Gateway Reads: Finding Texts that Matter to Students

Anne Smith

Follow this and additional works at: http://vc.bridgew.edu/honors_proj
Part of the Curriculum and Instruction Commons

Recommended Citation
Copyright © 2015 Anne Smith

This item is available as part of Virtual Commons, the open-access institutional repository of Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, Massachusetts.
Gateway Reads: Finding Texts that Matter to Students

Anne Smith

Submitted in Partial Completion of the
Requirements for Commonwealth Interdisciplinary Honors in English and Secondary Education

Bridgewater State University

May 15, 2015

Dr. Lee Torda, Thesis Director
Dr. John Kucich, Committee Member
Dr. John-Michael Bodi, Committee Member
Gateway Reads: Finding Texts that Matter to Students

Adolescents who struggle with reading are part of the same cloth from which good readers come.
– Donna E. Alvermann, “Reading Adolescents’ Reading Identities: Looking Back to See Ahead”

No one is a perfect reader, and we all continue to learn every time we read.
– Frank Smith, Understanding Reading: A Psycholinguistic Analysis of Reading and Learning to Read

1. Introduction

The National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State Schools Officers, nonpartisan organizations nationally representing government and education, introduced yet another historical shift in American education in 2010 when they released the Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts & Literacy in History/Social Sciences, Science, and Technical Subjects (hereafter referred to as the Common Core), ending a school reform developmental period upwards of 25 years that paralleled the nation’s use of high-stakes standardized testing as a measure of school and student achievement and progress (Applebee 25). The curricula of American public schools exist in a state of flux as states evaluate both the Common Core and the different high-stakes standardized tests that promise alignment and suitability for assessing schools’ and students’ achievement and progress under the new standards. While the popularity (and nefariousness) of the Common Core has been widely documented, and while some states wavered in their commitment of membership to the Common Core State Standards Initiative, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts has been a steadfast developer and implementer. The Commonwealth realigned its Curriculum Frameworks to include the Common Core as well as participated in field-testing of the state’s preferred high-stakes standardized test, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, before shifting to full implementation of the Common Core in 2013-2014 and voting whether to adopt the new assessment system in 2015 at the conclusion of the two-year trial period.

Individuals with a vested interest in the American and Massachusetts education system,
from teachers to school administrators, content area experts, professional consultants, government officials, and of course parents, have vocalized their opinions about the implementation of the Common Core, and this exchange has ranged from the well-researched argument to the heated, vitriolic attack teeming with logical fallacies. Arthur Applebee, who served on the review panel for the Common Core’s College and Career Ready Standards (for English Language Arts, or ELA) as well as the Common Core State Standard Initiative’s Validation Committee, sees both the blessing and the curse of the new standards, what he calls “the promise and the peril” (25). Realistically, teachers working within the temporal educational context of their career must explore this dichotomy and find ways to temper the negative aspects of the curriculum as well as to enhance the positive—a task that this thesis realizes for the Common Core within the realm of adolescent reading instruction. First, however, the teacher must understand how the Common Core developed, the origins of its theoretical foundations, and the reality of its portrait of literacy in the American school system.

According to the timeline on the Common Core State Initiative’s website, the development process began in 2009 and involved 48 states, which have since diminished to 43. At this time, the standards were divided into two categories: the college and career readiness standards (addressing what students are expected to know upon high school graduation) and the K-12 standards (addressing what students are expected to know during both elementary and secondary education). Applebee explains that

the process began by developing a set of College and Career Readiness Standards, which were later ‘back mapped’ to provide grade-by-grade guidance on how best to ensure that high school graduates were indeed college and career ready. (26) While the two categories of standards were undergoing drafting, the Common Core State
Initiative involved teachers in four ways: serving in work and feedback groups, consulting through professional teachers’ associations, convening in teams by state designation, and participating in two public comment periods. The second public comment period ended in March 2010, with the final Common Core released in June 2010. The standards were then in the hands of the states for review, adoption, and implementation. By December 2013, 45 states, the Department of Defense Education Activity, Washington D.C., Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands and the U.S. Virgin Islands adopted the Common Core. By June 2014, two states had left the Common Core States Initiative. Massachusetts revised the Curriculum Framework for English Language Arts & Literacy in 2011 and achieved full implementation of the Common Core in 2013-2014.

From conception in 2009 through final release in 2010, the process of developing the Common Core produced a wealth of standards for which states’ education boards and departments had to build curriculum; Applebee totaled 63 pages for the main Common Core document along with 333 pages for its three appendixes and 6 pages for its introductory materials (26). Yet according to Applebee, what is marketed as a cohesive portrait of literacy throughout elementary and secondary education, and beyond in higher education and careers, is actually a palimpsest representing “deeply embedded traces of our ongoing professional and political debates about the nature of effective curriculum and instruction in the English language arts” (25). Regarding reading instruction, this division is most evident in the Common Core’s adherence to New Criticism, a lens of literary criticism first (and last) popular from the 1950s-70s. Michael Smith, Deborah Appleman, and Jeffrey Wilhelm, authors of *Uncommon Core: Where the Authors of the Standards Go Wrong About Instruction—and How You Can Get It Right*, argue that their two criticisms of the Common Core (that the Common Core omits
pleasure and wisdom) are the result of

an impoverished understanding of both the New Criticism, the theory upon which the CCSS seem to be grounded, and reader-response criticism, which emerged as a humane corrective to the excesses of the New Criticism (16).

Smith, Appleman, and Wilhelm explain that New Criticism developed in the 1930s in response to a number of literary analyses of the time that relied heavily upon information from outside of the text being studied. “New Critical readings sought to explain connections between textual form and textual meaning, suggesting that the latter grew out of the former,” they summarize (21). In order to do so, New Critics believed that “the best way to arrive at a unified view of a text was to start from within and read the text outward,” a practice that David Coleman, the chief author of the Common Core, utilizes in what Smith, Appleman, and Wilhelm cite their colleague, Peter Rabinowitz, as nicknaming “Zombie New Criticism” (21-2). It is Zombie New Criticism that drives the Common Core; that is, New Criticism done badly.

New Criticism’s main strategy is close reading, wherein the reader remains within the text using its formal elements (such as, but not limited to, imagery, diction, figurative language, and syntax) to determine the text’s thematic meaning. Smith, Appleman, and Wilhelm explain that, to be done well, “[New Criticism] required that readers possess scaffolded knowledge, specific interpretative tools, and attention to reading strategies” (22). Where Coleman failed in applying New Criticism to the Common Core is where he failed in translating the standards themselves into lesson plans. Coleman, whose standards actually represent reading strategies, professed New Criticism when he asked teachers to focus on the texts themselves rather than reading strategies (20). He argues against pre-reading and strategy instruction, both of which true New Critics use when necessary, and which teachers routinely find successful in the
classroom. In a sample Common Core lesson plan, Coleman models “how to read [‘Letter from Birmingham Jail’] paragraph by paragraph, without any scaffolding, to ‘examine’ how the text progresses, to ‘force attention to,’ to ‘reveal’ evidence” (27). Tom Newkirk, also noticing the misuse of New Criticism in the Common Core, writes that the model of reading which Coleman presents in this lesson plan

seems to have two stages—first a close reading in which the reader withholds judgment or comparison with other texts, focusing solely on what is happening within ‘the four corners of the text.’ And only then are prior knowledge, personal association, and appraisal allowed in. (Smith et al. 27)

The Common Core, then, contradicts itself because the very strategies that the standards promote (for example, CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.3, “analyze how complex characters [e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations] develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme”) are the strategies that New Critics use to conduct a close reading but that Coleman, as a Zombie New Critic, rejects as being effective English instruction.

Yet the Common Core also features vestiges of reader-response criticism, the answer to New Criticism that Louise Rosenblatt developed in the late 1970s and which Smith, Appleman, and Wilhelm describe as the “humane corrective” (16). Reader-response criticism, particularly Rosenblatt’s transactional theory, emphasize the reader’s place in the Aristotelian triad of reader, text, and author in the same way that New Criticism emphasizes the text to the near exclusion of the reader. Rosenblatt’s premise for transactional theory is that a text, “once it leaves its author’s hands, is simply paper and ink until a reader evokes from it a literary work—sometimes, even, a literary work of art” (ix). She argues that there is no generic reader, “[underlining] the importance
of such factors in the transaction as gender, ethnic and socioeconomic background, and cultural environment”—factors that teachers recognize as critical to their pedagogical decisions given that there is no generic student, either (viii). Long has Rosenblatt seen allies for her transactional theory in teachers, with Smith, Appleman, and Wilhelm merely being the latest. In the Common Core, Rosenblatt’s theory appears in standards such as CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.9, “analyze how an author draws on and transforms source material in a specific work (e.g., how Shakespeare treats a theme or topic from Ovid or the Bible or how a later author draws on a play by Shakespeare),” which presents a strategy from reader-response criticism: making text-to-text, or intertextual, connections.

Just as Newkirk dismissed the Common Core’s preference for withholding the introduction of strategies that answer the reader’s comprehension needs until after the reader completes a close reading, Smith, Appleman, and Wilhelm argue that the strategies suggested by Rosenblatt’s transactional theory and reader-response criticism are necessary for successful English instruction in the high school classroom:

Adolescent readers, in the throes of identity development, seemed to yearn for ways to connect what they read in school with their lives outside of school. In fact, personal engagement with literary texts and connections between literature and personal experience proved to be an important way into texts for adolescent readers. (28)

Teachers, then, should look for opportunities to encourage their students to make these connections, perhaps, as Newkirk suggests, before conducting a close reading. There is room in the Common Core for both approaches—New Criticism and reader-response criticism—even though Coleman promotes the harmful Zombie New Criticism instead.
Of course, my intent is not to code the Common Core as a battle of good and evil between New Criticism and reader-response criticism, such as how Table 1.1, adapted from Teaching YA Lit Through Differentiated Instruction, represents this dichotomy. In fact, there is nothing particularly wrong with the Common Core; it simply requires careful implementation by the teacher to achieve successful reading instruction that is aligned with Massachusetts’ expectations for literacy and all that literacy entails (readers using a wide variety of texts to become better human beings and global citizens). Applebee, for one matter, is concerned that the grade-by-grade standards falsely suggest that students can learn and master reading strategies both sequentially and in isolation. Rather, development in the English language arts “involves
the recursive application of available skills to ever more complex and specialized texts and
tasks,” Applebee asserts (28). In effective instruction, both unit and lesson plans should call
upon the standards of current and previous grade levels, integrating them such that the student
clearly sees how previous and more familiar reading strategies work with the new ones to help
the student transact with the text and make its meaning.

The National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) raises another concern about the
Common Core: that it encourages censorship, a criticism shared by others. In a 2014 policy
brief, the NCTE warns that the Common Core State Standards “include a list of ‘exemplar’ texts,
and to the extent that schools and teachers feel obliged to teach only those texts, the list becomes
censorship” (18). Never mind the fact that, according to careful research of Smith, Appleman,
and Wilhelm, Coleman was forced to include in the list of text exemplars “many dated texts that
were in the public domain” in order to avoid the expensive permissions for the first-choice
contemporary texts, resulting in a “list that is not a reflection of the committee’s best thinking,
that tends to be dated instead of contemporary, and that focuses primarily on traditional print
instead of on any new media” (Smith et al. 142). The NCTE is concerned because it is this
second-best list, and not the entirety of published works, to which teachers and administrators
might self-censor themselves. Kierstin Thompson, author of “Beyond the Stacks: Why High
School English Teachers Should Be Talking about Books,” agrees with the NCTE’s censorship
concerns, writing:

in many cases, teachers self-censor texts they believe have controversial content
and thereby “succumb to the pressure to retreat behind the shield of other similar
books that are less controversial, but that may not compel the students to see
another perspective or think on a deeper level.” This means that teachers,
believing that they do not have adequate defense for the literature they teach, choose less dynamic and even less diverse texts to avoid criticism, district reprimand, or worse. (41-2) Thompson and the NCTE both recognize the ultimate result of such self-imposed censorship: the narrowing of the curriculum.

The NCTE, which guards the teaching profession as well as the instruction of English, also identifies another harm from censorship: the devaluation of teachers’ expertise, as “it prevents them from drawing on their knowledge about specific students, available materials, and the local context to make instructional decisions” (18). Oddly, this contradicts the authors’ praise in *Uncommon Core* for what they perceive as the Common Core promoting the professionalization of teaching and the encouragement of creativity and knowledge making (Smith et al. 6). This juxtaposition in the Common Core between its potential harms and benefits is the promise and the peril that Applebee describes; it is the power that the teacher carries in the force of his or her curricular choices when planning unit instruction. There is no reason for the teacher to self-censor, just as there is no reason for the teacher to adhere to Zombie New Criticism. Using reader-response criticism to frame students’ initial forays into New Criticism promises more success and greater student achievement, especially when the teacher makes careful, thoughtful text selections that widen, rather than narrow, the curriculum.

2. Gateway Read Theory

At the conclusion of his language and visual perception research at Harvard University, psycholinguist Frank Smith concluded, “reading was an intellectual activity that could be learned by children in the same self-directed way they learned to talk” (vii). That is to say, Smith’s reading theory purports reading to be a complex cognitive task that hopefully emerges in early
childhood largely independent of purposeful instruction. Even though Smith acknowledges that school-based instruction of reading begins with attention to the alphabet and phonics, he argues, “all reading of print is interpretation, making sense of print. You don’t worry about specific letters or even words when you read, any more than you care particularly about headlights and tires when you identify a car” (3). Reading instruction should, therefore, focus on helping students learn how to interpret print more accurately and fluently, not by teaching the features of written language, but by teaching the cognitive structure, which are students’ personal theories of the world. Cognitive structure thereby encompasses a theory about texts and how they operate on the reader’s consciousness:

If we are readers, or if we hope to become readers, our theories of the world must include story schemes, specifications of how stories are organized and how they unfold. We must know that stories comprise particular kinds of plots, characters, and episodes. How well a story is understood and remembered depends on how well it conforms to conventional schemes for stories and on how well the reader is familiar with those schemes. (22)

Teachers who design units of instruction to help students develop and refine story schemes are teachers who teach reading at its fundament.

