrowds the ELA curriculum (13). The CCSS make it very clear that teachers of English "are not required to devote 70 percent of reading to informational texts" but do so only in a footnote (NGA & CCSSO 5), leading to misunderstandings among those who implement the standards.

Motivation and Engagement. Another potential explanation for high school students' general decline in reading performance may be linked to motivation. It is no surprise to practicing teachers that student motivation to read tends to decline during the transition from elementary school to middle school. As instruction shifts focus from reading for pleasure to reading to acquire knowledge,
students become unmotivated to read the assigned texts (Barton 1), likely because they find scholarly reading boring and too difficult to understand (Barton 24; Ivey and Broaddus 363). This excess of academic reading and scarcity of reading simply for pleasure in the classroom may produce high school students with pessimistic perspectives on reading, which therefore impedes their willingness to read for any purpose, and thus severely impacts their acquisition of advanced literacy skills (Barton 2).

In a world of smartphones, video streaming services, and video games, struggling high school students are less likely to perceive reading as an enjoyable or valuable pastime and thus "have increasingly less exposure to or interaction with books outside of the classroom" (ACT 7). While teachers cannot control what students do outside of school, they usually can control which texts they select for in-class reading. Indeed, according to a 2013 survey, "teachers had shifted assigning classic literature to more 'relevant' and easily digested books such as teen movie novels and contemporary, young adult fantasies" (qtd. in Baima 36). However, policymakers might consider this practice a result of low teacher expectations (ACT 4); instead of encouraging students to strive toward more rigorous selections, teachers may choose to reduce frustration by assigning texts at or even below student reading levels (Baima 36).

Contrarily, research demonstrates that materials may be the main factor in student motivation to read in class (Ivey and Broaddus 361), and teachers often have to choose between assigning texts that students find engaging or risk their not reading at all. Evidence suggests that students are more inclined to read books that relate to their thinking and their lives (353); while most of the surveyed sixth-graders in Ivey and Broaddus's study preferred magazines, adventure books, and mysteries, nearly a third enjoyed reading across genres—fantasy, science fiction, historical fiction, and poetry—about people their own age (364). Ivey and Broaddus perceive that, by
failing to respond to student interests, traditional educational programs engender negative attitudes and school failure (353).

*The Case for Informational Texts.* Researchers define *informational text* in a variety of ways, leading to confusion among policymakers and educators. Though often used interchangeably, *nonfiction* is a vast genre whereas *informational text* is a mere subgenre. Duke and Tower sort nonfiction into five categories: informational texts, concept books, procedural texts, biographies, and reference materials; they then further define informational text as "text written with the primary purpose of conveying information about the natural and social world (typically from someone presumed to be more knowledgeable on the subject to someone presumed to be less so)" (qtd. in Maloch and Bomer 207). This definition distinguishes informational texts from narratives, such as biographies, and procedural documents.

The Common Core State Standards focus on incorporating *literary nonfiction* into the ELA classroom (NGA & CCSSO 5). According to Maloch and Bomer,

literary nonfiction (also called *creative nonfiction*) typically refers to a range of genres that attempt to represent the real world while also employing characteristics of literature, such as interesting and beautiful authorial style, rich characterizations, metaphorical as well as literal meanings, and sometimes complex and indeterminate themes. Literary nonfiction often contains at least some narrative and may be written as the story of an investigation to learn about the subject matter. (209)

Following this definition, then, high school English teachers are not required to teach so-called informational texts, but rather only texts with narrative structures, as memoirs and biographies. The CCSS does indeed state in the introduction that most forms of nonfiction must be taught in classes other than English (NGA & CCSSO 5); however, this idea is contradicted when the Standards later suggest the inclusion of "subgenres of exposition, argument, and functional text in the form of
personal essays, speeches, opinion pieces, essays about art or literature, biographies, memoirs, journalism, and historical, scientific, technical, or economic accounts written for a broad audience in the ELA curriculum (57). Despite the unclear definitions, research suggests that students should be reading and writing several forms of nonfiction.

According to The Aspen Institute, an educational policy study group from which the CCSS Initiative drew research, students acquire the skills necessary for success in college mostly from informational texts; additionally, it claims that reading in the workplace is primarily nonfiction (as cited in Baima 23). Maloch and Bomer further assert that in order to prepare students to communicate for real-world purposes, educators must teach a variety of texts. Informational texts, they argue, aid students in building knowledge about the world around them (206). Heller, especially, emphasizes teaching argument in the ELA classroom as a way to encourage students "to enter into contemporary conversations about relevant issues" (14). When students analyze rhetoric, they understand how language works to communicate an author's intention, which thus enables students to generate effective discourse of their own. In fact, Heller argues that failing to teach argumentative nonfiction may foster "a type of 'talk-show' mindset, where students don't pay as much attention to what other writers are saying, and they instead rely on emotions" (15). In order to become competent citizens, students must learn to recognize when the logic of an argument has been misconstrued and their emotions are being manipulated; furthermore, students must know how to identify credible sources and convince others to accept a particular point of view (15). Accordingly, there is little doubt among researchers that informational texts promote the gain of such advanced literacy skills, without which young adults would not be able "to explore fields as disparate as history, science, and mathematics; to succeed in postsecondary education, whether vocational or academic; to earn a decent living in the knowledge-based globalized labor market; and to participate in a democracy facing complex problems" (Murnane et al. 3).
The Case for Literature. It is important to note that proponents of informational texts do not call for the complete elimination of traditional literature from the ELA curriculum. Heller admits that "there are limitations to the study of nonfiction... it is not designed to transmit experience on a personal level" (16), thus constituting a void that only fictional reading can fill. Stories, as Alsup asserts, have the power to guide one through life's most difficult transitional periods; through narrative, one can truly understand and relate to others, allowing "readers to grow, develop, and rethink the self " (182). Indeed, adolescents have many sensitive emotional needs and social concerns that can be addressed subtly through the ELA curriculum. Polleck's study of inner-city teen girls in book clubs confirms that literature, paired with group discussions, has the ability to increase "students' self-worth, concepts, and esteem" (60), essentially creating a transformative space for young adults otherwise at risk. Alsup also cites research in neuroscience to demonstrate the "connection between fiction and the development of morality or empathy" (183), suggesting reading stories as a possible extrication for teen social issues, such as self-harm and bullying.

While reading fiction is known to result in "an increased ability to empathize or relate to others," Alsup further argues that advanced literacy skills—close reading, critical thinking, and analytical writing, etc.—can and should be taught using literature (182). Indeed, when Natalie Phillips, a researcher at Michigan State University, studied MRI scans as subjects read Jane Austen novels, she found that engaging in close reading of such rigorous texts employs the same brain processes as completing complex math problems (as cited in Alsup 184). The Common Core State Standards also acknowledge the cognitive and cultural benefits of reading fiction, stating that "students gain a reservoir of literary and cultural knowledge, references, and images; such works

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3 However, educators do object to the idea of a dramatic increase in nonfiction taught in English class, which would constitute a sacrifice in the amount of fiction.

3 Alsup does later acknowledge the lack of quantitative data to confirm her earlier assertions: "Cognitive literary studies may be the future direction that literature teaching scholars need to move in to show empirically what we know intuitively and anecdotally to be true: Stories are important and stories have power--to change minds, emotions, and behavior" (183).
offer profound insights into the human condition and serve as models for students' own thinking and writing" (NGA & CCSSO 35). Thus, while students develop affectively through reading fiction, their cognitive development is enhanced (Polleck 50).

Finally, it is well established within the body of research that fiction, particularly young-adult literature, is of higher interest to high school students; therefore, students tend to be more motivated to read from this genre, which Gallagher notes is "an important piece of helping them to become literate adults" (qtd. in Ostenson and Wadham 5). Teenagers are more likely to make connections with characters and see their own problems and challenges addressed—often with potential solutions—in fictional texts, leading to greater engagement (11). While skeptics may question the rigor of young-adult literature, Ostenson and Wadham find that a wide range of Lexile measures within the genre fits strongly with the CCSS's expectations for text complexity. Santoli and Wagner also declare that "the breadth and depth of young adult literature are equal to any other genre today," noting that "the recurring life themes of love, death, loss, racism, and friendship contained in the classics are also present in young adult literature" (qtd. in Ostenson and Wadham 8). Indeed, YA literature not only meets the standards in quantitative and qualitative measures of the CCSS, but it also meets the needs of readers (7), making it perhaps the perfect genre for the ELA classroom.

PROPOSAL

Purpose of the Study. Previous research focuses primarily on students from elementary to middle school, leaving a gap for the study of high school students. This part-quantitative, part-qualitative study will examine the relationship between student engagement and performance in relation to the increase of more complex, informational texts in the high school English Language Arts classroom as a result of the Common Core State Standards Initiative. This study will look closely at five high school English teachers and their students to explore any effects of a lack of literature in the
curricula using a mixed method of surveys, interviews, and statistical analysis of state test scores. This variety in design will aid the researcher in gaining a comprehensive, holistic understanding of student motivation as it relates to the type of texts assigned in English class. The study will provide information about the implementation of the CCSS, particularly the call for more rigorous informational texts, in three Ohio public schools, and is expected to reveal a negative correlation between the increase of nonfiction readings in the curriculum and general student motivation to read for class.

Setting and Participants. The scope of this study's setting and participants attempts to be vast in order to promote a more balanced result; however, all of the schools involved are located in Ohio and funded by the public. Teacher experience ranges from two to sixteen years; education ranges from a bachelor's degree to a master's degree. Three teachers are employed at a small village high school with enrollment at 376 students, 90 percent of whom come from economically disadvantaged families; one teacher is employed at a high school located in a distant rural district with 677 enrolled students, 39 percent economically disadvantaged; the final teacher works at a high school located in a large suburb with enrollment at 1,224 students and a total economically disadvantaged rate of 26 percent. Combined, the five teachers implement English Language Arts curricula to over 500 students in grades nine through twelve, ranging from students with individualized education plans for learning disabilities to gifted students enrolled in Advanced Placement courses. The researcher assumes that teachers have been trained in implementing the CCSS for English Language Arts. A link between student motivation to read in general, engagement in class, and performance on state assessments has been assumed, as well. Results are projected to reveal that a decrease in the amount of fiction read in the ELA curriculum correlates to a decline in student motivation and performance.

Methods. Data will be collected and analyzed to inform the following research questions:
1. Has the implementation of the CCSS had an impact on high school English teachers' inclusion of complex, informational texts in their curricula?

   To address Research Question 1, participating teachers will complete an initial interview gauging their views on the intent of the CCSS and their perspectives on its implementation. The researcher will ask teachers to provide their own definitions of informational texts, comment on who is most responsible for the instruction of informational texts, determine what percentage of their curricula should consist of informational texts according to how they understand the CCSS, and finally discuss if and how they have altered their curricula since the implementation of the CCSS.

   Projected Result: High school English teachers, under the assumption that 70 percent of student reading should consist of nonfiction, have increased the number of informational texts to at least 50 percent of their general ELA curricula since the implementation of the CCSS. Instructors of AP English Language and Composition teach at least 90 percent nonfiction. Teachers of AP English Literature and Composition teach no more than 10 percent nonfiction.

2. Do high school students believe they are more engaged by certain types of texts, and does the inclusion of these texts in their English curricula increase their motivation to read?

   To address Research Question 2, a survey with a Likert-like scale will be administered to all participating students in their English classes. The survey will have five sections: 1) Motivation to read outside of school, 2) Perceived engagement with various genres, 3) Perceived value of reading various genres, 4) Types of texts studied in school, and 5) Perceived engagement with texts in various classes. Since research demonstrates that materials may be the main factor in student motivation to read in class (Ivey and Broaddus 361), this survey is necessary to determine which materials are generally most engaging to
high school students, which will help inform the overall situation of student motivation and performance.

Projected Result: While high school students are generally more engaged by fictional texts, most students are unmotivated to read outside of school, though they recognize the value of reading various types of texts. Students perceive reading mostly nonfiction in the form of textbooks in most high school classes, except for English class, in which they study novels, short stories, and plays. Students are generally less engaged by poetry, essays, speeches, and biographies, though they do tend to enjoy argumentative texts.

3. Has high school student reading performance been positively impacted by the introduction of more complex, informational texts into the ELA curriculum?

To address Research Question 3, the researcher will gather performance data from state tests for individual students from eighth grade, tenth grade, and twelfth grade to determine if there has been an increase in overall reading achievement. Controlling for the time the CCSS was implemented at each school, item-analysis will focus on performance for reading informational texts compared to performance for reading literature.

Projected Result: The inclusion of more complex, informational reading selections since the implementation of the CCSS will result in no positive difference in overall student reading performance. Achievement for reading informational texts will have increased; however, achievement for reading literature will have decreased.

4. Do high school English teachers believe that students are negatively impacted by a reduction of fictional literature, drama, and poetry in the ELA curriculum?

To address Research Question 4, participating teachers will complete an exit interview in order to determine their perspectives on the recent educational reform's push for
an increase in complex, informational texts in the ELA curriculum. The researcher will ask teachers to comment on the student benefits of increasing nonfiction in their curricula as well as the perceived detriments. Teachers will discuss the value of reading fictional literature, drama, and poetry as the core of the ELA curriculum and consider the effect on student development and achievement of decreasing these texts to accommodate the increase in nonfiction. Most importantly, teachers will comment on whether they have perceived any difference in student engagement and performance since increasing the number of informational texts in their curricula.

Projected Result: Teachers will generally agree that a decrease in traditional English texts negatively impacts students; however, they will acknowledge that there is value in teaching some informational texts, particularly argument. Teachers will have noticed a decline in student engagement and performance, though they may not attribute it entirely to the increase in nonfiction in the ELA curriculum.

