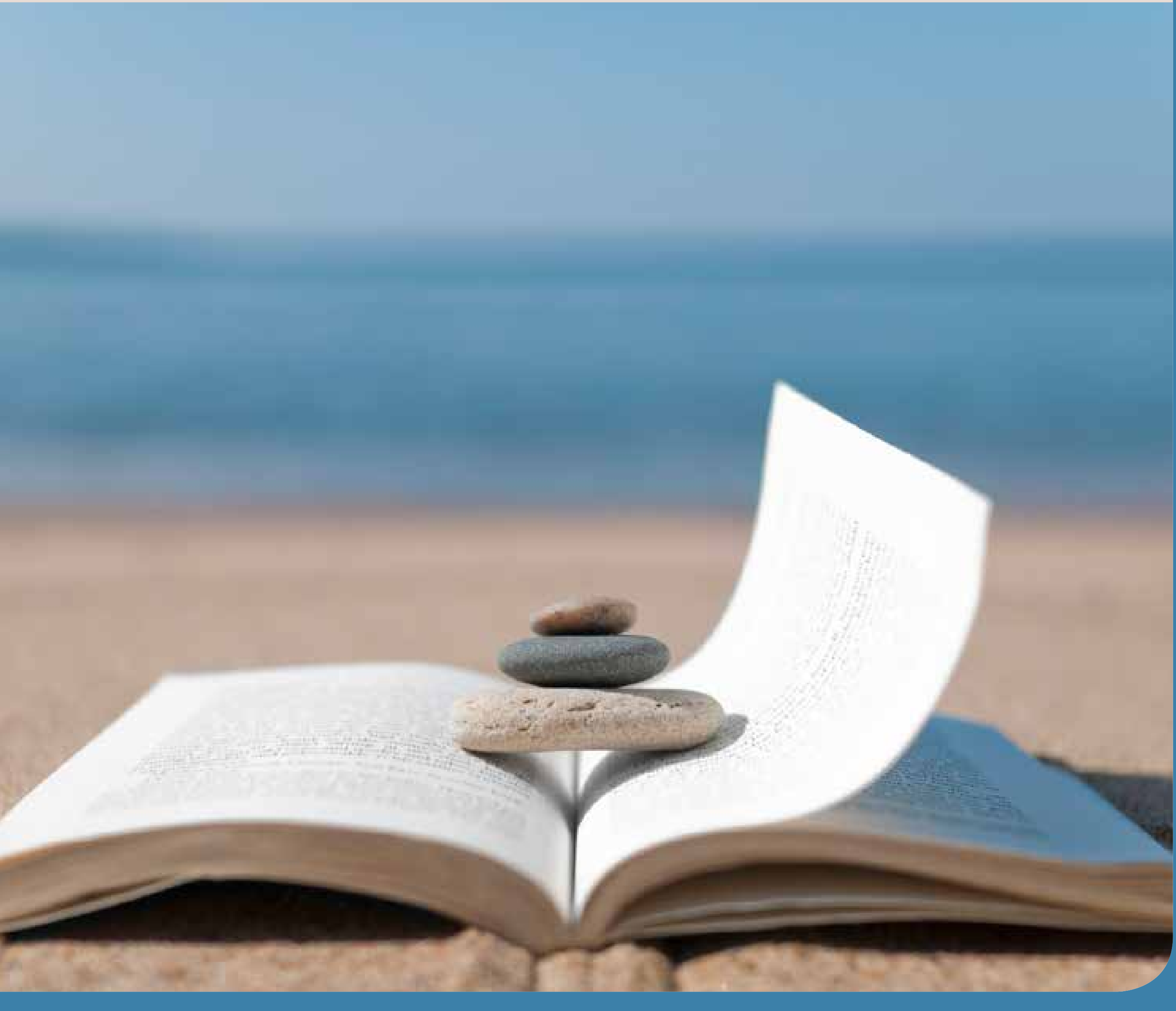
South Carolina English Teacher

South Carolina Council of Teachers of English | 2017



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Call for Articles

The South Carolina Council of Teachers of English welcomes contributions to *South Carolina English Teacher (SCET)*, a journal that represents varied perspectives, formats, and voices focusing on the teaching of English in our state. *SCET* publishes teacher research, critical essays, teaching strategies, bibliographies, interviews, personal essays, short stories, poetry, and other creative works including photography and drawings. Each manuscript should be no more than 12 double spaced, typed pages in current APA style. *SCET* is a blind, peer-reviewed journal. Place the author's personal and institutional identification including an e-mail address on the cover page only. Please attach a copy of your manuscript in Word, subject heading, SCET, to mstyslin@mailbox.sc.edu. Deadline for submission for the next issue of *SCET* is July 30, 2018. All submissions attached by this date will be considered.

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From the Editors

On behalf of the South Carolina Council of Teachers of English, it is our pleasure to bring to you the 2017 issue of our organization's journal, *South Carolina English Teacher.* While we're living in times of both great progress and significant upheaval, this issue provides perspectives on how to help students develop voices and identities that will allow them to be active, literate, compassionate and just participants in our society.

In the opening section of this issue, "Questioning our Practice," we present explorations of how the stories students read and tell can be used to spur change. In "Painting Literature with Imagery: Helping Students Navigate the Visualization Process in Reading," Jennifer D. Morrison describes pedagogical approaches designed to help students visualize what they read in ways that help them develop both their reading and writing skills. Jennifer Stowe and Mary Styslinger, with Kayla Hyatt Hostetler and Nicole Walker, discuss ways of using stories to help students understand people with experiences different from their own and take action within their communities in "Opening the Door to Advocacy through Story." The third article in this section, Trever Cline-Etminan's "Teachers' Words and Actions: Retaining Diverse Students in Advanced Programs," chronicles the stories students told him about their experiences in advanced courses and how those stories shaped the school's approach to recruitment and retention in those programs with the goal of increasing access for all students.

In "Methods that Matter," we present two articles that describe pedagogical approaches that are intended to help students develop their voices as writers. In "Building Word Choice Skills with a Virtual Wall," Alicia Kelley presents a twist on the word wall strategy that uses technology and students' prior knowledge to help enhance their vocabularies with the purpose of making their writing more effective. Meanwhile, Mary-Celeste Schreuder focuses on ways to help students become more accomplished revisers of their own work in "Teaching Students the Art of Revision: Zooming In and Layering with Sentence Branching."

We are particularly proud of the final section of this issue, "Writing with Purpose," in which you'll find several pieces of poetry from teachers throughout the state. Mary-Celeste Schreuder, Stephanie Harbulak, and Angela Byrd have written poems that engage both the head and the heart and attempt to give voice to those who are often voiceless.

We hope you take as much enjoyment from reading the issue as we did in putting it together. We are heartened, as always, to share the outstanding work English teachers are doing in South Carolina, and we hope these pieces inspire you to contribute to next year's issue.

Mary Styslinger and Matthew Nelson

Painting Literature with Imagery: Helping Students Navigate the Vizualization Process in Reading

By Jennifer D. Morrison

Jacob [all names are pseudonyms] was the football quarterback and homecoming king at the high school where I taught eleventh grade English. He was funny, good-looking, popular, athletic, dynamic, and everyone wanted to be around him. When I introduced Jacob's class to *Catcher in the Rye*, after doing some reading aloud, I gave the students fifteen minutes to finish the chapter silently in class. I settled into a seat and proceeded to take observational notes on my 16-year old readers. Most got right to work—there was eye-scanning, page-turning, and complete focus. Except for Jacob. He would read for a few seconds and then look up and around. He would go back to the text for another few seconds and then look up again. This continued for several minutes, then I decided to approach him.

I asked Jacob why he wasn't reading. He said the words didn't make sense. This puzzled me because he could call aloud every word on the page. I asked him what he did when he read. He said he just looked at the words. I asked him if he made pictures in his head based on the reading. He looked at me like I was speaking Greek. I asked him again if he made pictures—a movie—in his mind when he read. No, he didn't know how. This was a revelation to me. As a proficient reader, I never realized there were people in the world who didn't see and hear a movie as they read. That was the moment I decided I had to work on teaching reading—even to high schoolers—as a metacognitive skill by having students draw or enact what they were reading, teaching them the techniques good readers use, and having them practice those techniques with supports.

Why Visualization?

This experience with Jacob set me on a quest to find ways to help students "make the movies" in their heads and visualize text as effective readers do (see e.g. Eisner, 1992; Gambrell & Koskinen, 2002; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000; Wilhelm, 2016). It is not only important for students to be able to generate a visual depiction of text for comprehension – it is critical. In fact, Eisner (1992) asserts, "We cannot know through language what we cannot imagine. The image – visual, tactile, auditory – plays a crucial role in the construction of meaning through text. Those who cannot imagine, cannot read" (p. 592).

Intuitively, as a strong reader, I knew this, but this intuition is also what made it hard for me to realize not everyone knew to imagine text. Imagery seemed like a good access point to help students make sense of texts through visualization. However, the issue became that imagery in quality literature is often figurative and language dense. This was an additional complexity that needed to be unpacked. Students often struggle with comprehension of richly descriptive texts and do not always understand why authors choose to use figurative language to create imagery rather than simply "saying what they mean." By helping students better "translate" figurative language into text images they subsequently visualize, we encourage them to be more fluent, sophisticated readers who can self-monitor (see Fig. 1).

Why Imitation?

