

Comics and Curricula: Multimodal Literature in the Modern Classroom

By

Rebeka Wilder

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Faculty Advisor: Jessica Bannon, B.A., M.A., Ph.D.

Executive Director of Honors: James B. Williams, Ph.D.

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Abstract

For my Honors Project, I created a course curriculum for an eleventh- and twelfth-grade high school English Language Arts class that uses comic books to teach students how to read and analyze multimodal texts through a variety of theoretical lenses, including historical, postcolonial, and feminist approaches. Multimodal texts utilize multiple modalities—forms of expression such as dialogue, images, text, etc.—to communicate messages to readers. Recently, educators have begun expanding the traditional literary canon used in English Language Arts classrooms to be more inclusive. My project explores the potential of expanding that canon to include multimodal texts, specifically comic books. The main texts in my curriculum are a variety of Marvel Comics starring the heroes Captain America, Black Panther, and Captain Marvel. These comic books serve as important subjects of literary analysis because they provide significant examples of multimodal literary devices and thematic development that students would benefit from studying. In addition, the popularity of these comics and the Marvel Cinematic Universe can ensure increased student engagement in course concepts.

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Table of Contents.....	ii
Introduction.....	iii
Literature Review.....	v
Analysis.....	xiv
Conclusion.....	xx
Afterword.....	xxi
Works Cited.....	xxiii

Introduction

In English Language Arts classrooms across America, many educators will teach texts from the traditional canon of accepted high school literature. These texts are often called classics and include novels such as *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald and *To Kill a Mockingbird* by Harper Lee, as well as Shakespeare plays like *Hamlet* or *Romeo and Juliet*. Those texts have significant literary merit, and they contain engaging themes, motifs, and characters that educators have relied on for many years to teach various skills in English Language Arts classrooms. However, by only teaching texts within the traditional literary canon, educators overlook a whole host of literature that employ various modes of communicating meaning. My project addresses this issue of a too-narrow canon of literature by integrating multimodal texts into a high school English Language Arts curriculum. Educators already use diverse learning strategies to support and engage students with a variety of learning needs; integrating a diverse selection of literature can further support student engagement by introducing critical reading and writing through multimodal texts similar to those students encounter in their daily lives.

Although multimodal texts are being used more often as educators realize they must help prepare students for comprehending texts in today's technology-driven culture, there are doubts surrounding the complexity of multimodal texts. Dr. Michelle Falter, a former middle and high school ELA teacher and current Professor of English Education, addresses this concern, stating,

There is a stereotype that graphic literature is a lesser form of writing. This is absolutely untrue. The tasks and thinking skills required to read a multimodal text are actually higher level than if reading a print-based text alone. You have to see images and words work together, and when and why authors chose to put them together in a frame. I also think people think graphic novels are for ELL or elementary and middle grades students

only. Although they are definitely very helpful for these students, this misconception comes from the fact that people see this genre as “easy”—and it is not. (qtd. in Gonzalez)

While my project uses texts from the traditional literary canon, those texts are used as supplementary material rather than as the main texts in the curriculum. The main texts consist of comic books published by Marvel Comics. Comic books are not only excellent examples of multimodal literature—as they contain an interesting overlap between dialogue, text, images, and color—but they have also evolved over the years to better reflect and challenge their readers’ cultures, political systems, and social relationships. Although the main characters have remained the same over the years, their purpose changes as the authors, illustrators, and society changes. For example, Steve Rogers has always been the original Captain America but over the different iterations of his comics, his character evolves as new plotlines, villains, and fellow heroes emerge. I chose to integrate Marvel Comics in my curriculum since characters from Marvel Comics have become popular in recent years due to the popularity of the movie franchise. Students’ familiarity with Marvel Comics characters as a result of the movie franchise will increase their interest in the course reading and their motivation to engage in literary analysis of these multimodal texts. The Marvel Cinematic Universe is the highest grossing movie franchise of all time, having made over \$22 billion in the Worldwide Box Office over the past fourteen years alone with several movies currently in production (“Movie Franchises”). Due to the incredible popularity of Marvel’s movie franchise select movies are used as supplementary materials in my curriculum. The movies included in the curriculum serve the same purpose as the music videos and artwork listed on the supplementary materials list—to expose students to a diverse selection of multimodal work with the intent to further develop their ability to analyze multiple modes of communication.