DISCUSSION

This study attempts to examine a connection between text types and student engagement and, therefore, performance. The purpose of this study is ultimately to determine whether the benefits of increasing the percentage of informational texts outweigh the detriments of decreasing the number of fiction, drama, and poetry in the high school English Language Arts curriculum. Both genres have their merits and can be used to teach advanced literacy skills. With nonfiction, students can acquire the skills to understand a speaker’s intentions and communicate for real-world purposes—skills that they will need no matter which paths they choose to take in their lives. On the other hand, fictional texts have the power to express universal truths about the human condition (Heller 16), awakening students’ empathy and social awareness. These skills, too, are essential to living socially and emotionally fulfilling lives. Regardless of the results, it is the hope of the
researcher that this study will be used to inform the decisions of educational policy-makers as well as teachers.

In an ideal world, every teacher, no matter his or her content area, would share in the teaching of reading and literacy; however, for as long as can be remembered, English teachers have been solely responsible for teaching reading despite the fact that many literacy skills are subject-specific (Murnane et al. 13). As the ACT reiterates, "we can no longer afford to ignore reading instruction in high school" (7). The Common Core State Standards Initiative attempts to solve this problem, but its implementation has been controversial and focuses mainly on English teachers, with only mentions of solutions in other subject areas. Further research could examine whether non-ELA teachers have increased the amount of complex, informational texts in their respective curricula and explore how these teachers address the teaching of literacy skills specific to their subjects.

This topic is worthy of contemplation among high school educators--those who have dedicated their careers to not only students' academic success, but also students' development into successful citizens. After the completion of the study, the resulting article would be a good fit for English Journal, a journal produced by the National Council for Teachers of English, tailored for educators in middle and high school. English Journal tends to prefer submissions about new pedagogical methods and technology, but an article produced with this research would allow teachers to consider their curricula in a new light. While policymakers and government officials may make their mandates, ultimately, it is our nation's teachers who know their students' needs best and offer the first hand in shaping their development. In the end, our teachers will choose which texts to teach with their students' best interests at heart.
Works Cited

ACT. "Reading Between the Lines: What the ACT Reveals about College Readiness in Reading." American College Testing, 2006.


Maloch, Beth and Randy Bomer. "Research and Policy: Informational Texts and the Common Core Standards: What Are We Talking about, Anyway?" *Language Arts*, vol. 90, no. 3, National


"Sterling High School." Best High Schools Ranking,

Statement of Teaching Philosophy

After five years of teaching AP English Language and Composition, I am more dedicated than ever to sharing my enthusiasm for writing; my goal is that, by the time they leave my classroom at the end of their junior year of high school, my students have come to appreciate the personal, academic, and professional growth that writing often inspires. Thus, I agree wholeheartedly with Downs and Robertson when they outline two overarching goals for a first-year college composition course in Naming What We Know (Adler-Kassner & Wardle, 2015) : "(1) for students to examine and ideally consider prior knowledge about writing in light of new experiences and knowledge... and (2) for the course itself to serve as a general education course, teaching transferable knowledge of and about writing" (p. 105). In an effort to achieve these goals, I currently anchor my teaching philosophy in three threshold concepts.

Concept 1: “Writing Is a Social and Rhetorical Activity”

Throughout the years, I have come to realize–both personally and professionally–that the most effective messages are tailored to meet a specific audience's expectations and change form when applied to new contexts. In order to imbue my students with this understanding early in my FYC course, I ask them to read and discuss scholarly articles introducing the rhetorical situation. Students then apply the concept to their own lives by narrating their writing histories from a rhetorical lens. Furthermore, students complete a pre-writing task explaining the rhetorical situation for each additional major project in the course. This activity not only encourages students to craft their projects with purposeful design, but it also promotes metacognition as students discern the steps to success and articulate the qualities that their writing must possess in order to be effective within its context.
Concept 2: “Writing Is (Also Always) a Cognitive Activity”

Good writers know that good writing is rarely simple or easy; after all, it requires metacognition. Therefore, I engage students in contemplating the writing process not only before but also as they are involved in it by assigning reflective progress checks. Then, once students have finalized their project, they complete yet another reflection activity, this time recalling the strategies that they employed, evaluating their success, and reframing the task. I truly believe that integrating such metacognitive tasks throughout the process empowers students to take control of their writing.

Concept 3: “All Writers Have More to Learn”

Finally, it is likely that some of my students will enter my course thinking that they are simply “bad at writing”—that they will always be “bad” at it; yet, whenever contexts change, so do the expectations, and even the best writers have to learn how to adapt. Therefore, as a culminating project, I ask students to explore a hypothetical rhetorical situation that they are likely to encounter in their academic and professional careers, thus encouraging them to consider how the learning they have done in my course can extend beyond the course itself. As Downs and Robertson assert in *Naming What We Know*, "[w]hen students understand the end goal is learning how to learn how to write… rather than learning the right way to write, they will be more successful at writing in all contexts" (p. 119). Indeed, my utmost purpose as a writing teacher is to guide students in confronting their misconceptions of writing so that they can develop a deeper, richer understanding of how writing works—and then realize how engaging in the writing process can benefit them in the future.
Welcome to WRIT 1110: Introduction to Academic Writing!
Paulding High School | Fall 2020
Ms. Eubank | Room A207 | h_eubank@pauldingschools.org

Course Description

from BGSU’s course catalog

WRIT 1110 provides a theoretical and practical foundation for college writers and lays important groundwork for future academic reading and writing experiences. This workshop-based course explores diverse intellectual practices associated with effective writing, including analyzing and producing genres, investigating individual writing processes, and reflecting on one’s learning with an eye toward transferring writing knowledge to new situations. Students explore and experience how writing works in worlds they inhabit by composing digital, visual, narrative expository arguments. UWP Placement. ABC/No credit.

 belang, this course gives you a space to develop as a writer within the academic discourse and grow essential skills and understandings that can apply to any future writing.

Required Materials

- School-issued laptop (keep it charged or bring your charger to class)
- Word-processing software (Google Docs preferred; Microsoft Word acceptable)
- Access to school-managed Google account (especially Classroom, Drive, and Gmail)
- Course readings (provided by the instructor)
- Folder or binder for organizing handouts, worksheets, etc.
- Notebook or loose-leaf paper and a writing utensil for note-taking and in-class work
Learning Outcomes
from the Ohio Transfer Module’s “Outcomes for TME001: First Writing Course” (May 2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rhetorical Knowledge</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Understand how genre conventions shape the texts they read and should shape the texts they compose.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Understand the possibilities of electronic media/technologies for composing and publishing texts for a variety of audiences.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Compose texts that have a clear purpose, respond to the needs of intended audiences; assume an appropriate stance; adopt an appropriate voice, tone, style, and level of formality; and use appropriate conventions of format and structure.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Critical Thinking, Reading, and Writing</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4. Use reading and writing for inquiry, learning, thinking, and communicating.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Locate and evaluate secondary research materials, including visual texts such as photographs, videos, or other materials.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Analyze relationships among writer, text, and audience in various kinds of texts.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Use various critical thinking strategies to analyze texts.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Knowledge of Composing Processes</th>
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<tr>
<td>8. Recognize that writing is a flexible, recursive process that typically involves a series of activities, including generating ideas and text, drafting, revising, and editing.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Understand that writing is often collaborative and social. To demonstrate that understanding, students should work with others to improve their own and others' texts and balance the advantages of relying on others with taking responsibility for their own work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Apply this understanding and recognition to produce successive drafts of increasing quality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Use electronic environments to support writing tasks such as drafting, reviewing, revising, editing, and sharing texts.</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Knowledge of Conventions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12. Recognize the genre conventions for structure, paragraphing, tone, and mechanics employed in a variety of popular forms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. Learn to control syntax, grammar, punctuation, and spelling through practice in composing and revising.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. Select and employ appropriate conventions for structure, paragraphing, mechanics, and format in their own writing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. Acknowledge the work of others when appropriate.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16. Use a standard documentation format as needed.</td>
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</table>

University Policies
I have included only those relevant to CCP; for a complete list, visit bgsu.edu/general-counsel/university-policies.

Accessibility
If you have a documented disability that requires accommodations to obtain equal access for your learning, please make your needs known to me, preferably during the first week of the semester. Please note that students who request accommodations need to verify their eligibility through the Office of Accessibility Services, email: access@bgsu.edu, phone: 419-372-8495; TTY: 419-372-9455).

Title IX
Bowling Green State University (BGSU) is committed to providing a safe learning environment for all students that is free of all forms of discrimination and harassment, including sexual assault, domestic violence, dating violence, and stalking. Please be aware all BGSU faculty members are “mandatory reporters,” which means that if you tell me about a situation involving sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, I must share that information with the Title IX Coordinator. If you or someone you know
has been impacted by sexual harassment, sexual assault, dating or domestic violence, or stalking, BGSU has staff members trained to support you. Although I have an obligation to report, you will, in most cases, control how your case will be handled. When working with the Office of the Dean of Students and/or Title IX Office you will have access to resources, but also have the opportunity to express if you wish to move forward with an investigation. Our goal is to make sure you are aware of the options available to you as a BGSU student. If you wish to speak to a confidential resource, you can contact any of the following on-campus and local resources:

- Counseling Center (confidential) – (419) 372-2081
- The Cocoon (confidential) – (419) 373-1730
- Falcon Health Center (confidential) – (419) 372-2271
- Wood County Crisis Line (confidential) – (419) 502-HOPE (4673)
- Psychological Services Center (confidential) – (419) 372-2540
- Wellness Connection – (419) 372-WELL (9355)
- Wood County Hospital – (419) 354-8900

Grade Appeals
WRIT courses abide by the grade appeal process of the English Department and the College of Arts and Sciences. If you would like to appeal your grade, please contact the UWP office.

Religious Holidays
It is the policy of the University to make every reasonable effort to allow students to observe their religious holidays without academic penalty. In such cases, it is the obligation of the student to provide the instructor with reasonable notice of the dates of religious holidays on which he or she will be absent. Should you need to miss a class due to a religious holiday, you should understand that absence from classes for religious reasons does not relieve you of responsibility for completing the work. In such an event, you should consult with me well before you leave for the holiday to find out what assignments will be due while you are absent—and you subsequently should have the assignments completed and turned in to me prior to missing class.

Major Assignments
All formal writing projects will be workshopped and go through the full writing process. You will receive feedback from peers and/or the instructor on at least one rough draft. Each final draft will be evaluated with a rubric to indicate its strengths and weaknesses, as well as to determine its score.

Writing Project 1: Writing Narrative (min. 1,000 words)
This first major assignment asks you to consider your own writing history. You should not simply describe the types of writing you like to do (although that may come into play); instead, this narrative should build on the course readings and use terminology and ideas from those readings to discuss the different writing situations you have encountered so far, both inside and out of school. You will also craft an argumentative analysis that examines the way your writing experiences were shaped by their contexts and how those experiences influenced your conception of writing. By the end of this project, you will have reflected on your writing development from a rhetorical perspective and explored in depth what it means to write.

Writing Project 2: Rhetorical Analysis (min. 800 words)
A rhetorical analysis examines the rhetorical situations and arguments in a chosen text to determine how it works and why. For this assignment, you have considerable freedom in choosing which type of text (either linguistic or visual) you will analyze, though you will need to get your text approved before getting too far into the writing process. To perform this task, you will review the elements of linguistic/visual arguments and compose an essay that analyzes the rhetorical choices that the author(s) makes to achieve his/her/their purpose and convey the text’s message to the intended audience.
In this project, you will choose a famous oral speech (fictional, historic, contemporary, etc.) and change the rhetorical situation in at least two elements. After completing a brief rhetorical analysis of the original text, you will adapt it to increase its effectiveness in the new rhetorical situation. Finally, you will analyze and argue for the changes you made in order to make the remixed speech meaningful within its new context.

A discourse community is a group that uses communication to reach goals and purposes. As a whole, people in this group typically have similar goals and values. Think of a discourse community that you are currently learning to navigate or intend to join as you continue in your academic or professional career? What types of writing or communication does this group create? What medium does it typically use? For this assignment, you will discover ways to gain competence in a discourse community of your choice. You will examine the conventions of a particular discourse community, paying specific attention to its writing and language. In essence, you need to look at the type(s) of writing and communication that your discourse community produces. You will conduct research, interviews, etc. in order to detail the conventions of your specific discourse community. Please note that you will also need to adapt and present this project to the class after its submission.

This final project asks you to draw on the concepts we've explored and conversations we've had as a class throughout the semester to answer the question, broadly, “What is writing?” In answering this question, you might use the course readings to explain and support your answer. The assignment allows you to process and reflect on what writing is and to define this reflection. Your discussion of what writing is should be contextualized in relation to your writing, perhaps drawing on your work in this course for support. You might want to consider your view of writing at the start of the course and how it has changed.

Additional Coursework

The following are labor-based, lower-stakes assignments—similar to “participation” grades; however, they are still essential learning opportunities and cannot be skipped. These activities are designed to improve your strategies for writing and critical thinking and will help you build stronger formal writing projects.

**Reading Responses**

There is no textbook required for this course; instead, throughout the semester, you will read many articles and other assigned texts, which will be incorporated into class discussions and in your formal writing projects. For most assigned readings, you will be required to write a reading response (min. 200 words). Responses should go beyond mere summary; rather, they are an opportunity for students to engage deeply with some aspect of the reading—a particular idea, argument, approach, conflict, etc.—and to push back, extend, or apply it in some new way. The prompts and deadlines for each week's reading response(s) will be posted on Google Classroom by 3PM on the preceding Friday. Be prepared to share your responses with the class in order to build on and intensify our discussion of the ideas introduced in the readings.