At the same time I was working through struggling readers' concerns like Jacob's, my school invited Don Killgallon, known for his work with helping students learn to write by imitating mentor sentences found in canonical and young adult literature (see e.g. Killgallon, 1998), to conduct a professional development session. Killgallon argues that since as children, we learn to speak by imitating more experienced speakers like our parents, we can also learn to write by imitating how professional writers use written language. It occurred to me this conception of "imitation" could be combined

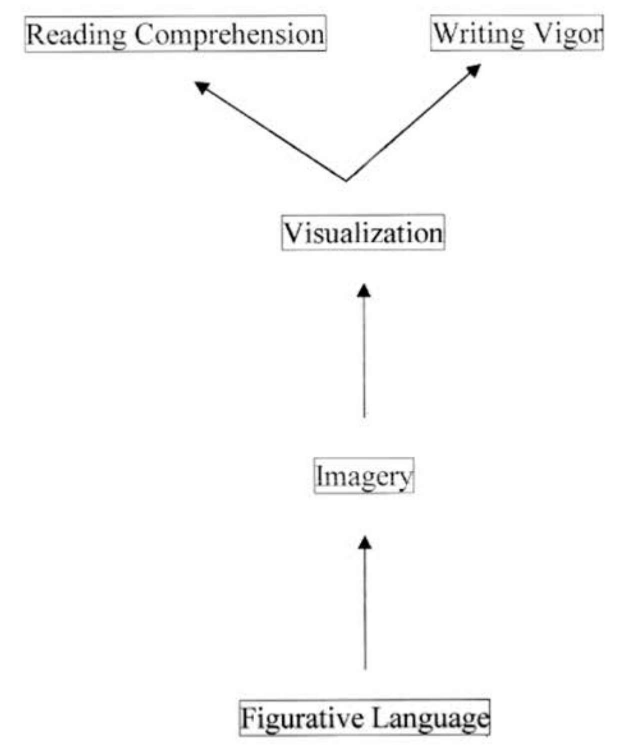


Figure 1.
Figurative Language, Imagery, Visualization Relationship Graphic

with the conception of "visualization" in order to help students develop their ability to connect mental images to not only text they were reading, but also text they were writing. By encouraging appreciation for and understanding of rich imagery created by figurative language, we provide models for students to apply to their own writing, thereby enlivening and invigorating it (see Fig. 1). Using literature as a springboard for students to create their own figurative, language-rich images means they are learning from writing masters.

The interaction of these events bore the lesson technique described in this article. In the next section, I will explain the process and provide concrete, student examples. While the examples I am sharing derive largely from *The Giver* (middle school) and *Heart of Darkness* (high school), I have conducted this lesson with many other texts including *Tuck Everlasting, Their Eyes Were Watching God, The Great Gatsby*, and "Dark They Were and Golden-Eyed."

Painting Literature with Imagery Method

Why Figurative Language?

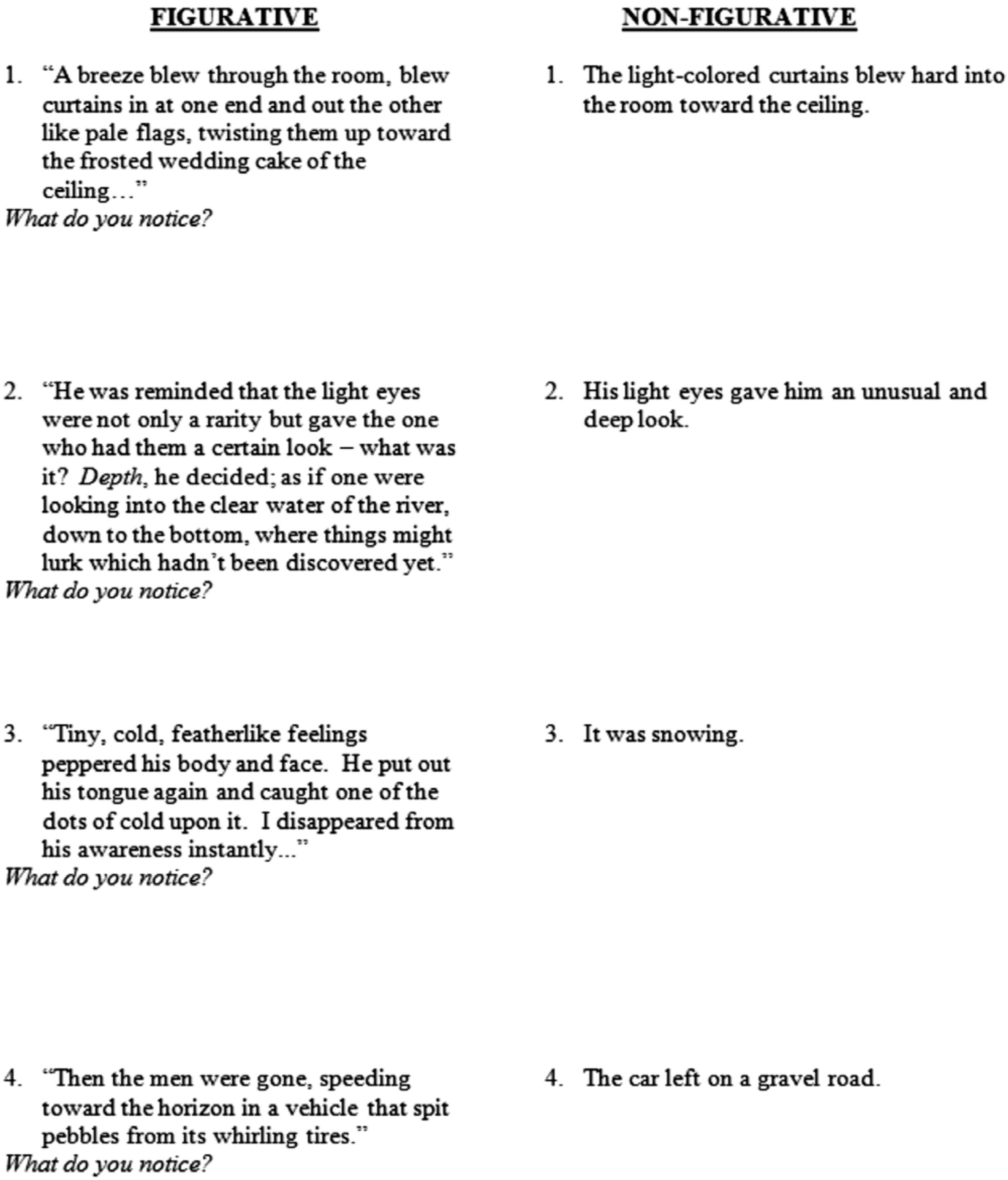
I begin this lesson by defining figurative language, imagery, and visualization, building upon students' prior knowledge of these terms. I then address the "why can't they just say it" issue with a demonstration. I provide a handout (see Fig. 2) with quotations using figurative language examples on the left side of the page and the "translation" of that quotation with figurative language removed on the right side of the paper. These can be adjusted based on class readiness and current text. I ask students to fold the paper in half so they can only see one side of the paper at a time.

Next, we look at the non-figurative description. I ask students to visualize what is happening, and then, in the case of the first example, ask them to describe what kind of house the curtains occupy and to enact, using their hands and arms, how the curtains might be blowing. The students quickly discover the discrepancies in their interpretations. I point out to them that part of a writer's responsibility is to make word choices that clearly share his or her vision with the reader. When the images are stagnant and flat, there is a greater possibility the writer's intention may not be realized in the readers' minds. We agree as a class there is a lack of clarity in how we interpret the nonfigurative image.

We then flip the paper over and read the figurative example. I ask students to enact what they NOW experience. They wave their hands "like pale flags," and they all agree that a "frosted wedding cake of the ceiling" must be in a very wealthy home (It is, after all, Tom and Daisy Buchanan's house from *The Great Gatsby*). While there may still be some variations in how they visualize the scene, it is much more consistent and aligned with the author's intention. Students then repeat the process in pairs with one of the three other examples from the page. They choose an image, look at the non-figurative description, talk to their partner about what they see, flip the paper over to see what the figurative example states, and then discuss what they find. By the end, most students overwhelmingly say they prefer the figurative images to the non-figurative ones.

Why Borrow Text?

Once we have an understanding of how figurative language builds imagery and subsequently audience response, we talk about the book or text we are using at that time. This lesson works best about half-way through the

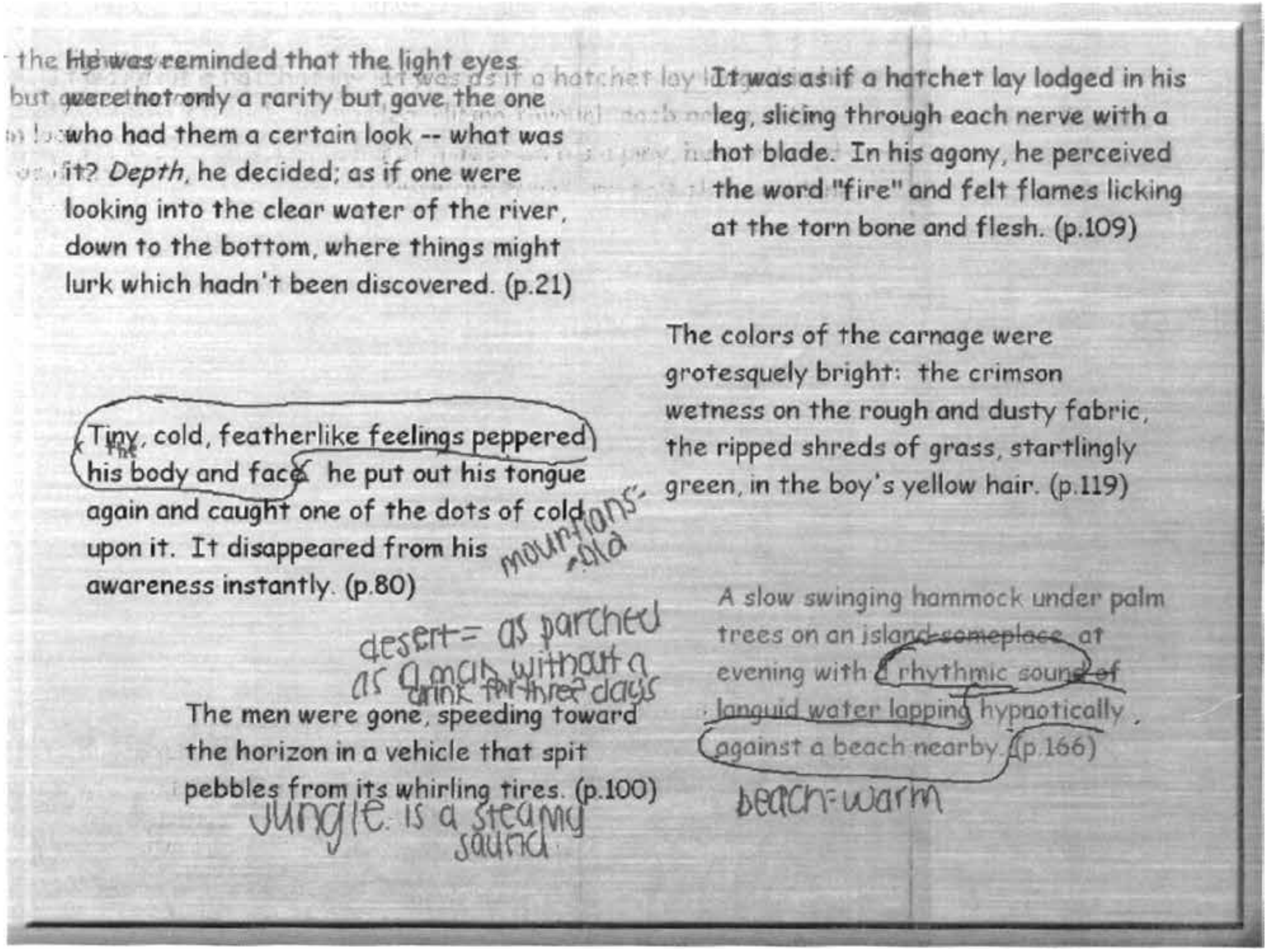


FIGURATIVE	NON-FIGURATIVE
1. “A breeze blew through the room, blew curtains in at one end and out the other like pale flags, twisting them up toward the frosted wedding cake of the ceiling…” *What do you notice?*	1. The light-colored curtains blew hard into the room toward the ceiling.
2. “He was reminded that the light eyes were not only a rarity but gave the one who had them a certain look – what was it? *Depth*, he decided; as if one were looking into the clear water of the river, down to the bottom, where things might lurk which hadn’t been discovered yet.” *What do you notice?*	2. His light eyes gave him an unusual and deep look.
3. “Tiny, cold, featherlike feelings peppered his body and face. He put out his tongue again and caught one of the dots of cold upon it. I disappeared from his awareness instantly...” *What do you notice?*	3. It was snowing.
4. “Then the men were gone, speeding toward the horizon in a vehicle that spit pebbles from its whirling tires.” *What do you notice?*	4. The car left on a gravel road.