The most purposeful method of teaching story schemes is the introduction of a gateway read to students’ reading assignments. The gateway read is any text that provides space for developing readers to refine their reading practices while preparing them to attempt a more complex reading event. For the high school student, the gateway read is most likely pleasure reading, which might be a work of Young Adult literature. Of course, the gateway read could also be another canon text that the student finds appealing, or any nonfiction text that relates to
the primary text of study. Regardless of what form the gateway read takes, it is a product of the teacher’s artful selection—given the reading preferences of the students—and requires guided instruction as the teacher creates lessons that demand students use gateway reads and the skills gained from interpreting those texts to make sense of the primary text of study. Grounded in the central premise that reading is a craft which it is possible and admirable to refine, Gateway Read Theory upholds five central tenets: first, that reading is an event; second, that any text can isolate readers; third, that Gateway Read Theory reconstructs the canon; fourth, that the gateway read galvanizes readers; and fifth, that the gateway read trains readers.

After long-term exposure to the written form of their language, children (as a generalization) realize that the markings of text are predictable, conform to rules and conventions, and convey popular meaning (Smith 169). This process mirrors learning to speak by being submerged in and assimilating the sounds of a native language. As children transition to a school-based reading environment, teachers provide students with optimal opportunities for the development and sometimes revision of their independent reading practices, practices which reflect the diversity of the students’ history with written language, anywhere from rich to destitute literacy. Teaching reading, therefore, while concerned with teaching students how to read, is also the act of coaching students during their reading experiences so that they might read well. Teachers provide developing readers with the strategies that they need to read well by modeling successful reading experiences and creating a space in the classroom for students to have similar experiences of their own. Smith advocates this approach, writing:

If reading is a natural activity, then literacy education should obviously center on aspects of reading that are the most natural to us. The most natural activity for human beings is experience, the absence of which leads to boredom and
withdrawal. But experience is not a topic that has much currency in education, except for the absurd suggestion that some students don’t do as well as others because they haven’t had many experiences. (55)

Teachers serve developing readers by helping them adjust their reading behaviors as they work with a text so that they might have the best possible reading experience; this is especially important because authentic reading experiences are not premeditated and are therefore wholly unpredictable and surprising, either for a student’s better or worse. Also, teachers serve developing readers by promoting conversations during which students make connections between the texts that they have read. In making these literary connections, students align the texts they have read with other texts they are currently reading using tools that will help them read more complex texts in the future. Students also affirm that their pleasure reading contributes to their academic success as a literary critic in training.

Reading is an event. Best laid out by Louise Rosenblatt in her transactional theory, this tenet of Gateway Read Theory suggests that reading is an experience demanding active participation from both the reader and the text. Rosenblatt describes the literary work as an event in time, asserting: “A specific reader and a specific text at a specific time and place: change any of these, and there occurs a different circuit, a different event—a different poem” (Rosenblatt 14). Let it be known that what Rosenblatt means by “poem” is the literary work, something intangible that grows from the text as the reader transacts with it and constructs its meaning. For Rosenblatt, the poem is any text that a reader can identify as literature: “I shall use the term ‘poem’ to refer to the whole category of aesthetic transactions between readers and texts without implying the greater or lesser ‘poeticity’ of any specific genre” (12). In that sense, a piece of nonfiction, perhaps a newspaper article, which many readers would dismiss from the
category of literature, actually belongs to that category in the presence of a reader whose transaction with the article treats it as such. All texts have the potential for serving as literature provided that they are approached as literature and held to the standards of literature, a story scheme in its own right.

Rosenblatt’s research about the reading process, that is to say, how readers participate in a reading event, reveals that readers engage in complex, recursive thinking in which they apply their cognitive structure to the text (Rosenblatt 10). By doing so, readers attempt to match the text to its appropriate story scheme, which they then use to make sense of the story—sense that they also make by applying the entirety of their cognitive structure, which contains theories about the rest of the world other than story schemes. Rosenblatt refers to cognitive structure as prior knowledge, arguing that

The reader’s attention to the text activates certain elements in his past experience—external reference, internal response—that have become linked with the verbal symbols. Meaning will emerge from a network of relationships among the things symbolized as he senses them. The symbols point to these sensations, images, objects, ideas, relationships, with the particular associations or feeling-tones created by his past experiences with them in actual life or in literature. (11) Rosenblatt clearly recognizes that the prior knowledge helping readers make sense of a text can have one of two origins: real life, or real texts. For example, a student can better make sense of Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* by touring a whaling ship, an experience from real life that will relate to symbols in the text, or by reading a whaling captain’s log, an experience from literature that will accomplish the same. A student with either set of prior knowledge is better equipped to make sense of *Moby-Dick* than a student lacking in prior knowledge.
Smith points out, too, that all texts that readers recognize as stories utilize certain conventions, called story grammars. Story grammars, or rather, a student’s familiarity with story grammars, contribute to the student’s prior knowledge and therefore shape his or her future reading events. Smith argues, “if a story makes sense to us, if it sounds like a story, this is not just because the story is told in an appropriate way but also because we know the appropriate way in which stories are told, at least in our culture” (47). Students with a better understanding of story grammars find it easier to make sense of a story because they can recognize the story grammar in use; thus, reading is an event that the reader establishes within the range of his or her own reading and life experiences.

*Any text can isolate readers.* Certainly, readers of all abilities are familiar with titles that commonly isolate inexperienced readers, especially those belonging to the high school community, where the context of school and the term “classic” attaches a stigma to reading assignments for English classes. Many of these assigned texts—*The Scarlet Letter, The Canterbury Tales, anything by Shakespeare, nearly anything in the high school curriculum*—belong to what literary critics call the canon. Ankhi Mukherjee, a literature scholar, makes a distinction between the classics and the canon, terms which most high school English teachers use interchangeably; the classic, a text distinguished by its survival of critical questioning over the years, is primarily a singular act of literature, while... canonicity implies the formulation of a corpus, the congealing of the “literary art of Memory,” the making up of a list of books requisite for a literary education, and the formation of an exclusive club, however painstakingly contested the rules of inclusion (and exclusion) may be. (Mukherjee 1028-9)
Literary criticism creates a classic when a text survives the test of critical questioning, and the nature of critical questioning in the literary discipline requires that such a text be read widely and many times since its original publication date (1028). Furthermore, the classic “occurs when a civilization and a language and literature are mature and there is a community of taste and a common style” (1029). Such a requirement stipulates that the canon, whose members are necessarily classics—although not all classics belong to the canon—is also established in a mature community of readers who share a set of principles regarding literary quality.

There is no reason to believe that a high school English classroom could not serve as this mature community of readers; indeed, this is the same as Frank Smith’s assertion that children learning to read are being inducted into the club of readers (Smith 190). By introducing a gateway read, the teacher capitalizes upon an opportunity for teaching students to read as literary critics, especially when the teacher encourages students to bring texts of their own selection into the classroom. For a student to successfully market a book from outside the canon to the teacher as a gateway read, the student must be able to apply story grammars and story schemes as well as the cognitive structure; the student must justify why the text holds up to the standards of literature, particularly if the text—perhaps a work of YA fiction—is neither canon nor classic.

The teacher achieves two ends by assigning students the task of creating the gateway read: first, the teacher has students expand the canon, and second, the teacher gives students space to practice using their prior knowledge to make sense of a text while adding to their prior knowledge by the very act of reading.

The benefit of widening the canon is clear, especially if it is the students doing the work; students get to read texts that give them pleasure, which in turn makes them more likely to read in the future. Penny Kittle, a veteran English teacher for the Conway, New Hampshire school
district, believes “the pathway to difficult reading begins with books [the students] enjoy” (1).

As a result of having little to no practice in building a canon, Kittle argues that “our disinterested and struggling readers don’t know how to choose books that match their passions and abilities, and without attention, they drift along without reading, or when pressed, they choose what’s popular, not what’s truly terrific writing” (19). Teaching students to build a canon by creating gateway reads certainly is an answer to the problem of lost readers who do not know how to find a text that matters to them.

Of course, teachers see that plenty of students struggle with grade-level texts, never mind the canon. Because each reader is the accumulation of the reading events he or she has experienced, each reader has a different history, or, more accurately, different baggage that can either embolden or hinder him or her in future events. Rosenblatt asserts, “we must recognize that the reader brings to or adds to the nonverbal or socio-physical setting his whole past experience of life and literature” (81). The teacher must be aware that the effect of the reader’s prior knowledge can be either positive or negative on each reading event, and so the teacher must work to help students use their prior knowledge constructively.

Some readers have mostly positive reading experiences that prevent those readers from feeling isolated in the proximity of a challenging text. Most readers have had occasional or perhaps numerous negative reading experiences that promote those feelings of isolation. Equally likely are readers that have mostly positive reading experiences with texts much simpler than the canon that they are expected to read successfully. These past reading events are not discriminatory; they do not care whether or not the upcoming reading event is canon. Whatever a reader’s past history, he or she is confident to read some texts and is isolated from others. There is no rule that governs textual isolation; it often results when a reader’s past reading events
are insufficient for the upcoming reading event, regardless of textual complexity or canonicity. Even when readers have an adequate reading history for the assigned canon text, those students might face textual isolation from not having a wide array of reading strategies at their disposal. All texts have the potential for textual isolation because students might not be a wide enough reader to tackle them, or a practiced enough reader to minimize the isolating.

_Gateway Read Theory reconstructs the canon._ While Mukherjee asserts that classics are created through the practice of literary criticism, and the canon forms as a mature community of readers agrees on a set of literary principles, literary scholar Laura Aull suggests that the canon for high school English classrooms is established by the anthologies that school districts require teachers to use in their lesson plans. Aull also explains that this canon is undergoing revision, first by “making anthologies more inclusive,” and second by “challenging and rethinking values and structures that have excluded them” (Aull 497-8). Aull recommends that teachers involve students in the canon formation process by having them treat anthology apparatus (introductions and editorial notes) with literary criticism, develop their own anthologies, and write apparatus to justify their canonical selections. Gateway Read Theory proposes to expand this task by encouraging students to do more than simply select classics that ought to belong to the canon; it asks students to read widely in current literature of all genres, and, from those reading events, to select those texts that first should be recognized as classic and further as canon. In that sense, Gateway Read Theory supports Aull’s statement that the canon is

a made thing—a thing we construct and reconstruct as we teach it, read it, anthologize it. This version acknowledges the role of privilege and power in canon construction and suggests that students and teachers can be critical actors in its reconstruction. (498)
When the teacher recognizes students as belonging to a community of readers and fosters a treatment of Young Adult literature as potential members of that classroom’s canon, the students are directly invited to build their own canon based upon the texts they choose to read and analyze as literature. Both texts that the class can uphold as classics, and the texts that fail to receive such a distinction, adopt Mukherjee’s label, “masterwork,” which “can engage in a ‘great conversation’ with their aristocratic forebears, a conversation in which their culture and class of origin mattered less than the great ideas they expressed anew” (Mukherjee 1036). The conversation that the students place gateway reads into is one that helps developing readers experiment with the skills required for successful reading and higher-order critical thinking, literary interpretation, and analysis because they must interpret the literariness of the reading event after making sense of the text.

*The gateway read galvanizes readers.* The gateway read is an important text for students who face textual isolation in the classroom curriculum selections. Lacking the stigma of canonicity, the gateway read is a text that appeals to developing readers and has the appearance of belonging to their reading level. Selected by the teacher, who is aware of his or her students’ abilities and interests, or selected by the student, who is discovering his or her abilities and interests, the gateway read is made, not born. No matter the ability of the reader, whether it is a student with many previous reading experiences or a student with none at all, the gateway read is a text that the teacher mines for lasting and constructive connections to the classics. With the teacher’s guidance and modeling of reading strategies, the gateway read becomes a text that forms a positive reading event, perhaps the first of many—hence, a gateway. In the space of the gateway read, the teacher models how readers work with texts to construct meaning, whether it is by consulting resources, keeping a reading journal, looking up unknown words in a dictionary, or
re-reading confusing passages, amongst other strategies. The teacher designs lessons that require students to practice engaging with a text using varied techniques, and the ultimate goal of such a classroom practice is that students gain confidence in their reading abilities and build up both prior knowledge and reading strategies that will aid them in their comprehension of a more complex text.

**The gateway read trains readers.** Or, more accurately, the teacher uses the gateway read as a mechanism for training readers to read well for the most meaning in a text. By encouraging students to discuss the reading event and providing possible solutions for moments of textual isolation, such as not being able to connect with a character, the teacher has students practice the craft of reading. In the context of mini-lessons as students complete gateway reads, teachers can model the reading strategies of taking notes, looking up allusions, making connections (text to world, text to self, or text to text), making predictions, analyzing characters, and identifying themes, among others. According to Smith,

> Prediction is the core of reading. All our schemes, scripts, and scenarios—our prior knowledge of places and situations, of written discourse, genre, and stories—enable us to predict when we read and thus to comprehend, experience, and enjoy what we read. (25)

Smith connects making predictions to readers’ feelings during pleasure reading, which especially makes mini-lessons about this skill of interest to teachers (30). Not only can teachers further galvanize readers by using the students’ predictions to gain their buy-in for that and future texts, but also the process of making predictions requires readers to apply the full extent of their cognitive structures. Every time a reader makes a prediction, he or she is further developing story schemes and story grammars, all of which becomes ever more useful as the reader selects
new texts and engages in more reading events.

Regardless of the complexity of the text, the teacher can transform it into a gateway read by requiring students to treat it as they would canon literature; in practicing the skills of literary analysis on a text that is well within their respective reading levels, students will be confident in their ability to select from and use an array of reading strategies on the more isolating required reading. It is very easy for teachers to train their students as readers by scaffolding the primary text of study, the canon work, with a gateway read. This can be done in terms of theme, craft, or both. I invoke the first as a case study of themes that are held in common by two texts, one gateway and the other canon, and I invoke the second as a case study of some element of the writer’s craft—say, narration—that is likewise held in common. Teachers can also ask students to find texts that they believe relate to the canon text in some manner, with the understanding that students will investigate this connection and its ramifications as they work to answer the essential question of a given unit plan. Matching texts is part of forming the gateway read, as the natural proclivity to compare and contrast directs students’ superficial interpretations of their reading events when they are not being guided directly by their teacher. This again highlights the training wheel mechanism of the gateway read; through creating the gateway read, teachers scaffold reading instruction and construct a resource from which students can continue to learn while they are away from the classroom. Once students are practiced in conversing about texts through the lens of gateway reads, reading instruction transcends individual units and primary texts of study to enhance all reading experiences, perhaps even encouraging reluctant readers to engage in pleasure reading outside of school.