**Class Discussions**

Conversation is an essential tool for exploring ideas and gaining understanding, as well as collaborating with others, so active participation in class discussions is vital to your learning in this course. We will discuss our course readings often using a variety of strategies, including Socratic seminar, philosophical chairs, concentric circles, conver-stations, fishbowl, snowball, etc., and participation may be recorded as a grade. Thus, you are expected to come to class each day having completed the readings and other additional coursework so that our discussion and in-class activities can be as fruitful as possible.
The mechanics of grammar and writing are constantly evolving and change from situation to situation; still, as we are currently engaged in an academic environment, it is important for you to both acquire knowledge of and demonstrate an ability to employ the conventions of Standard American English. For this purpose, we will use Quill.org, “a nonprofit, educational technology organization dedicated to improving student writing,” throughout the semester. This website is a particularly beneficial resource for college writing as the Quill Connect tool encourages students to “develop their sentence construction skills by combining multiple short sentences into a more sophisticated single sentence.”

During the first week of classes, you will be asked to complete a diagnostic survey, which will generate a personalized learning plan for each student. After that, I will assign the recommended activity packs to individuals. You are expected to reach proficiency on 2-3 activities per week. I will check your account on Thursday mornings to ensure that you are making adequate progress on your individualized learning plan.

You will be expected to apply metacognitive strategies (i.e. “thinking about one’s thinking in order to grow”) throughout the writing process through the completion of routine tasks. For example, before you begin work on a major assignment, you might be asked to demonstrate your understanding of its rhetorical situation by composing an informal analysis of the text you intend to produce or comparing it to prior writing experience you’ve had. As you are involved in the writing process for each major assignment, you might also be required to complete periodic activities reflecting on your progress, and once you have finalized the project, you might compose a brief commentary recalling the strategies that you employed, evaluating your own success, and explaining how you would approach the assignment differently if you had to re-do it or had been writing within a different context.

Research indicates that students who employ metacognitive strategies when writing tend to not only produce higher-quality work but also understand how to adapt their composition processes to changing demands, both of which are goals for the course as a whole.

For most major assignments, class members will work together to review one another’s drafts. Peer reviews are an important part of the knowledge-making process in academia and beyond. For writers, it is helpful to get as much feedback as possible from thoughtful reviewers in order to revise substantively and to create a more rhetorically effective text. Moreover, peer reviews have the added pedagogical benefit of encouraging substantive conversations about writing. Through critical reading and focused discussion, writers and reviewers articulate their knowledge and, in the process, become sharper readers and writers.

To ensure that you are getting the encouragement and feedback you need in your writing, you may seek an individual consultation with the instructor for each major assignment. In fact, some class periods throughout the semester will be dedicated to conducting writing workshops and conferences, and students may receive credit for meeting with the instructor during this time.

Each of the major assignments is graded on a 100-point scale; additional coursework cumulates in a straight-point system. Your average for the course as a whole is calculated according to the weighted distributions outlined below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coursework</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing Project 1</td>
<td>15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Writing Project 2</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Project 3</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Project 4</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Project 5</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Coursework</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Overall
At the end of the course, your overall average will be converted to the following letter grades. Decimal points above 0.5 are rounded up to the next whole number.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>90 - 100</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Excellent performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70 - 79</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>Satisfactory performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80 - 89</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Strong performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 - 69</td>
<td>NC</td>
<td>No credit (previously D or F)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Classroom Policies

#### Attendance
Because this class is a seminar emphasizing writing workshops, class discussions, group work, and other activities that prepare students for the major writing assignments, attendance is required. However, I recognize that students may need to miss class for various reasons outside of their control. In those cases, please communicate with me, preferably in advance (if possible), to make arrangements for completing any classwork that is missed and to ensure you remain on track. A student who is absent for more than two weeks of classes and has not made alternative arrangements with the instructor is ineligible to pass the course and will receive a grade of NC. Additionally, arriving to class late not only affects you; late arrivals also disrupt the rest of the class. Therefore, you will be expected to be in the classroom and ready to begin class when the bell rings. To reinforce such punctuality, you will be held to PHS’s tardy policy stated in your handbook.

#### Classroom Etiquette
Class time will be devoted to building writing practices by composing, discussing, and critiquing your own writing and the writing of others; therefore, it is critical that you maintain mental presence throughout the class period. Though technology provides numerous resources for education, it can also be incredibly distracting. Please know that multitasking with other work, phone/computer games, side chats, etc. during our course can be detrimental to your success. Additionally, disruptive behavior will not be tolerated in class. Disruptive behavior is behavior that interferes with other class members and their access to an appropriate educational or work environment. Examples of disruptive behavior include yelling or screaming, persistent and unreasonable demands for time and attention, words or actions that have the effect of intimidating, threatening, or harassing another, and words or actions that cause another to fear for personal safety.

#### Public Nature of Work
As this is a workshop-style writing seminar, be aware that everything you write for this course may be read by peers and your instructor, and because our discussion may sometimes address sensitive and personal topics, it is essential that students approach topics and peers with appropriate levels of care, sensitivity, and understanding to facilitate a conducive learning environment for all.

#### Academic Honesty
All work submitted for a grade in this class must be your own original work. It must also be written originally for this class unless otherwise noted for a particular assignment. You must responsibly credit sources of information (whether quoted, paraphrased, or summarized) in your submitted work. For more information on how the University defines and enforces academic honesty, see the [Code of Academic Conduct](#).

#### Late or Missing Work
All work must be completed and submitted in the assigned location by the assigned date and time. In most cases, I will not accept late work unless you have made previous arrangements with me. Please note that missing class on a day an assignment is due does not excuse you from turning in that assignment, especially if the submission process is electronic; handwritten work should be turned in upon return to class. Additionally, “I left it at home,” “I lost the paper,” “The file got corrupted,” etc. are not acceptable excuses. You must complete and submit all writing projects in order to pass the course. For major assignments,
the project grade will drop one letter grade for each calendar day it is late. In general, if you feel as though you cannot complete any given assignment by the due date, contact me to discuss alternative options. I am more than happy to work with you as long as you keep me informed in a timely manner.

Course Calendar

Compared to a college campus, schedules in the high school setting are more likely to change due to field trips, assemblies, snow days, etc. Therefore, the following calendar is tentative and intended only to give students an overview of the course’s workload and pacing. Changes may be made in consultation with class members. For a more specific agenda, access the lesson plans on our Google Classroom (updated weekly).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week/Theme</th>
<th>Possible Readings</th>
<th>Possible Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Welcome Period</strong></td>
<td>• “Entering Class Discussions” (Graff &amp; Birkenstein)</td>
<td>• Discuss course expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/19 - 8/21</td>
<td>• “Reading for the Conversations” (Graff &amp; Birkenstein)</td>
<td>• Discuss preconceptions of writing and writers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “What Is Academic Writing” (Irvin)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week One: Defining Writing</strong></td>
<td>• “The Inspired Writer vs. The Real Writer” (Allen)</td>
<td>• Discuss reading(s) using Socratic seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/24 - 8/28</td>
<td>• “So You’ve Got a Writing Assignment. Now What?” (Hinton)</td>
<td>• Share typical drafting processes and writing tools</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “The Writing Lives of College Students” (Grabill et al.)</td>
<td>• Introduce WP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “About Rhetoric” (Nugent)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Invention: Starting the Writing Process” (Purdue)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week Two: Starting to Write</strong></td>
<td>• Map the writing lives of class members</td>
<td>• Complete WP1 pre-writing tasks and brainstorm with classmates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8/31 - 9/4</td>
<td>• “Shitty First Drafts” (Lamott)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week Three: Rhetoric Basics</strong></td>
<td>• “Responding--Really Responding--to Other Students' Writing’” (Straub)</td>
<td>• Discuss expectations for rough drafts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/9 - 9/11</td>
<td>• “How to Respond to a ‘Revise and Resubmit’ from an Academic Journal” (Golash-Boza)</td>
<td>• Plan and outline WP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• “Revision Strategies” (Sommers)</td>
<td>• Time in class to draft WP1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week Four: Critiquing Writing</strong></td>
<td>• “Reflective Writing and the Revision Process” (Giles)</td>
<td>• Discuss readings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9/14 - 9/18</td>
<td>• “Backpack vs. Briefcases” (Caroll)</td>
<td>• Peer-review WP1</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Text(s) about analyzing images (suggestions welcome!)</td>
<td>• Develop a revision plan for WP1</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week Five: Revising Writing</strong></td>
<td>• “Revision Strategies” (Sommers)</td>
<td>• Revise and submit WP1</td>
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<td>9/21 - 9/25</td>
<td>• “Reflective Writing and the Revision Process” (Giles)</td>
<td>• Reflect on WP1 product and process</td>
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<td>• “Backpack vs. Briefcases” (Caroll)</td>
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<td><strong>Week Six: Rhetorical Analysis</strong></td>
<td>• Practice analysis by writing rhetorical precis and mapping images</td>
<td>• Introduce WP2 and complete pre-writing task(s)</td>
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<td>Week Seven: Visual Rhetoric</td>
<td>10/5 - 10/9</td>
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<tr>
<td>● “So What? Who Cares?” (Graff &amp; Birkenstein)</td>
<td>● Time in class to draft WP2</td>
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<td>● Reflect on WP2 progress and process</td>
<td>● Peer-review WP2</td>
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<th>Week Eight: Oral Rhetoric</th>
<th>10/12 - 10/15</th>
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<tr>
<td>● Excerpts from “About Oral Modes of Communication” (Wysocki &amp; Lynch)</td>
<td>● Revise and submit WP2</td>
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<td>● Reflect on WP2 product and process</td>
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<th>Week Nine: Literacy</th>
<th>10/19 - 10/23</th>
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<tr>
<td>● “Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistics” (Gee)</td>
<td>● Define what it means to be “literate” today</td>
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<td>● “Sponsors of Literacy” (Brandt)</td>
<td>● Discuss our own literacy sponsors</td>
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<td>● Introduce WP3</td>
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<th>Week Ten: Adaptability</th>
<th>10/26 - 10/30</th>
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<tr>
<td>● “Filter. Remix. Make.” (Dusenberry et al.)</td>
<td>● Discuss reasons for “remixing” a text</td>
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<td>● “Embrace the Remix” (Ferguson, online video)</td>
<td>● Complete WP3 pre-writing task(s)</td>
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<td>● Begin drafting WP3</td>
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<th>Week Eleven: Composing Arguments</th>
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<tr>
<td>● “Argument as Conversation” (Greene)</td>
<td>● Reflect on WP3 progress and process</td>
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<td>● “Designing Compositions Rhetorically” (Wysocki &amp; Lynch)</td>
<td>● Showcase original speech vs. remix</td>
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<th>Week Twelve: Discourse Communities</th>
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<tr>
<td>● “Discourse Communities and Communities of Practice” (Johns)</td>
<td>● Peer-review WP3</td>
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<td>● “Learning the Language” (Klass)</td>
<td>● Finalize and submit WP3</td>
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<td>● Reflect on WP3 product and process</td>
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<th>Week Thirteen: Genres</th>
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<tr>
<td>● “Navigating Genres” (Dirk)</td>
<td>● Discuss readings</td>
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<td>● “Discourse Communities, Genres and English as an International Language” (Swales)</td>
<td>● Introduce WP4</td>
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<th>Week Fourteen: Research</th>
<th>11/23 - 11/24</th>
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<td>● “Googlepedia” (McClure)</td>
<td>● Complete WP4 pre-writing task(s)</td>
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<td>● “Quoting, Paraphrasing, and Avoiding Plagiarism” (Krause)</td>
<td>● Review how to cite sources following MLA guidelines</td>
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<td>● Begin drafting WP4</td>
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<th>Week Fifteen: Writing in New Contexts</th>
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<tr>
<td>● “Identity, Authority, and Learning to Write in New Workplaces” (Wardle)</td>
<td>● Reflect on WP4 progress and process</td>
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<td>● Peer-review WP4</td>
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<th>Week Sixteen: New Literacies</th>
<th>12/7 - 12/11</th>
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<tr>
<td>● “From Pencils to Pixels” (Baron)</td>
<td>● Finalize and submit WP4</td>
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<td>● Reflect on WP4 product and process</td>
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<td>● Present WP4</td>
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**Wrapping Up**  
12/14 - 12/18  
- TBD / Catch up  
- Introduce WP5 and complete pre-writing tasks  
- Begin drafting WP5

**Final “Exam”**  
12/21 - 12/22  
- TBD / Catch up  
- Revise and submit WP5  
- Complete end-of-course survey

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### Additional Resources

**LibGuides**
LibGuides are class-specific pages with materials to support students as they learn about scholarly sources. To help familiarize you with the level of academic research skills necessary for this course and beyond, the [LibGuide for WRIT 1110](https://example.com) offers assistance with search strategies, use of the Library’s databases, evaluation of sources, incorporation of sources into papers, academic honesty, and more. The site also contains a “Library Quiz,” which you will be required to complete when I assign it, and contains an IM Chat Box, which allows you to communicate directly with a BGSU librarian. I strongly recommend that you refer to this site as you work on your papers both during and outside of class.

**The Learning Commons**
Located on the first floor of the Jerome Library, the Learning Commons is a valuable resource that provides students with free tutoring, including writing consultations at [The Writing Center](https://example.com). Consultants provide a real audience and work with writers collaboratively, rather than serving as a proofreading or editing service, toward revising writing for clarity, logical organization, and overall effectiveness.

**Falcon Forward**
[Falcon Forward](https://example.com) is BGSU’s online resources hub for first-year students and includes information about academic expectations and resources, building relationships with faculty, key offices and initiatives on campus, career exploration and resume building, and managing your transition to college.
Heather Eubank

Dr. Erin Labbie

ENG 6800 “Dystopian Literature: The Poetics and Politics of Disaster”

8 July 2021

Reassessing My Teaching of Orwell’s Classic Dystopian Novel: An Annotated Bibliography of Pedagogical Research and Literary Criticism Concerning *Nineteen Eighty-Four*

RATIONALE

At the end of every school year, I ask my AP English Language and Composition students to complete an end-of-course survey. I look forward to their responses to one question in particular: “Thinking back over the whole year, what was the most valuable assignment(s) or project(s) this year? What made it so valuable?” In past years, students had often cited our Socratic seminar over the summer-reading novel as not only the most enjoyable but also one of the most intellectually stimulating activities; however, in response to this past year’s survey, only one student mentioned our discussion of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*.