Figure 2.
Figurative and Non-Figurative Handout: Examples from The Giver

text, when students have some sense of the book or story but have not completed it yet. I provide examples of figurative language-laden images from the text; then we discuss these images, addressing what we already know about the book and consider what sensory experiences they arouse. It is particularly effective to put these on an interactive white board and allow students to notate the images that appeal to them (see Fig. 3). Students are then asked to explore the text in pairs for further examples of images that utilize figurative language, one of which they "translate," analyze, and share with the class.

I then explain to students one of the ways for us to learn how to use figurative language to create vivid images is to imitate what master writers do, and we just so happen to be reading a master writer's text. I model for students how to take a phrase, image, or series of words from the sample quotes and use them to begin crafting a poem (see Fig. 4). The example I show utilizes a phrase or sequence of words somewhere within the poem – together or broken up—and the result may or may not be related to the actual text. Using the author's words does two things for students. First, it provides a model for students to emulate the craft involved in effective writing. Second, it removes the fear many students feel about being able to start their own writing. When students struggle to establish an idea for their writing or they are afraid their ideas will not be valued, they can develop writing anxiety, which inhibits their writing desire and efficacy (see e.g. Berk & Ünal, 2017; Yetis, 2017). Giving them an accessible starting point, such as a text quote, removes these barriers and allows students to focus on developing a high-quality product.



He was reminded that the light eyes were not only a rarity but gave the one who had them a certain look -- what was it? *Depth*, he decided; as if one were looking into the clear water of the river, down to the bottom, where things might lurk which hadn't been discovered. (p.21)

It was as if a hatchet lay lodged in his leg, slicing through each nerve with a hot blade. In his agony, he perceived the word "fire" and felt flames licking at the torn bone and flesh. (p.109)

The colors of the carnage were grotesquely bright: the crimson wetness on the rough and dusty fabric, the ripped shreds of grass, startlingly green, in the boy's yellow hair. (p.119)

Tiny, cold, featherlike feelings peppered his body and face. he put out his tongue again and caught one of the dots of cold upon it. It disappeared from his awareness instantly. (p.80)

mountains-cold

A slow swinging hammock under palm trees on an island ~~someplace~~ at evening with a rhythmic sound ~~of~~ languid water lapping hypnotically against a beach nearby. (p.166)

desert= as parched as a man without a drink for three days

The men were gone, speeding toward the horizon in a vehicle that spit pebbles from its whirling tires. (p.100)

jungle is a steamy sound

beach=warm

Figure 3.
Sample Imagery Quotes from The Giver *displayed on Promethean Board with Student Notation.*

Once students decide on their words and image, they write their poems. It may be humorous or serious, related to the current text or not. The point is for them to transform the author's words in a way that gives them ownership of the image. Once they have written their draft, they must get at least two people to look at it and make suggestions before bringing it to me. When I give it final approval, I then provide students with plain paper and watercolor paints. They use the watercolors to paint the visualization of the image they have now created in their poem. While I have tried using crayons or markers, they do not have the same impact as watercolors in how the students make their images tangible; there is something about the watercolors that seems to inspire students to elevate their work quality. The final step is to write their poem on the painting once it has dried (see Figs. 5-6) and to display the work by hanging it or publishing it on an online forum such as Padlet (https//padlet.com).

A Russian harlequin in *brown holland*
With bright patches, blue, red, and yellow,
Colorful like the maps of Marlow's past.
Devoted, dedicated, would die for
Kurtz,
Tall, frail in body, warped in spirit, but strong in
voice.
He was, afterall, a voice.
Grave, profound, vibrating,
while the man did not seem capable of a whisper.
The man, who exploited for ivory,
who made himself a god,
who danced in evil's bosom
and partook of human flesh –
the round knobs on the tops of poles
were human heads, afterall.
Black, dried, sunken, with closed eyelids
And smiling too.
Smiling at
The horror, the horror.
Kurtz never realized *how hollow was his soul*
until the end.
The horror, the horror.

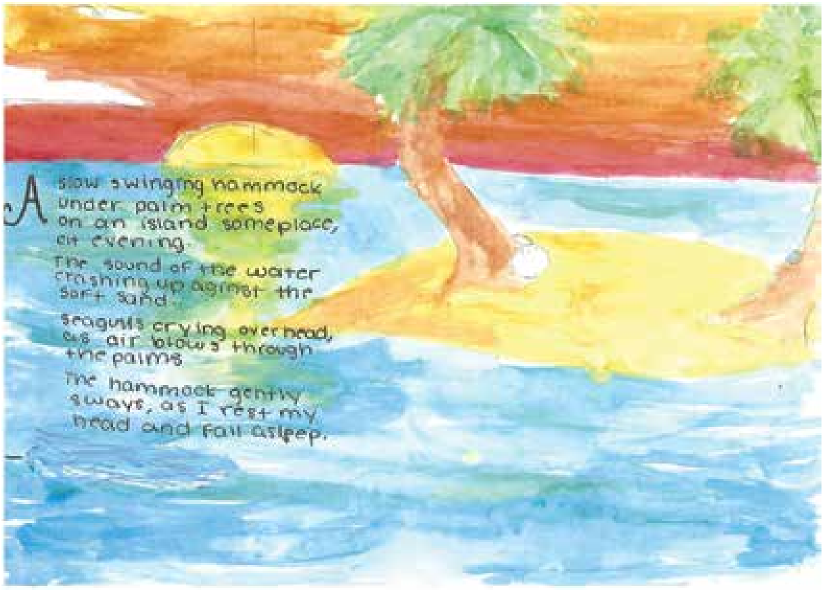
©J.D. Morrison

Figure 4.
Model Poem Embedding Text Quote from Heart of Darkness*—Deeper Complexity and More Subtle Integration [Italics indicate words from text; regular font is newly created]*

Discussion

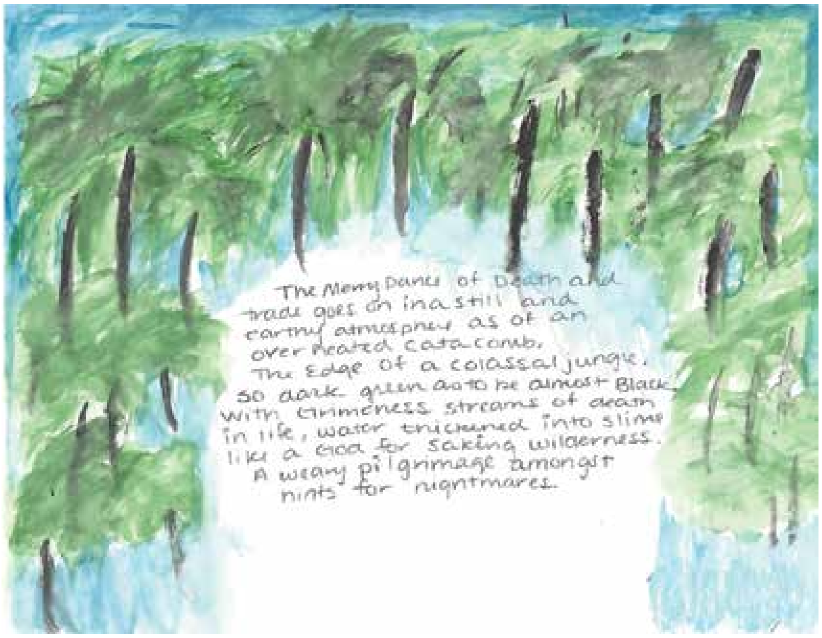
This is by far one of the most successful, powerful, and popular techniques I have ever used. The final products students produce from this lesson are always impressive, and often, individuals who struggle with more traditional forms of expression are some of the most efficacious. Additionally, I have found in mimicking the language, they also mimic the vocabulary, which serves to elevate their exposure to and internalization of rich diction (see Figs. 5-6). After completing this lesson, students reenter the focus text with enthusiasm and are always eager to point out the figurative language and imagery they now notice. They also begin to deepen their analysis and interpretation of the text. For example, after I conducted this lesson with *The Giver*, students noticed the figurative language and vivid imagery were not existent in the early parts of the book. However, as the main character, Jonas, is given more memories and gains greater insight into the true workings of his society, the figurative language and imagery explode. By considering the writer's choice to use the language in this way, students begin to recognize the oppressive, static, and sterile quality of Jonas's seemingly utopian world, and they can clearly identify the author's attitudes and beliefs about such a place.

This lesson is adaptable to a multitude of texts and can be effective for elementary children as well as adolescents. I have presented the process at local and state



A slow swinging hammock
under palm trees
on an island someplace,
at evening.
The sound of the water
crashing up aginst the
soft sand.
seagulls crying overhead,
as air blows through
the palms
The hammock gently
sways, as I rest my
head and fall aslpep.

Figure 5.
Student Work Sample from The Giver



The Merry Dance of Death and
trade goes on in a still and
earthy atmospher as of an
over heated catacomb.
The Edge of a colassal jungle.
so dark green as to be almost Black
with Grimness streams of death
in life, water thickened into slime
like a God for saking wilderness.
A weary pilgrimage amongst
hints for nightmares.