3. Profiling the YA Reader

Readers are as diverse as the texts that they read or do not read, although it is easy for
teachers to divide their classes into readers and non-readers, as well as those who can and cannot read. Then, within the category of those who cannot read, it is even easier for teachers to separate those who attempt reading from those who do not. Unfortunately, this is only a highly stereotypical introduction to the many profiles of a YA reader that lacks attention to each student as an individual who has his or her own prior reading experience and transaction with particular texts. Donalyn Miller, a fifth-grade teacher known for her Teacher Magazine-commissioned blog, The Book Whisperer, divides students into three categories. These categories she calls developing readers, dormant readers, and underground readers:

Developing readers struggle to master basic reading skills and get lots of attention in class. Dormant readers are often taken for granted because they’re able to pass state tests, but don’t enjoy reading. Underground readers are star readers, but they see the reading they love as separate from what they’re assigned to read in class.

(Collopy 15)

Miller’s categories are notable for two things. First, her categories do not acknowledge non-readers, even though teachers know these students exist. This conscious decision to render all students as readers, regardless of whether they do read, emphasizes Miller’s instructional goal to “turn all of her students into ‘wild’ readers who develop a lifelong reading habit inside and outside class” (15). Even if students in Miller’s class elect not to read, she considers them either developing or dormant; I would argue that these reluctant readers might be a combination of the two, in that they might need more time and support while mastering the skills that improve transactions as well display abilities to pass state exams such as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (which will be more difficult or perhaps impossible with the new statewide assessment, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and
Careers. I believe that Miller’s definition for dormant readers implies a reluctance to read; very often, the students who dislike assigned reading but do well on the classroom and statewide tests are ones very adept at feigning first-hand knowledge of texts. They are very good at discussing books that they haven’t read while appearing to have done the reading in its entirety.

Miller’s definition for underground readers presupposes that these students read. Very likely, these are the students that English teachers thoroughly enjoy having in their classes, because the students reliably read even if they don’t completely enjoy the text; this is where Miller sees a disconnect between the texts that the underground reader elects (and enjoys) to read outside of class and the texts that the underground reader must read as a school assignment. If Miller classifies some students as underground readers, then I argue that there must also be aboveground readers, which Miller doesn’t recognize in her system. Aboveground readers are readers who love the assigned texts just as much as their independent pleasure reading, and who strive to love the assigned texts even when they don’t have a natural affection for them.

Miller’s instructional goal of turning all of her students into active, avid readers is shared by high school English teacher Penny Kittle, the author of Book Love: Developing Depth, Stamina, and Passion in Adolescent Readers. According to Kittle, “if we want to create lifelong, satisfied readers, we need a balance between the careful study of complex texts and time to pursue personal passions in books of choice for pure pleasure” (34). Thus, Kittle’s view of readers converges with the second notable aspect of Miller’s categories: that pleasure is a desirable component of reading. For students who can read, the dormant and underground readers, pleasure is either completely absent from reading or, when it is present, only appears in non-assigned free-choice reading. Only aboveground readers experience pleasure with assigned reading and this, often, is the result of their hard work making meaning of an isolating text.
Teachers understand the effect pleasure has on student motivation, particularly its effect on motivation to complete challenging tasks. Jeffrey Wilhelm and Michael Smith see a direct connection between a student’s sense of reading pleasure and his or her likelihood to become a lifelong reader: “But think for a minute about how we so often say that we want to encourage students to become lifelong readers. They aren’t going to be if they don’t take pleasure in the act” (21). This concerns Kittle, too, although she adds that some students’ struggle to read, in reducing their motivation and likelihood to read independently, also impacts their ability to select quality texts for independent reading. Kittle writes:

Our disinterested and struggling readers don’t know how to choose books that match their passions and abilities, and without attention, they drift along without reading, or when pressed, they choose what’s popular, not what’s truly terrific writing. (19)

The problem, then, isn’t only that consecutive reading experiences that lack pleasure create a negative attitude towards reading, preventing students from becoming lifelong readers; these very reading experiences prevent students from engaging in new events that have the potential for pleasure, and where teachers can help students learn how to independently select titles as well as decide when to give up on a title in favor of trying another text.

Kittle argues, as do Wilhelm and Smith, that pleasure reading is decreasing in high school classrooms. “Pleasure reading has suffered under the assessment mania of the last decade in the United States,” Kittle writes. “Carol Gordon and Ya-Ling Lu (2007) report that ‘all adolescents are reading less. There is a downward trend in voluntary reading by youth at middle and high school levels over the past two decades’” (Kittle 2). But other reading research reminds us that the situation is not terribly dire; Susan Groenke and Lisa Scherff cite two studies of relevance.
First, Groenke and Scherff summarize existing studies about classroom reading habits by writing that “adolescent engagement with reading and motivation to read increases when adolescents read young adult novels” (2). Thus, while the national trend in voluntary reading is decreasing, students are more likely to engage with texts when the reading assignment is a work of YA literature. In fact, Groenke and Scherff continue that “adolescents choose to read adolescent novels over more canonical works when given opportunities to choose” (2). While Kittle warns that students who are not frequently active, engaged readers trained in reading strategies tend to select titles of little to no literary merit, given a choice, Groenke and Scherff suggest that students do intuitively select texts with which they are more likely to have a positive reading experience.

4. Determining Textual Complexity

Of course, teachers selecting texts to become gateway reads must make these selections with limited guidance of the Massachusetts English Language Arts Frameworks and the Common Core State Standards, both of which emphasize the classics rather than the contemporary in their respective canons. Teachers would consider themselves lucky to have a student in their classrooms for whom a classic might be a gateway read, but for the most part, the gateway read will be a new or emerging title; new in the sense that it does not belong to the high school canon but could be added to it, given time, and emerging in the sense that it could be a recently published book that either the teacher or the student discovers. I do not mean to suggest that high-interest books, typically a bestselling YA novel series that enjoys a cult-like following, are the only emerging source for gateway reads, although they might be the first place to look. Consider Stephenie Meyer’s Twilight series as opposed to Suzanne Collins’ Hunger Games trilogy; both were a teenage reading fad, but only the latter, with its treatment of government
oppression and the power of the media, has the necessary scope for serving as a gateway read.

It is ultimately the teacher’s responsibility to cull from these new bestsellers, high-interest books, fad reads, and recently published books the chosen few that have potential to serve as a gateway read. The process of finding and making these gateway reads is simple: First, the teacher must read widely and with abandon. Then, the teacher must determine which students would like these books, as well as the reason for this determination. If the teacher cannot think of a student who would like the book, the teacher should not waste his or her time trying to make it into a gateway read and should instead move on to other potential titles. The chief issue with the high school canon is that many of the books it features are isolating; hence, students often do not want to read them and do not see a reason why they should—there is a lack of student buy-in. Assigning another book that they also would not want to read solely to help them read the nuclear text, that initial isolating text from the high school canon, simply compounds the problem. The resulting situation is a teacher assigning two books that students will not read, when the better situation is selecting one text that most students would find engaging.

Once the teacher has read a book that guarantees student buy-in, the teacher should interact with it the same way he or she interacts with the literature in the school’s curriculum. The strategies for creating a gateway read are conducting a close reading, identifying the text’s themes, and thinking about the extent of its intertextuality. If the teacher is unable to think of a text in the curriculum that would serve as the nuclear text for the gateway read, then the gateway read will not function, simply because there is nothing for which the text would be a gateway.

Unfortunately, this is only the first aspect of the gateway read. A text will not increase students’ literacy unless students read it, which is the reason why the gateway read must be
engaging to students. But teachers must also consider the second aspect of the gateway read, which addresses the purpose for having the gateway read in the curriculum. This purpose is, simply, scaffolding instruction. Once teachers find a text that students would want to read, they must determine the text’s complexity, because the gateway read should also challenge readers, not merely engage them. Ideally, the complexity of the gateway read should fall just within each student’s Zone of Proximal Development while remaining more accessible than the nuclear text, as Figure 1.1 demonstrates. In that sense, the gateway read is a stepping stone for students; teachers assist them in their analysis of the gateway read, and then the students use the gateway read as well as the teacher’s support to analyze the nuclear text.

![Zone of Current Development](image.png)

*Figure 1.1. Gateway read and nuclear text on a hypothetical student’s Zone of Proximal Development.*

This begs the question of what textual complexity is. For the most part, teachers rely upon the appendices of the Frameworks and the Common Core because these documents are the drafts of committees that spent incalculable hours using a systemic approach to determine textual complexity. Most teachers would be hard-pressed to use their precious planning time for analyzing textual complexity when this work has been completed, to some extent, by the authors of the Common Core; complex texts are already determined in both the Common Core and the Curriculum Framework.
Teachers who decide to analyze textual complexity have a variety of readability formulas and rubrics at their disposal, although the different criteria and focuses of these tests can produce murky or contradictory results. Martha Ruddell amasses a collection of such readability formulas and rubrics in *Teaching Content Reading & Writing*, although some of these were created for the sole purpose of evaluating English textbooks. The formulas applicable to literature are the Fry Readability Graph and the Simple Measure of Gobbledygook (SMOG) formula. Ruddell introduces these readability formulas in context of their historical origins in the 1920s: “Essential to the notion of readability was the belief that if we could establish the level of competence required to read a particular text, we could then more accurately match texts with readers” (58). This valiant effort, however, is limited because it only considers semantic and syntactic complexity, just two dimensions of textual complexity. As Ruddell explains:

> For each of these dimensions, the assumption of readability formulas is that longer = harder. Semantic complexity is therefore assumed to be associated with word length and multiple syllables; syntactic complexity is assumed to be associated with long sentences made so by modifiers and embedded phrases and clauses. (58)

Thus, most readability formulas involve selecting random sections of a text and counting the number of sentences, syllables, and, depending on the formula, polysyllabic words. To use the Fry Readability Graph, for example, one counts out three passages of 100 words each. In each passage, one must count the number of sentences (rounding to the nearest tenth of a sentence) as well as the number of syllables. The number of sentences and the number of syllables per 100 words is averaged and then plotted on the Fry Readability Graph, with average number of syllables on the X-axis and average number of sentences on the Y-axis. The resulting coordinate
appears somewhere along the graph’s curve, which contains grade level brackets. The text’s readability corresponds to the grade level bracket where the coordinate lies. Thus, the Fry Readability Graph assumes that a text is more complex if it contains many syllables in very few sentences (because the sentences are longer and, most likely, compound-complex).

For the SMOG formula, one counts out three passages of 10 complete sentences (ideally from the beginning, middle, and end of the text). Then one counts every polysyllabic word in each passage, adding these together before taking the nearest square root, always rounding down to the nearest square root if the total is not a perfect square. After obtaining the square root of the sum of the polysyllabic words, one adds the number three to receive the text’s appropriate grade level. The SMOG formula, therefore, assumes that texts are more complex if they contain many polysyllabic words.

While these features do give teachers an idea of text’s relative complexity, a readability formula is not the sole means for determining complexity, partly because the formulas evaluate mechanistic elements of texts—grammar and vocabulary—to the exclusion of content, and partly because the formulas’ results can misrepresent a text’s complexity. Plenty of monosyllabic words are semantically challenging to students, especially if the students are English language learners. For example, *dearth* is one of the monosyllabic words appearing in *Seraphina*, the William C. Morris Debut Award winner by Rachel Hartman (Hartman 318). *Rouse* is a similarly difficult monosyllabic word that appears in *Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children*, a bestseller by Ransom Riggs (Riggs 222). As for syntax, there are plenty of simple sentences that challenge readers, largely a result of figurative language. One of the sentences in Patricia McCormick’s *Never Fall Down*, a National Book Award finalist, reads: “I wish I can be like this horse” (McCormick 108). While the language is not confusing on the literal level, readers must
work extremely hard to determine its figurative meaning and comprehend the larger passage, in which the protagonist yearns for the lack of human responsibility that comes with being an animal while simultaneously recognizing the similarity of them both being another person’s chattel. This complexity is not encapsulated in the readability formula; in fact, it is ignored. These calculations, then, while giving an estimate for textual complexity, are not an appropriate independent measure because they can disguise the true complexity of a text. The formulas might provide an estimate for whether a text is greatly far beyond a student’s ZPD, but they can grossly misrepresent texts as being “easy” by ignoring students’ vocabulary, which is statistically poorer for students of low socio-economic status, English language learners, or students who have very little prior reading experience. The readability formulas can also misrepresent textual complexity because they do not account for figurative language that, by its very nature, is extremely complex.

Tables 2.1-2.4 present the Fry Readability Graph results for three titles on the Young Adult Library Services Association’s 2013 Top Ten Best Fiction for Young Adults list and one high-interest novel that remained on The New York Times Best Sellers list for 63 weeks.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage (Page Number)</th>
<th>Number of Sentences</th>
<th>Number of Syllables</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143</td>
<td>7.25</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>265</td>
<td>9.25</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>21.5</strong></td>
<td><strong>389</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Average</strong></td>
<td><strong>7.2</strong></td>
<td><strong>129.7</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.1 Fry Readability Graph Results for Ratha’s Creature by Clare Bell.

Later removed from the Top Ten list, Ratha’s Creature by Clare Bell is both an example of the Fry Readability Graph’s occasional accuracy and some YA novels’ unsuitability as a gateway read. According to the Fry Readability Graph, Ratha’s Creature lands squarely in the bracket for sixth grade. The book did demonstrate, in its three passages, a wide range for
sentence length (five to nine sentences within 100 words), but the semantic complexity was consistently low. The passage that represents *Ratha’s Creature* best,

Ratha trotted over the beach, her pads obliterating for a moment the maze of tracks in the sand. She stepped in a pile of dung and hopped on three legs, shaking her foot in disgust, while the dapplebacks covered her tracks with sharp-edged toe prints. The beach wasn’t big enough for this many animals at once, she thought, wiping her pad clean in a patch of scrubby dune grass. The three-horned deer stood together in a tight bunch eyeing the clan herdsmen. The stages pawed and thrust their spikes into the sand, their musky scent sharp with ill temper.

Herdfolk… (Bell 56)

does not read any differently from the passage that, according to the Table, represents *Ratha’s Creature* the worst:

“*I don’t bother with fangs for such as you. Claws do well enough.*” Again Meoran lashed out at Thakur, laying the other’s cheek open to the bone. Ratha flinched as if she had been the one struck. Something inside her began beating against the walls of its prison. She wanted to shriek at Thakur to stand aside and let her face Meoran alone. She began to tremble, fighting her rage. She knew if Meoran struck Thakur again, that her rage would win. (265)

The vocabulary in both passages, which reveals itself as highly repetitive over the course of the entire novel, is my greatest concern about the text’s complexity. I am less concerned about the syntactic complexity because the process of textual analysis revealed that passages of exposition, often describing the scene’s setting, contained more textual complexity than passages featuring advancements of the plot or exchanges of dialogue. This particular novel contained mostly
dialogue and action sequences, elements of a text that tend to appeal to young adults and novice readers more-so than prolonged description, which happened to skew the average number of sentences in favor of lesser syntactic complexity.