Literature Review

Scholarly Criticism of Marvel Comics

Within the last two decades, numerous scholars have published analyses of various comic books published by Marvel Comics. This scholarly work serves two functions in the context of my Honors Capstone Project: first, it provide evidence that comic books can be analyzed using different literary criticism theories to find complex meanings; and second, I will integrate them in my curriculum as examples of how to successfully analyze multimodal texts using close reading skills and applying literary criticism theories to comic books. I selected the following articles due to their readability and more recent publication dates. Since comic books are typically viewed as more simple forms of literature because they contain illustrations and often cater to a younger audience, scholars have recently begun to seriously consider the value of comic books. In fact, some educators who advocate for the inclusion of graphic novels in ELA curricula dismiss comic books as being “silly,” refusing to consider their merit as multimodal texts (Gonzalez). It is important for students to have reliable examples and sources to refer to when learning about how to analyze multimodal texts and integrate textual evidence into their essays. Being able to break down and study how scholars created their arguments is an instructional strategy to teach writing skills to writers of all skill levels.

One of the Marvel superheroes whose comic books I plan to teach in my curriculum is Captain America, one of the heroes with the longest history. Since the original publication in 1941, as different authors and illustrators created new versions of the character or expanded Captain America’s story, the meaning of the comics changed as well. Scholars Mike Milford and Mike Dubose both wrote articles applying historical criticism to two different Captain America comics, and their conclusions were vastly different. This shows that the same lens can be applied

to the same comic book character, but the application of historical criticism shows how the character and themes have changed over time to reflect societal and historical concerns. In “Veiled Intervention: Anti-Semitism, Allegory, and Captain America,” Milford’s historical criticism of the original Captain America comics released in 1941 clearly leads readers through the isolationist and anti-Semitic political and social climate of the early 1940’s, explains the visual and thematic impact of Steve Rogers’ heroic crusade against the Nazis, and concludes by detailing the impact of allegorical devices on audiences. Milford’s break-down of such broad subjects as isolationist American policies and the events leading up to World War II is incredibly insightful and allows him to form an impactful and convincing argument that comic books were a powerful rhetorical tool for marginalized groups within America. He also provides a detailed and clear analysis of Captain America as an allegorical tool for interventionist rhetoric supported by specific panels from the comic book.

Demonstrating another analytical approach, Dubose’s article “Holding Out for a Hero: Reaganism, Comic Book Vigilantes, and Captain America” uses three main points to support his claim that in the 1980’s, comic book superheroes such as Captain America defined what popular culture viewed as heroism in the face of President Reagan’s failure to fulfill that role politically. When he analyzes Captain America’s evolving role within Marvel Comics, he notes that the character adapts to reflect the morals and values at the time of publication. Dubose sets up his argument by detailing the progression of Captain America from the 1940’s where he was a loyal soldier and American icon to the 1980’s where he shed the role of Captain America and took on the name Nomad to fight the corruption within the American government. This depiction of the American government as the “villains” of such an iconic American comic book hero reflects the disenfranchised feelings of popular culture in America at the time. Dubose’s analysis of the

evolution of Captain American comics is an excellent example for student reference. He references a wide range of quotes and panels from the comics and connects them to historical events and figures to create a clear image of the state of American society and politics in the 1980's, and his use of historical criticism to construct his argument is compelling. The strong examples of historical criticism in Milford and Dubose's articles prove that comic books contain compelling themes and messages which can be analyzed by scholars.