Figure 6.
Student Work Sample from Heart of Darkness

professional development workshops, and teachers of all levels have loved the combination of metacognition, kinesthesia, imagination, and creativity. More importantly, my former students still appreciate the work they created twenty years ago. While I was not able to share this lesson with Jacob, other students like Demonte, Carson, and Leah, who benefitted from my earlier learning about visualization and imitation, were elated to see their paintings recently. Demonte was relieved when I reassured him that his graphic illustration of a dripping head on a stake was directly related to *Heart of Darkness;* he was worried it had been his enactment of "teenage angst" (personal communication, October, 2017). Carson was impressed by his ability to integrate two impactful pieces of literature (He used the structure of Poe's "The Raven" to write an image for *Heart of Darkness)*. "Wow, I can't believe I actually wrote something that clever!" (personal communication, October, 2017) was his response to seeing his work I had digitally saved. When I sent a copy to Leah, she messaged me saying, "That's so cool! I have to show my kids! ... Never in a million years would I think an assignment I did that long ago would make an impression. LOL, I think I was just happy to get through high school, LOL" (personal communication, October, 2017).

Reading is a complex process that requires active participation on the part of the reader. Providing an opportunity for students to glimpse the intersections of writer's craft, readers' perceptions, and imagination enables them to better navigate this complex process and emerge as stronger, more cognizant, and more engaged producers and consumers of text.

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Opening the Door to Advocacy through Story

Jennifer Stowe and Mary E. Styslinger
with Kayla Hyatt Hostetler and Nicole Walker

In her scholarship, Bishop (1990) often wrote of metaphorical windows, doors, and mirrors. Sometimes books offer windows, she explained, through which students view familiar and less familiar worlds. Windows can also be sliding glass doors through which readers walk and become part of an author's realm. And every so often, when the light is just right, a window becomes a mirror, and magically, readers see their own lives and experiences reflected in the lives and experiences of others. As high school teachers, doctoral students, and a university professor, we purposefully select literature which opens the door to advocacy for our students. While windows and mirrors offer a metaphorical foundation, ultimately, we aspire to make the entryway literal. Our hope is that by encouraging students to engage with the perspectives of others, we will inspire them to walk through real doors in the real world to promote change on behalf of the others they discovered through story.

Practice Inspired by Social Justice and Critical Literacy

Our practice is inspired by a commitment to social justice and critical literacy. Social justice theory advocates for transformative and liberatory educational practices that lead to critical consciousness. Critical consciousness occurs as we come to perceive social, cultural, political, and economic contradictions and oppressions in the world. We come to notice incongruities and coercions in surrounding societal structures. For example, we might begin to notice which schools and students have more access to books than others, question who makes the decisions to purchase these books, and contemplate why money is spent on some students and books and not others.

Social justice informed learning experiences help students develop their critical awareness and support an ethical approach towards social action and change. As Freire advocated, our students need to be engaged in "consciousness-raising problem solving" (2000). We might ask, what can we do to ensure that all students, regardless of the school they attend, have equal access to literature? Agency and engagement is intrinsic to social justice teaching, particularly in a democracy, because as learners challenge individual and systemic forms of injustice, they also learn how to be active and engaged citizens.

According to Wolk (2009), however, "social responsibility must go far beyond basic citizenship; it is about shaping human beings with intellectual curiosity, a caring heart, and a belief in a common good" (p. 665). As literacy teachers, we are uniquely positioned to cultivate this type of mindset among our students. We especially have the power to liberate, empower, or oppress students. After all, when we teach students to read, we are teaching much more than that. We are teaching students how to better understand the world, their place within it, and their capacity to transform both. In 2001, Glasgow wrote about the polarization of American society, and her words seem even more urgent today:

> In an increasingly abrasive and polarized American society, social justice education has the potential to prepare citizens who are sophisticated in their understanding of diversity and group interaction, able to critically evaluate social institutions, and committed to working democratically with diverse others. Young adult literature provides a context for students to become conscious of their operating worldview and to examine critically alternative ways of understanding the world and social relations. (p. 54)

Closely intertwined with social justice, critical literacy theory uses a political lens to specifically examine literacy education. In order to adopt a critical stance, teachers and students collaborate, considering how texts work (Behrman, 2006). Readers question who is writing the text and contemplate who decides what is included and excluded from its pages. Critical literacy demands we consider whose voices are represented, whose voices are missing, and who gains and loses by any reading.

Critical literacy depends on students having access to culturally diverse literature. As teachers, we make conscious and deliberate choices, choosing texts which introduce students to a variety of settings, characters, and situations then transporting students into the lives of others like and unlike them. As a student once so aptly told Wilhelm (1997), "Reading is a way to get inside other people. . . . It's a way to learn stuff that's impossible to learn any other way because you learn from the inside" (p. 35). With the help of literature, we can provide access to many possible ways of being in our classrooms. As students read, they grapple with moral dilemmas (Wolk, 2009) and ponder character identity (Bean & Moni, 2003). YA literature then helps students "forge identities" in an increasingly "shifting and unstable landscape" (Bean & Moni, 2003, p. 641).

Because of its tremendous potential in the classroom, many educators have found ways to use young adult literature to help students understand themselves and others while cultivating critical consciousness and a passion for social justice. For example, Bean and Moni (2003) used the YA novel, *Fighting Reuben Wolfe (*Zusak, 2000), to teach high school students how to use a critical literacy framework. Other educators have also created units centered around YA novels. Brozo, Walter, and Placker (2002) utilized *Scorpions* (Myers, 1990) as the centerpiece for a critical literacy unit focused around violence and masculinity. They found students who participated in the unit demonstrated changes in their attitudes towards masculinity and were less likely to see violence as an essential part of a masculine identity. And Johnson and Ciancio (2003) created a unit for at-risk high school students using the novel *Othello: A Novel (*Lester, 1998), encouraging students to engage with texts in ways that help them think about their own lives. Schieble (2012) used theories of critical literacy, theories of whiteness, and critical race theory to examine two popular YA texts: *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part Time Indian (*Alexie, 2009) and *Speak (*Anderson, 2010), concluding that YA literature can facilitate critical conversations about race and offered examples of how to engage with Alexie and Anderson's texts.

In spite of these examples, there are relatively few articles that offer real-life examples of how high school teachers use young adult literature to encourage advocacy among their students. Ehst and Hermann-Wilmarth (2014) adopted the Freirian conception of critical literacy to explore ways in which teachers might use YA literature to deal with issues of prejudice, poverty, and war in international contexts. And Houser (2001) explored different ways that a variety of children's and YA critical texts might be used to promote meaningful discussion and reflection. In particular, he chose texts that offer non-mainstream perspectives as a way of including marginalized perspectives into the social studies curriculum.

However, according to Freire and Macedo (1987), it is not enough just to grapple with the issues. We must critically reflect upon this reality and attempt to transform it through further action. Articles describing students as change-agents are almost non-existent, with the notable example of Powell, Cantrell, and Adams (2001) whose work described how their students took political action to protect a local mountain from strip-mining. We find this type of work inspiring, and we are constantly looking for ways to prepare our students to take action in their communities. Giroux (1987) argued that critical literacy is about drawing from students' lived experiences and helping them use the tools of literacy to transform society around social justice goals, and providing students with opportunities to take action is a way of using the word to transform the world. Providing students with opportunity for action allows them to demonstrate the knowledge they have gained through social justice and critical literacy teaching and learning experiences and gives them a platform to display their ability to transform knowledge into productive action for the betterment of society (Naiditch, 2010).

Of course, all of this is much easier said than done. As we know, theory does not always translate effortlessly into practice. It has taken a great deal of reading and conversation with one another, not to mention trial and error in the classroom, to discover texts and pedagogy which promote critical literacy and social justice teaching. In this article, we describe how we open the door to advocacy and invite our students to step through by taking action in their communities. Through the teaching of literature, some old and some new, we prompt students to see their selves, others, and the world with a more critical perspective. We encourage holding up metaphorical mirrors, opening up figurative windows, and yes, eventually walking through actual doors. In the sections which follow, we offer a descriptive framework we have found helpful in guiding students through story towards advocacy. While not a hierarchy, this structure provides a way and means for: developing voice; broadening perspective; and promoting advocacy.

Holding up Mirrors and Developing Voice

"Literacy is freedom and everyone
has something significant to say"
(Jimmy Santiago Baca)

Before students can become advocates for others, they must first come to recognize the power of their own voice. Jimmy Santiago Baca teaches us that everyone has something significant to say, and we use his stories such as "Sign Language, Convict Style" from his collection, *Stories from the Edge* (Baca, 2010), to teach students the power and value of story. "Sign Language, Convict Style" tells of Baca's return visits to prison, reading and writing poetry with a group of inmates. Baca details how inmates create their own sign language to communicate because in prison they are so often silenced. He writes about his interactions with the inmates in his workshops, how much he enjoys his time because he is giving them an opportunity to share their stories. Baca's narrative is personal and provocative, encouraging students to recognize the privilege of voice. After reading, we discuss the significance of Baca's stories, asking questions such as: Why is reflecting upon and sharing our experiences important? What makes a story come to life? Why is there a need to tell our stories? How can our stories shape others?

Sharon Draper's now classic *Forged by Fire* (2011) is another initial text we use to grow voice. This relatable and intense young adult novel tells the heartbreaking tale of Gerald, born to a drug-addicted mother. At a young age, he is left alone and almost dies in a fire he started. His aunt Queenie takes him in, and he begins to lead a better life, but tragedy strikes when his aunt passes away. He then must return to live with his mother, abusive step-father, and his sister, Angel. Gerald loves his sister and works hard to protect her. Gerald's determination to rise above tragic circumstances inspires our students, and they respond to the novel in journal entries. Writing prompts range from the tragic to the lighthearted. Many students shared in response to the writing invitation: Were you or do you know someone who was ever abused? If so (and if you are comfortable), share your experience. If not, share an experience when you were disappointed as a child. Many students shared deeply personal connections to child abuse. One student wrote about how her father abused her mother in front of her. She detailed her fear and urge to protect her mother even though she was only a small child. She described how scared she still is every time her mother talks to her father. She is always afraid her mother will go back to him, even though it has been a few years since they were last together. She wrote because of her father, she does not trust men.