Looking over the Fry Readability Graph results as a whole, one notices that the texts belonged in a wide grade range (second through sixth) even though there was little variation between the syntactic and semantic complexity of each text. The average number of sentences in 100 words ranged from 7 to 10, and the average number of syllables in the same passages ranged from 117 to 133. While the Fry Readability Graph would have teachers use these texts for different grades, the actual passages of the texts suggest the similarity of their textual
complexity. If one of these texts is suitable for sixth grade, then they all should be.

I have two final comments about the Fry Readability Graph results for *Seraphina* and *Never Fall Down*. To my teacher’s eye, these texts have an unfairly low grade level assignment by the readability formula. *Seraphina*, according to the Fry Readability Graph, belongs in the fifth grade—a grade below *Ratha’s Creature*—yet its passages are much more challenging for students:

‘No, but she knew.’ Comonot laid a hand atop my father’s balding head, mystified. ‘What did she see? And why can’t I see it?’ Papa extricated himself, bowed, and set off down the hall. For a fleeting instant, in the sad curve of his shoulders, I saw what Comonot could not: the core of decency; the weight he had carried so long; the endless struggle to do right in the wake of this irreversible wrong; the grieving husband and frightened father; the author of all those love songs. For the first time, I understood. Comonot seemed unfazed by my father’s… (Hartman 428)

What makes this passage more challenging than the passages in *Ratha’s Creature* is, first, the text’s vocabulary; as proven with the SMOG Readability Formula as shown by the results in Tables 3.1 and 3.2, *Seraphina* outpaces *Ratha’s Creature* in its use of polysyllabic words, lending the text greater complexity, especially when the teacher considers the repetition of vocabulary in *Ratha’s Creature* as compared to the diverse vocabulary that appears in *Seraphina*. Second, where *Ratha’s Creature* focuses on the development of a plot, with the novel expending most of its energies in portraying action sequences, *Seraphina* introduces and discusses complex, abstract ideas. In this particular passage, students must decide what it means to be decent, whether it is ever appropriate or ethical to keep a secret, and recognize the author’s argument
that familial love overcomes the rules of a racist social order. Such themes are coded in the text, but even though the student faces the complex task of identifying these themes and finding a use for them in his or her daily life, the readability formula purports *Ratha’s Creature* to be the more challenging read.

The SMOG Readability Formula is slightly more accurate because of its attention to polysyllabic words, which do tend to indicate greater textual complexity with the exception of those monosyllabic words that still put demands on students’ vocabularies. Overall, the SMOG Readability Formula places texts in higher grade levels. *Seraphina, Never Fall Down, and Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children* each jump three grade levels when assessed by the SMOG Readability Formula. I conclude is that, semantically, these texts are suited to their respected grade levels (8, 5, and 7), but their content and the artistic decisions that their authors made during the writing process actually place these texts in the ninth and tenth grades, or perhaps, in a reading support class in the high school for students who are struggling to read at grade level. I also interpret from these results that, read independently by students as free reading, these books are appropriate according to the SMOG Readability Formula results; however, in the classroom, the extra attention to the text that the teacher demands requires a more skilled reader.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Passage (Page Number)</th>
<th>Number of Polysyllabic Words</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>143</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>265</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nearest Square Root</strong></td>
<td>$\sqrt{9} = 3$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>+3</strong></td>
<td>$3 + 3$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grade Level</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 SMOG Readability Formula for Ratha’s Creature by Clare Bell.
Another approach to determining textual complexity is to consult the Lexile Framework for Reading. This system tests the reading ability of students and matches students’ scores to the readability of texts. MetaMetrics, the company responsible for calculating the Lexile measures of books, uses a readability formula also based on semantic and syntactic complexity, while students’ Lexile measures are calculated by various third-party companies with which school districts may contract. When teachers know both a book’s Lexile measure as well as a student’s, they can reasonably predict the success of a student reading a book that is either at, slightly below, or slightly above the student’s Lexile.

In the past, Lexiles were only useful if a teacher knew each student’s Lexile. The system
is much improved since the adoption of the Common Core because the Lexile Framework for Reading used the Common Core to calibrate Lexile measures with grade levels, such that grades 9-12 should be reading books with Lexile measures in the 1050L-1385L range. This assists teachers in finding texts for the appropriate grade level even if their students’ Lexiles have not been tested, although the Lexile Framework for Reading’s website notes that:

Many other factors affect the relationship between a reader and a book, including its content, the age and interests of the reader, and the design of the actual book. The Lexile text measure is a good starting point in the book-selection process, with these other factors then being considered.

Furthermore, MetaMetrics notes in its Lexile Map, “Lexile measures do not consider factors such as age-appropriateness, interest, and prior knowledge.” Teachers may interpret this as a concession that readability formulas can only say so much about the complexity of a text, and that most of the factors determining textual complexity are more subjective.

Another concern is raised in a policy research brief published by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) on the subject of censorship, in which the NCTE wrote that “leveling systems such as Lexiles have the potential to create censorship because they can lead teachers to guide or require students to read only books on their specific ‘level’” (18). This is doubly harmful if the readability formula misrepresents the complexity of a text, since both teachers and students lose prime learning opportunities from books that receive too low a Lexile.

Table 4.1 presents the Lexiles and appropriate grade levels, as suggested by the Lexiles, for the selected YA titles. *Never Fall Down* is, in terms of language, very easy for high school students to read, aside from its heavy use of figurative language in the literary devices of similes and metaphors. While the novel’s low Lexile of 710L demonstrates this relative ease by suiting
the text to either third or fourth grade, this range tells us nothing conclusive about the novel’s utility in high school. *Never Fall Down* is a text that should have its evaluation focus on its literary merits, rather than the results of its readability formulas, which fail to reveal the textual complexity because of the author’s choice of writing style. The novel’s greatest literary merit happens to be its device of broken English, which is a metaphor for Arn’s developing voice and identity. The readability formulas portray this device as evidence for low textual complexity when the opposite is true.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title and Author</th>
<th>Lexile</th>
<th>Grade Level (Based on Text Demand Study 2009, 25th-75th Percentile)</th>
<th>Grade Level (Based on 2012 Common Core State Standards Text Measures)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Ratha’s Creature</em> by Clare Bell</td>
<td>Not Available</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Seraphina</em> by Rachel Hartman</td>
<td>760L</td>
<td>4/5</td>
<td>3/4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Never Fall Down</em> by Patricia McCormick</td>
<td>710L</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Miss Peregrine’s Home for Peculiar Children</em> by Ransom Riggs</td>
<td>890L</td>
<td>6/7</td>
<td>4/5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Table 4.1 Lexiles for Selected YA Titles.*

My criticism of evaluating textual complexity purely by its semantic and syntactical complexity suggests the value of rubrics, such as the ones populating Susan Groenke and Lisa Scherff’s book, *Teaching YA Lit Through Differentiated Instruction*, in curricular planning. Groenke and Scherff expand upon Carol Jago’s work from *Classics in the Classroom* by using Jago’s criteria to select YA titles in addition to classical works, the rubric’s original use. Groenke and Scherff note that “NCTE president Carol Jago (2004) has suggested that young adult literature is useful only when entertainment and pleasure—rather than careful literary study—are instructional goals,” arguing that English teachers can indeed use YA literature to achieve the same instructional goals as the classics, provided that these YA titles are held to the same standards as canonical works (1). Groenke and Scherff cite Jago’s criteria about these...
canonical works as follows:

1. are written in language that is perfectly suited to the author’s purpose;
2. expose readers to complex human dilemmas;
3. include compelling, disconcerting characters;
4. explore universal themes that combine different periods and cultures;
5. challenge readers to reexamine their beliefs; and
6. tell a good story with places for laughing and places for crying. (4)

It is important to note that this criteria for YA literature encourages teachers to select texts based on their literary merit. While this rubric is extremely strong, I find the most concerning weakness is the absence of intertextuality as a criterion. Intertextuality would encourage teachers to make their text selections from the position of a reader-response theorist, as intertextuality would account for students’ prior reading experience and suggest curricular opportunities for introducing gateway reads.

5. Reading Texts Closely for Gateway Reads

Never Fall Down by Patricia McCormick. Set in Cambodia during the Vietnam War, Patricia McCormick’s YA historical fiction, Never Fall Down, portrays life during the Khmer Rouge’s concentration camps and the horrors of the Killing Fields, where nearly two million people were murdered in a genocide that masqueraded as revolution (McCormick 1). McCormick assumes the voice of eleven-year-old Arn-Chorn Pond, whose home the Khmer Rouge ravages and whose family is torn asunder. Based on interviews with the real-life Arn-Chorn Pond, McCormick’s novel recounts a terrifying story of war and political asylum through challenging broken English that runs the risk of alienating English language learners (ELLs) throughout the English-speaking world. For McCormick, this gambit of falsifying broken
English succeeds as a literary device because it is with Arn’s haunting voice that she recreates the Cambodian genocide for readers who have never witnessed the violence of genocide or civil war. *Never Fall Down* exhibits literary mastery in its juxtaposition of war-torn Cambodia and avenging America; this shift in the novel’s setting dramatically mirrors the change in Arn’s life as he struggles to adopt his new American identity upon being rescued from the Vietnamese refugee camp by an American philanthropist, even though that philanthropist, Peter, and the America he represents are not the heroes that Arn supposed they would be. It is not until the final pages of the novel that McCormick allows Arn to reconcile these two Americas, one perceived and one experienced, which he does by speaking his own words rather than reciting propaganda for either of the nations—Cambodia and America—that claim him.

The voice that McCormick creates for Arn is very direct, very stark. He does not have a wide vocabulary, so he uses simple sentences that are powerful in their austerity. Arn narrates exactly what he sees, and that means that the reader has to face the horrors of the Cambodian genocide head on, making sense of these horrors just as Arn does. The text does not pull any punches with Arn narrating memories such as:

> The baguette man now is under a tree, sitting, look like taking a nap, except for blood coming out of his mouth. A little girl in a yellow dress, dirt on her dress, like people step on her. One whole family dead: a man hug his baby under him, his wife, her mouth wide open, like still screaming. In just one day a person can get used to seeing dead body. (22)

Arn’s sparse language allows the reader to focus his attention on the graphic images; the power of Arn’s voice comes from the contrast between complex, concrete images that the reader furnishes in his imagination and the uneducated language of a child who can only communicate
his experience by telling it exactly as it is. Arn speaks the horrific truth of the Cambodian genocide, which introduces the central irony in McCormick’s novel: that Arn speaks truth even though he is vocal propaganda for both the Khmer Rouge and the American movement, championed by Arn’s adoptive father, Peter, to assist the Cambodian victims.

Literary critics should read Never Fall Down as a story of one boy’s struggle to find and use his voice. On the literal level, Arn struggles to communicate because he only speaks broken English. This greatly impedes his transition to life in America after the genocide, when Arn cannot fully participate in school. Arn tells his reader, “Special class for me now. ESL, it call. Special teacher. Pat her name. Every day the other kid go to class, even Sojeat and Ravi, they go to regular school. Sojeat tease me; he call me stupid” (196). Arn’s inability to use English isolates him from his fellow Cambodian refugees as well as his new American classmates. Even as Arn becomes Peter’s rising star at the fundraising galas for Cambodia, he becomes more of a failure in the classroom. He is placed in a separate class from the rest of his peers, and he skips school whenever Peter wants him to attend a publicity stunt, which further impedes his learning (198). But on the metaphorical level, Arn struggles to communicate because no one allows him his own voice. While he is in Cambodia, Arn is the voice of the Khmer Rouge to the inhabitants of the concentration camps; while he is in America, Arn is Peter’s prop. When Arn finally has a grasp of the English language at the end of the novel, he casts propaganda aside and speaks only for himself, speaking his truth. The inauthenticity of Arn’s broken English suggests that McCormick emphasizes Arn’s search for his own voice. When McCormick allows Arn to shed this literary device, he is finally his own person able to express his opinions to the wider world.

Arn survives the Cambodian genocide largely because of his voice. The khim, a Cambodian stringed instrument similar to a dulcimer, is a metaphor for Arn’s voice; he speaks
with his instrument. It is an old musician who teaches Arn how to play the khim before the Khmer Rouge kills him:

   Wooden instrument with many string, string you hit with bamboo stick. You sit on the floor and play, and it give a beautiful sound, like heaven. I hit the right string sometime, the wrong string sometime, but always I hit it too hard. (49)

This passage is similar to Arn’s description of his ESL class with Pat, where his “tongue like asleep at the end of one hour” (196). In learning to play the khim as well as learning to speak in English, Arn has to practice to the point of exhaustion. This is because his life depends on it; the Khmer Rouge will kill Arn if he does not learn how to play the khim, and Arn will not be able to survive in America if he does not learn the language.

   When Arn masters the khim, he gains a voice. The Khmer Rouge force him, under the threat of execution, to use it to promote their politics. At a rally held in honor of one of the higher Khmer Rouge generals, Arn has to play songs that praise the Khmer Rouge:

   We play all the song, no stopping, just playing. Only playing, not even hearing. We play, we sing, we smile—big big big, all teeth, all gums—we sing how we love Angka, how the blood was spill to set us free, how happy we are now to live in this land of plenty. (60)

Of course, these songs do not convey the Cambodians’ true feelings about the Khmer Rouge and the concentration camps. But Arn has no agency; he cannot prevent the Khmer Rouge from using him as a means to spread their ideology.

   Even when Arn safely relocates to America as Peter’s adopted son, he lacks agency. This is partly because he lives in a new country where he does not speak the native language. But more critically, Arn lacks agency because his words are once again controlled by someone with a
hidden agenda: Peter, the American who wants to use the refugees he rescues via adoption to amass American support for aiding Cambodia during the country’s civil war. Unlike the Khmer Rouge, Peter has good will. But still he is a controlling, even colonizing, force that limits Arn’s personal expression. When Peter brings Arn to rallies, he provides Arn with a speech to read. The first time, Arn says:

I hold the microphone like I see Elvis do, like the Beatle, and I say something from the paper Peter give us. I say I am happy to be here in the United State.