Furthermore, the visual nature of comic books means that readers have a very clear picture of what all the characters look like. In fact, the illustrations are sometimes the most compelling modality for readers. However, it does mean that issues of race are prominent in many comic books even if not directly addressed by the authors. Some comic books or heroes do address race issues directly, such as Black Panther and Lucas Cage. Although I plan to use Black Panther comic books in my curriculum, Tracy Bealer's analysis of a 1970's Lucas Cage comic book is a great example of the application of critical race studies to a comic book. In "The Man Called Lucas': Luke Cage, Mass Incarceration, and the Stigma of Black Criminality," Bealer uses examples and specific panels from the comics to describe and analyze how Cage's incarceration and escape from prison present a sympathetic view of his subsequent social and economic marginalization and systemic racism within the government. The combination of various literary theories—such as Marxism, historical criticism, critical race theory, and reader-response criticism—to address multiple aspects of the text and show the impact the comics had on readers and its relevancy to the socio-political issues of both 1970's and modern times makes Bealer's article engaging and informative. This article will serve as an example of several different types of literary criticism theories, and even though it does not analyze a Black Panther comic book, students will still get a better idea of how critical race studies works. Critical race

studies do have similarities to other literary theories that apply to other social issues, such as feminist criticism, due to the similar ways they break down societal constructs like race and gender. Therefore, Bealer's article will be of some use during the unit on Feminism and Captain Marvel.

In my curriculum, the last unit is designed to give the students more freedom and the opportunity to choose the text and literary criticism theory to apply. I also plan to have students analyze at least one movie or television adaptation of a comic book hero, but film analysis does differ from multimodal analysis, since there are different modalities to consider. Ashley Robinson's application of Marxist theory to the first *Iron Man* movie analyzes how Tony Stark and his superhero identity Iron Man represent modern American culture through the portrayal of Tony Stark's transformation. In her article titled "We Are Iron Man: Tony Stark, Iron Man, and American Identity in the Marvel Cinematic Universe's Phase One Films," Robinson examines each of the three movies and relates Stark to modern anxieties about the American identity, economic and political turmoil, and social responsibility. Her use of quotes and descriptive language paints a clear picture for readers who may not have seen the movies to easily visualize the scenes used as evidence to support her claims. The use of evidence and connection to modern anxieties held by many Americans creates an incredibly in-depth analysis that reveals the way Iron Man represents the reconceptualized "American Dream" by combining what she terms "frontier values" such as individualism and freedom with more modern values such as moral relativism and technological advancement. Robinson's article is an astounding example of both historical criticism and Marxism applied to a modernized comic book figure. Her argument is strengthened by her referral to the original Iron Man comics, by explaining how the overarching purpose of Iron Man—to represent the restructuring of American values—stays the same from

the 1960's to the release of the first *Iron Man* movie in 2008, and the subsequent Marvel Studios movies.

Since students will be completing an independent study in the last unit of the curriculum, this means they will also have the freedom to choose the literary theory they apply to their chosen comic book. This means that students are not limited to only choosing new historicism, feminism, and race studies. Instead I plan to teach several short lessons about various literary theories the week before students must make their final decisions regarding their independent study. Since I want students to choose a literary theory they feel comfortable working with, but that they are also personally interested in exploring, I plan for the short lessons to cover literary theories such as queer theory, ecocriticism, Marxism, and critical disabilities studies. Once students have made final choices about their comic book and literary theory, I can then begin further instruction on the literary theories students picked that were not taught in prior units. Although this instruction will not be as lengthy as the instruction students received covering new historicism, feminism, and race studies, it will be enough to ensure they can complete their independent studies to similar levels of proficiency. In order to support their work, I compiled a list titled "Optional Scholarly Sources" in the curriculum that will be used during this period of instruction. This list consists of scholarly sources that apply a variety of literary theories to several different comic books published by Marvel Comics such as Daniel Martin's dual use of Marxism and race studies in "The Americanization of the Hong Kong Kung Fu Hero: Orientalism and Social Class in Marvel Comics' Iron Fist." In addition, it includes Anthony D'Agostino's use of queer theory and feminism in "'Flesh-to-Flesh Contact': Marvel Comics' Rogue and the Queer Feminist Imagination" to analyze the young hero Rogue's sexual identity across several X-Men comics. Also listed is P. Miller's comprehensive study of X-Men comics