Once students have been immersed in the stories of others, they are challenged to craft their own narratives, validating their experiences and developing their voices. They write accounts of personal hardships, descriptions of comical moments, details of unfair treatment. Several girls wrote about being sexually assaulted by peers. One young man wrote about his father losing his job, and how his family struggled to make ends meet. Another young man tackled discrimination, describing his experience of going into an expensive store in the mall and being followed around the store by a sales clerk. Through the telling of these stories, students guide others to perceive, know, feel, and experience. Students listen to the stories of others through the peer review process and are encouraged to submit their final works to teenink.com. As a result of writing and listening to these stories, students begin to make sense of their selves and hopefully develop their own voice, a precursor for advocacy.

Opening Windows to the World and Broadening Perspective

"If you care about something enough, it's going
to make you cry.
But you have to use it.
Use your tears. Use your pain.
Use your fear. Get mad."
(Sherman Alexie)

Sherman Alexie's *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian* (2009) offers many students a new outlook on Native American life. This novel tells the story of Junior, an adolescent growing up on the Spokane Indian Reservation, who leaves his school on the "rez" to attend an all-white high school in pursuit of a better education and brighter future. As none of our students have had any experiences on reservations, we collaborate with a history teacher and provide historical context for the novel. Students learn about the Spokane Indian Reservation. They learn about the living conditions, ceremonies, education, laws, careers, and challenges of life on the reservation.

In order to broaden students' perspective of others, students are assigned mini-collaborative research projects. They are placed in groups of four and select a topic to research related to Native American life. Once they have completed their research, they create a prezi, powerpoint, and/or video. They also must make a pamphlet or handout about their topic and share their results with our local community. Most students use social media to do so. For example, one group created an Instagram account that focused on tribal history. Students then share what they have learned with their classmates and organize a community night, where they share their research with family and friends, promoting awareness of Native American life in a more public forum.

Another YA novel that we use to grow students' perspective is *A Long Way Gone* (Beah, 2008). This harrowing memoir tells the story of Ishmael's journey from a carefree village youth to a drug-addicted child soldier. Eventually he is taken to a rehabilitation center and comes to the United States to tell his story. Many times during the novel Ishmael shares tales from his childhood that teach important lessons. One story that Musa, a boy Ishmael meets when he escapes the rebel attacks on his village, tells is about Bra Spider. Bra Spider was a man who was invited to many village feasts. Instead of just choosing one feast to attend, he wanted to try and go to them all, so he came up with a plan. He laid ropes from each village to his home. He told the villages to pull on the ropes when their feasts were ready. He then tied all of the ropes around his waist. He went without food for a whole day to prepare for the feasts. Unfortunately, all of the feasts started simultaneously, and all of the villages pulled on Bra Spider's ropes at the same time. This suspended him in the air and gave him a very tiny waist, much like a spider. From this tale we learn an important lesson about greed.

Once we better understand Ishamel's culture, the tradition of oral story-telling, and the importance of Beah sharing his story with the world, students are asked to bring in objects that tell stories about their families, their traditions and beliefs. They tell the stories of these objects, helping peers understand varied experiences. In this way, our students grow their understanding of others. They learn that a baseball cap represents an uncle who taught a niece to ride a bike; that a diary represents a father who writes poetry; and that dog tags represent an uncle killed by a drunk driver.

We heighten student awareness of the world through story. As this text focuses around child soldiers and genocide, we provide students the opportunity to listen and speak with a Rwandan genocide survivor. Kayla met a survivor through a work colleague. The survivor came to the library and sat down with the students. She looked them in the eyes and said, "Today I am going to tell you my story." She then detailed her experience. She revealed the atrocities she witnessed. Her mother was killed in front of her; she saw women raped in front of her. She cried at moments, and the students cried with her. She explained how she escaped to a neighboring country and eventually made her way to the United States. The students were in awe. They cried with her and hugged her. They thanked her for sharing her story. Reading, telling, and listening to these stories broaden students' perspective of others and the world.

Walking through Doors and Promoting Advocacy

> “I wanted you to see what real courage is,
> instead of getting the idea that courage is a man
> with a gun in his hand.
> It’s when you know you’re licked before you
> begin but you begin anyway
> and you see it through no matter what. You
> rarely win, but sometimes you do.”
> (Harper Lee)

To Kill a Mockingbird (Lee, 2006) has served as a starting place, inspiring our students towards many different types of advocacy. Like many YA novels, *To Kill a Mockingbird* deals with numerous themes that are both classic—such as the battle between good and evil and the loss of innocence—and themes that are particularly relevant to teen’s daily lives—such as racism, sexism, and other forms of prejudice and inequity. The novel’s enduring complexity allows us to approach it from a different direction each year. For example, some years we have used it to help students see the impacts of racism on local history and on our state community. Other years, we have chosen to read it through a feminist lens and have paired the novel with *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide* (Kristof and WuDunn, 2010), a non-fiction text that tells the stories of women around the world triumphing in even the most severe circumstances.

We believe it is our job to open students’ eyes to issues like these because we have found that once students have developed voice and broadened perspective, fostered their critical consciousness and are aware of injustices in the world, they can be incredibly passionate about setting things right. Our job is to nudge students further, beyond voice and perspective, towards action. We want to help them find the place where they can make a difference. We want them to take action—to be advocates, do something meaningful, and effect change. As they take on the role of advocates, they learn real-world skills, from researching and presenting, to networking and taking part in the political process.

Although we begin in the same place, with *To Kill a Mockingbird*, every group of students takes a different direction with their advocacy projects. Choice is vital. However, we are always amazed by what they are able to learn and accomplish, and we think the stories of their advocacy are worth sharing. For us, these stories include: being a part of George Stinney’s sentence vacation and pushing for a law on teen dating violence to be passed by the South Carolina legislature.

One of the central conflicts in *To Kill a Mockingbird* is the trial of Tom Robinson, a Black man falsely accused of raping a White woman. In spite of the evidence of Robinson’s innocence, the all-White jury still convicts him of the crime. Although the novel is fiction, Tom Robinson’s story portrays a harsh reality about racism in America, and the story of a Black man being wrongfully convicted by racist juries is all too common.

For example, George Stinney was a 14 year-old African American boy who, in 1944, was the youngest person in American history to be executed. He did not commit the crime for which he was convicted, and his conviction was a result of racism, not evidence of his guilt. In 2014, the state of South Carolina was forced to admit that he was wrongly convicted, in part because of the work our students did to review the evidence and help build the case that ultimately led to the vacation of the sentence.

Our students decided that working on this case would be a strong contribution in the fight against racial profiling. They contacted the attorney who had filed to have the case reopened in South Carolina and asked how they could help. They did basic clerk work for the case, reading primary documents and raising questions about the evidence. They even had the opportunity to lobby with the attorney to put pressure on the judge because he had not made a ruling on the case 14 months after the initial hearing. Students worked together to create a website and public presentation on the damage done by racial profiling.

This work provided students many opportunities to engage in reading and writing for authentic purposes and helped them develop their reasoning skills. Getting the court to vacate the sentence was a long road, but in the process, our students learned a lot about the legal system, the importance of persistence, and the power of their voices. In 2015, the history department at the University of South Carolina honored these students as part of their Columbia 63 project (www.columbiasc63.com), focusing on the projects that have advanced racial justice in our state. However, achieving the sentence vacation was also personal for our students because they met George Stinney's sisters, who are still living in South Carolina.

After reading *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Half the Sky,* two other groups of students decided to address issues that impacted women. Although racism is a powerful theme in *To Kill a Mockingbird*, we also try to help our students see the way women are treated in the text. For example, Aunt Alexandra is very much concerned with the protagonist, Scout, adhering to feminine gender norms since being a "tomboy" makes Scout standout in Maycomb. Critical conversations can also take place around the role of Calpurnia, the maid, and Ms. Maude, the widow who takes an interest in Scout and Jem.

After discussing the ways gender norms put women at risk, one group of students decided to focus on the issue of teen dating violence. They felt strongly about this issue, and passion is key in advocacy. They wanted to determine where they could make the greatest impact, so they researched teen dating violence laws. They discovered a teen dating violence bill called Sierra's Law, named after Sierra Landry who was killed by her ex-boyfriend in 2012. If passed, the law would, among other things, allow minor teenagers to get orders of protection from abusive partners and would keep abusers from getting bail. Our students are still working to get this bill passed, but they have made huge progress. One of their biggest accomplishments so far has been testifying at a senate subcommittee hearing on the bill. They were prepared and polished as they answered tough questions from state senators, and their professionalism and passion was truly impressive.

Although these students were able to achieve something remarkable in the George Stinney case and in the fight for Sierra's Law, they also experienced some of the challenges that can be associated with advocacy work. In facing these obstacles head-on, they demonstrated the type of "real courage" that Atticus Finch describes. For example, our students were essentially "licked" before they began working on the George Stinney case; no sentence vacation could reverse his unjust execution in the electric chair. Even though they were fighting against a wrong that could not be righted, our students poured their hearts into the work. When the sentence was finally vacated, many of them experienced mixed emotions because the reality of Stinney's death could not be changed. However, their experience with advocacy—including its disappointments—propelled the majority of these students to pursue legal studies in college.

The students fighting to get Sierra's Law passed face incredible odds. For example, students called senators' offices for weeks without managing to schedule a hearing for the bill. In spite of this lack of responsiveness from the legislature, students kept moving forward with their work and created a presentation to inform the public about the tragic reality of teen dating violence. They presented at local schools and churches. After one of these public presentations, a woman approached them. She was a secretary for one of the senators they had been calling, emailing, and writing for months. Impressed by their presentation and persistence, she told them she would make sure to get the hearing scheduled. A week later, it was on the books. The secretary remembered their calls because they had contacted the senator's office nearly one hundred times in the past months. Our students learned that a lot of advocacy is doing the work, day in and day out, and seeing it through, "no matter what."

Our students are absolutely the driving force behind each of these advocacy projects, but we believe the literature we teach is the means to a just end. We have seen stories inspire change, characters prompt understanding, themes grow critical consciousness and urge students forward. Literature, old and new, from Jimmy Baca to Harper Lee, can foster student voice, perspective, and advocacy.

Our role as teachers of literature is also important. We have found that many students with voice and perspective are eager to take action in the world. However, they often lack the skills, guidance, and experience they need to be effective advocates for the causes they care about. Our job as literacy teachers is to arm them with those skills, to help them think through the issues, to teach them how to focus their energies, and finally, to encourage them to act. And, when something doesn't work out as they hope, our job is also to help them learn how to rethink and repackage their ideas and keep trying. Our job is to teach them that at the end of the day, advocacy is about real courage, about showing up and doing the hard work.