And all the people clap. They applause us for a very long time… (188)

Because Arn is not afraid to speak for Peter, just as he was not afraid to play music for the Khmer Rouge, it is Arn whom Peter selects from his three adopted Cambodian children to bring to his rallies. For a while, Arn contents himself with reciting Peter’s speeches. He now speaks against the Khmer Rouge, but his words are still not his own.

The reader is pleased, then, when Arn discovers his own voice and assumes his agency. At the end of the novel, Arn gives a speech at one of Peter’s rallies that he has written. The final chapter represents a turning point in Arn’s life as he finally uses his words, his broken English, to retell his horrifying story as a victim of the Cambodian genocide. The passage is too long to quote in its entirety, but these are some of its most beautiful moments:

…the story pour out of me, about the kid dying from no food, the ax hitting the skull, the people calling to me from the grave. And then something happen. The paper I hold, big splash of water on it, the word now dripping off the page. And my voice now, my careful American voice, it crack and break and die in my throat… Nice man who introduce me, he come to my side, ask me if I want to stop. I say no, I want to finish my speech. (210)
The scene is immensely powerful because Arn recognizes his ownership of the speech and decides to speak even though his voice is weak and his emotions impede him. Arn makes a conscious decision to communicate; for the first time, he is not speaking publicly under the orders of another person. Arn does not play music for the Khmer Rouge, he does not recite speeches for Peter; he tells his story. Arn discovers his voice.

**Fire Bringer by David-Clement Davies versus Ratha’s Creature by Clare Bell.** A lengthy YA fantasy novel set in ancient Scotland and featuring anthropomorphic deer, David-Clement-Davies’ *Fire Bringer* is an allegory for modern warfare. With interesting parallels to World War II, *Fire Bringer* suggests the propagandic power and use (also, abuse) of the war hero. Additionally, the novel critiques the latent power of the masses. Rannoch, a red deer fawn born with an oak-leaf birth mark on his forehead, is foretold to be “Herne justly woken/Born to set the Herla free,” two lines from the deer’s prophecy about the coming of their savior, their deer-god Herne’s return. Hunted by the Sgorr, the hornless stag who introduces human behavior into the herd’s lifestyle whilst banning the deer’s natural rutting season, Rannoch must flee from a mass infanticide equivalent to Herod the Great’s Massacre of the Innocents. He undertakes a journey and homecoming of Odyssean scope, ultimately returning not as a god but as an individual who recognizes that the masses believe in his divinity, affording them the morale necessary to overthrow Sgorr’s regime. Clement-Davies’ adherence to the epic journey makes the anthropomorphism work as a veil covering his criticism of total warfare, evidencing the novel’s literary qualities.

On the other hand, Clare Bell’s anthropomorphic tale of prehistoric wild cats, *Ratha’s Creature*, falls short of such artistry. While also portraying the exile of a hero, as well as utilizing the novels’ shared trope of discovering fire to indicate the savior identity of the hero,
Bell’s novel amounts to a weak criticism of following tradition for the sake of having a tradition. *Ratha’s Creature* fails to meet the standards of literature, particularly within the context of the gateway read, because it lacks the storytelling framework of the epic journey and the artistic writing that distinguishes *Fire Bringer*. Anthropomorphism, the strength of *Fire Bringer*, is the weakness of *Ratha’s Creature*; furthermore, Bell’s writing contains little ambiguity, which prevents readers from grappling with the text’s meaning and experiencing intellectual pleasure, as the reader does from reading Clement-Davies’ work.

David Clement-Davies presents the deer’s society, their folklore about their god, Herne, and their trickster-hero, Starbuck, and the events that befall the herd as components of the human experience. When the reader first encounters the herd, the societal structure includes a Lord of Herds, selected in the deer’s version of a political election during each rutting season, as well as a police force, a band of stags called the Outriders. The deer have a monotheistic religion attributing the creation of the world to Herne, who made deer in his own image. Starbuck, the first deer, frequently tricks Herne to win favors for his race, such as their antlers (Clement-Davies 18). And, of course, the novel draws on stories from human history and literature.

The inciting incident in the novel’s plot is Sgorr’s ascension to power. An immigrant to the herd, Sgorr introduces new and controversial ideas that, Rannoch learns while undertaking his journey, come from Sgorr’s close observations of the Scottish people (457-8). Sgorr, who lacks antlers and therefore cannot make a successful challenge for Lord of the Herd, instead serves as advisor to the current Lord of the Herd, Drail. He prevails upon Drail’s age and paranoia to create a second, private police force in the herd: the Draila, which overthrows the Outsiders under Sgorr’s orders and kills any stag who will not recognize the permanent rule of Drail as Lord of the Herd (30). Sgorr encourages Drail’s obsession for power by declaring him
the Lord of Herds and sending the Draila, now an army, to attack any neighboring herd in the Scottish Low Lands that does not recognize Drail’s authority. Meanwhile, in the home herd, Sgorr creates a youth corps for the yearlings and prickets, called the Drailing. He uses the Drailing to train future members of the Draila as well as to spy on the hinds, rooting out any dissension in the herd.

Clement-Davies likens the Drailing to the Hitler Youth, down to the marching and songs. When the Draila assassinate Drail under Sgorr’s orders, he declares himself the Lord of the Herds and transforms the Draila and Drailing into the Sgorrla and Sgorrling (72-3). Having conquered the entirety of the Low Lands, Sgorr teaches the Sgorrla to sharpen their antlers into spears and prepares to attack Herne’s Herd, the herd of red deer in the High Lands from which Sgorr was exiled after attacking and killing humans, whom Herne’s Herd worships as a cult (338). Sgorr also seeks Rannoch, supposedly the incarnation of Herne who will overthrow Sgorr and restore the natural order of deer life. Simultaneous to the war between deer herds is the war between the Scottish clans; Rannoch experiences a premonition of the Massacre of Glencoe, a glen through which he travels (270-1). Thus, Clement-Davies artfully layers three conflicts—between the deer, between the Scots, and (through allegory) World War II—juxtaposing the horrors of each and demonstrating that whether animal or human, the terrible ends are the same.

At the same time that Clement-Davies uses the plot, setting, and allegory as discourse about modern warfare, he uses Rannoch’s travels from the Low Lands to the High Lands to introduce the conventions of the epic journey. Setting Rannoch on a journey with many stops and obstacles, such as Odysseus’ travels back to Ithaca, encourages the reader to interpret Rannoch as an epic hero rather than the novel’s simple protagonist. As a result, Clement-Davies elevates his anthropomorphic fantasy story. Rannoch’s task to defeat Sgorr is more than one
deer overthrowing another; it is about how one individual can use the masses’ belief in religion as a rallying point. It is also about the natural cycle in the world whereby tradition and peace shall be restored after a period of turmoil. After saving the world, the hero retires to a quiet existence, and life, as always, goes on: “So the years passed, and the Herla flourished” (496).

But where David Clement-Davies uses anthropomorphism to craft a complex narrative, Clare Bell creates a relatively flat narrative. Ratha and her fellow clan mates are intelligent wild cats with the ability to speak. They have learned to herd their prey, prehistoric deer and horses, while the non-speaking wild cats from outside the clan live as typical hunters (Bell 1-3). After a forest fire, Ratha discovers how to control flame, a creature she calls the Red Tongue, but when she tries to teach her clan mates how to build a fire, they exile Ratha (105). She loses the Red Tongue, her name for fire, when she crosses a river, but Meoran, the clan leader, will not allow Ratha to return because he feels that she has betrayed the clan way of life by suggesting that they use fire: “‘There will be no herder of the Red Tongue on ground I rule,’ Meoran said, his gaze steady on Ratha” (96). Bell sets Ratha on a limited journey by having her discover that some of the non-speaking wild cats are, in fact, intelligent, and when these wild cats plan an attack on the clan, Ratha returns to the clan to help them defend their herds and way of life. In this conflict, Meoran dies and the clan decides to follow Ratha’s advice and tame the Red Tongue, thus modifying their way of life (270).

The first sign that Ratha’s Creature is not a work of literature is that it can be summarized in a succinct paragraph. More importantly, Ratha’s Creature is not literature because it does not ask questions about the human condition. The questions about war, leadership, and the natural order that Clement-Davies raises in Fire Bringer are questions that have no clear-cut answer in his novel; however, in Ratha’s Creature, the plot clearly
communicates the idea that refusing to change traditions in order to welcome new ideas, even though they are frightening, is bad and welcomes societal ruin. *Fire Bringer* asks the reader to wonder why war happens and what one’s response to war should be; *Ratha’s Creature* tells the reader that change is good and should be embraced. Where *Fire Bringer* captivates the reader with its opportunities to question whether his or her cognitive structure truly represents the world as portrayed in the novel, *Ratha’s Creature* does not challenge the cognitive structure. As readers move through Bell’s novel, they already know how the story is going to end. It is predictable and therefore unchallenging because the story lacks scope; anthropomorphism in *Ratha’s Creature* is merely the device that makes the novel a work of fantasy. It adds nothing to the text’s complexity, and detracts everything from its literariness.

6. **Approaching the Instruction of Gateway Reads**

While the model unit plans that conclude this argument demonstrate two variations for utilizing gateway reads in the high school English classroom, teachers might also, depending on the classroom structures they have designed, be tempted to use gateway reads as part of an independent reading or literature circle program. Although it is better to encourage students to read a gateway read than to not use gateway reads at all, simply handing students a gateway read is not in keeping with the theory. The gateway read is made both in the teacher’s work as he or she reads a potential text closely and explores its connections to canon texts, as well as in the classroom instruction itself; the discussions that the teacher designs, as well as the assignments that the students complete. Penny Kittle says that “curriculum is presented as either ‘a rigorous study of the classics’ or ‘free reading of what’s easy,’” but Gateway Read Theory presents curriculum as rigorous study of the canon through hard reading of what is easier (21). The two unit plans are examples of curriculum designed with Gateway Read Theory in mind, but this
section explores the intermediary stages of unit planning—the process for taking a text and, having critically analyzed it as a literature scholar, considering the strengths and weaknesses of the gateway read in the classroom. No matter how the teacher envisions the integration of gateway reads in a unit plan, he or she must determine how to satisfactorily prepare students for the text, how to support the students while they read the text, as well as anticipate how students might react to the text so that the teacher can prepare an effective response which will resolve meaning-making errors and help students make the greatest scope of meaning from the text.

**Never Fall Down by Patricia McCormick.** According to the Fry Readability Graph and Smog Readability Formula results, this novel is suitable for second or fifth grade readers; the most recent calibration of its Lexile Measure suggests suitability for the third grade. However, the close reading of the novel reveals the text’s actual complexity, which had been disguised by the three readability analytical systems. Using teacher’s intuition, this text is suitable for ninth and tenth grade readers in a college preparatory world literature English class, where the teacher would use *Never Fall Down* to show students how to conduct a close reading as well as push students to refine verbal and written expressions of intertextual connections to canon texts. *Never Fall Down*’s theme of how people develop their voices and identities presents an opportunity for teachers who wish to introduce *The Diary of Anne Frank*, a text in the Massachusetts Curriculum Framework; the YA novel provides a comparative historical context for understanding Anne Frank’s experiences. But because *Never Fall Down* may also operate as a critical lens for discussing other texts, the model unit plan contained in this thesis matches it to Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* to explore the key concept of change-agency.

**Consideration 1: Preparing Students.** The first obstacle that students need to overcome in order to fully understand *Never Fall Down* is possible ignorance of the Cambodian genocide.
Many high school students lack a complete understanding of the political turmoil in Cambodia simultaneous with the Vietnam War; also, while most students would understand the concepts of genocide and war crimes because of the Holocaust, they would not truly know the extent of the horrors that genocide entails, unless they had prior experience with primary source documents. Students would need this understanding in order to recognize the gravity of Never Fall Down, and they would need this understanding so that they might not be overwhelmed or unduly disturbed while reading the novel, which does not sugarcoat any war crime.

Before reading the novel, then, the teacher might use resources from Jennifer Hanson’s electronic primary source library. Her collection includes video recordings of interviews with Arn Chorn-Pond that the class might view as a whole; the teacher also might take students to a computer lab to complete a web quest requiring them to answer questions about the political turmoil, the Khmer Rouge, and the Killing Fields. The teacher might also play excerpts from the PBS documentary, The Flute Player. There are more interviews on the documentary’s website, some of which talk about the process of telling Arn’s story through film. These clips would efficiently segue to the topic of appropriation since Patricia McCormick, like the documentary director, tells Arn’s story through a chosen medium on his behalf. Before reading Never Fall Down, the teacher might lead a class discussion about what it means to retell a true story versus a fictional one.

The idea of appropriation and retelling stories is the second obstacle that might prevent students from fully understanding Never Fall Down. While the PBS documentary and filmmaker interviews would provide fodder for a discussion, this is not the most engaging method for teaching about appropriation. Instead, the teacher might introduce the concept with an activity such as this: The teacher divides the class into pairs. In each pair, students share a personal
story. It can be about anything, but the teacher offers prompts—for example, learning to ride a bike, your first day of school, etc.—and only requires that the story contain a lot of details and emotional memories about the events that occurred during the story. After the students share, the teacher re-groups students in new pairs. The students then retell the stories they heard with as many of the details and emotional memories that they can remember. Next, the listener retells the story to the entire class, and the person who originally told the story reveals what in the retelling was truthful and what was not. From the “telephone” environment created by this activity, students will realize how retelling stories can actually modify the story. Then, the class can discuss how the fact that *Never Fall Down* is a retelling might challenge its validity, particularly because of the cultural difference between the author and the subject.

*Consideration 2: Supporting Students.* As students read, the teacher would want to continue supporting them as they build their cognitive structure by learning about the Cambodian genocide. To do that, the teacher might supply in-class primary source readings. The teacher might also complement the text with in-class primary source readings of other genocides, such as the Rwandan and Armenian genocides, the Holocaust, and the Irish Potato Famine.

The teacher would also want to support students by introducing vocabulary words from the novel that are foreign in derivation, such as khim, the musical instrument that Arn learns to play. Most students keep reading past words that they don’t understand. Only good readers stop to look up the meaning of unknown words. Part of the teacher’s job when students read is to give them opportunities to look up definitions and fill in their content knowledge.

*Consideration 3: Teacher’s Concerns.* Teacher’s intuition suggests that the foremost concern about this text is its possible offensive nature; *Never Fall Down* is a story appropriated by a person who has had no personal experience with genocide, and it uses the stereotypical
language of an English language learner as a literary device. The teacher should be concerned about the truthfulness of the story, as well as the message that the book might send to ELLs in the classroom. The text might either offend or embarrass them.