To be fair, this was my first time teaching Orwell’s classic dystopian novel, though I had thought about using it in previous years. Prior to the 2020-2021 school year, I had simply continued the preceding teacher’s assignment of Steinbeck’s *Of Mice and Men* as summer reading. While students did find Steinbeck’s novella engrossing and thought-provoking, I could no longer justify including it on my AP Lang syllabus as the course is designed to develop students’ ability to analyze rhetoric and construct arguments, not critically read and analyze literary texts. Indeed, as much as I appreciate the social realism in *Of Mice and Men*, the novella does not lend itself to rhetorical analysis, which is most often taught using nonfiction texts; in fact, there are some in the AP Lang community who would even suggest that we teachers not
assign works of fiction at all. I had been thinking for several years, however, that Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* could serve both purposes: the fictional narrative would still engage students—especially considering that they would be reading the novel over summer break—while the social and political themes—particularly the “control of information and history” and “language as mind control”—coincide nicely with several of the enduring understandings that students are intended to acquire from the AP Lang curriculum (SparkNotes). Orwell’s dystopian society is exactly what we AP Lang teachers are trying to prevent by developing our students’ ability to analyze rhetoric; therefore, I can think of no better work of fiction to include on my course syllabus—and so I finally made the switch this past year.

Nevertheless, I fully recognize that my first time teaching *Nineteen Eighty-Four* was not great; in fact, the word “teach” might be too generous. I did not provide students with any secondary sources to deepen their understanding of the novel’s themes and concepts; instead, I merely asked students to write a 100-word response to each of the book’s three parts as their summer reading assignment—and then, after the first few weeks of school, I simply handed students a list of questions to answer in preparation for the Socratic seminar. While their two-day discussion was moderately fruitful, I knew there were better ways to teach the novel; I just needed to find them. Therefore, when it came time to devise a final project for this seminar course on dystopian literature, I decided to make the most out of the opportunity and create an annotated bibliography of resources that would not only inform my approach to teaching the novel but also serve as or contribute supplemental materials for my unit on Orwell’s classic piece of dystopian literature.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY
Sixty years after Nineteen Eighty-Four’s original publication, which also happens to mark the “twenty-fifth anniversary of Orwell’s fateful date,” Goodman sets out to prove in this article published by a far-right magazine that Orwell’s masterpiece is not, as the experts say, a prediction of “the communist take-over of Britain and America” or “a vilification of the Soviet dictator Stalin,” but rather a “satire of the highest order written against Fabian socialists” (33). Goodman first reasons that, since “Big Brother is merely a televised image,” he does not truly represent Stalin; instead, “Big Brother symbolizes the rise of super agencies in Britain and America staffed by intellectuals on the political Left,” as evidenced by a letter from Orwell himself (33-34). In this letter, Orwell predicts that the next generation of government leaders, because they would have been raised under state socialism, would eventually “establish a state so totalitarian that it would destroy every vestige of democratic thought” (34). In fact, according to Goodman, Orwell had already seen totalitarian ideas starting to take root among the intellectuals he worked with at the BBC and the Ministry of Information.

In the article’s next section, Goodman claims that Orwell specifically targeted Fabian socialists Beatrice and Sidney Webb; in fact, Goldstein’s character is an obvious allusion to Sidney Webb (35). The book’s title, too, is implicative: 1984 marks the 100th anniversary of the Fabian Society of London’s founding. The first date mentioned in the novel, April 4th, and a poem written by Orwell’s wife further support Goodman’s interpretation that Nineteen Eighty-Four “combines the pro-Soviet vision of the Webbs with Big Brother government enacted by the arrogant new Fabians” (35). Continuing his
list of allusions, Goodman points to other satire Orwell has written, O’Brien’s character, and Orwell’s experience with Indian culture, after which Goodman explains how Orwell foresaw the Fabians rising in social standing over the next two generations.

In the following section, Goodman switches gears to denounce scholars’ arguments that Orwell’s predictions missed the mark, noting that Nineteen Eighty-Four was intended as a warning, not prophecy–though some might prefer such a future. Goodman then illustrates several examples from a list of 137 “predictions” that Orwell actually got right, including the expansion of doublethink, attacks like those on 9/11 “leading to the establishment of dictatorial powers,” continuous warfare, the conglomeration of individual countries into superstates, an increase in diagnosed mental illness, a surge in the government’s surveillance of its citizens, educational reform leading to unmotivated youth, and, of course, the proliferation of telescreens. Finally, though “America today still falls far short of the Josef Stalin monstrosity,” Goodman claims that socialists will “continue to build a more-Orwellian society” unless his audience takes action (38). In the end, Goodman advises readers to “reject communism, socialism, and collectivism, and instead adopt Freedom” by “elect[ing] candidates in 2010 and 2012 who run as non-experts willing to tell the truth and obey the U.S. Constitution” (38).

Although this nonacademic article aims to contradict most conventional scholarly publications, Goodman’s interpretation of Orwell’s intention is well evidenced and reasonably articulated; in fact, his claim that Nineteen Eighty-Four is really “a warning about how socialism cast free of its moral anchors could eventually lead to an all-powerful state exercising totalitarian rule” is echoed by several scholastic sources
included in this bibliography—though Goodman’s call-to-action at the end does commit the either/or logical fallacy (38). True, the magazine in which Goodman’s article was originally published, *The New American*, tends to put out less-than-reliable and overly-biased stories, but that is precisely the reason I chose to read this article: I wanted to see what “the other side” said—and it turns out that I might even be able to use the article as a supplemental text after students have read *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. One of the essential skills of AP English Language and Composition is evaluating arguments from multiple perspectives, so I would assign Goodman’s piece paired with a more traditional scholarly essay and encourage students to compare the two from a rhetorical lens.


Maleuvre starts his metacritical analysis with a poignant question: Why has Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four* “virtually disappeared from the university classroom”? (33). “[I]t is the strange destiny of 1984,” he laments, “to vanish even as its fame stands undiminished, and to vanish indeed at the hands of people whose social function is to keep books alive” (33). Of course, as any logos-oriented writer would, Maleuvre immediately verifies that professors have indeed ceased assigning the novel by citing the Open Syllabus Project’s ranking of “the most and the least frequently assigned books in universities”: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* places dismally at 716 (33). Next, Maleuvre points out that “[w]hat a culture favors often explains why it disfavors other things” before noting that several of the highest-ranking texts, such as Plato’s *Republic* and *The Communist Manifesto*, “share a pronounced dislike of parliamentary government and prefer absolutism” (33). Maleuvre then cites Irving Howe to support his claim that the
book has been cast out of academia due primarily to its discomforting premise: In *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, the intelligentsia has become the oppressing class.

Maleuvre continues to suggest other reasons why Orwell’s (in)famous novel has been snubbed by the university: “1984 indicts, not just a political system, but its philosophic foundation, a foundation that happens to underpin the most influential school of thought of the late twentieth century and early twenty-first university, which is postmodernism” (34). In other words, literary theorists shun the book because Orwell’s philosophy of communication does not coincide with their postmodernist theories of language. Maleuvre also criticizes the university for its “snobbery” in dismissing *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as “a negligible piece of literature,” a work of plain prose that professors claim is better left to high schoolers than intellectuals at college (35).

Moving on, Maleuvre “observe[s] the verbal strategies that manufactured the irrelevance of 1984” (36). He declares the first strategy as one of “literate distraction—ways of attenuating the moral seriousness of 1984 by expounding on its outer dress” (36), after which he delineates how the novel has been understated as an unrealistic dystopia, a freakish satire, or a too-ambivalent critique of socialism. On the other hand, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* has also been overstated as alarmist and borderline sadistic, while other critics refuse to take Orwell’s work seriously because he “was not a philosopher, and had not received enough schooling in high Marxist criticism to write anything of intelligence on a subject so complex as socialist society” (37). Maleuvre subsequently labels such reasoning as fallacious and, in turn, commends Orwell: “His interest was with the concrete practical effects of political ideas on the lives of real human beings, not how they form a doctrinal mesh” (37).
Over the next few pages, Maleuvre expands on his assertion that academics have rhetorically “manufactur[ed] the irrelevance of *1984*” by ignoring its message, instead choosing to look beyond it—yet another logical fallacy. He meticulously disproves critics’ interpretations of the novel as an attack on free-market capitalism and discredits such “boldly absurd assertions” as Google is the real Big Brother or the society in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is post-ideologic (39). Finally, Maleuvre returns to his central claim that Orwell’s novel has been ousted from the university classroom because it presents an inconvenient message: “Its villain-in-chief O’Brien openly professes a subjectivist social-constructivist philosophy according to which language trumps reality, and the ideological logos is first and last. This puts Postmodernism in a difficult position” (40).

Maleuvre spends the final pages scrutinizing one postmodernist thinker’s essay, in particular—Richard Rorty’s—ultimately proving that O’Brien is indeed dangerous despite Rorty’s attempt to argue otherwise. As a result, Maleuvre exposes the danger in a relativist-subjectivist philosophy of truth, the very philosophy that led to Ingsoc and the intelligentsia gaining and abusing power in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. In the end, Maleuvre upholds his central claim: “Orwell languishes because he is still an adversary of postmodern subjectivism” (45).

Maleuvre’s metacritical analysis is thorough, and while I would like to assign it to my AP students as supplemental reading, I am not sure that they would appreciate the scholarly approach as much as I do. Much of the critical theory that Maleuvre discusses goes beyond my students’ comprehension level (and, to be honest, sometimes mine), but it would be interesting to discuss the various interpretations of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* with my students. Maleuvre argues tangentially for the existence of objective truth as he
discusses how critics use rhetoric to contrive and publish interpretations of literature that
suit their preconceptions; this is a concept that I encourage my students to explore, as
well, especially concerning contemporary media. Maleuvre’s argument ultimately
validates my decision to include *Nineteen Eighty-Four* on my AP English Language and
Composition course, especially since my students are not likely to discuss the novel in
college.

Poynting, Scott. “Rocket Bombs and War Without End in the ‘War on Terror.’” *New Zealand

In the introduction, Poynting implicitly compares the US-led “War on Terror” to
the perpetual war in Orwell’s *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, condemning it as “wholesale state
crime” by a global “Empire of Capital” (77-78). He notes the history of the “War on
Terror,” highlighting the shift in locations--first Afghanistan, then Iraq, now Syria--and
pointing out the irony in once-ally Russia’s becoming the Empire’s enemy yet again.
Then Poynting tells the story of Eric Blair, a British man who fought against fascism in
the Spanish Civil War yet could now be “prosecuted under anti-terrorism laws as applied
to Syria in 2014” (79). “When Orwell was writing *Nineteen eighty-four*, the dystopia was
fantastic, futuristic, prescient,” Poynting writes, “but some of its imagined elements are
now found in currently lived reality as much as in our language” (79). He then presents
his thesis: to relate several of Orwell’s themes in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to state crime and
the “War on Terror” as a leadup to an argument about empire crime.

The first theme that Poynting discusses is weapons of terror. He compares the
rocket bombs in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* to modern-day drones, noting their similar
purposes: “they function very effectively to instil [sic] fear as well as to kill”—essentially
state terrorism (81). Then Poynting analyzes how Orwell’s newspeak is “routinely used these days to deny, to redefine, to mislabel, to mitigate and to attempt to justify state crime” (81), specifying numerous examples of post-9/11 war terminology. “It is as if the US military were using *Nineteen eighty-four* as a text-book,” Poynting remarks. Next, he turns to contemporary doublethink, which is damningly evinced by Bush-era controversies such as the torture at Abu Ghraib and the “kidnapping and torture of Australian Guantánamo detainee Mamdouh Habib” (83). Telescreens and Orwell’s “Big Brother is watching you” theme, Poynting argues, are just as prevalent: “Edward Snowden, of course, has revealed–and proven with documents--levels of state surveillance with technology that Orwell... could only dream about” (85).

At this point, Poynting pauses his analysis “to make three related points about state crime”: first, that it is occurring on a global scale; second, that perpetrators are committing said crime with impunity; and three, all nations in Poynting’s “Empire of Capital” are in it together–though the US does possess hegemony. Poynting then moves on to the topic of thought crime, providing several examples to support his claim that holding extreme Islamic views–even just being Muslim, in some cases–has become criminalized. Next, Poynting once again refers to Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo Bay, this time as real-life Room 101s, and for his final theme, he hones back in on how the US-led “Empire of Capital” (which includes all of Britain’s former white settlement colonies) and its “War on Terror” parallel Orwell’s Oceania and its war against the other superstates in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. This final theme leads Poynting to a brief discussion of “exceptionalism,” after which he concludes the article by drawing even more compelling parallels between Orwell’s world and our current reality.
Poynting’s article is beyond fascinating, not to mention convincing. Though most of the events that Poynting uses as evidence happened before my students were born, I expect that they will appreciate such irrefutable proof that Nineteen Eighty-Four does indeed have real-life implications. Presently, however, I am not quite sure how I could work it into my classroom—especially because the objective of my instruction is to have students make these sort of connections for themselves, not just read about them—but perhaps I could assign the article as supplemental reading or as a model argument.


At the beginning of his article, Rodden points out an interesting fact: “Just as anno 1984 was thirty-five years from 1949, we today stand thirty-five years beyond 1984” (24). He then transitions to briefly introduce not only the novel’s but also the author’s enduring relevance, including yet more interesting tidbits of information, as well as a couple of intriguing analogies: “Likewise, the controversial afterlife of its author—who died in January 1950, just seven months after his book’s explosion on the cultural front like an intellectual H-bomb—shows every sign of continuing well beyond the biblical three score and ten” (24).