The Necessity of Advocacy

The texts we share with our students are carefully chosen to help them grow into thoughtful, engaged human beings. Our students are growing up in a world that can be complicated, dangerous, and unfair, and many of them have already experienced the realities of discrimination, violence, and poverty. However, the world can also be diverse, nurturing, and beautiful, and we want to empower our students to make the world a more just place. Literature can help us do just that. These texts have served as mirrors to help our students to see themselves more clearly, windows to show them the worlds of others, and doors to encourage them to step out into the world and make a difference (Bishop, 1990). For us, teaching is about hope, and through story, our hope is to open the door to advocacy for our students.

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Teachers' Words and Actions: Retaining Diverse Students in Advanced Programs

Trever Cline-Etminan

The struggles of Black and Latinx students are widely discussed in research, which has attempted to unfold the academic achievement differences between students of color and their white peers. Achievement gaps—differences in average standardized achievement scores between racial groups—have been reported by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). These reports have motivated educators to develop and implement systems of retention and intervention. Educational institutions learned that if they are going to close the achievement gap they would need to implement new systems aimed at helping diverse students succeed. Debating the term "achievement gap," Milner (2012) described opportunity gaps that lead to differences in achievement outcomes. Ladson-Billings (2006) and Irvine (2010) also problematized the notion of an achievement gap, instead highlighting structural and societal inequalities for students of color. Allen and Griffin (2006) argued that underachievement was a result of available resources and the resegregation of our nation's public schools.

Lack of access to advanced level courses in low income communities is an example of an opportunity gap. Allen and Griffin (2006) compared two schools: one low-resourced and one well-resourced. The low-resourced school had fewer college preparatory courses. Another example of an opportunity gap lies in the recruitment of diverse students. The standard assessments used nationwide to identify high-achieving students rarely take into account racial and ethnic factors influencing the scores of traditionally underrepresented populations. Under-representation is identified as a consistent and inequitable product of failed testing procedures and a failure to recognize how individual experiences effect scores on placement tests (Ford, Wright, Washington, & Henfield, 2016; Ford & Whiting, 2001; Grantham & Biddle, 2014; Ford, 2015). The inequitable tests used to identify gifted learners for advanced programs often result in false positive identification for white students and false negative identification for traditionally marginalized populations (Ford, Wright, Washington & Henfield, 2016). Diverse students who score well are often under-referred to advanced classrooms. While no immediate solution has been found to combat the issues of inequitable tests and under referral, it is important to note that even diverse students who score well are often not enrolling in advanced programs (Grissom & Redding, 2016).

While research sheds light on the issues of enrolling and retaining diverse students in advanced programs, it has not yet offered a fully inclusive picture that aims at discussing the reasons why diverse students leave or do not enroll in advanced programs. Few intervention programs exist that aim to support diverse students in advanced programs. The research highlights the need for additional support but offers no clear picture as to how the support should be implemented. Understanding the opportunity gap, building a conception of inequitable testing, and realizing the impact of deficit views can all be seen as methods of addressing the issue of why diverse student populations are so underrepresented in advanced programs. But do these offer a fully inclusive picture of the issue? The simple answer is, "No." It is important to acknowledge that those who are impacted by this issue have a voice of their own. Students can help educators understand the struggles they face and the reasons why they choose not to enroll or leave advanced programs.

Underrepresentation at LowCountry High School

While research is helpful in understanding the challenges of our educational system and suggesting methods of improvement, it does not always shed light on the student perspective. As an advanced program teacher at LowCountry

High School [pseudonym], I wanted to dig deeper into this issue. I sought to understand from the student perspective, not why students were underrepresented, but why diverse students often stopped enrolling in advanced programs throughout their schooling. Research tells us that diverse populations are always at a higher risk of dropping out of high school; this is no surprise to any educator, but it appeared they were also at a greater risk of leaving honors and advanced programs. As I began my research I learned through current district enrollment data that the school minority population averages 31%. I then discovered what researchers (Ford, White, Washington & Henfield, 2016) argue is a dramatic under identification and under representation of diverse students. Of all advanced students in the school, only 17%, a small fraction of the overall diverse student population, were identified as advanced students. If the lack of representation was not alarming enough, I learned that 21% of diverse students who were identified as gifted were served by a single honors course or fewer, with 8% not being enrolled in even a single advanced course. I could not understand why so many gifted diverse students were not enrolling in advanced programs. So I approached my research, attempting to understand the reasons why 21% of the gifted diverse students at my school were slowly leaving advanced programs or had already left the programs all together. In order to glean that perspective I realized I would have to go directly to the students at LowCountry because no research article would offer me a perspective that contained these particular students' raw emotions and reasons.

Student Focus Groups

I decided it would be best to engage with the students directly impacted. I organized a series of focus groups and student-to-teacher conversations in order to determine the needs and perceptions of our diverse advanced learners in regard to advanced programs. Each semester, teachers discuss with their classes the criteria for teacher recommendation of students into advanced classes. I asked Honors English and College Preparatory English teachers to suggest students who, during the class discussion had expressed opinions about the recommendation policy. I then invited those students to participate in the focus group session. Not all students who were suggested by their teachers chose to participate. The focus groups consisted of 80% diverse students. The participants were current advanced level students and students who had dropped out of the advanced programs and ranged from age 16 to 18. After obtaining consent but before beginning the focus groups, I informed students they were participating in a study that would potentially help ensure teachers understood their perspectives of advanced programs. The focus groups were student led, and leaders were identified by the group as individuals who could redirect the conversation if necessary. Before the conversation began, I informed students I would be in the room, making notes about what they were saying. I encouraged them to be open and honest about the issue and respond conversationally to the prompts provided by the student leaders. As students discussed the issues I wrote notes and verbatim statements from the conversations. Students responded to questions such as:

- Why do you think diverse students leave/do not enroll in honors programs as frequently as their white peers?
- Do you think your teachers in advanced programs have continually advocated for your best interests?
- Where have you experienced success in advanced classes and why was that success possible?

Because student responses to these questions were rapid and in a discussion setting, I decided to document the responses in my notes that most adequately targeted one of the specific questions asked within the given dialogue. At times the responses were short and concise, while other responses were developed and very specific. Students who wanted to discuss focus group topics further were asked to meet with me for a teacher-to-student conversation. In these conversations students expanded on the comments they made during focus groups

As soon as each focus group elected their leader, the students began to offer their perspectives. After the first question, the flood gates opened, and the groups were immersed in open and honest dialogue. After the focus groups concluded, I reviewed my notes, allowing categories to emerge that shed light on the various reasons why diverse students were failing to reenroll in advanced programs at LowCountry

High School. All names have been replaced with pseudonyms.

Findings

The focus group conversations were both alarming and enlightening:

Lenasia: I dropped because all my friends dropped, and I didn't have any friends in my honors classes.

Lamar: I dropped because I felt unwelcome in Mr. Blue's class. I could tell he didn't like me.

Angela: My teacher flat out told us if we don't do the homework we just were not honors material and need to drop.

John: I had a B+ last year but wasn't recommended for honors.

The groups revealed that diverse students failed to reenroll, desired to drop, and/or did drop out of advanced programs because of a perceived unwelcoming teacher and an unwelcoming atmosphere. Students also confirmed that a desire for friendship and peer pressure also resulted in diverse students not wanting to be a part of advanced programs.

Table 1.
Student Recommendation Process for Advanced Classes

Recommendation process before revision	Recommendation process after revision
English 2 Honors uses a point system for recommending to English 3 Honors and AP Language (AP typically for 11th graders only). For each category met the student receives 1 point. The categories are: All students must have one of the following two points for Honors Recommendation: -Student has a Semester 1 average of 93 or above. -Student has a Semester 1 average of 85 or above. Student can receive points for any or all of the following for Honors Recommendation: -Student is not missing any assignments. -Student has 2 or fewer late assignments. -Student demonstrates strong writing and grammar skills. -Student demonstrates strong academic engagement (participates, positive attitude, excellent work ethic) All students, regardless of how many points are earned, will be recommended for English 3 CP. Students must receive 4 or more points to be also recommended for English 3 Honors (one point must be from Grade Averages). Rising 11th graders must receive 6 points to be also recommended for AP language.	All students who are passing (ideally with a 70 or better) may move to the next honors or AP class if they choose to take on the challenge.

* All Honors and AP English courses adopted the recommendation process after revision to promote equity and uniformity in all courses.

The open and honest feedback of the students provided insight into the variety of concerns and obstacles that diverse students face when they are enrolled in, stop enrolling in, or decide to un-enroll in advanced programs. Students who stop enrolling in advanced classes simply decide not to enroll in to the next advanced level course for the year to come. Un-enrolling or dropping to a lower level course from an advanced course at LowCountry is much more complex. Un-enrollment is attached to an intervention process. When a student wishes to un-enroll they must first participate in a parent, teacher, student meeting that aims at identifying the reasons for un-enrollment. After determining the reason for leaving an advanced class mid-year, an administrator must approve the change. While there are various processes and interventions, LowCountry High still sees diverse learners leaving advanced classes and programs more frequently than their white peers.

Friendship and Peer Pressure

While students discussed issues such as classroom teacher attitudes, curriculum, and courses, many students also cited friendships and peer pressure as a reason for not enrolling in advanced programs. One of the categories that emerged in the student responses specifically spoke to friendship as a reason for leaving advanced programs:

> Shaundra: I dropped because my friends dropped. I didn't have any friends in the class. I felt unsupported, and nobody liked me in the class anyways.
>
> Juan: Yeah, I didn't have and friends in the class, so I dropped.

Students reiterated these sentiments again and again, offering new insight into the reasons why diverse students fail to enroll in and drop from advanced courses. Through the focus groups, students continued to expose friendship as a reason for dropping. Friends dropping a class was deemed an acceptable reason to drop, and simply having no friends in a class was also a reason for leaving advanced programs. Some students like Shaundra and Juan were thorough in their responses while students like Janice simply stated "no friends." As the discussions continued, the mounting pressure faced by diverse students became clear. Carlos was particularly vocal in his efforts to expose peer pressure as a reason for leaving advanced programs. Carlos and others stated, "It's also not cool to be in Honors." This statement by Carlos was answered with a choral "Amen!" by at least three other students.