A second concern is that students might only think about the story as a triumphant account of survival during genocide, rather than considering its complexity as a story about finding one’s voice. Another concern is that students who do make this observation might equate their own struggles for discovering their identities with Arn’s life and death struggle, thereby trivializing this very serious novel.

A final concern is that this novel might encourage students to dismiss international humanitarian efforts because of the portrayal of Peter, who seems to appropriate Arn just as much as the Khmer Rouge even despite his intent is to help the survivors of the Cambodian genocide. No teacher would want students to read *Never Fall Down* and conclude that organizations fundraising on behalf of those who face hardships are not worthy philanthropies.

**Fire Bringer and The Sight by David-Clement Davies and Watership Down by Richard Adams.** These three texts serve as gateway reads for either Homer’s *Odyssey* or Shakespeare’s *The Tragedy of Macbeth* in the first of the two model unit plans. According to the Lexile Measure, *The Sight* is the most complex with 890L for its measure, followed by *Watership Down* with its 880L and *Fire Bringer* with its 840L. This suggests suitability for fourth and fifth grade. However, from my personal experience, *The Sight* was a challenging text that I did not fully understand in seventh grade even though I was reading above grade level. As a result, my teacher’s intuition suggests that these texts would be more suitable for the ninth grade. These texts work together because, as the *Locus* review on the cover of *Fire Bringer* says, “*Fire Bringer* does for deer what *Watership Down* did for rabbits,” and *The Sight* is a companion
novel to *Fire Bringer*. When the teacher reads these three novels, he or she realizes that *Fire Bringer* and *Watership Down* portray the same epic journey—stop by stop—although *Fire Bringer* is more accessible to developing readers because the text of *Watership Down* is both old and British, two qualities that might create textual isolation. *The Sight* has its own plot, but it takes place in the same universe as *Fire Bringer*. Through allusions, *The Sight* complicates the reader’s initial interpretation of *Fire Bringer* and calls for a revision of the cognitive structure.

**Consideration 1: Preparing Students.** One way to prepare students for these texts is to help them interpret the texts as literature rather than mere fantasy. The teacher might accomplish this by providing students with a critical lens that they can apply to each novel. For example, the teacher could begin the unit by introducing Joseph Campbell’s monomyth, a thesis that all stories are variations of a single myth that transcends cultures. The teacher could create a handout that describes each stage of the hero’s journey, beginning with the Call to Adventure and ending with the Freedom to Live. The teacher should also distribute a chart with columns for each of the novels so that students can write notes about the event in each story and how it corresponds to a stage of the hero’s journey. As students read, the teacher might invite them to share and discuss their notes with the rest of the class.

**Consideration 2: Supporting Students.** In order to support students, the teacher would want students to see the connections between the texts. The teacher can help students make these connections between *Fire Bringer* and *Watership Down* by creating an activity in which students, divided into three groups, must resolve a copyright dispute. The teacher explains to the class that one group, representing Richard Adams and *Watership Down*, is accusing a second group, representing David Clement-Davies and *Fire Bringer*, of plagiarism. Each group will participate in a structured debate (featuring opening statements, cross examinations, rebuttals,
and closing statements) in order to argue that *Fire Bringer* was or was not an act of plagiarism. The third group will decide the case and create a report detailing the textual evidence that convinced them to uphold the side that they selected. This activity requires students to identify the similarities and differences between the texts, and the debate format for the activity helps students to apply textual evidence to a critical argument.

*Consideration 3: Teacher’s Concerns.* The teacher will most likely have a concern about the likelihood of students’ interest in a story about talking animals. Because *Fire Bringer*, *The Sight*, and *Watership Down* are fantasy, students will either love them or hate them. Even students who are engaged in the novels might believe that books told from the point of view of animal protagonists are trite and for a younger reader, even though the teacher recognizes the literariness of these texts. The teacher will have to work to help students to see the texts’ literary qualities, which will surely provide the students with buy-in.

The teacher might also be concerned that students will not interpret the animal protagonists as if they were human protagonists, missing the effect of anthropomorphism on the author’s statements about the human condition. Even students who do reach this level of literary analysis might not believe that the animal protagonists reveal anything about them personally as the texts’ readers.

**7. Conclusion: A Look at Two Unit Plans Featuring Gateway Reads**

The final research question is how the English language arts teacher might incorporate gateway reads into the high school curriculum, particularly when the primary texts of study are determined both by the department and the availability of classroom sets in the school’s book room; the next pages, which contain two model unit plans that represent different approaches to gateway read instruction, demonstrate how teachers can plan for gateway reads from the
beginning of a new unit plan as well as modify existing unit plans to incorporate a gateway read and gateway read instructional strategies. The first unit plan is “The Bounds of Humanity,” which was designed in Summer 2014 as part of the Adrian Tinsley Program. Because this unit plan was experimental, it takes gateway reads into account from its first planning stages. The second unit plan is “So It Goes: The Refrain of Resignations in *Slaughterhouse-Five,*” which was designed in Fall 2014 for the strategies course of the English teacher preparation program at Bridgewater State University. While this plan is reproduced from the original, the following discussion suggests the major edits that a teacher must make in order to implement Gateway Read Theory. I indicate these changes in the unit plan with red font, yellow highlighting, and strikethrough.

First consider “The Bounds of Humanity,” which was written for B.M.C. Durfee High School in Fall River, Massachusetts. The unit features MCAS data disaggregation which helped me identify the appropriate power standards—standards, it so happens, that are easily addressed by gateway read instructional strategies. Consider CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4, for instance: “Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.” As I have already argued, one of the textual features that can isolate developing or novice readers is the text’s vocabulary. If students do not know how to problem-solve when they encounter unknown words, they will not be successful readers. If a teacher uses a gateway read with, as this unit does, the literature circle scaffolding to model the collection of vocabulary, students gain a skill that helps them meet this power standard as well as improves their chances for successful reading in the future.

“The Bounds of Humanity” gives students two opportunities to choose reading selections
over the course of the unit. All students will read Richard Adam’s *Watership Down*, which serves as the classroom text from Day 1 to Day 29. During this first half of the term, students also form literature circles to read either *Fire Bringer* or *The Sight*, both YA novels by David Clement-Davies. These texts represent two Lexiles so that all students, between the three novels, will be reading an “easy” and a “hard” book. Of course, the unit notes that these texts will still challenge the students who dislike fantasy. Thus, the class meetings that feature direct instruction by the teacher (those class meetings between the literature circle’s sessions) feature lessons encouraging students to see past the anthropomorphism. These lessons, generally speaking, represent the overall goal of gateway read instruction: helping students learn how to personally connect with texts, rather than give up on them. All readers have to work for buy-in; it is rare to find a book that you instantly enjoy.

Most of the gateway read instruction takes place through the use of literature circles. The role sheets break down the reading process into separate tasks. Students rotate through these roles while reading their YA novel and maintain records in a group binder, as well as make and review videotape recordings of their literature circle sessions. The teacher can therefore interact with the literature circles as they are meeting to help students practice the skills for each literature circle role, as well as review and evaluate the records that each circle keeps. Throughout this process, the teacher can insert a mini-lesson if he or she finds that students struggle with a particular skill, such as collecting vocabulary, analyzing character or setting, identifying symbols, and so on. The teacher has the students complete this work in the literature circle for the YA novel because this text is less likely to be isolating; it also frees the class schedule for richer direct instruction of *Watership Down*. In this direct instruction, the teacher can model the process for making intertextual connections between the three novels.
On Day 30, students begin their second literature circles. This time, they elect from either *The Odyssey* or *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, both primary texts of study. Students make their selection based on the theme they want to explore. The students who read *The Odyssey* will most likely explore the idea of effective leadership. Students reading *The Tragedy of Macbeth*, however, will most likely explore the ideas of free will and fate. If the unit is successful, students will realize that their themes share a point of convergence. They can use all of the texts to decide how to be a leader (or whether that is even possible) in a world lacking free will. As the unit plan’s curriculum unit demonstrates, the teacher leads these discussions between the literature circle’s meetings. Throughout the process, students practice natural, authentic reading. At the conclusion of each text, they write and post a review on Goodreads. Students are allowed to dislike texts even as they complete the work necessary for their grade in the class.

Please take a moment to review “So It Goes: The Refrain of Resignations in *Slaughterhouse-Five.*” In its original representation, this unit explores change agency through the arts, particularly literature and film. When students complete the curriculum-embedded performance assessment, they become change-agents themselves. In order to prepare students for this task, the teacher helps them analyze a variety of texts by change-agents. The diversity of genre promotes intertextuality, but these texts are not gateway reads even though the unit does use gateway read instructional strategies. The reason that these texts are not gateway reads is that the class instruction focuses solely on helping students to analyze *Slaughterhouse-Five*, not to overcome textual isolation. There is a taint in the original unit plan that comes from teaching the novel as if every student might become an English majors when her or she attends college. All of the supplementary texts appear in the unit plan in context of literary analysis—not the context of improving meaning-making for the nuclear text, *Slaughterhouse-Five*. In other words,
the original unit sets forth to assist students in exploring one interpretation of *Slaughterhouse-Five*, and it accomplishes this goal by introducing the relevant supplementary materials. It does not, however, support students who are not reading *Slaughterhouse-Five* because they are isolated from it. Neither does it allow for students to make their own interpretation of the novel.

The first change that must be made to “So It Goes: The Refrain of Resignations in *Slaughterhouse-Five*” is removing the supplementary materials that are not serving as gateway reads. I am torn about the use of Stanley Kubrick’s *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. It could certainly be a gateway read for some students, but the unit’s original intent for the film was for students to write a film/text comparison paper. If students are using the film as a gateway read, this paper is unnecessary because the assignment actually limits the work that the film can do for students in terms of engaging them with *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Students must make their comparisons during the process of reading, not as a final product to evidence understanding after they read. Therefore, if the film remains in the unit plan as a gateway read, it must be part of a literature circle and the film/text comparison paper must go—hence, the strikethroughs in the unit plan.

The second change to the unit plan is, of course, the introduction of the gateway read. I have left *Dr. Strangelove* in the unit but have also introduced *No Easy Day: The Firsthand Account of the Mission that Killed Osama Bin Laden* by Kevin Maurer and Mark Owen. This text would make an excellent gateway read because it is contemporary and lacks the science fiction that isolates readers in *Slaughterhouse-Five*. It, too, is a work of change-agency that discusses war, which would allow students to better understand Kurt Vonnegut. Pairing it with *Slaughterhouse-Five* actually tempers isolation in the nuclear text because students come to realize that science fiction helped Vonnegut discuss the war just as nonfiction helped Maurer and
Owen. This recognition means that students can dismiss their feelings about science fiction, or at least navigate around them. Students who understand the reason Vonnegut selected this genre finally see science fiction in *Slaughterhouse-Five* for what it is: a device. They acknowledge and appreciate its utility even as they express their dislike for it.

Like “The Bounds of Humanity,” the unit “So It Goes: The Refrain of Resignations in *Slaughterhouse-Five*” presents gateway reads in a literature circle setting. The general approach that the gateway read instructional strategies take is to place responsibility in the hands of students—responsibility to read, responsibility to reflect and conduct self-analysis, and responsibility to try new strategies as well as to engage in metacognitive thought about how these strategies work for the individual reader. The responsibility that falls in the hands of the teacher is to identify potential gateway reads and to model different comprehension strategies for the students. The teacher must frame the primary text of study, the nuclear text, with the gateway read, meaning the teacher must lead the discussions that help students begin to explore intertextual connections. The teacher also does not give up on the students who are not reading, or are not reading deeply. Like Miller, the teacher must classify all students as readers.

Clearly, building gateway reads into the curriculum requires careful planning, wide reading on the part of both teacher and student, and flexibility. The teacher who elects to use gateway reads must remember that most readers are developing, dormant, or underground. Naturally, we want these readers to be aboveground readers and enjoy reading as well as read voluntarily. But until students are comfortable reading and have a variety of strategies at their disposal, we must be careful not to instruct them as if they are, in fact, aboveground readers. We must always look for a gateway read that will get them above ground, and we must be the first to hand readers a spade to dig out of the hole—as well as to dig a little ourselves.
**Unit Title:** The Bounds of Humanity  
**Course:** 09102F – English I Introduction to Literature College Preparatory  
**Grade Level:** 9th  
**Themes:** Leadership, Fate/Destiny  
**Key Words:** anthropomorphism, folktale, myth, hospitality  
**Additional Topics:** form/structure, plot devices, human history, monomyth  
**Time Frame:** 45 days/1 term  
**School District:** Fall River Public Schools  
**School:** B.M.C. Durfee High School

**Brief Summary of Unit:** In this introductory unit of the Introduction to Literature course, students will build stamina as independent readers and practice the strategies that lifelong readers use to make sense of challenging texts. Students will read either *The Sight* or *Watership Down* in a literature circle while simultaneously reading *Fire Bringer* as the class novel, keeping a reading journal to document the strategies that they use in their literature circle roles (i.e., questioner, connector, selector, illustrator, summarizer, and definer). In the second part of the unit, students will select either *The Odyssey* or *The Tragedy of Macbeth* for a subsequent literature circle. In the culminating performance task, students will write a formal analytical essay that compares and contrasts at least two of the three texts regarding their themes and forms or structures. The unit concludes with a self-assessment in which the students reflect on their reading habits and the techniques they used to make meaning of the texts.

**Overarching Essential Questions:**
- Can a community help us understand texts that we read?  
- How do readers make sense of a text when they encounter words or phrases that are unfamiliar and/or confusing?  
- What is the relationship between the form or structure of a text and its overall meaning?  
- What techniques can an author use to convey a text’s theme?  
- How can we support our claims about a text and its meaning when we talk and/or write about them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Unit Design Status</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Completed template pages—Stages 1, 2, and 3 | ✓  
| Completed rubrics or performance task lists | ✓  
| Materials and resources listed | ✓  
| Assumptions, preconceptions, and misconceptions identified | ✓  
| Accommodations and extensions suggested | ✓  
| Completed curriculum map | ✓  
| Peer reviewed |  
| Field tested |  
| Anchored | ✓  
| **Revised draft date** | 04/23/15  

## Stage 1 – Desired Results

### Established Goals:
*Common Core State Standards (see Stage 1 Appendix A)*
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.4
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9
- CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1

### Other Goals
- Improve reading experiences and build reading stamina.
- Analyze and reflect on reading habits and strategies in guided journal writing.
- Successfully engage in discussions that place texts in conversation with each other.