using critical disabilities studies, queer theory, and Marxism to explore the various marginalized groups represented in X-Men comics titled “Mutants, Metaphor, and Marginalism: What X-Actly Do the X-Men Stand For?” As students complete the last unit in the curriculum, they will conduct individual research to find sources that support, expand, or inform their independent study, but the articles on the “Optional Scholarly Sources” will provide them with a starting point.

Curriculum Building, Instructional Strategies, and Justification

A major challenge of creating my curriculum was balancing different learning objectives and strategies to best teach students the various analytical skills I want them to learn. One of the most important skills for students to learn when attempting to apply a literary criticism theory, or to critically think about a text, is close reading. Obtaining close reading skills will allow the students to better craft their own sustained interpretations of various texts with enough evidentiary support to defend their interpretations. Jennifer Gonzalez, an educational blogger and former teacher, wrote an article titled “Graphic Novels in the Classroom: A Teacher Roundtable,” which is a great resource for teachers who are interested in using multimodal texts in their classroom. She includes advice from four teachers who have experience using multimodal texts in their classrooms as reading materials, whether as main texts or supplementary materials. The four teachers answer five questions about why they chose to use multimodal texts, the benefits of using them, as well as different pedagogical techniques that worked best to help their students understand how to read and analyze multimodal texts. This article was very helpful in developing my curriculum, because most methods used to teach textual analysis and close reading skills were constructed around the analysis of traditional texts which only utilize the written word as a mode of communication.

Another important learning objective of my curriculum is to teach students how to critically analyze a text using specific literary theories. Like the close reading instructional strategies I plan to implement in my curriculum, other teachers have already successfully integrated those strategies. Beth Wilson shares her struggle to teach students literary theory and how to apply it, in addition to several instructional strategies in her article titled “Teach the *How*: Critical Lenses and Critical Literacy.” To introduce literary theory and criticism to students she suggests an activity where the teacher generates two separate word lists, each with a different theme. For example, the theme of list one might be “nature” and contain words such as *wind*, *flower*, *tornado*, *forest*, and *sun*. The teacher would then color-code each list so that when they are projected or written on the board at random, the words in list one are all blue and the words in list two are red. Doing this ensures that when students first view the words there is no obvious pattern, so that when the teacher asks them to identify a pattern it is difficult to do so. After this, the teacher then hands out red and blue tinted lenses, much like those on 3D glasses at movie theaters. Students will then be instructed to view the words through each lens and identify patterns now. The red colored lens will cause the words written in blue to stand out, but the words written in red will be difficult to see. After students identify the two themes, the teacher will explain that the colored lenses are literary theories and the words are texts—literary theories are lenses scholars use to analyze texts and identify meaningful patterns that provide structured insight into a text. This activity is meant to visually illustrate the importance of literary criticism theories to students and give them a concrete way to relate such abstract concepts to their own future application of literary theories. Wilson more broadly suggests lessening the amount of modeling done by the teacher and allowing students to find their own textual interpretations, no matter how tempting it is to lead them in a certain direction. She also provides two examples of

lessons teaching different literary theories and scaffolding instruction, so students have support but can draw their own conclusions. Wilson's article is a thorough, insightful view into the obstacles and tricks to successfully teaching literary theory in a high school classroom. However, she also strongly advocates for the benefits students gain from learning to view texts through various theoretical lenses and how it can help them think more critically about social issues they are already exposed to.