Shifting to the first major section, Rodden asserts that the majority of Nineteen Eighty-Four’s numerous editions “have been issued without a preface or an introduction,” which suggests that publishers believe “the novel is easily understandable and the reader requires no guidance” (25)–a major misconception, Rodden declares. Indeed, despite Orwell’s famous “plain” prose style, the vision of his work is anything but; it is rich and
Rodden laments that the novel has become “less and less accessible to its swelling audience, which ha[s] expanded far beyond intellectual circles to millions of school-age readers,” making a “historically informed introduction” all the more necessary (25).

In the next section, Rodden criticizes specific editions of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: one edited by Irving Howe, a renowned literary critic, and another edited by Orwell’s first biographer, Bernard Crick. Rodden concludes that “[n]o authoritative edition of the novel has been available to the public. Instead the vacuum has been filled by punditry and polemics about the book’s meaning—and by loose cannoneers firing off its catchphrases in all ideological directions”–consequentially dishonoring Orwell’s masterpiece (26-27).

Rodden then takes a moment to establish his ethos on the topic—he has extensive experience studying the author and teaching the novel–before acknowledging the biggest obstacle to publishing a new, better edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*: the price of permission rights. Yet, there is some hope, as evidenced by a recent Australian reprint; one could at least publish a new critical edition in “countries where the novel is already in the public domain,” though that does not include the U.S until 2044. (27).

Lastly, in the third section, Rodden proposes the conditions for his “utopian” edition of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. “It is impossible to appreciate or even understand the book’s depths without comprehending its historical and political context,” so that is Rodden’s first and foremost requirement; a new edition must explain the historical backdrop of the 1930s, the events leading up to World War II, and the post-war climate leading up to the novel’s publication in 1949. Nonetheless, readers must also understand that *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is a satire, and for them to understand what Orwell is
satirizing, the new edition should discuss the psychological and ideological issues surrounding the novel. Just as well, the commentary ought to “devote attention to the politics of Orwell’s reputation” and the controversy sparked by the novel (28). Finally, Rodden provides a list and additional explanation of specific “satirical allusions and cultural references that are invariably lost to present-day readers” (28) before concluding that “Orwell’s unique ‘afterlife’ can make Nineteen Eighty-Four at seventy freshly available to audiences in the twenty-first century” (30).

Reading just the title, I thought that Rodden was going to argue for a utopian (as opposed to dystopian) version of Orwell’s famous novel; it was this notion, as well as the potential comparison with Goodman’s commentary on Nineteen Eighty-Four’s 60th anniversary, that initially drew me to this article. While such an argument would have been interesting, I am still pleased with the article. I think students will find the “tidbits of information” sprinkled throughout intriguing and useful for our discussion of the novel. True, they may be better off researching most of the historical and political contexts for themselves—Rodden does not really explain them—but the list of allusions and references is convenient, and the article could serve well as pre-reading for either the summer reading or my Socratic seminar assignment.

Just as the 1980s were dubbed the “Orwell Decade,” Rodden proposes that the twentieth century will be considered the “Orwell Century.” He reasons that contemporary events like the war on terrorism, not to mention Orwell’s 100th birthday, make the author as relevant as ever, after which he shares praise from recent tributes to the author. A quote from Wesley College is particularly compelling: "Orwell anticipated, criticized, or
warned against the key developments that would mark the 1900s: the legacy of imperialism, the tragedy of homelessness and poverty, the Cold War, the Bomb, the specter of totalitarian superstates and ceaseless proxy wars, the betrayals of the Left, the advent of mass culture and the ‘media age’, the rise of the ‘organization man’” (qtd. in Rodden 62).

Similar to Maleuvre, Rodden claims that critics have “exalted Orwell in terms far greater than those commonly applied to a writer” (62). Rodden then shifts to describing his own research on the author, which primarily concerns Orwell’s “intellectual legacy and cultural impact,” eventually proclaiming the author his “beneficent intellectual big brother” (62). Rodden shares the names of various people he has interviewed over the years–not only Orwell’s friends and colleagues but also contemporary critics of Orwell’s work–who helped Rodden “better understand Orwell and his times” and “see Orwell as not just a man but a legendary figure” (63).

Next, Rodden recalls the popularity of Orwell’s most famous novel in the early-1980s. “Orwell stands as the most influential political writer of the twentieth century,” Rodden claims, after which he spends the next two pages describing in-depth the challenges he faced writing his 1989 study of Orwell and how he overcame them (63). Finally, Rodden briefly describes Nineteen Eighty-Four’s influence on modern politics before reasserting that Orwell remains relevant to this day: “For us all, Orwell is our intellectual big brother” (65).

Ultimately, I was disappointed by this article. Based on the title and introduction, I expected Rodden to provide a cogent argument for why the twentieth century should be called the “Orwell century.” (Misleading titles seems to be a pattern for Rodden’s work,
apparently.) To be fair, Rodden does spend some time outlining Orwell’s impact, but without a comparison to other influential authors, the potential argument falls flat. Instead, Rodden spends the bulk of the essay relating his experience studying Orwell, lending the article an air of self-promotion. Before reading, I was thinking of assigning this article to my students as a supplement to Nineteen Eighty-Four, but with the turn toward a rationale supporting Rodden’s work, now I am thinking that I would be better off using one of the tributes that Rodden mentions instead.


Rubin, a national board-certified high school English teacher, introduces his pedagogical article with a statement backed by research: “[I]t is essential that language arts teachers attempt to incorporate non-print materials in their classrooms such as music, film, and art, to involve, engage, and motivate a new generation of students” (74). He goes on to expound the myriad of ways that music “can support and contribute to the discussion of classroom literature”—again, all backed by research—before honing in on the 1988 heavy-metal concept album that he pairs with Nineteen Eighty-Four (74). By providing a summary of both works, Rubin effectively demonstrates how Queensrÿche’s Operation: Mindcrime and Orwell’s novel convey similar themes and concepts. After that, he launches into a detailed description of his lesson plan: students first brainstorm a list of “themes and concepts from Nineteen Eighty-Four”—implying that students have already read the novel; next, they analyze the album’s cover; and Rubin plays the album to the class, students highlight important lines—which suggests that he gives students
copies of the lyrics to annotate (75). Then, students write an essay analyzing “the parallels between the album and the novel” and “drawing their own conclusions as to why these two texts work so well together… and relate to government and society” (76). In the next two sections of the article, Rubin cites several students’ essays and reflections as he evaluates the unit’s results, confirming that students were “successful [not only] in integrating the major themes and concepts from the novel and the album” but also in further developing “a critical eye toward injustice, personal empowerment, and the creation of a political consciousness” (77). Finally, Rubin uses his conclusion to express once more the ongoing relevance of both *Operation: Mindcrime* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four’s*, as well as the importance of teaching students to think critically about the world around them.

Admittedly, I almost chose not to read this source. Just skimming the article, I did not see how I could work music into my unit on *Nineteen Eighty-Four*; it did not help that I did not think I liked heavy metal music, either. The purpose of this annotated bibliography is to gather teaching ideas, though, so I decided to take a closer look—and once I started to read more closely, I was inspired to check out the album for myself. It really does pair perfectly with Orwell’s novel—it turns out I actually do like heavy metal, too—and I would be remiss not to use Rubin’s lesson somehow! This article has inspired me to add a “read/listen to the supplemental material and compare it to *Nineteen Eighty-Four*” option to my list of Socratic seminar prompts.

Tanenbaum opens his pedagogical article by nostalgically relating his experience reading Nineteen Eighty-Four in the early 1970s as a warning of “how our world could evolve into Orwell’s world,” after which he describes the difference in the typical contemporary approach to the novel: “discussions of 1984 now focus on how Orwell's prophecy missed the mark” (31). Tanenbaum then presents his essay’s essential question: “[W]here can a discussion of 1984 lead? What approach to 1984 will go beyond the societal horrors to examine the human conflicts?” (31). The answer, according to Tanenbaum, is “to emphasize the individuals' struggles as they involved these five themes”: “Innocence and Experience,” “Conformity and Rebellion,” “Love and Hate,” “Discovery and Creation,” and “Death” (31). Tanenbaum supports his reader-response approach with the assertion that “it demands that students examine their values,” after which he compares which themes seem most important to teenagers to his own priorities as he has aged (31).

For the next two pages, Tanenbaum provides a brief analysis of Nineteen Eighty-Four through each of the five thematic lenses. Then, in his conclusion, he shares student responses to his initial question: “[W]hich theme seemed the most important for them and why?” (31), after which he celebrates the opportunity to explain why the themes that students did not choose are important to others. Finally, Tanenbaum explains the underlying significance of his approach to teaching Nineteen Eighty-Four: “If students can begin to understand how identity changes and develops in themselves, in their parents, and in literary characters, they will have learned something valuable” (34).

This article is somewhat useful to me as I consider how to modify my teaching of Nineteen Eighty-Four to better engage students in thinking critically, particularly in
making real-world connections with the texts we read. Tanenbaum convincingly argues for the value of his reader-response approach, so I am interested in adapting Tanenbaum’s strategy by including his question in my class’s Socratic seminar over the novel; however, the overall approach does not quite align with the goals of the AP English Language and Composition course, which focuses more on analysis of rhetoric and the very societal implications that Tanenbaum wishes to go beyond. Therefore, I also appreciate Tanenbaum’s introduction, which identifies two other approaches that I can explore.


Vinz begins her pedagogical article with a particularly poetic quote from when the glass paperweight shatters in Nineteen Eight-Four, which she interprets as symbolic of the “private war” that Orwell himself experienced (39). Then, in the second paragraph, seeming to have suddenly switched gears, Vinz laments having “stress[ed] the political and social ramifications of 1984” as she first taught the novel. She explains that “[t]he novel did not touch [her students] personally as [she] hoped it might”—which led her to replace the novel with “more intriguing stories” (39). Still, the image of the glass paperweight in Nineteen Eighty-Four haunted her. Vinz returns to analyzing its symbolism, after which she claims to have finally understood “the power of Orwell's vision” and discovered the ideal approach to teaching the novel (39).

Throughout the next page, Vinz continues to investigate the deeper significance of the paperweight before switching gears again, this time by detailing several imagery-and-character-quotation-centered tasks that she asks her students to complete.
Vinz then lists the questions she uses to “move to the meaning and debate whether Orwell wrote 1984 as a prediction of a possible future or as a warning of a possible future” (40), after which she adds her prompts for descriptive writing and “further work with imagery” (41). Finally, Vinz provides her culminating assignment options before returning one last time to briefly analyze Orwell’s imagery in Nineteen Eighty-Four, ultimately claiming that it “is the beauty of the novel” (41).

Vinz’s article is perhaps the most immediately useful to me of all the sources on this bibliography. I appreciate her attention to detail and generosity in sharing her work with such specificity. The imagery-and-character quotation tasks that she describes and the discussion questions she provides will not only lead my students to “build a [more] detailed awareness of Orwell's image making” (40), but they will also engage my students in analyzing the novel on a deeper level than my current assignments do. Vinz’s own analysis of the glass paperweight is also insightful and awe-inspiring.

CONCLUSION
The insights that I have gained from completing this project have already proven immensely helpful. In fact, I have already made significant changes to the way I plan to discuss Nineteen Eighty-Four with my upcoming AP English Language and Composition class. After reading through these sources, I decided to completely redesign my Socratic seminar preparation handout to include a supplemental reading requirement (Appendix A and B). Students now have the option to listen to Queensrÿche’s Operation: Mindcrime and compare it to Nineteen Eighty-Four (Rubin); as an alternative, they can read and respond to “Rocket Bombs and War Without End in the ‘War on Terror’” (Poynting), which will hopefully launch a discussion of other connections that students can make between our world and Orwell’s. Finally, though it is likely too difficult
for most of my students, I ultimately decided to include “The Disappearance of 1984” (Maleuvre) as an optional supplemental text with the hope that, if one of my higher-level students does decide to take up the challenge, he or she will be able to summarize the more pertinent concepts for the rest of the class. As I discover and read more literary criticism on Nineteen Eighty-Four, though, I may replace Maleuvre’s article.

After deliberating their merits, I decided not to assign Goodman’s and Rodden’s articles as supplemental reading to my students; their arguments were either too limited or irrelevant. However, I did end up using Vinz’s and Tannenbaum’s pedagogical articles to create two new sections on my list of prompts for my students’ Socratic seminar: one devoted to close reading and analyzing the text, and the other dedicated to exploring the novel’s themes and real-life connections. I hope that, in the end, students will find this expanded yet refined unit on Nineteen Eighty-Four valuable to their growth not only as AP Lang students but also as members of society.
Appendix A: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Socratic seminar handout before revisions

*Nineteen Eighty-Four*  
Socratic Seminar Preparation

**Overall Instructions:** Type your responses on one document and submit it to Turnitin.com before the first day of the Socratic seminar (be sure to label section parts and question numbers so I know what is what!). Also, bring a printed copy of your document to class to reference as you participate in the seminar.

**Part 1 Instructions (30 points):** Write about a paragraph (high school standard = 5+ sentences) in response to each of the following prompts. You must integrate at least two pieces of evidence to support your claim(s) and thoroughly explain your line of reasoning in order to receive full credit for each response. Don’t forget to include page numbers for your quotes and informal citations (i.e. “According to [website]...”) for any outside research. (5 points per prompt)

1. Analyze the core elements of the rhetorical situation for *1984*. Who is the *speaker*? Who is the intended *audience*? What is the *subject*? How do these elements influence the text itself? For example, how does the information you discover about Orwell affect what and how he wrote? How did Orwell need to adapt his writing to better suit his intended audience? Did the subject of the novel present any constraints?

