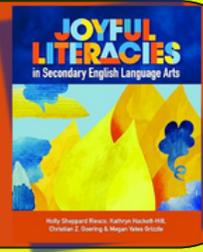


JOYFUL LITERACIES IN SECONDARY ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS



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“As secondary ELA teachers, our job is to take up students’ literacies while adding to them, and we see that job as being built on the joyful practices and endeavors of student agency. There is no more important job than giving students the space to extol, contend with, problematize, and add their voices to the literacies that surround them” (p. 87).

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Defining Joyful Literacies Pedagogy

We define a joyful literacies pedagogy as a student-first approach that “centers students’ literacies as a starting point for discussion and learning about the processes of inquiry, research, reading, writing, designing, and composing” (p. xx). Borrowing on the work of many scholars, we position curricular development around the following:

- Students’ affinity spaces (Gee, 2004)
- Inquiry-based learning where students are “problem-explorers” instead of “answer-getters” (Wardle, 2012)
- Students as change agents
- Classrooms as spaces of “deep fun” (Romano, 2009, p. 31), belonging (Comber & Woods, 2018), and authentic intellectual work (Boardman et al., 2021; Garcia & O’Donnell-Allen, 2015; Sisserson et al., 2002)

As teachers, we want students to construct the literacies of secondary ELA as relational to the literacies that they use outside of the classroom, all while offering a structured space to interrogate and wrestle with these ideas through joyful interactions.

How We Organize the Units

We conceive units through the structure of three fluid categories: reflection, critical exploration, and action. These categories allow us to shape the beginning, middle, and end of a unit while centering students’ intellectual development and joyful literacies. Here’s an explanation of each:

- **Reflection:** This is the beginning of a unit, where students are introduced to the essential questions and the skills they are learning throughout the unit. In the reflection stage, we ask students to consider their background knowledge about video games or classic literature or pop culture and begin to reflect on how these spaces of literacies connect to secondary ELA.
- **Critical Exploration:** This is the largest piece of the unit. Students focus on exploring their selected spaces of literacy by creating inquiry pathways about how they know what they know and offering examples for their takeaways. Discussions, writings, inquiry, and readings all take place within the critical exploration stage, and students also ask themselves about the power structures of their literacy spaces--where they are problematic, what solutions exist to solving the problems, and so on.
- **Action:** In the final piece of the unit, the students build a product that positions them as change agents within their literacy spaces--where they may build a new game that combats some ill of society, create a multimodal self-portrait that dismantles assumptions about their identities, or create a response reel to a problematic take in social media.

Our Presentation Activities

Any critical digital literacies units must now include consideration of artificial intelligence (AI). Katie highlights the issue with AI as she discusses the biases that AI perpetuates within its platform (p. 108; see QR code for conversation with ChatGPT).

Melding both social media and AI is also important. In her class, Holly and her students

watched Above the Noise's video "Is the Internet Expanding or Narrowing Our Minds?" and then considered quotes from the popular Netflix documentary The Social Dilemma (Orlowski, 2020).



FIGURE 8.5. A conversation with ChatGPT.



FIGURE 8.4. Quotes from The Social Dilemma

The Activity

Taking the quotes and putting them individually onto

butcher paper, we completed a Silent Discussion that mirrored students making text-to-text connections, text-to-self connections, and text-to-world connections. We then developed discussion questions based on the question stems for discussions.

Then, we discussed texts that focus on the use of AI within various spaces (see QR code).



Reflection Questions

- In your own class, how do you see or hear about students using digital literacies within their lived literacy spaces?
- In what units could you connect to critical digital literacies?

What are critical digital literacies?

As students examine the digital literacies they encounter, it becomes imperative that English teachers work toward students' critical understanding of the digital information they encounter. According to Luke (2013), a critical digital literacies approach is where students are "naming and renaming the world, seeing its patterns, designs and complexities, and developing the capacity to redesign and reshape it" (p. 29).

Reflection

For the reflection piece of the unit, we offer activities that focus on the students' digital worlds. One activity for students' reflection is The Daily Six, where students analyze a piece of media--anything from an advertisement to a reel--at the beginning of class and answer the following questions to gain a critical understanding of the multimodal text:

1. Who are all the possible people who made choices that helped create this text?
2. How was this text constructed and delivered or accessed?
3. How could this text be understood differently?
4. What values, points of view, and ideologies are represented or missing from this text or influenced by the medium?
5. What was this text created and/or shared?
6. Who does this text advantage and/or disadvantage?

The first time, this task takes approximately 30-45 minutes, depending on the teaching and modeling needed to complete it. However, once the expectations are established, this task can be used as a bell ringer (5 minutes) at the start of the class to engage students in a discussion about the power structures that exist in the digital world around them before diving into the main lesson for the day.

Critical Exploration

In the exploration stage, students apply what they've learned through the Daily Six to brands. Students encounter both explicit and implicit brand content through multiple sources. In this exploration, we invite students to investigate the branding of a particular content creator, company, or item through collaborative research. Students consider the following as they deeply analyze how brands are created:

- What identity is the content creator purposely creating?
- What identity does the content creator want to create in the audience?
- What is the content creator's/company's purpose in creating these identities?
- How does the content creator want the audience to change their moods, minds, or moves?
- What relationships does the content creator want to create with the message and audience? What groups/values does the content creator/company align with? Why does this matter?
- Does the content creator/company claim that their opinion or argument is better, correct, worthwhile, or valuable? What does this matter?
- What judgments are the content creator/company making? Why does this matter?
- Is the content creator privileging values, judgments, or expectations at the expense of others? Why does this matter?

For this activity, we have helped students understand branding through "game day fits" and examining popular brands associated with a creator's identity, such as Jason Kelce's clothing brand, Underdog Apparel.

Action

The action piece is where students begin to "redesign" the world around them. During this stage, students choose a reel that focuses on an argument to create an "incoming stitch" where they respond to the reel through their newly developed critical lens. (See QR code for student instructions).



FIGURE 8.9. Responding to Social Issues assignment.