There are those who doubt the practicality and usefulness of multimodal texts in classrooms, raising concerns such as "the vocabulary and themes presented in graphic novels did not challenge students" and that "reluctant readers or struggling students would always choose graphic novels as the 'easy' choice and slow down their progress" ("Do Graphic Novels"). Some critics also argue that "Since much of the story in a graphic novel is expressed in pictures, rather than words...replacing too many standard books with graphic novels will result in a decline in overall literacy" ("Are Graphic Novels"). Contrary to these beliefs, there are several benefits of students reading multimodal texts in a classroom setting, such as literacy skills, engagement, and the prevalence of multimodality in modern society. In recent years, several scholars have begun advocating for the increased use of multimodal texts in classrooms in order to benefit students. One such scholar, Sean Connors, details the importance of multimodal texts to student's literacy experiences outside of the classroom and uses research from other scholars to establish that those experiences should be reflected in classrooms. In "Expanding Students' Analytical Frameworks Through the Study of Graphic Novels," Connors articulates the uses of multimodal texts by applying it to the development of student's reading and writing practices. Like Connors, teacher Rachel Williams advocates for the use of multimodal texts for three reasons in her article "Image, Text, and Story: Comics and Graphic Novels in the Classroom:" students are typically

more engaged in the genre, they are mostly inexpensive, and they usually contain easy-to-read vocabulary while still addressing a variety of serious issues. Both she and Connor support their arguments by providing examples of past students' work, revealing the importance and efficiency of integrating multimodal texts in ELA curricula.

Including multimodal texts in an ELA curriculum benefits not just students, but teachers as well. The inclusion of multimodal texts opens up new possibilities for instruction, curriculum design, and expanding the variety of literature to which they expose students. James Paul Gee, one of the first scholars to gain notoriety for his evaluation of multimodal texts' value in classrooms, uses video games to make a case for why teachers should apply learning principles found in video games to their classrooms. Many of the thirty-six learning principles that he defines in his book *What Video Games Have to Teach Us About Learning and Literacy* can be found in multimodal texts such as comic books. Although the focus of the book is on how these learning principles found in video games apply to the development of literacy skills in classrooms, Gee creates examples for nearly all content areas, showcasing the value of his work for all teachers. His theories and principles are so widely applicable and formed a basis for my own understanding of multimodal texts and their practical applications within classrooms.

Another scholar who argues that multimodal texts benefit both students and teachers is Rob Simon, who focuses on how diversifying reading lists can improve relations between teachers and their class by orienting teachers as "connoisseurs" of their student's literacy interests. Simon supports an approach to teaching literacy that is focused on developing a relationship with students by understanding their needs, goals, current literacy practices, and complex identities. Building this relationship allows teachers to better comprehend what will engage their student's interests, and to plan accordingly. In the article, "Without Comic Books,

There Would Be No Me’: Teachers as Connoisseurs of Adolescents’ Literate Lives,” Simon uses two student teachers’ experiences teaching literacy with unconventional and multimodal texts to show that the current typical cannon of literature taught in school needs to be reconsidered and expanded—this helps illustrate Simon’s arguments and ground them in practical applications. His proposed “connoisseur” or “inquiry” approach to teaching combined with support for using multimodal texts in classrooms is a balance between education and literary research, a balance my own Honors Capstone Project attempts to achieve.

Analysis

All students will have a notebook or journal that they bring to class each day in which they write their responses to the Journal Entry prompts. These prompts will be used to activate prior knowledge about a topic discussed previously in class, to engage students in anticipating what the day’s lesson will be about, or to reflect on an activity or important concept at the end of the lesson. The Journal Entries in each unit will, generally, follow the theme specified in the Assignments section at the bottom of each unit breakdown on the curriculum. The five themes of the Journal Entries are: reflection on literary theories, patriotism, gender constructs, racial experiences, and project progress. Although the Journal Entries make up only ten percent of the student’s final grade, due to the quick and relaxed nature of the assignment, they will prompt students to engage in metacognition. Metacognition means having an awareness of one’s own thought processes, and when students engage in metacognitive activities it means that they are reflecting on their own knowledge, performance, or feelings. This helps students identify gaps in their knowledge, see areas of success or improvement, and understand how they best learn. Students will complete between two to three Journal Entries per week, and all Journals will be checked at the end of each unit in accordance with the grading rubric in the course curriculum. I