2. Consider the *context* and *exigence* (Latin for “demand”) of the novel. What social, cultural, geographic, and political factors surround its publication? What issue, problem, or situation caused/prompted Orwell to write this particular story? What do you think his *purpose* was in having the storyline develop and events play out the way they did?

3. Much of the book focuses on Newspeak and the limiting of language. Explore the power of language and the act of writing in this novel. How is language transformed to suit the needs of authority? How is language and writing used to subvert authority?

4. O’Brien says that the proles will never revolt, yet Winston sees the proles as the only hope for change. Which man is right, and why? What does the Party do to discourage rebellion among the proles, and why are these techniques successful? Do you see any parallels between the lives of the proles and our own lives?

5. Is Winston sane or insane? How does our society determine what is sane and insane, appropriate behavior or deviant behavior, moral or immoral? If one person believes in an idea or creed that is totally different from or opposite to that of the entire society, is that person insane?
6. How accurate was Orwell in his vision of the future? In what ways does our contemporary society compare to his idea of society in 1984? Are there examples in which he was correct? Do you see a potential for aspects of Orwell's "vision" to come true?

**Part 2 Instructions (10 points total):** Prepare two unique and interesting discussion questions of your own. Then answer these questions as if they were included in Part 1; however, only one piece of evidence is needed for your responses in this section. (5 points each)

1.

2.
Appendix B: *Nineteen Eighty-Four* Socratic seminar handout after revisions

**Nineteen Eighty-Four**

Socratic Seminar Preparation

**Overall Instructions:** Choose one prompt from each section to respond to *in writing*, though you will want to be able to respond *verbally* to all of them during the Socratic seminar. For this assignment, you need to reach **50 points total** (each thoughtful sentence typically earns one point), but each response **must consist of a minimum of 5 sentences** in order to count toward your overall score. Some prompts may require you to complete outside research; don’t forget to include in-text citations for any evidence you use, including page numbers from the book! (A formal Works Cited page is encouraged but not required.) Type all of your responses on one document and submit it to Turnitin.com by the due date (be sure to label section parts and question numbers so I know what is what!). Also, bring a printed copy of your document to class to reference as you participate in the seminar.

**Section 1: The Rhetorical Situation**

1. Analyze the *speaker* of the novel in relation to its *subject*. Who was George Orwell? How does the information you discover about him affect what he wrote?

2. Analyze the *context* and *exigence* of the novel. What social, cultural, geographic, and political factors surround its publication? What issue, problem, or situation caused/prompted Orwell to write this particular story?

3. Analyze the intended *audience* of the novel in relation to its *purpose*. Whom did Orwell want to read his novel? Why? How did Orwell need to adapt his writing to better suit his intended audience?

**Section 2: Close Reading**

1. Orwell describes the beginning of the two-minute hate: “The next moment a hideous, grinding screech, as of some monstrous machine running without oil, burst from the big telescreen at the end of the room. It was a noise that set one’s teeth on edge and bristled the hair at the back of one’s neck.” What is the enemy of this hate? What do the descriptive words in this passage tell us about the type of hate encouraged in this society?

2. Winston has some remarkable dreams. Choose one and describe the concrete details that Orwell uses to describe the dream. From these images, tell what the dream foreshadows as you develop its recurring images.

3. Winston writes in his diary that “freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two makes four. If that is granted, all else follows.” What does he mean? How does he come to realize that the party has taken away this right? Why might it follow that Winston would realize “thoughtcrime

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does not entail death; thoughtcrime is death”? How does this concept clarify our image of the philosophical ideas behind the novel?

4. Choose at least one of the important and recurring objects present in the novel—the glass paperweight, the old picture of St. Clement’s Church, telescreens, the prole woman outside the apartment, Julia’s sash, Winston’s varicose ulcer, etc.—to discuss. Analyze the purpose of such repetition and the importance of the image(s) to the themes of the novel.

5. The Chestnut Tree Cafe and its related song present an intriguing problem for interpretation. Winston’s nostalgia for the past is transferred to a nostalgia for his corner table at the Cafe. The song “Under the spreading chestnut tree, I sold you and you sold me—” rings in our ears as well as Winston’s. Why? What meaning and significance exist in these images?

Section 3: Theme

1. All great novels, at their core, discuss the human condition: “all of the characteristics and key events that compose the essentials of human existence, including birth, growth, emotion, aspiration, conflict, and mortality” (Wikipedia). The human experience can be divided into five “themes,” each important at various stages of life: “Innocence and Experience,” “Conformity and Rebellion,” “Love and Hate,” “Discovery and Creation,” and “Death.” Which of these five themes is most important in Nineteen Eighty-Four? Why? Analyze its development throughout the novel.²

2. Much of the book focuses on Newspeak and the limiting of language. Explore the power of language and the act of writing in Nineteen Eighty-Four. How is language transformed to suit the needs of authority? On the other hand, how is language and writing used to subvert authority?

3. O’Brien says that the proles will never revolt, yet Winston sees the proles as the only hope for change. Which man is right, and why? What does the Party do to discourage rebellion among the proles, and why are these techniques successful? Do you see any parallels between the lives of the proles and our own lives?

Section 4: Supplemental Text

1. Listen to Queensryche’s 1988 concept album, Operation: Mindcrime (links to the full album on YouTube and the lyrics on Genius.com available in the “1984” folder on Google Classroom). Compare Queensryche’s album to Orwell’s novel by analyzing the parallel concepts and themes.³

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2. Read and respond to “Rocket Bombs and War Without End in the ‘War on Terror’”\(^4\) (PDF available in the “1984” folder on Google Classroom). While you will want to include brief summaries of relevant parts of the article for your classmates who did not choose this option, at least half of your response must be analytical in nature. Review the “How to Write Reader Response” handout for more direction.

3. Read and respond to Didier Maleuvre’s “The Disappearance of 1984”\(^5\) (PDF available in the “1984” folder on Google Classroom). While you will want to include brief summaries of relevant parts of the article for your classmates who did not choose this option, at least half of your response must be analytical in nature. Review the “How to Write Reader Response” handout for more direction.

**Section 5: Pick Your Poison!**

1. Prepare a unique and interesting discussion question of your own; then answer the question.

2. Choose a passage from the text that strikes you as important and trace how it is significant throughout the novel.\(^6\)

3. Respond to a second prompt from one of the other four sections.

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Predicting Philosophy: Agamben’s Theory of the State of Exception and Baudrillard’s Hyperreality in Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*

**Introduction**

“[W]hat does it mean to act politically?”

Giorgio Agamben, *The State of Exception*

“[H]ow far can we go in the extermination of meaning?”

Jean Baudrillard, *America*

The 1950s was an interesting time for American fiction. Following the 1932 publication of *Brave New World* and the 1949 publication of *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, penned by the famous English writers Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, respectively, American writers such as Ray Bradbury, Walter Miller, Kurt Vonnegut, and Sloan Wilson began drafting their own visions of postwar dystopia. Perhaps none of these author’s novels is more famous than Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451*¹ (Seed). In this particular dystopia, firefighters are no longer the public-service heroes that they were in the 1950s—and are today—saving people and their property from fires; instead, the firemen in *Fahrenheit 451* have become extensions of a totalitarian government, using the destructive force of nature from which they used to protect people to eliminate the public’s ability to think and act politically. Throughout the novel, Bradbury chronicles the evolution of his protagonist, Guy Montag, from a thoughtless “member of the state apparatus that

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¹ Some other popular dystopian works published by these authors in the 1950s are as follows: Bradbury’s *The Martian Chronicles* (1950), “The Veldt” (1950), “There Will Come Soft Rains” (1950), and “The Pedestrian” (1951); Miller’s ”Conditionally Human” (1952), "The Darfsteller" (1955), and *A Canticle for Leibowitz* (1959); Vonnegut’s *Player Piano* (1952); and Wilson’s *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* (1955).
enforces [its] prescriptions by destroying the books which might counteract the solicitations of the media” to an introspective rebel who realizes “the consequences of his participation in [such] a system” and attempts to dismantle the structure from within (Seed 227).

There is no doubt that Bradbury drew from his own social and cultural context as he imagined the dark, futuristic world in *Fahrenheit 451*. As Roberts asserts, “Ray Bradbury lived in a golden age—a time that was uniquely rich in history and popular cultural advancement” (27). Born in 1920 in Waukegan, Illinois, a young Bradbury was first introduced to “literature, silent film, newspaper comic strips, and much, much more” by his much-adored Aunt Neva, who proceeded to nurture his love of popular culture until his family moved to Los Angeles in 1934 (Roberts 29). Even after the move, Bradbury continued to be “educated in a library” as he read—and was thus influenced by—authors like John Steinbeck and Ernest Hemingway. In fact, as early as age 15, Bradbury was sending his science-fiction—the popular genre at the time—stories “for publication to national magazines, though with no success at first.” By age 22, however, Bradbury had honed his craft and had started reaching “a wider, more literary audience in such national magazines as *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The New Yorker,*” eventually receiving critical acclaim for his novel, *The Martian Chronicles*, in 1950 (“Author Study” 68).

Part of the social and cultural context that precipitated dystopian fiction in the 1950s includes the scientific and technological advancements of the preceding decades. Bradbury’s work, especially, is well-known for its technological themes; after all, he had personally witnessed the significant strides that the science community was making throughout his early life. For example, when Bradbury was 6 years old, the first liquid-fuel rocket was flown. The

2 Bradbury was “profoundly affected” (“Author Study” 67) in his early life by the film adaptations of “Victor Hugo’s *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (1923), Gaston Leroux’s *The Phantom of the Opera* (1925), and Arthur Conan Doy’s *The Lost World* (1925)” (Roberts 31).

3 Reflecting on his work, Bradbury himself expressed a basic theme of *The Martian Chronicles*: “Science ran too far ahead of us too quickly, and the people got lost in a mechanical wilderness” (“Author Study” 68-69).
planet Pluto was discovered when he was 10 years old, and by the time Bradbury was 16, the first computer had been developed (‘Author Study’ 68). Nevertheless, perhaps no inventions frightened Bradbury more than those conceived within the context of war: “technology that has gone wrong, like advanced forms of weaponry” (Roberts 28). In 1942, the first atomic bomb was created, and in 1945, when Bradbury was just 15 years old, he witnessed the bomb’s stupefyingly powerful consequence as the United States ended World War II (‘Author Study’ 68). Of course, the Cold War began shortly after in 1947, leading to an era of “[s]uspicions and dissensions” in both domestic and international politics (Roberts 33). In Fahrenheit 451, too, the nation is engaged in an ongoing conflict–though most of its citizens are too distracted by the technology of entertainment and a culture of consumerism to notice or even care, let alone express dissent–and the technology of war plays a significant role in the plot’s resolution.

As a whole, the dystopian fiction of the 1950s served–and continue to serve–as warnings for the future. Bradbury’s Fahrenheit 451, in particular, “is the result of the keen observations and personal experiences of its author; it is also a cultural artifact, which reflects who we were, who we are, and who we might become” (Roberts 35-36). Indeed, Bradbury might even be considered a pioneer in postmodern philosophy as the themes in his novel point toward critical social theories published decades later. Inherent within Fahrenheit 451 are Giorgio Agamben’s thinking on the state of exception and Jean Baudrillard’s concept of hyperreality. In fact, these two theories operate hand-in-hand to create and maintain the dark, futuristic world that Bradbury originally envisioned.

The State of Exception

In State of Exception, originally published in 2003 but later translated and printed in the United States in 2005, Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben argues that states have been
extending their powers throughout history, to the point that the public, scholars, and policymakers alike have now begun to accept totalitarianism as a paradigm for modern-day democracy. Clearly, there is a permanent state of exception in *Fahrenheit 451*, as evinced by the citizens’ having accepted their government’s practice of book-burning as normal, even preferable. Nevertheless, no discussion of Agamben’s work would be accurate without first considering ideas from the philosopher’s 1995 book, *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

In *Homo Sacer*, Agamben investigates the “life of power” (Durantaye 179). Drawing on French philosopher Michel Foucault’s theories of sovereign power and biopolitics⁴, Agamben distinguishes the Greek concepts of *zoe*—the simple fact of being alive, as evidenced by hunger, sleep, and other bodily functions—and *bios*—the social and political manners of existence (Pal-Lapinski). In doing so, Agamben observes that the word “life,” when used in a political context, typically refers to *zoe* (“Bare Life”); throughout modern history then, especially in the Nazi concentration camps, “people [have been] stripped of their collective, political, and social existence and reduced to the simple fact of living, which is called ‘bare life’” (Pal-Lapinski).