### Transfer

**Students will be able to independently use their learning to...**
1. Evaluate the success of their reading experiences and diagnose problems in reading comprehension.
2. Address problems in reading comprehension by employing the appropriate reading strategy or technique.
3. Place diverse texts in conversation with one another in order to make and defend a claim, either in a discussion or a piece of writing.

### Meaning

**Enduring Understandings:**
1. Reading is a craft that can be honed over time.
2. Good readers are active readers who adjust their reading and employ strategies as they progress through a text.
3. Writing is a medium that allows readers to process texts and share their insights.
4. A theme is the central and universal idea of a text that allows readers to make connections between texts and the world.

**Topical Essential Questions:**
- What is the best way to lead a community through adversity?
- What makes a good leader?
- Do we have free will?
- Are we responsible if something is fated or destined to occur?
- Are humans different from animals?
- What does the word “humanity” entail?

### Acquisition

**Students will know...**
- The definitions and proper uses of literary terminology relevant to their text selections.

**Students will be skilled at...**
- Annotating texts in order to support statements and claims during group and class discussions.
### Power Standards:

- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1** – Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2** – Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize key supporting details and ideas.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3** – Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.4** – Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5** – Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.6** – Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.
- **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.4** – Determine or clarify the

### MCAS Data Disaggregation:

According to the 2013 ELA MCAS results for Grade 10 students at B.M.C. Durfee High School, the subgroups with the greatest percentage of their number earning Needs Improvement and Failing grades are: students with disabilities (58%), ELLs and former ELLs (74%), African American students (25%), and Hispanic/Latino students (41%), compared to White students (13%) and Asian students (8%). Low-income students also face a high percentage of NI and F scores (21%). According to the DART Analysis, the Fall River district has not met its target for students with disabilities and ELLs and former ELLs. On the itemized score report for the 2013 ELA MCAS, the data shows that the students underperform in the seven standards listed at right as Power Standards, particularly CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.5 and CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.4, performing an average of 13 percentage points below the state on each of those two standards.
meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.

| Teacher’s Assumptions: | Anticipated Preconceptions: Some students might hold the preconception that books told from the point of view of animal protagonists are trite, meant to be entertaining, and/or meant to be for children. These students will conceive of animal protagonists as being different from human protagonists, even though they serve the same function in the texts. Similarly, students might have the preconception that stories about animals have nothing to say about the human experience, and even if they do have something to say about the human experience, they have nothing to say about them personally as readers. Another preconception that the students might hold is that the texts in the second literature circle are boring, as well as contain certain meanings as defined by the teacher and online sources like SparkNotes and/or Wikipedia. Of course, there are also the preconceptions about the act of reading, which vary for each student based on prior experiences. | Anticipated Misconceptions: Once students learn about Joseph Campbell’s theory of monomyth, they will likely interpret the texts only from that critical lens. They might (falsely) conclude that all texts must be analyzed in terms of monomyth, or that their knowledge of monomyth means that there are no additional or other truths contained in works of literature. Students may also misconceive the roles for literature circles as they begin to practice them, concluding (falsely) that they can only fulfill one role in preparation for a given literature circle meeting. Also, they might believe that they will become successful readers if they use strategies in a certain order or in a certain combination, when the teacher’s purpose of introducing the strategies is so that students might have a wide variety of tools that they can select from in response to the challenges they face in reading any text in any context for any purpose. Another misconception is that each text only has one meaning worth discussing, when actually the teacher has selected the meaning(s) for ease of instruction. |

- It is fair to assume that some students will have limited to no prior reading practice, meaning that they will lack the stamina to read two books simultaneously as well as three books in a nine-week period. It is also fair to assume that some students will not immediately connect to the animal protagonists in *Fire Bringer*, *The Sight*, or *Watership Down*. It will be a challenge to convince those students to think about the humanity that the books present.
### Stage 2 – Evidence

#### Formative Assessments

1. **Role sheets/literature circle binders:** Each literature circle will maintain a binder for the duration of reading the selected novel. Each student is responsible for submitting the entry for his or her role during a given meeting. The entry consists of the role sheet and enough copies of the prepared handout for the entire literature circle, as well as one copy to be submitted in the binder. At each meeting of the literature circle, one student will be responsible for taking and submitting notes detailing the circle’s discussion. When the literature circle videotapes the meeting, the students will each submit a review of the circle’s recording. This serves as students’ self-reflection throughout the unit.

2. **Reader’s journal/in-class writing:** Each student will keep a reader’s journal and participate in in-class writing assignments and writing-to-learn activities while reading *Watership Down*. Students will submit their reader’s journal and in-class writing to the teacher for periodic review and to receive comments. Entries will be graded for completeness, timeliness, use of quotes, documentation of reading strategies used, and quality of analysis for any close readings.

#### Summative Assessments

1. **Formal analytical essay:** Students will write a formal, 3-5 page analytical essay in which they explore a theme held in common with at least two of the three novels that they read during this unit. Students may compare and contrast novels or discuss how one novel complicates the theme of the other novel. Essays will be graded based upon their adherence to the MLA style, use of quotations from both novels, quality of textual analysis, attention to the rhetorical strategies in each novel, and overall attention to grammar, spelling, conventions, and style.

#### Other Evidence

1. **Teacher’s observations/literature circle video recordings:** Each literature circle videotapes its proceedings twice. After videotaping a meeting, the literature circle views the recording and students write an analysis. This self-reflection should address the student’s strengths and weaknesses in the literature circle, as well as the literature circle’s strengths and weaknesses. The self-reflection should end with two goals, one for the student and one for the literature circle.
2. **Literature circle rubrics:** The teacher uses a rubric to assess each student’s participation during literature circle meetings. The rubric addresses the student’s preparation for the meeting, ability to communicate clearly with the literature circle in both speech and writing (evidenced by the handouts), and comfort with the text (evidenced by references to the text and the sharing of quotes to support claims).

### Stage 3 – Learning Plan

**Key Learning Events:**
1. Literature Circle 1: *Fire Bringer or The Sight*
2. Plagiarism Debate
3. Literature Circle 2: *The Odyssey or The Tragedy of Macbeth*

**Materials, Technology, and Resources:**

**Texts**
- *Fire Bringer* by David Clement-Davies
- *The Sight* by David Clement-Davies
- *Watership Down* by Richard Adams
- *The Odyssey* by Homer
- *The Tragedy of Macbeth* by William Shakespeare

**Other Materials**
- One-inch binders (one per literature circle)
- One-subject spiral bound notebooks (one per student)
- Literature circle role sheets

### Curriculum Map

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Monday</th>
<th>Tuesday</th>
<th>Wednesday</th>
<th>Thursday</th>
<th>Friday</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Day 1: Teacher explains literature circles, gives a book talk on <em>Fire Bringer</em> and <em>The Sight</em>; students begin reading <em>Watership Down</em> in class</td>
<td>Day 2: Lit Circle 1 Begins: Students hold their first literature circle meeting, make entries in their binders; participate in activity on the rabbits’ language in <em>Watership Down</em></td>
<td>Day 3: Students make an entry in their reading journal about rabbits’ characterization in <em>Watership Down</em>; teacher leads discussion about potential themes in the novel (mini-lesson on making predictions)</td>
<td>Day 4: Students hold their second literature</td>
<td>Day 5: Research day to learn about</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 9: Class discussion about the different warrens and each warren’s social structure</td>
<td>Day 10: Students investigate the rabbits’ folklore—read selections from <em>Tales from Watership Down</em></td>
<td>Day 11: Students hold their fifth literature circle meeting</td>
<td>Day 12: Students refine their character analyses; in their reading journals, students write about which character is most like them; class discussion about which character is the best leader</td>
<td>Day 13: Students write their own story about El-Ahrairah and Rabsccutle on a theme that they feel relates to the story’s current plot development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 14: Students read and comment on each other’s folklore</td>
<td>Day 15: Class discussion about folklore in <em>Watership Down, Fire Bringer, The Sight</em>, and human history—what is each novel’s folklore like? What does folklore do for us?</td>
<td>Day 16: Students hold their sixth literature circle meeting</td>
<td>Day 17: Mini-lesson on dialect and vernacular; discussion about how language works in <em>Watership Down, Fire Bringer, and The Sight</em></td>
<td>Day 18: Students write in their reading journals (followed by class discussion) about what the rabbits’ greatest adventure has been; who was the hero in this episode of the novel?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 19: Students add to their entries on the stages of the hero’s journey and the plot developments in <em>Watership Down</em> and their Lit Circle 1 novel</td>
<td>Day 20: Totalitarianism experiment during classwork followed by discussion about life under General Woundwort’s paw</td>
<td>Day 21: Students hold their seventh literature circle meeting</td>
<td>Day 22: Discuss the battle for <em>Watership Down</em>; students make predictions in their reading journals about how the battle will end</td>
<td>Day 23: Research day to learn about battle strategies; discuss the battle for <em>Watership Down</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 24: Students write in their reading journals about the end of <em>Watership Down</em>—what would the novel’s sequel be about?</td>
<td>Day 25, Lit Circle 1 Ends: Students submit binders, write and post a book review on Goodreads</td>
<td>Day 26: Students compare/contrast <em>Fire Bringer</em> and <em>The Sight</em> in a jigsaw activity</td>
<td>Day 27: Students prepare for the plagiarism debate</td>
<td>Day 28: Students participate in the plagiarism debate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>NO SCHOOL</strong></td>
<td>Day 29: Teacher introduce two themes for exploration, gives a book talk on <em>The Odyssey</em> and <em>The Tragedy of Macbeth</em>; class discussion about leadership in <em>Watership Down</em> as well as the role of fate in all three books</td>
<td>Day 30, Lit Circle 2 Begins: Students hold their first literature circle meeting, make entries in their binders</td>
<td>Day 31: Students write in their reading journals about the importance of setting, class discussion about the settings in each book—students should map characters’ journeys</td>
<td>Day 32: Students hold their second literature circle meeting, make entries in their binders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 33: Students hold their third literature circle meeting, make entries in their binders</td>
<td>Day 34: <em>Macbeth</em> &amp; <em>The Sight</em> students compare/contrast the Weird Sisters to Morgra in their reading journals; <em>The Odyssey</em> &amp; <em>Fire Bringer</em> students identify the epic heroes and invocations to the muse in their reading journals</td>
<td>Day 35: Students develop a research question using their Lit Circle 1 and Lit Circle 2 texts that they can answer by the end of the class period in their reading journals</td>
<td>Day 36: Research day to learn about the historical contexts of the Lit Circle 2 texts</td>
<td>Day 37: Students hold their fourth literature circle meeting, make entries in their binders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day 38: <em>Fire Bringer</em> students compare Sgorr to General Woundwort and, if reading <em>Macbeth</em>, to Macbeth; <em>The Sight</em></td>
<td>Day 39: Students hold their fifth literature circle meeting, make entries in their binders</td>
<td>Day 40: Class discussion about the greatest leaders in each text—what makes them good leaders? What decisions</td>
<td>Day 41: Class discussion about fate and free will in each text—what are the characters responsible for?</td>
<td>Day 42, Lit Circle 2 Ends: Students submit binders, write and post a book review on Goodreads</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students compare, if reading <em>The Odyssey</em>, Morga to Kalypso, otherwise they compare Larka to Fiver &amp; possibly Macbeth</td>
<td>Do they have to make as leaders?</td>
<td>Day 43: Students workshop essay drafts, submit revision letters for a participation grade</td>
<td>Day 44: Students conference with teacher; while conferences take place, students pick a 3-page passage in their Lit Circle 2 text to close read in their reading journals</td>
<td>Day 45: Students conference with teacher; while conferences take place, students pick a 3-page passage in their Lit Circle 2 text to close read in their reading journals</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Stage 1 Appendix A – Common Core State Standards

#### College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.RL.1</td>
<td>Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.RL.2</td>
<td>Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize key supporting details and ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.RL.3</td>
<td>Analyze how and why individuals, events, and ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.RL.4</td>
<td>Interpret words and phrases as they are used in a text, including determining technical, connotative, and figurative meanings, and analyze how specific word choices shape meaning or tone.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.RL.5</td>
<td>Analyze the structure of texts, including how specific sentences, paragraphs, and larger portions of the text (e.g., a section, chapter, scene, or stanza) relate to each other and the whole.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.RL.6</td>
<td>Assess how point of view or purpose shapes the content and style of a text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.L.4</td>
<td>Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases by using context clues, analyzing meaningful word parts, and consulting general and specialized reference materials, as appropriate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.1</td>
<td>Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.4</td>
<td>Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.W.9</td>
<td>Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.SL.1</td>
<td>Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### English Language Arts Grades 9-10 Standards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.1</td>
<td>Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2</td>
<td>Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
provide an objective summary of the text.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Standard</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3</td>
<td>Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.4</td>
<td>Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the cumulative impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone (e.g., how the language evokes a sense of time and place; how it sets a formal or informal tone).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.5</td>
<td>Analyze how an author’s choices concerning how to structure a text, order events within it (e.g., parallel plots), and manipulate time (e.g., pacing, flashbacks) create such effects as mystery, tension, or surprise.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| CCSS.ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.4 | Determine or clarify the meaning of unknown and multiple-meaning words and phrases based on grades 9-10 reading and content, choosing flexibly from a range of strategies.  
  a. Use context (e.g., the overall meaning of a sentence, paragraph, or text; a word’s position or function in a sentence) as a clue to the meaning of a word or phrase.  
  b. Identify and correctly use patterns of word changes that indicate differing meanings or parts of speech (e.g., analyze, analysis, analytical; advocate, advocacy).  
  c. Consult general and specialized reference materials (e.g., dictionaries, glossaries, thesauruses), both print and digital, to find the pronunciation of a word or determine or clarify its precise meaning, its part of speech, or its etymology.  
  d. Verify the preliminary determination of the meaning of a word or phrase (e.g., by checking the inferred meaning in context or in a dictionary). |
| CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.1 | Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence.  
  a. Introduce precise claim(s), distinguish the claim(s) from alternate or opposing claims, and create an organization that establishes clear relationships among claim(s), reasons, and evidence.  
  b. Develop claim(s) and counterclaims fairly, supplying evidence for each while pointing out the strengths and limitations of both in a manner that anticipates the audience’s knowledge level and concerns.  
  c. Use words, phrases, and clauses to link the major
sections of the text, create cohesion, and clarify the relationships between claim(s) and reasons, between reasons and evidence, and between claim(s) and counterclaims.

d. Establish and maintain a formal style and objective tone while attending to the norms and conventions of the discipline in which they are writing.
e. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from and supports the argument presented.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4</th>
<th>Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9</td>
<td>Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1</td>
<td>Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. Come to discussions prepared, having read and researched material under study; explicitly draw on that preparation by referring to evidence from texts and other research on the topic or issue to stimulate a thoughtful, well-reasoned exchange of ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. Work with peers to set rules for collegial discussions and decision-making (e.g., informal consensus, taking votes on key issues, presentation of alternate views), clear goals and deadlines, and individual roles as needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. Propel conversations by posing and responding to questions that relate the current discussion to broader themes or larger ideas; actively incorporate others into the discussion; and clarify, verify, or challenge ideas and conclusions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. Respond thoughtfully to diverse perspectives, summarize points of agreement and disagreement, and, when warranted, qualify or justify their own views and understanding and make new connections in light of the evidence and reasoning presented.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kurt Vonnegut’s *Slaughterhouse-Five* is a complex novel criticizing the human race for its propensity to wage war and destroy life. Billy Pilgrim, the anti-hero protagonist of the novel, bumblingly leads the reader through his universe in a series of time-travel and space-travel adventures which, while complicating the traditional plot arc, toy with the theme of individual agency. A close reading of *Slaughterhouse-Five* through the historicist critical lens places the novel within the larger history of American warfare; students’ natural response to the text with the deconstructionist critical lens creates the ideal environment for students to practice higher-order critical thinking and analytical skills whilst learning how to appropriately refute competing ideas.