chose to make the Journal Entries a low percentage of student's final grade because I want students to participate in low-stakes, personal writing. The grading rubric makes no mention of grammar conventions or word count but focuses instead on addressing the prompt fully and including relevant details. This, as well as my in-person reminders of the goal of Journal Entries, will ensure students can focus more on the metacognition and writing processes than on their writing conforming to Standard English conventions.

The Vocabulary Quizzes serve as a check to confirm whether students can recall content-specific vocabulary common among scholars who engage in literary criticism and analysis. The expectation that students will use their course vocabulary in class discussions, Journal Entries, and Analysis Essays are the primary ways I support each student's ability to perform well on the Vocabulary Quizzes. There will also be short vocabulary review activities to begin or end lessons throughout each unit, which will give me an idea of which words students are struggling with or whether certain students need more direct support to succeed. Additionally, the Vocabulary Quizzes guarantee that students meet any state standards and essential questions related to vocabulary usage in each unit. The Comprehensive Vocabulary Test serves as the Final Exam of the course and the final way for students to show their general knowledge about course concepts, since it requires students to recall all key vocabulary terms used throughout the school year.

During each unit, students will complete an Article Summary and Evaluation after they learn about key vocabulary and theories but before they write an Analysis Essay. I purposefully situated the Article Summary and Evaluation assignments in this way to give students an exemplary model of theory application and use of close reading strategies to analyze comic books before they are asked to do so themselves. For each Article Summary and Evaluation

students will complete a graphic organizer, all of which will be graded following the rubric in the course curriculum. Below is an example of a successfully completed Article Summary and Evaluation graphic organizer that would earn full credit, or thirty points.

Name: Jane Doe Article Title: "The Man Called Lucas:" Luke Cage, Mass Incarceration, and the Stigma of Black Criminality Author: Tracy Bealer	
Thesis Statement: in <u>YOUR</u> words	Luke Cage's heroic origin story, <i>Hero for Hire</i> , reveals the extreme degree to which institutional racism in politics, economics, and society in the 1970's contributed to the mass incarceration of black men in America.
3 Supporting Arguments (Identify 1 piece of evidence that supports each supporting point)	1. "The first issue...is interrupted by an extended flashback sequence, narrated by Lucas himself. This account both implicates him in the sort of criminal underworld tough-on-crime politicians partially invoked, partially created, in justifying over-policing and mass incarceration, and takes great pains to pardon him from the social fiction of pathological black criminality" (Bealer 172). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. The author supports this point both by analyzing dominant images on the comic's cover and by describing panels and dialogue depicting Lucas' willing association with young criminals yet his resistance to participating in criminal activity.
	2. "Because our hero is currently incarcerated, the writers must quickly invert the reader's expectation that the guards are the "good guys," and they do so through the officers' increasingly explicit expressions of racism" (Bealer 175). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. On page 176 in Figure 2, Bealer uses close reading strategies to analyze how the prison setting visually reveals institutional racism and how the dialogue between guards shows the normality of racist attitudes towards all prisoners in the four panels.
	3. "The iconic trappings of Luke Cage's superhero identity—his costume, name, and the powers themselves—are elegant encapsulations of the way prison marked and continues to mark his psychosocial biography" (Bealer 179).