Without a doubt, what the citizens in Bradbury’s *Fahrenheit 451* are living is “bare life.” With perhaps the exception of the firemen and other agents of the state, it is clear that the people’s political presence has been extinguished—a point I will return to later—but even their social lives have been subverted and all but destroyed by the government’s perpetual state of exception. For example, early in the novel, Clarisse, the eccentric daughter-like character who enkindles Montag’s metamorphosis, explains how the very definition of “social” has been warped:

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⁴ See Foucault’s 1978-1979 lecture series at the Collège de France, published posthumously as *The Birth of Biopolitics* by St Martin's Press.
I’m antisocial, they say. I don’t mix. It’s so strange. I’m very social indeed. It all depends on what you mean by social, doesn’t it? Social to me means talking to you about things like this.” She rattled some chestnuts that had fallen off the tree in the front yard. “Or talking about how strange the world is. Being with people is nice. But I don’t think it’s social to get a bunch of people together and then not let them talk, do you? An hour of TV class, an hour of basketball or baseball or running, another hour of transcription history or painting pictures, and more sports, but do you know, we never ask questions, or at least most don’t; they just run the answers at you, bing, bing, bing, and us sitting there for four more hours of film-teacher. That’s not social to me at all. (26-27)

Clarisse demonstrates bios, or at least an awareness of her inability to fully achieve it in Fahrenheit 451’s world of socially isolated individuals. Meanwhile, the other main female character, Montag’s wife Mildred, represents the bare life lived by the rest of society. Halfway through the novel, Bradbury finally provides a glimpse into the typical adult “social” gathering. In this scene, two of Mildred’s friends, Mrs. Bowles and Mrs. Phelps, come over to the Montags’ house to watch a show in their parlor, a room with three wall-sized television screens and surround sound. Montag observes as the three women “vanish” into the parlor “with martinis in their hands”: “They were like a monstrous crystal chandelier tinkling in a thousand chimes, he saw their Cheshire cat smiles burning through the walls of the house, and now they were screaming at each other above the din” (89). Their ensuing dialogue consists of meaningless exclamations and parrot-like replies—certainly not the sort of talk that Clarisse would consider “social”—as the parlor walls display violently colorful and increasingly macabre images. Disgusted, Montag pulls the power switch, which irritates the women. He attempts to talk to them about the war, their families, anything of substance— but topic after topic, the women
continue to reveal their lack of social awareness and empathy. Eventually, Montag becomes “infuriated by the mindlessness, superficiality, and, essentially, inhumanity of his wife’s visiting friends” (McGiveron 9); he reads a poem to them, and when Mrs. Phelps cries afterward, he orders her to “go home and think how it all happened” (Bradbury 98). At this point in the novel, Montag has started to achieve bios, and he wants the women to strive beyond zoe, as well; they, however, choose bare life.

While Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life focuses on the concept of biopolitics, Agamben later turned his attention to the conditions that allow for states to reduce people to bare life. Agamben designates State of Exception as the second book in his Homo Sacer series, but he wrote and published the third book, Remnants of Auschwitz: The Witness and the Archive, 15 years earlier. In his 1998 work, Agamben “pursued the investigation of life and its limits into the horrors of the Nazi concentration camps” (Attell), proclaiming them “the most powerful paradigm of Foucault’s conception of biopolitics and [his] own concept of ‘bare life’ in democratic states today” (Pal-Lapinski). Agamben sees the shadow of Nazism in contemporary politics, and he is right to be sensitive to it. Bradbury, too, in publishing his novel a mere eight years after the end of World War II, reminded his contemporary readers of “the horror of not only the book burning, not only the censorship, but the perversions and atrocities of Nazi Germany” (Roberts 32).

The parallels between Fahrenheit 451 and Nazi Germany may be relatively obvious to those who have read the novel and recall their high-school world history studies, but for the sake of context, I will provide a brief summary of the Third Reich’s rise to power: The early 1930s saw a worldwide economic depression–Americans are likely familiar with their own “Great Depression”–but having lost the first world war just 15 years earlier and now faced with more
bleakness, the German public had become especially unconfident in their current government, the Weimar Republic. Thus, in 1932, when Bradbury was twelve years old, the German people voted a new party into power: the National Socialist German Workers' Party, or “Nazi” for short (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Hitler Comes to Power”). In January of 1933, Adolf Hitler was appointed chancellor, effectively “bringing an end to German democracy” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Nazi Rule”); the Third Reich’s practice of burning books—motivated primarily by anti-Semitism, though “any books that were deemed ‘un-German’ were targeted”—began shortly after (Roberts 32). In the name of uniting the people under a “Volk” community, the Nazi Party took control of the “culture, the economy, education, and law,” creating a one-party dictatorship and corresponding police state where anyone could be “subject to arbitrary arrest and imprisonment” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “Nazi Rule”). The Nazi Party remained popular with the vast majority of Germans and retained power until Hitler’s suicide in 1945, after which Germany surrendered, World War II officially ended, and the party was banned (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, “The Nazi Party”).

In order to establish its police state—again, under the guise of the public good—Nazi Germany entered a prolonged state of exception:

No sooner did Hitler take power (or, as we should perhaps more accurately say, no sooner was power given to him) than, on February 28, he proclaimed the Decree for the Protection of the People and the State, which suspended the articles of the Weimar Constitution concerning personal liberties. The decree was never repealed, so that from a juridical standpoint the entire Third Reich can be considered a state of exception that lasted twelve years. (Agamben 2)
When writing his dystopia in the 1950s, then, Bradbury needed only to think back to recent history to create the not-so-fictional totalitarian government of *Fahrenheit 451*. In fact, in the first part of the novel, when Montag is still struggling to acknowledge the problematic nature of his society, the reader discovers that Montag’s country is also in a perpetual state of exception. Captain Beatty, Montag’s boss and main antagonist, explains how, like Hitler, the totalitarian government did not need to take its power from the people; rather, the people simply gave it up: “It didn’t come from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick, thank God. Today, thanks to them, you can stay happy all of the time” (Bradbury 55). The firemen, as agents of the state, burn books in order to keep society safe from discontent—in much the same way that the Nazis burned books to bring its “Volk” community together—but firemen do not need to search their victims/criminals out; instead, the public are willing participants in the system, just as many Germans willingly participated in the Holocaust. Take, for instance, the fact that all three women to whom Montag reads the poem—his own wife, even—“turn in an alarm” on Montag, which leads to his being forced to burn down his own house (Bradbury 111). In this way, the people in *Fahrenheit 451* help maintain the government’s permanent state of exception. Whatever constitution that might have once protected an individual’s right to read and own books has, we can assume, been suspended, and personal freedom has been eradicated.

While censorship by book burning is the main focus in *Fahrenheit 451*, there are other ways in which the government maintains its control and thus preserves the state of exception. Just as individuals in Nazi Germany were arrested and imprisoned for arbitrary “crimes,” so are the people in *Fahrenheit 451*. For example, as Clarisse informs Montag on the first night they

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5 Though, I should note, there is little need for police in the world of *Fahrenheit 451* as, again, nearly every member of society has become complacent in the system; the few who wish to resist must live on the outskirts of the city, “waiting for the war to begin and, as quickly, end” so that they can rebuild society (Bradbury 146).
walk together, her uncle “drove slowly on a highway once” and was jailed for two days; another

time, he was arrested “for being a pedestrian” (Bradbury 6-7). Driving slowly and taking walks,
of course, allow people time to think, and thoughtful citizens are very dangerous to a totalitarian
government; one might realize that he has been stripped of his political and social existence, and
he might seek to end the government’s state of exception. Therefore, “[a]nyone who professes
his or her individuality is seen as a threat” (Abootalebi 12). So, as Beatty declares in his lecture
to Montag on the history of the firemen organization in this society—the very same scene in
which the state of exception in Fahrenheit 451 is revealed—the government watches families like
Clarisse’s carefully in the hopes of finding some sort of infraction with which to “rid
[them]selves of all the odd ducks” (Bradbury 57).

Furthermore, the scene in which the police finally catch “Montag” evinces Agamben’s
notion that a government in a permanent state of exception will stop at nothing to maintain its
power. Montag, on the run after killing Beatty in a moment of panic, actually manages to escape
the city and join a group of resisters wandering the countryside; however, the state, which has
been filming the chase and broadcasting it live as a spectacle for public consumption, cannot
admit that they were fooled. Safe in the country, Montag watches the live broadcast as the police
viciously apprehend another man, a fake “Montag,” whom they knew would be out walking at
the time. When Montag asks how the police knew that they could use this man as a scapegoat,
the rebel leader Granger explains: “Don’t think the police don’t know the habits of queer ducks
like that… the police have had him charted for months, years. Never know when that sort of
information might be handy. And today, it turns out, it’s very usable indeed. It saves face”
(141-142). Thus, as Agamben warns in State of Exception, the government in Fahrenheit 451 has
become less concerned with the welfare of its citizens and more concerned with “its own
preservation” (Agamben 23). Bradbury’s novel, then, efficaciously recounts the danger of the state of exception; Bradbury just happened to write his fictional narrative 50 years before Agamben published his theory.

**Hyperreality**

Evidently, the state of exception has transformed the once-democratic government of *Fahrenheit 451* into a totalitarian state—but if that is the case, why do the people not revolt? After all, there are more citizens than there are firemen. What is preventing the public from recognizing the reality of their situation and doing something about it? The problem—as France’s leading philosopher of postmodernism, Jean Baudrillard, would say—is that the society of *Fahrenheit 451* is entangled in multiple orders of simulation.

For Baudrillard, the term *simulation* refers to the image or sign of something real; a simulation is not reality, but merely “a reflection of basic reality”—at least in its first phase. Signs can grow to obscure and distort reality, and after so much recirculation, the images begin to replace reality altogether, to mask “the absence of a basic reality” (Baudrillard, “Simulacra” 405). Baudrillard considers this third phase of a simulation “hyperreal, in that [it is] a sign of the collapse of the real within the imaginary” (408). From there, a pure simulacrum—a simulation that “bears no relation to any reality whatever”—is not far (405)... And it is in such a simulacrum, not reality, where the people of *Fahrenheit 451* focus their attention. They cannot see the reality of their situation because, for them, “the real is no longer possible”; they are lost in hyperreality (407). Of course, the United States is, as Baudrillard illustrates in his 1988 book *America*, “the land of hyperreality” (Cover copy). It is no coincidence, then, that Bradbury makes hyperreality an inherent element of his 1953 U.S.-based dystopia*. Indeed, there are many parallels to be

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*One might even argue that Bradbury saw Americans’ potential to become enmeshed in simulacra decades before Baudrillard did; the critical theory just had not been published yet.*
drawn between *Fahrenheit 451* and *America*, especially when it comes to religion, speed, and media.

In “Simulacra and Simulations,” Baudrillard asks, “[W]hat if God himself can be simulated, that is to say, reduced to the signs which attest his existence?” (404). He then observes during his travels through Salt Lake City that “all the Christs here are copied” (*America* 2). In this way, the American practice of religion, at least as Baudrillard perceives it in the 1980s, has become “weightless; it is no longer anything but a gigantic simulacrum” (“Simulacra” 404). So, too, is the case in *Fahrenheit 451*. Faber, a former English professor who chose to obey rather than revolt when the totalitarian government first created the fireman structure fifty years before the events of the novel, describes the simulation aptly when Montag proffers a stolen Bible:

> Lord, how they’ve changed it in our ‘parlors’ these days. Christ is one of the ‘family’ now. I often wonder if God recognizes His own son the way we’ve dressed him up, or is it dressed him down? He’s a regular peppermint stick now, all sugar-crystal and saccharine when he isn’t making veiled references to certain commercial products that every worshipper *absolutely* needs. (Bradbury 77-78)

Religion, therefore, has become part of the larger simulacrum in *Fahrenheit 451*. What may have once brought meaning to people’s lives has since been reduced to an insignificant image, warped and reproduced as entertainment or advertisement of consumer goods. One might even suggest that there is no real religion left in Bradbury’s dystopia. The Bible may exist, at least this one copy, but the ideas it contains hold little significance to the vast majority of society. The people in *Fahrenheit 451* believe, if anything, in only the image of Christ, the copy; the real Christ has evaporated.
Baudrillard, in *America*, also discusses the allure of speeding through the desert: “Speed creates a space of initiation, which may be lethal; its only rule is to leave no trace behind. Triumph of forgetting over memory, an uncultivated, amnesic intoxication” (7). Baudrillard’s thinking here keenly explains Mildred’s underlying character motivation. Take, for instance, Mildred’s suggestion when Montag admits that he has “got an awful feeling” about working at the firehouse that makes him “want to smash things”: “The keys to the beetle are on the night table. I always like to drive fast when I feel that way. You get it up around ninety-five and you feel wonderful… It’s fun out in the country. You hit rabbits, sometimes you hit dogs” (Bradbury 61). Mildred enjoys speeding through the country recklessly, with complete disregard for life—likely even her own—because the immediacy of the activity helps her forget about the lack of the real in her life; she suggests that Montag try to forget, too—to distract himself so that reality can disappear for him as it has for her. This absence of reality, Mildred believes, is the key to happiness. As might be expected, some deeper part of Millie likely recognizes that she has been living a life—if we can call it that—without purpose⁷, yet she consciously chooses to replace meaning with exhilaration. Furthermore, while speeding is just one of the many intoxicating distractions in the world of *Fahrenheit 451*, it is the most directly lethal—and not only for animals in the country. Montag himself is nearly run over by a car as he escapes the city. The drivers, he later realizes, were young teenagers⁸—and they had sped up as soon as they saw him in the road; they were only “children out for a long night of roaring five or six hundred miles in a few

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⁷ In fact, when the reader is first introduced to Mildred, she has evidently attempted suicide. Coming home after work, Montag finds her bottle of sleeping pills empty and Millie comatose in her bed. He calls for help, and Mildred is revived—but when Montag later tells her what happened, suggesting that she had taken too many pills by mistake, she does not even entertain the possibility: “‘I didn’t do that,’ she said. ‘Never in a billion years.’”(Bradbury 10-17). The underlying implication is, of course, that her overdose was no accident— but Mildred continues to stubbornly deny the incident, just as she denies reality.

⁸ “It was clear now. A carful of children, all ages, God knew, from twelve to sixteen, out whistling, yelling, hurrahing, had seen a man, a very extraordinary sight, a man strolling, a rarity, and simply said, ‘Let’s get him,’ not knowing he was the fugitive Mr. Montag” (Bradbury 122).
moonlit hours, their faces icy with wind, and coming home or not coming at dawn, alive or not alive, that made the adventure” (122). Of course, one may argue that Bradbury is exaggerating in his speculations here, but he nonetheless displays the danger of hyperreality. Indeed, in his dystopian society, people do not appreciate life because there is no real life–only the simulation of it.