N.B. We don’t need to teach *Slaughterhouse-Five* as if our students are English majors; their critical lens is going to be the gateway read they select, not necessarily the historicist lens.
### ESTABLISHED GOALS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage 1 – Desired Results</th>
<th>Transfer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Students will be able to independently use their learning to...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.1</strong> – Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text, including determining where the text leaves matters uncertain.</td>
<td>• Identify and analyze the theme of a text knowing that a theme is the central and universal idea of a text allowing readers to make connections between texts and the world.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.2</strong> – Determine two or more themes or central ideas of a text and analyze their development over the course of the text, including how they interact and build on one another to produce a complex account; provide an objective summary of the text.</td>
<td>• Develop their understanding of a text by identifying its main ideas and finding supporting details for those ideas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.3</strong> – Analyze the impact of the author’s choices regarding how to develop and relate elements of a story or drama (e.g., where a story is set, how the action is ordered, how the characters are introduced and developed).</td>
<td>• Determine a text’s message about the human condition by interpreting or analyzing the behavior of complex characters.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.11-12.4</strong> – Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in the text, including figurative and connotative meanings; analyze the impact of specific word choices on meaning and tone, including words with multiple meanings or language that is particularly</td>
<td>• Write effectively about literature through including references to the texts and the relevant literary terminology.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Transfer

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students will understand that...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Writing is a powerful venue for change-agents to identify a problem of their world and suggest solutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Authors sometimes create a philosophical underpinning for their...</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS

1. How can we be change-agents despite oppositional forces from our universe?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students will know...</th>
<th>Students will be skilled at...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. The definitions and proper uses of literary terminology relevant to the primary text of study: authorial intrusion, epigraph, flashback, antihero, static &amp; flat characters, dynamic &amp; round characters, dark humor, low comedy, humanism, post-modernism, science fiction, irony, dramatic irony, verbal irony,</td>
<td>1. Annotating texts in order to support statements during class discussions and in writing assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Analyzing themes as they develop over the course of a story.</td>
<td>2. Explicating a short piece of literature.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Asking strong discussion questions.</td>
<td>3. Asking strong discussion questions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Translating figurative language into</td>
<td>4. Analyzing themes as they develop over the course of a story.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Conducting a protagonist’s world that might reflect or exaggerate aspects of our own.</td>
<td>5. Translating figurative language into</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fresh, engaging, or beautiful.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question (including a self-generated question) or solve a problem; narrow or broaden the inquiry when appropriate; synthesize multiple sources on the subject, demonstrating understanding of the subject under investigation.

11. **CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.11-12.9** – Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

12. **CCSS.ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1** – Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9-10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

**Other Goals**

- Improve reading experiences and build reading stamina.
- Analyze and reflect on reading habits and strategies in guided journal writing.
- Successfully engage in discussions that place texts in conversation with each other.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2. The definitions and proper uses of cinematic terminology: cinematography (including types of shots, such as aerial), editing (including types of transitions, such as cross-cutting), lighting, sound, setting and costuming, etc.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3. Propaganda is heavily biased material dispersed across any form of communication in order to promote a specific agenda, often by misrepresenting information and/or obscuring contrasting or contradicting information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. The historicist lens involves studying the social, political, economic, cultural, and/or intellectual climate of the time during which the author wrote the text, in addition to the historical influences on the author’s life.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. The deconstructionist lens involves exploring the potential interpretations of a text because words can only be defined in the context of their opposites, thereby resulting in an inability to assert any one meaning for a text.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. The roles and responsibilities for literature circles.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Comparing and contrasting texts (across genres and across media) regarding the handling of a common theme.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Negotiating group discussions and making preparations for effective collaborative work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Using parenthetical MLA citations in writing assignments.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Utilizing their literary heritage to think critically about current events.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Stage 2 – Evidence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Evaluative Criteria</strong></th>
<th><strong>Assessment Evidence</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>WRITTEN MATERIAL</strong></td>
<td><strong>CURRICULUM EMBEDDED PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Conflict Write-up:</em> In 1-2 double spaced pages, introduce the domestic or global conflict by answering the following questions: who is in conflict?; where does the conflict take place?; what harm is being committed, and who is the victim?; how is the harm being committed?; why is it important for people to care about solving this conflict? Integrate at least three sources using MLA format.</td>
<td><em>What’s YOUR Children’s Crusade?:</em> This assessment requires students to imagine themselves as a change agent. After identifying and researching a contemporary issue in their domestic or global community that reveals the destructive nature of humankind, students will write a summary of their issue, create an action plan for how they can be change agents to solve the issue, and present their issue and suggested response.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Works Cited:</em> Use MLA format.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Action Plan:</em> In 1 page, explain a change agent’s response to the issue. Use the example’s format to write the first brainstorm, first boiled-down list, second brainstorm, and suggested response.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### PRESENTATION

- **Introduction of the Conflict:** Presentation includes all necessary information from the Conflict Write-up; audience fully understands the conflict and is inspired to respond.
- **Explanation of the Suggested Response:** Presentation includes all components of the suggested response; suggested response is ready to implement.
- **Voice:** The student speaks in a loud, clear, and steady voice that everyone in the audience can hear and understand.
- **Eye Contact:** The student does not read from the slides and maintains steady eye contact with the audience.
- **Preparation:** The student tests the presentation and comes to class with slides ready; the student is familiar with the slides.
### Formative Assessment

- **Role sheets/literature circle binders:** Each literature circle will maintain a binder for the duration of reading the selected novel. Each student is responsible for submitting the entry for his or her role during a given meeting. The entry consists of the role sheet and enough copies of the prepared handout for the entire literature circle, as well as one copy to be submitted in the binder. At each meeting of the literature circle, one student will be responsible for taking and submitting notes detailing the circle’s discussion. When the literature circle videotapes the meeting, the students will each submit a review of the circle’s recording. This serves as students’ self-reflection throughout the unit.

- **Reader’s journal/in-class writing:** Each student will keep a reader’s journal and participate in in-class writing assignments and writing-to-learn activities while reading *Dr. Strangelove* and *Slaughterhouse-Five*. Students will submit their reader’s journal and in-class writing to the teacher for periodic review and to receive comments.

- **Film/text Comparison Paper:** This assessment requires students to compare and contrast the artistic decisions that Stanley Kubrick and Kurt Vonnegut make in order to convey their anti-war message. After viewing the film, students will write a 3-5 page paper using both cinematic and literary terminology as well as references to the two sources to make their argument.

### True/False, Selected Response, and Matching

- Accuracy compared to the *Slaughterhouse-Five*.

### Short Answer and Essay Questions

- Address all aspects of each question.
- Use textual evidence to support each argument.

### Summative Assessment

- Students will complete a 50-minute test composed of true/false, selected response, character matching, and short answer questions. There will be two essay questions from which students will select one to answer.
## Stage 3 – Learning Plan

### TEXTS
1. *Slaughterhouse-Five* by Kurt Vonnegut
2. *No Easy Day: The Firsthand Account of the Mission that Killed Osama Bin Laden* by Kevin Maurer and Mark Owen
3. “Roll out the Drums of War” by Jackson Browne
4. “Dulce et Decorum Est” by Wilfred Owen
5. “The Ballad of the Landlord” by Langston Hughes
6. “Protest” by Ella Wheeler Wilcox
7. “The Lottery” by Shirley Jackson
8. “We Teach Life, Sir!” by Rafeef Ziadah
9. *Dr. Strangelove or: How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* directed by Stanley Kubrick

### RESOURCES
3. [http://www.vonnegutlibrary.org](http://www.vonnegutlibrary.org)
4. “Kurt Vonnegut on How to Write a Short Story” ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmVcIhnvSx8 - t=31](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nmVcIhnvSx8 - t=31))
5. “Kurt Vonnegut on the Shapes of Stories” ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP3c1h8v2ZQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oP3c1h8v2ZQ))
6. Emma Watson’s UN Speech ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-ifI4qhBSE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p-ifI4qhBSE))
7. “Becoming a Change Agent” PowerPoint

### Calendar

| WEEK 1 | DAY 1 | **Activity:** Teacher explains literature circles, gives a book talk on *Slaughterhouse-Five* and *No Easy Day*, plays trailer for *Dr. Strangelove*  
**Song:** “Roll out the Drums of War”  
**Reading:** “Protest”  
**Topic:** What is Browne criticizing |
|--------|------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| DAY 2 | **Reading:** S5 (Chapter One)  
**Resource:** Kurt Vonnegut, The Art of Fiction No. 64  
**Topic:** Vonnegut’s WWII/Dresden experiences as his creative impetus; authorial intrusion and authorial intent; the relationship |
| DAY 3 | **Reading:** S5 (Chapter Two)  
**Topic:** Plot conventions and how Vonnegut flouts them; answer the question “Who is Billy Pilgrim?”  
**Homework:** Read all of Chapter Two in S5 by Day 4 |
| DAY 4 | **Reading:** S5 (Chapter Three)  
**Topic:** The Ballad of the Landlord  
**Activity:** TP-CASTT and poetry explication  
**Homework:** Prepare for literature circles |
| DAY 5 | **Activity:** Literature Circles meet  
**Homework:** Read Chapter Four in S5 |
| WEEK 2 | DAY 6 | Reading Quiz: Chapter Four in S5  
**Short Story:** “The Lottery”  
**Topic:** Discuss Chapter Four using Google Docs for note-taking  
**Homework:** Read all of Chapter Five in S5 by Day 9 | DAY 7 | **Activity:** Literature Circles meet  
**Homework:** Read all of Chapter Five in S5 by Day 9 | DAY 8 | **Activity:** Read Chapter Five with PLAN reading strategy  
**Homework:** Read all of Chapter Five in S5 by Day 9 | DAY 9 | **Reading:** S5 (Chapter Five) as well as previous appearances of Tralfamadoreians  
**Topic:** Tralfamadore; philosophical underpinnings of S5  
**Homework:** Prepare for literature circles | DAY 10 | **Activity:** Literature Circles meet  
**Homework:** Read Chapters Six and Seven in S5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| WEEK 3 | DAY 11 | **Topic:** Temporality and narrative structure in S5  
**Activity:** Representing Billy Pilgrim’s life on multiple timelines  
**Homework:** Read all of Chapter Eight in S5 by Day 14 | DAY 12 | **Activity:** Literature Circles meet  
**Reading:** “Dulce et Decorum Est”  
**Topic:** Anti-war literature; compare and contrast the styles of Owen and Vonnegut  
**Homework:** Read all of Chapter Eight in S5 by Day 14 | DAY 13 | **Film:** Dr. Strangelove  
**Assign:** Film/text comparison paper  
**Homework:** Read all of Chapter Eight in S5 if necessary; prepare for literature circles | DAY 14 | **Film:** Dr. Strangelove  
**Assign:** Film/text comparison paper  
**Homework:** Read to page 198 in Chapter Nine in S5 |
### WEEK 4

| DAY 16 | Activity: Literature Circles meet  
| Spoken Word: “We Teach Life, Sir!”  
| Homework: Finish S5 by Day 19 |
| --- | --- |
| DAY 17 | Reading: S5 (Chapter Nine)  
| Topic: The meanings of S5’s subtitle and epigraph  
| Homework: Finish S5 by Day 19 |
| --- | --- |
| DAY 18 | Using your  
| Activity: Literature Circles meet  
| Activity: Peer-edit film/text comparison papers in writer’s workshop  
| Homework: Finish S5 by Day 19 |
| --- | --- |
| DAY 19 | Reading: S5 (Chapters Nine and Ten)  
| Topic: Vonnegut and all characters in S5; answer the question “Do the characters’ life or death have any meaning?”  
| Homework: Finish film/text comparison paper; prepare for literature circles |
| --- | --- |
| DAY 20 | Activity: Literature Circles meet for the last time  
| DUE—film/text comparison paper  
| Homework: None |

### WEEK 5

**N.B.** This week was completely restructured to give students more time to work on the CEPA, based on observations made during the student teaching practicum.

| DAY 21 | Topic: Change agency; use the “Becoming a Change Agent” PowerPoint  
| Assign: What’s YOUR Children’s Crusade?  
| Activity: Brainstorm possible issues  
| Homework: Select an issue and begin research (find at least two sources) |
| --- | --- |
| DAY 22 | Activity: Conduct research in the library and compose in the computer lab  
| Homework: Begin composing the conflict write-up and/or action plan (have a complete draft ready for at least one of the parts) |
| --- | --- |
| DAY 23 | Activity: Teacher/student conferences  
| Homework: Continue composing the conflict write-up and/or action plan (have a complete draft ready) |
| --- | --- |
| DAY 24 | Activity: Compose in the computer lab  
| Activity: Teacher/student conferences  
| Homework: Finish What’s YOUR Children’s Crusade? |
| --- | --- |
| DUE—all components for What’s YOUR Children’s Crusade? |
Works Cited


**Works Consulted**


Smith 81


*Dr. Strangelove: Or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb.* Columbia TriStar Home Video, 2001. DVD.