	<p>a. Bealer uses Luke Cage’s superhero costume and moniker as evidence to support this point. The imagery of his costume is representative of how the stigma of criminality haunts even his heroic actions and choices, while the moniker “Cage” is chosen specifically as a reference to how influential prison is on his decision to be a hero in Harlem. Bealer references a specific instance of dialogue in the comic book where Lucas explains his rationale to a friend.</p>
<p>Evaluation <i>In my opinion the article...</i></p>	<p>In my opinion Bealer’s argument is well-constructed and well-supported by textual and secondary sources; therefore it is a very strong argument.</p>
<p>Justification <i>I believe the argument is ___ because...</i></p>	<p>I believe Bealer’s argument is very strong because Bealer uses examples and specific panels from the comics to describe and analyze how Cage’s incarceration and escape from prison present a sympathetic view of his subsequent social and economic marginalization and systemic racism within the government. Its relevancy to the socio-political issues of both 1970’s and modern times makes Bealer’s article engaging and informative.</p>

To support students’ successful completion of the Article Summary and Evaluation assignments, I will model the processes of identification, summarization, and evaluation in daily lessons since those are three key skills students need to complete the assignments satisfactorily. Even though not all the strategies will be modeled using examples of scholarly application of literary theories to comic books, watching the teacher model these processes are the first step to students internalizing and developing the skill themselves. My goal is to get students comfortable and familiar with the three processes to complete the first Article Summary and Evaluation in Unit One in small groups. This will provide students who are still developing the skills with peer scaffolding—or instructional support—and students who have developed the skills with time to teach those skills to the developing students. Then, by the time the second Article Summary and Evaluation in Unit Two is assigned, students should be able to complete the assignment

individually with time to complete it in class; this allows developing students to receive scaffolding as needed and developed students to practice the skills independently. In Unit Three, when students are assigned the third Article Summary and Evaluation, my goal is to have all students familiar and comfortable with identification, summary, and evaluation to complete the assignment wholly independently with minimal peer or teacher scaffolding.

The Article Summaries and Evaluations are also important for developing students' writing abilities. Reading and evaluating good examples of writing are two common strategies used to incorporate active learning in daily lesson plans. Active learning allows students to actively participate in the learning process instead of passively receiving information. Providing examples of well-written arguments and analyses also encourages the development of writing abilities because it gives students reputable examples of literary analysis to reference when they write their own analyses later in the curriculum.

Students will write three Analysis Essays during the course which make up thirty percent of their final grade. The Analysis Essay grades are weighted more heavily than other assignments because it allows me to evaluate students' understanding of course concepts and vocabulary, their ability to organize their ideas logically, and their integration of sources to support their claims. The importance of these skills is reflected in the grading rubric, so students will know the success criteria they need to meet in order to get the best grade possible. Each Analysis Essay is also a chance for students to engage in a long process of active learning, and since the demand for independent work and use of several skills is higher than prior assignments they have completed, the point value is correspondingly higher.

There are several instructional strategies I will use to support students in their effort to complete the Analysis Essays. Other course assignments (Journal Entries, Vocabulary Quizzes,

Article Summaries and Evaluations) are intended to build students' skills associated with understanding and correctly using course concepts and vocabulary, evaluating and finding useful quotes in secondary sources, and developing writing skills including organization. The completion of these assignments and the way they support students' learning and skill acquisition has already been discussed, but there is another, vital instructional strategy I plan to use to support students' essay writing: Essay Workshops. On the course calendar, the week before each Analysis Essay is due, I have days specified as Essay Workshop days. These lessons will focus on developing specific writing skills, peer and teacher review, and personal rereading and editing time. Before the Essay Workshop days begin, I will either do a brief check of student progress or have students complete a survey to gauge and plan the lessons for workshop week so that they address actual student needs and not random topics. Since writing is a personal process and students cannot be expected to work at the same pace the Essay Workshop week is a time for me to provide more individualized scaffolding or independent work time depending on each student's needs.