Perceptions of Teachers

Perhaps the most enlightening revelation that was exposed during the focus group sessions was how students felt about classroom teachers. Arguably all teachers become teachers and stay in teaching because of a deep love of education and students. Unfortunately this deep love appeared to be missing from the perceptions of the students. The established high expectations, arguably so important according to Tomlinson & Jarvis (2012), were misunderstood by students. Students argued that teachers were unwelcoming, unkind, or uncaring as a result of their approach to rigor and expectations. In the focus groups students expanded their sentiments, arguing teachers over-assigned work, encouraged students to drop, and suggested other less-rigorous courses. Students continued to expose their honors teachers as one of the predominant reasons for leaving advanced programs. Andrew claimed: "Our teacher just keeps assigning us more and more work and never tells us how to do things so we just keep screwing everything up and then we get yelled at. I don't think she cares about us at all." Students who participated in the focus groups agreed that teachers over-assigning diagnostic assessments, over-assigning daily activities, and over-assigning homework created an unwelcoming atmosphere. As Amy explained, "In my first week in English I felt completely inadequate. I was evaluated by two essays (one on a novel I only had a week to read), a reading test, and a grammar test. I did okay on all of them (C's mostly); but I felt like I wasn't ready so I dropped the course.

These students continually exposed classroom environment and teacher expectations as an area of concern. Teachers openly told students to drop if they did not meet all diagnostic goals or did not possess a certain skill set. The students agreed that most honors teachers did not have their best interests in mind. While most students exposed their reasons for leaving advanced classes, a few responses addressed where students had experienced success. Fortunately the students did have positive experiences in some advanced classes, but they were isolated:

> Michael: I love my honors English teacher. She always tells us we are doing great and even if we are not doing great she is honest, but then tells us what we can do to improve.
>
> Gina: My honors teacher just keeps it real and offers us his support all the time. At the beginning of the year he said we could all do well because we would not be here if we couldn't.

Interestingly, the focus groups data shed light on two reasons for diverse students leaving the programs and few instances where students expressed positive experiences. Students were encouraged to remain in the difficult and rigorous programs by only a few teachers, and whether students had these teachers or not was absolutely uncontrollable. I began to think about how the positive attitudes of these teachers could inform the attitudes of others in an effort to help increase our diverse student retention and enrollment.

Friendship pressure and perceived negative teacher attitudes in the classroom became the ugly truth that was revealed during the focus group sessions. As I evaluated the data I thought, "Surely these perceptions are incorrect." I also could not help but question my school and peers; "how can my peers who teach advanced courses be so callous and uncaring?" This led me to the realization that teachers of advanced programs at LowCountry often come across as too extreme, and students believe advanced program teachers do not care about or consider their perspectives. I began to realize if we want to increase diverse student retention and enrollment we need to work to change this student perception. It also became clear that what students experience and hear in the classroom is not always what we as teachers are attempting to convey.

The student-to-teacher conversations yielded similar results as the focus groups. Students who wanted to discuss focus group topics further were asked to meet with me for a conversation. In these conversations students expanded on the comments they made during focus groups. During the student-to-teacher conversation the students had choice in what they wanted to discuss. While no new categories emerged from these conversations, the established concerns of the students were reiterated by the points they made in the focus group conversations. Because students had choice and were unprompted in the student to teacher conversations it became increasingly clear the diverse students' perspectives of advanced programs were generally negative in nature. Students overwhelmingly articulated a sentiment similar to that found in the larger focus groups: the feeling of failure at the beginning of the year which, they felt, was a product of the rigorous diagnostic testing of their advanced courses.

Implications for Instruction

After analyzing these students' responses to the focus group questions, I began to think of myself and my peers through the students' perspective and began to understand why the student perceptions were often negative. I am one of the teachers described by the students in the focus groups and this study opened my eyes to their perceptions of me, my classroom, and my peer teachers. While we wanted nothing more than to challenge diverse students to succeed, the students perceived the actions of advanced program teachers differently from what we attempted to convey. It was clear that students were influenced by friendships, peer pressure, and the words and actions of their teachers.

In recent years teachers have worked diligently on the frontline of education advocating for the needs of diverse students populations. Teachers have advocated for equal expectations of all students (Ford & Whiting 2008; Tomlinson & Jarvis 2012), advocated for diverse student retention in schools and in advanced programs (Bernal 2002), and advocated for equity in assessments used to identify gifted learners (Ford, White, Washington, & Henfield 2016). Despite each of these advances in knowledge, students at LowCountry continued to perceive advanced courses and programs negatively. Advocacy has helped to increase diverse student retention in high schools, but not adequately addressed the specific needs and perspectives of diverse students in advanced programs.

Showing Students We Care

Although LowCountry had implemented practices supported by research, teachers at LowCountry were missing the full picture. We never attempted to address how students perceived us because we never had the data to show how truly impactful our actions were. We understood our students through research and practice but not through their perspectives. Teachers' words and actions caused diverse students to perceive us as uncaring and unkind.

Since conducting this study, LowCountry implemented a schedule change that has impacted all students and teachers. The LowCountry administration implemented a common lunch time in order to provide a time when students could take responsibility for their own improvement by meeting with teachers for academic support. This has encouraged advanced level teachers to adjust their approaches to students who are struggling, and they now offer instructional support during the school day, rather than encouraging them to just drop from advanced programs. As a result of the common lunchtime policy, I now have about 20 students in my classroom during the lunch period. Students receive help from their teachers, and develop bonds with other advanced level students as a result of the common lunch period.

Changing Policies

Armed with the data collected for this study, I approached my fellow advanced level English teachers by engaging in strategic conversations about diverse students in the advanced programs. Several of these teachers met and reviewed the data on student recommendation for advanced classes. Then we collaboratively revised the recommendation policy to be less punitive and more supportive of students (see table 1). During this process, the teachers at LowCountry learned they can adjust their own attitudes, dispositions, and methods of interacting with students. As focal group students determined, more honors teachers should be supportive, welcoming, and reframe their comments so their interactions can be viewed as helpful and positive. Our new policy focuses on student effort, rather than student perfection. Teachers at LowCountry continue to establish high expectations but are moving away from the extreme first week rigor that discouraged students like Amy.

Friendships in the Classroom

LowCountry teachers found they can also do much to combat friendship pressure and peer pressure's influence on student retention and enrollment. Teachers are now seeking to establish community within the classroom to help students feel welcome. The classroom itself has become our primary method of encouraging friendship and combating peer pressures. This is accomplished through three changes: reducing stressful assignments and testing during the first week of class, inviting students into the classroom during the lunch period, and using grouping strategies. During the first week of class, we now build classroom community through group work and student engagement activities rather than requiring students to prove their abilities through diagnostic testing. The common lunch time affords students a chance to make friends with other advanced level students and to help one another with class assignments. Teachers now implement much more group work, especially at the beginning of the year, allowing students to form friendship bonds with other advanced level students. Diverse student perspectives have helped us adjust everything from instructional methods to recommendation processes and teacher dispositions, all in an effort to help every student succeed, regardless of race, culture, ethnicity, and social background.

Student engagement with advanced level coursework, particularly diverse student engagement, is a concern in educational institutions across the nation. While the specific needs and sentiments of diverse learners at LowCountry High School may not mirror the needs and sentiment of learners in other states, it is important to realize that student perspectives can shed new light on common issues. Teachers of advanced courses and teachers in general have a responsibility to engage students and foster growth, rebuilding advanced programs to meet the needs of diverse students. In order to achieve that goal students must feel connected to the course and teacher. This connection can be made possible by diligently working to alter our dispositions and approaches to students as teachers through understanding the perspectives of our students. Through understanding student perspectives teachers truly are able to target the needs of all learners, ensuring that every student will succeed.

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Building Word Choice Skills with a Virtual Word Wall

Alicia Kelley

Word choice is one of the writing traits that gives a text its personality. The perfect word can spur a reader to laughter or to tears. Akdal and Sahin (2014) assert that “feelings and thoughts should be communicated in an original way via writing” (p. 172). Part of this originality is letting the author’s “authenticity and imagination” shine through the specific words she or he chooses (Akdal & Sahin, 2014, p. 173). Since word choice assists the reader in connecting with a text, writers need to be purposeful and creative in crafting each word they write. This skill of choosing just the right word does not come naturally to the average student; writing teachers should explicitly teach students how to identify poor word choice and how to select a more fitting word for the context.

Just Read More?

A common answer to improving word choice skill is to grow students’ vocabularies by having them read more texts (Sloan, 1996). Indeed, teachers always want students to read more, but simply encouraging or even assigning more reading as a way to increase vocabulary can be fruitless. One issue with this solution is the structure of the modern ELA classroom does not allow for much independent reading during the school day. Thus this extra reading would have to be completed at home. Cuevas, Irving, and Russell (2014) point out that “the tumultuous home lives of many students, particularly the poorest readers from disadvantaged socioeconomic backgrounds, do not create an environment that is conducive to highly focused reading practice” (p. 129). While having students complete a large amount of reading outside of class would be an effective method of building students’ vocabularies, the structure of the school environment does not allow teachers to rely primarily on this strategy.

In addition, explicitly teaching new vocabulary from texts is not enough to see growth in word choice in just one school year. Vocabulary instruction and vocabulary building activities are highly beneficial to literacy skills (Dobbs & Kearns, 2016), but vocabulary breadth is not synonymous with depth. Scholars acknowledge that the sheer number of words a student knows does not predict how well he or she can use those words (Christ, 2011). Newly learned words may not be used until long after they are learned since these words must be seen and understood multiple times in a wide variety of contexts (Hadley, Dickinson, Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, & Nesbitt, 2016). Just because my student “learns” fifty new words during the school year and regurgitates them on command does not mean I will see even one of those words show up in student writing.

Looking Within Instead of Looking Out

One side effect of relying on having students read more to build their vocabulary is that this technique may imply that students do not have a useful and well-developed vocabulary within themselves. While my students may come to me with a smaller list of texts they have read than I would like, they nonetheless join the class with life experiences and relationships that vary widely. Moll, Amanti, Neff, and Gonzalez (1992) theorize that students, even those from traditionally disadvantaged positions such as being from low socioeconomic backgrounds or having recently immigrated to the U.S., are “funds of knowledge” (p. 133). These “funds,” full of experiences and conversations, provide a rich source of words that students already know how to use.