But what keeps the society of *Fahrenheit 451* so ensnared in “the order of the hyperreal” (Baudrillard, “Simulacra” 406)? The main source of simulation, both in Bradbury’s novel and in today’s world, is the media. According to Baudrillard,

> Rather than creating communication, [mass media] exhausts itself in the act of staging communication. Rather than producing meaning, it exhausts itself in the staging of meaning. A gigantic process of simulation that is familiar… behind this exacerbated mise-en-scene of communication, the mass media, the pressure of information pursues an irresistible destruction of social⁹. (qtd. in Abootalei 9)

Mass media plays a major role in *Fahrenheit 451*; in fact, it almost entirely consumes Mildred’s–and the rest of society’s–life. For example, even when Montag tries to talk to Mildred about her near-fatal overdose on sleeping pills, her awareness is only briefly detached from the television: “His wife in the TV parlor paused long enough from reading her script to glance up… She didn’t look up from the script again” (Bradbury 17). The script that Mildred holds is her attempt to participate in the play she is watching–a futile attempt, in fact, as there is nothing meaningful in which to engage; like the conversation between Mildred and her friends, the dialogue in the script is insubstantial, saying “nothing, nothing, nothing and [saying] it loud, loud, loud” (41). Still, Mildred finds familiarity in the simulation. She repeatedly refers to the

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⁹ This “destruction of the social” echoes Agamben’s concept of “bare life.”
characters on the parlor walls as her family, always choosing them over Montag. The scene when Montag becomes physically ill after a book-owner is burnt alive best illustrates this point:

“Will you turn the parlor off?” he asked.

“That’s my family.”

“Will you turn it off for a sick man?”

“I’ll turn it down.”

She went out of the room and did nothing to the parlor and came back. (46)

Indeed, Mildred is so engrossed in the simulacrum that it has almost entirely “mask[ed] the absence of a basic reality” for her (Baudrillard, “Simulacra” 405). Once again, after spending the afternoon reading with Montag, instead of acknowledging the reality into which books provide insight, Mildred chooses to reject it: “‘Books aren’t people. You read and I look all around, but there isn’t anybody!’ […] ‘Now,’ said Mildred, ‘my “family” is people. They tell me things; I laugh, they laugh! And the colors!’” (69). In fact, the parlor walls that Mildred loves so much function to conceal “the fact that the real is no longer real” in much the same way that Baudrillard argues Disneyland does (“Simulacra” 406). In this way, with their “play of illusions and phantasms,” the media produce and perpetuate hyperreality in Fahrenheit 451.

The Operation

So, the people in Fahrenheit 451 are absorbed in a third-order simulation—if not a pure simulacrum—and have thus lost their bios; in other words, because society is lost in hyperreality, the people are living bare life—and while its citizens are distracted by mindless media and reckless recreation, the government continues to exercise and further extend its power without criticism or objection, as evidenced by the noise of jet bombers throughout the novel’s plot10.

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10 “‘Jesus God,’ said Montag. ‘Every hour so many damn things in the sky! How in hell did those bombers get up there every single second of our lives! Why doesn’t someone want to talk about it! We’ve started and won two
Unlike the Nazi concentration camps, however, the government in *Fahrenheit 451* did not strip the people of their social and political existences—at least not at first; in Bradbury’s novel, the people reduced *themselves* to bare life. In fact, in his lecture on the history of firemen, Beatty informs Montag that society did away with books—the media that most closely reflect reality—on its own, preferring vapid yet pleasant entertainment: “Magazines became a nice blend of vanilla tapioca. Books, so the damned snobbish critics said, were dishwater. No *wonder* books stopped selling, the critics said. But the public, knowing what it wanted, spinning happily, let the comic books survive. And the three-dimensional sex magazines, of course” (Bradbury 55). Beatty’s full lecture\[11\] describes the gradual process through which society became absorbed in hyperreality, which Faber and Granger later confirm. Therefore, by reducing themselves to bare life, the people in *Fahrenheit 451* essentially ensured that the government could enter the state of exception in the first place. Still, the government actively maintains the simulation, and thereby its power, by indoctrinating the country’s youth.

Just as the Nazi Party took control of education in Germany, we can assume that the state oversees the schools in *Fahrenheit 451*. Clarisse, the “antisocial” seventeen-year-old introduced earlier, elaborates further on the education system and its effects on her peers:

> “An hour of TV class, an hour of basketball or baseball or running, another hour of transcription history or painting pictures, and more sports… they just run the answers at you, bing, bing, bing, and us sitting there for four more hours of film-teacher… It’s a lot of funnels and a lot of water poured down the spout and out the bottom, and them telling us it’s wine when it’s not. They run us so ragged by the end of the day we can’t do anything but go to bed or head for a Fun Park to bully people around, break windowpanes

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atomic wars since 2022! Is it because we’re having so much fun at home we’ve forgotten the world?” (Bradbury 69).

\[11\] In the 2013 Simon & Schuster edition, Beatty’s lecture spans pages 51-59.
in the Window Smasher place or wreck cars in the Car Wrecker place with the big steel ball. Or go out in the cars and race on the streets, trying to see how close you can get to lampposts, playing ‘chicken’ and ‘knock hubcaps.’ [...] everyone I know is either shouting or dancing around like wild or beating up one another.” (Bradbury 27)

The state, by overwhelming its students with signs and images from a young age, prevents the children from “rais[ing] the queries they have,” thus condemning them to become automatons like rest of society (Abootalei 12). The education system in *Fahrenheit 451* even goes so far as to distort the basic reality—the second phase of Baudrillard’s simulation theory—by teaching, or at least allowing students to believe, that the current firemen structure had always existed. This knowledge—or, rather, lack thereof—then becomes cemented in adulthood. Take, for example, Montag’s answer when Clarisse asks, “Is it true that long ago firemen put fires *out* instead of going to start them?” during their first interaction: “No. Houses have *always* been fireproof, take my word for it” (Bradbury 6). Montag later poses the same question to Beatty at the firehouse, and the other firemen scoff at the idea that any history except the one they had been taught could be true13. Of course, after achieving a second-order simulation, the state needs only to flood society with signs to “mask the *absence* of a basic reality” for its citizens (Baudrillard, “Simulacra” 405). The parlor walls do the trick there, and thus, the government in *Fahrenheit 451* successfully uses hyperreality to make its state of exception permanent.

12 Beatty confirms the education system’s purpose in his lecture to Montag: “We know how to nip most of them in the bud, early. You can’t build a house without nails and wood. If you don’t want a house built, hide the nails and wood. If you don’t want a man unhappy politically, don’t give him two sides to a question to worry him; give him one. Better yet, give him none. Let him forget there is such a thing as war… Cram [the children] full of noncombustible data, chock them so damned full of ‘facts’ they feel stuffed, but absolutely ‘brilliant’ with information. Then they’ll feel they’re thinking, they’ll get a *sense* of motion without moving” (Bradbury 58).

13 It is worthy to note, however, that Beatty later divulges the hidden reality to Montag alone: “And so when houses were finally fireproofed completely, all over the world (you were correct in your assumption the other night) there was no longer need of firemen for the old purposes. They were given the new job, as custodians of our peace of mind” (Bradbury 56). This revelation, among many other factors, inspires Montag’s attempt to destroy the fireman structure from within.
The Solution

From the beginning to the end of his most famous novel, Bradbury forces us readers to “examine ourselves and our culture, and to analyze who we are and where we are going” (Roberts 36). Growing up through the Roaring Twenties, the Great Depression, and World War II, Bradbury was in a unique position to analyze the social, cultural, and political trends of the times, which he later drew on to craft the then-futuristic world of Fahrenheit 451. However, his science fiction grows less and less fictional over time as real-world technology continues to develop. In fact, several of Bradbury’s made-up mechanisms, such as the “Seashell ear-thimbles” (16), the “wall-TV” (18), and the “door-voice” (68), are common contraptions in modern life, their counterparts being AirPod wireless earbuds, large flat-screen TVs or ceiling projectors, and Ring home-security devices. Modern citizens, too, are bombarded by spectacular images in the media while politics and other serious topics are made sensational, often evoking outrage—yet most people cannot articulate this emotion or explain why they feel so strongly. Even the Window Smasher and Car Wrecker places have modern-day equivalents—for example, The Rage Cage in New York—and social critics regularly lament the fact that people often speed through life these days, coming home from school or work too drained to do much more than sit mindlessly in front of the television or scroll through social media on their phones, replacing family dinners at the dining room table with microwaveable meals in the living room, not really sleeping at night yet starting the whole process over again the next day, day after day. Students in today’s American public education system read less and less, write less, think less, as they spend exorbitant amounts of time absorbed in video games and other phantasmagorias as soon as they get home from school. Indeed, there is no denying that our real-world society already resembles much of Bradbury’s made-up one in Fahrenheit 451.
The underlying issue in both Bradbury’s dystopia and the “real” world, Baudrillard would argue, is a “consumer culture completely divorced from political awareness” (Seed 228). Indeed, much of Baudrillard’s critical project is an analysis of and commentary on the “increasingly disorganized consumer-oriented capitalist economy” of post-war America (Luke 348). As the people in Fahrenheit 451 consumed more and more, they, in turn, became more and more “consumed by [the] commercially induced processes,” and as a result, became more and more withdrawn from their social and political lives (Seed 231). Then, as they were reduced to bare life, the people became complacent, allowing “the authorities [to] make all the decisions for them” (Abootalei 10). Thus, the government was able to extend its power indefinitely.

In a way, Bradbury anticipates Agamben’s thinking on the state of exception. Half a century after Fahrenheit 451 was published, Agamben argues that “the state of exception, which was meant to be a provisional measure, became in the course of the twentieth century a working paradigm of government” (Cover copy). Even more telling is Agamben’s observation that “though this transformation of the constitutional order (which is today underway to varying degrees in all the Western democracies) is perfectly well known to jurists and politicians, it has remained entirely unnoticed by the citizens” (18). Just as the citizens in Fahrenheit 451 do not notice the jet bombers screaming overhead—Bradbury’s symbol of the government’s power—neither do Americans realize just how far we have allowed our government to stretch and prolong its authority15. Why? What is preventing us from doing something about it? Perhaps we are just as entangled in multiple orders of simulation as the people in Bradbury’s dystopian society are.

14 After all, as Seed keenly notes, “Millie and her friends are defined entirely by their roles as consumers, whether of sedatives, soap-operas, or fast cars” (229).
15 Agamben highlights the “USA Patriot Act issued by the U.S. Senate on October 26, 2001,” as a instance when our government used the state of exception to extend its powers beyond the juridical order—notably with hardly any public outcry (3-4).
So, all three authors’ works function at least implicitly to warn us of a potential future, to encourage us to veer off the dark path on which we are headed–but how? Where do we go from here? Agamben does not suggest a solution for the state of exception–only an analysis of the problem–but Baudrillard does offer a way out of the simulacrum. His answer to hyperreality is hyperconformity: Baudrillard “call[s] for average consumers to ‘resist’ [the system of simulation] by fully complying with or totally submitting to its cultivation of commodified cravings” (Luke 353). However, as Luke explains in “Power and Politics in Hyperreality,” Baudrillard’s theory can be considered flawed in its generality: “Baudrillard tends to misplace the concreteness of the relations that he is investigating… he never really demonstrates definitely how this all works with carefully considered evidence” (352). Therefore, his solution is likely also flawed. We are left, then, with Bradbury’s resolution, and it is bleak.

At the end of Fahrenheit 451, the war finally begins–and ends in an “instant” as the city that Montag had just escaped is bombed and reduced to “a heap of baking powder” (Bradbury 151-155). The only people who are left alive are the resisters on the outskirts of society, suggesting that those who had lost their bios have no hope of regaining it; what remains for them is only zoe, and even then, that too must end before those who have preserved their bios can exert their influence on society. Bradbury hopes that, like the Phoenix, humanity will “[spring] out of the ashes” and remember “all the damn silly things we’ve done”; he hopes that society will use this knowledge to do better going forward (156). For all his pessimism, then, Bradbury at least concludes his novel with that one hopeful note.

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16 It is important to note, however, that Luke still finds value in Baudrillard’s work: “Despite these weaknesses, however, Baudrillard’s critical project does cast new light on the problematics of postmodernism. And, even with its flaws, this framework still is instructive for developing fresh insights into the workings of power and politics within informationalizing systems as they develop hyperreal tendencies in their cultures and societies” (353).
17 Incidentally, this notion coincides with Baudrillard’s claim that “it is always a false problem to want to restore the truth beneath the simulacrum” (Simulacra, 411); therefore, an optimist could use the similarity between Bradbury’s solution and Baudrillard’s assertion to support the argument that Bradbury’s thinking is also flawed.
Conclusion

Reflecting on his first interaction with Clarisse, Montag compares her face to a mirror and asks both himself and the reader, “how many people did you know that refracted your own light to you?” (8). Similar to his character, throughout Fahrenheit 451 Bradbury holds a mirror up to American society in the 1950s, projecting the very theses that Baudrillard and Agamben would not publish until 30 and 50 years later, respectively. Roberts proclaims that “[f]or 60 years, Fahrenheit 451 has served as an entertaining yet serious warning—not of what has to be, but of what unfortunately increasingly is—and to an extent, we have listened” (36)—but have we listened well enough to prevent the outcome that Bradbury envisions? Agamben would argue that we have not: “At the very moment when it would like to give lessons in democracy to different traditions and cultures, the political culture of the West does not realize that it has entirely lost its cannon” (18). Baudrillard also argues that too much meaning has been exterminated in today’s capitalist society—and if people no longer know what it means to act politically, how can we ever expect them to end the government’s state of exception? I disagree, though. I would argue that much has changed since 2003, when Agamben published State of Exception, and society has recently started to see itself in the mirror. There is hope yet to “restore the truth beneath the simulacrum” (Baudrillard, “Simulacra” 411). The question, nevertheless, remains: How?
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