The Multimodal Project is a chance for students to creatively showcase the skills they acquired throughout prior units. Like the Analysis Essays, the Multimodal Project is thirty percent of students' final grade. This last unit has nine weeks dedicated to it, simply because of how demanding and detailed the final product is expected to be. The Multimodal Project essentially gives students the chance to further explore topics that interest them personally and then complete a Vocabulary Quiz, Article Summaries and Evaluations for their independently researched sources, and write an extended Analysis Essay applying their chosen theory to their chosen text. Although the project is largely independent, since students will be reading different texts and using different theories, the routine established in prior units will continue. Students

will still complete a Vocabulary Quiz specific to their literary theory, read and discuss their focus text with classmates, and reflect on their knowledge and progress with Journal Entries. So even though students are given quite a bit of choice in Unit Five, they will all be receiving instructional support depending on their need. However, it is expected in Unit Five that the majority of students will be able to receive minimal scaffolding because of their progress and accomplishments in prior units. This cumulative project requires students to draw on all previously learned skills and present the results using multiple modes of communication. The design element of the project will have one week dedicated to it, since students have not yet been graded on design—by this week students should have their materials either fully written, reviewed, and edited or be close to that stage. This allows students to do final checks, practice their presentation in front of select peers, and dedicate time to polishing the visuals, audio, and text elements of their project.

Conclusion

In the education field my project expands the traditional literary canon to include a genre of literature often overlooked and dismissed in academic settings. Although my project incorporates comic books in an ELA curriculum due to my personal interest in Marvel Comics, the same implication applies to other genres of commonly dismissed literature such as science fiction, fairytales (original or retold versions), LGBT+ literature, or multicultural literature, to name a few. However, teachers could also integrate other multimodal texts or media—podcasts, music, television episodes, social media posts, etc.—in their curricula as either supplemental material or as the focus of a unit. Expanding the traditional literary canon does not, of course, imply that the traditional literary canon has no place in ELA classrooms. Rather, the expansion my project suggests will enrich and broaden learning opportunities students have in ELA

classrooms. Teachers who wish to integrate comic books or other alternative forms of literature or media in their classroom can do so to whatever degree they think is best for their students—whether it is a whole unit or companion material to a more traditional novel, the inclusion of nontraditional literature or media in ELA curricula is not only possible, it is necessary for the benefit of students.

Afterword

Based on the outcome of my project, future areas of investigation for myself or another researcher are practical application of the curriculum and the inclusion of other genres of literature or media. Sadly, I have not yet gotten the chance to apply my curriculum in a classroom setting which would have given me the opportunity to study direct results and learning outcomes from the various readings and assignments. Another researcher or I could also create a curriculum focused on other types of multimodal texts such as graphic novels, other types of multimodal media such as podcasts, or other genres of literature excluded from the traditional literary canon taught in classrooms such as science fiction. Future research could also explore the potential of teaching nontraditional texts alongside traditional texts as companion texts or material, or even creating units that each focus on a different type of literature not yet part of the traditional literary canon.

My personal inspiration for this project was my love of comic books and desire to explore their potential in an academic setting. The project gave me the chance to reflect on and begin articulating my personal teaching philosophy as an English Language Arts teacher. Doing so helped me realize the importance of exposing students to several modes of communication and various types of literature. This is especially important because of the heavy presence of multimodal literature and media in students' lives ranging from fun apps and games like TikTok

and Fortnite to serious government announcements broadcast on news networks. It is essential for students to have the skills necessary for interpreting messages communicated through the combination of visuals, sounds, and text they ingest daily so they can make informed decisions and responses. Although I chose to integrate comic books as the curriculum's main texts, I made sure to incorporate other forms of multimodal literature as well so that I could maximize the modes of communication students would analyze. This is why I changed the title from "Supplemental Texts" to "Supplemental Material" in the curriculum, since I originally had compiled a list of text-only materials but upon reflection added music videos, paintings, and a mix of fiction and nonfiction texts. This project has made me extremely conscious of how my choices as an educator can lessen or heighten the learning opportunities students receive in my classroom.

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