It makes sense then that a teacher’s first line of defense when seeking to build students’ vocabulary use would be to activate the words already in the students’ own minds. Students’ spoken and written vocabularies may differ, meaning they could have many words stored in their brains that they understand but do not use in writing. One reason for this difference may be that “students have not been taught to value their own words . . . but instead [have been] taught to believe that all the words in dictionaries and thesauruses are the ones that really matter” (Lane, 1993, p. 188). When I began looking at my students as fountains of interesting words instead of wells I needed to fill up with new words, I saw a tremendous possibility for developing a classroom word choice resource.

Word Walls as Community Builders

I then developed two goals for the resource I was looking to create; this strategy would need to help students activate the vocabulary they already know but may not use in their writing and it would need to capitalize on the classroom as a community. Fellow ELA teacher Marsha Arons (2016) discovered that she better facilitated classroom community and student responsibility when she backed off from interceding in every student interaction. Following her lead, I reimagined the traditional word wall strategy as a student-led resource; instead of my adding words from outside sources that I wanted students to know, the students themselves would build this wall using the vivid words they already know. Fisher, Frey, and Hite (2016) recognize vocabulary lists and word banks as key collaborative learning strategies to grow literacy skills in the classroom. Harmon, Wood, Hedrick, Vintinner, and Willeford (2009) assert that word walls are useful for extending students' use of words in a variety of settings. Harmon et al. (2009) also discovered that middle school students already know how to use word walls and already understand the purpose of this tool. It was my hope that by transforming a traditional strategy to meet students' needs, students would feel comfortable with how a word wall typically works and more readily take part in the strategy.

In joining a class word wall, students are activating their own mental resources and sharing their favorite words. By empowering students to take control of this resource, I wanted to teach students that what they know and what they are learning is useful not only to themselves but to others. There they can learn from each other as they fiddle with words "like toys, assembling and re-assembling them in different ways to create different effects" (Lane, 1993, p. 181).

A collaborative word wall imitates real life practices. The National Research Council (2000) indicates that there is a vast chasm between the tasks that dominate school settings and the tasks that dominate everyday life. For example, the future everyday career setting for our students will most likely be characterized by using a variety of tools and by working collaboratively. A class-built word wall moves students toward real life skills by providing a writing resource or "tool" that was built by their community.

A Virtual Advantage

While a physical word wall in a classroom has the potential to create a useful space for word sharing and collaborating, I also wanted to bring this learning tool into the virtual environment. A virtual word wall has some possible strengths. An online wall removes the fear of being embarrassed for many students. Block (2014) found that even students who would not typically participate in class interactions felt comfortable enough to join in online. This less threatening environment invites traditionally marginalized students such as English language learners to both share and borrow words with confidence.

Implementing a Virtual Word Wall

This strategy addresses the following South Carolina College and Career Ready Standards for English I:

Standard 2.1j. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to manage the complexity of the topic

Standard 3.1f Use precise words and phrases, telling details, and sensory language to convey a vivid picture of the experiences, events, setting, and/or characters

1. Create your virtual space
    a. In advance, set up your virtual word wall space. If your class already uses a blog, Google site, or additional learning management tool, then start there. If not, some great spaces are available for free to begin designing a classroom website or blog. Check out web2.0 for some ideas. Even something as simple as Padlet may provide a good starting point for your class.
    b. Decide how you will set up the wall-consider organizing it by "nouns," "verbs," and "adjectives." This organization will reinforce grammatical concepts as well. Decide if you want students to include a definition for the word or just an example sentence or two.
2. Introduce students to the power of their

own words.

   a. Begin a discussion with students on the power of their words.
   b. Invite students to see how many words they actually know. One way to do this could be to have students write down five words that describe a favorite person in their lives. Then have them write synonyms for each of the five words. Do this activity again for a third round. See how many students were able to think of synonyms for several of the words they had originally written. Explain that we often have many words in our heads that are not the first words we think of that may still be great words to use in our writing.
   c. Engage students in a discussion of what a word wall is. Show example pictures from other classrooms if necessary.
   d. Ask students what they perceive would be the purpose for using this type of strategy.
   e. Pair them up and have them brainstorm other possible uses for the ELA classroom and other subject areas as well.
   f. Explain that in your classroom, students will use a virtual word wall to create a community of words that they can use as they write. This resource could become a place to get inspiration for writing or revision if they are "stuck" and need a new word.

3. Set up community guidelines as a class for frequency and types of posts that are expected.
   a. Decide on the community guidelines for your class's word wall together. Guidelines may address such areas as how often students are expected to post new words, what types of words are acceptable/unacceptable to post, and when/where students will report when they used a word in their writing from the wall if they wish to do so.
4. Model, model, model!
   a. When first establishing your word wall space and throughout the year, model both how to add words to the word wall and how to use words you find there in your writing.
   b. Use think-aloud to demonstrate the mental process you go through to decide when a word is a good fit for the wall and how you decide what example sentence to include.
   c. Revisit the wall during writing workshops and pull from it when writing as a class.
5. Monitor your wall
   a. Check in regularly to ensure the wall is being updated and is being used correctly following the guidelines. Consider appointing 2 or 3 monitors from among your students as well to help you.

Results

I implemented my virtual word wall with my English I students during the 2016-17 school year. Since our school's learning management system already contains a "message board" system, that location seemed most logical for rolling out the word wall. Students were already familiar with the boards and understood how to navigate between pages. The message board system was also easily managed from the teacher interface.

I spent a portion of a class period rolling out the new word wall system and working with my students to create policies for using the wall. Some of the categories I started were for adjectives, replacement words for "very," and vivid verbs. Other categories were added throughout the year as needed. I saw some expected results and was surprised by others. Several students posted to the board every month; many others "lurked," not posting themselves but frequently looking for replacement words to use. The most frequently searched words were replacements for "bad," "good," and "big." I was thrilled to see students recognizing these weak word choices in their writing and accessing the word wall for help.

One result I did not expect was the investment that some students developed in their word choice. These individuals specifically requested that I add sections to the word wall for other words they had seen in their writing and thought were a bit tired and in need of replacement. One of these suggestions, replacement words for "bad," was one of the most frequently searched sections. Another aspect of the word wall that I found interesting was how equalizing the resource was. Since the wall could be accessed by all of my students, Honors students were sharing words with and learning words from students in the college prep level courses. I sadly had never before purposefully allowed these multiple levels to interact, but I enjoyed watching this larger community grow without direct intervention on my part. The virtual word wall brought word choice into the conversation on writing skill for my students and provided a platform from which these many voices could "stand and speak with dignity" (Giroux as quoted in McCaleb, 1994, p. 142).

Poet William Stafford once mused, "I'm not alone when I'm writing- the language itself, like a kind of trampoline, is there helping me" (as quoted in Rousseau, 2015, p. 274). The words out of our students' minds will indeed be the trampoline setting up their writing for success. As a child I loved jumping on trampolines. The thrill of soaring into the air, gaining a new perspective for a moment, and coming back down again in a rush was exhilarating. If I could rope a friend into joining me, the jumping was always better. With a jumping partner nearby ready to offset my landing, together we would both be flying twice as high in no time. With a virtual word wall, our class community of peer writers helped individuals' writing and word choice soar higher by working together.

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Teaching Students the Art of Revision: Zooming In and Layering with Sentence Branching

Mary-Celeste Schreuder

Until I began researching revision strategies, I never realized the importance of teaching revision in the classroom. Writing depends upon a three-step process: prewriting, writing, and revision. The first two steps, prewriting and writing, are often highly emphasized through explicit classroom instruction, but revision is rarely a focus. Undoubtedly, it is "the writing skill least researched, least examined, least understood, and . . . least taught" (Newkirk & Miller, 2009, p. 123). This has led to a generation of students who do not take the time necessary to revisit their writing in a deep and meaningful way (Witte, 2013). Students mistakenly view revision as the surface process of editing a piece of writing for grammar and punctuation errors. Yet according to Witte (2013), "revision is defined as a sequence of changes in a composition, in which ideas, words, and phrases are added, deleted, moved, or changed throughout the writing of the work" (p. 34). It is clear that revision and editing are not the same skill, but most students do not understand the difference because teaching instruction and assessment do not concentrate on revision (Witte, 2013). In a study conducted by Flanigan and Menendez (1980), students struggled with revision because "[They] lack knowledge of what to look for or a lexicon to describe what they have found" (p. 259). As teachers, we cannot expect students to practice a skill they have not been taught; they need our guidance to revise effectively.

Implementation Strategy

Zooming in and layering with sentence branching are two excellent revision techniques that can be taught separately as mini-lessons or can be used in tandem. Both strategies are beneficial for the revision of narrative and creative pieces of writing but can be adapted for persuasive and expository writing as well. South Carolina writing standard 3 is addressed through these techniques which includes the development and strengthening of revising, editing, and rewriting a narrative. It is also important to note that grammar is addressed within the writing context through these two revision strategies which addresses South Carolina language standard 4.

The strategy of zooming in is a productive way for students to learn to look closely at their word choice during revision. Focusing on individual words fits into Murray's (2009) third stage of in-depth revision: language. As stated by Murray, zooming in on language naturally leads to an improved voice, which he describes as "an extremely significant form of internal revision" (Newkirk & Miller, 2009, p. 134). By zooming in on words, students begin to understand that revision necessitates a keen eye for detail and requires more than a cursory scan for mechanical errors.

The strategy of layering with sentence branching teaches students a helpful way to revise simple sentences while also adding detail, all of which leads to a stronger writer's voice. Gallagher (2006) asserts that sentence branching "gives an instant visual" (p. 65) of the types of sentences students are using in their writing and aids students in "creating more sophisticated sentences" (p. 65) on their own. It also requires students to use unique grammar such as appositives and absolutes which adds to the overall complexity of sentence structure.

Zooming In

To begin the strategy of zooming in, I start the lesson by putting a paragraph from Noden's (1999) *Image Grammar* on the white board. Students are also directed to their own copy which they will highlight and mark on Google Classroom. The paragraph from *Image Grammar* is purposefully short and contains weak and nondescript words (See Fig. 1).

I read the paragraph out loud to the class and ask the students to spend a minute underlining the boring and bland nouns within

> *Down the road late at night, the blind man went. He made noise with his stick. He wore something shading his eyes and was bent over. He said he lost his eyes helping England and King George.*
>
> *Taken from Noden, H. Image Grammar, 1999.*

Figure 1.
Example Zooming In Paragraph

the paragraph. At this point, the students may need one or two examples to get them thinking independently, so it is important to always ask for an example before leaving the students to work by themselves. After the students complete this task, I ask them to converse and compare their answers in partner groups. When the students finish sharing, I ask for the list of nouns that they underlined in the paragraph. Typical answers are: road, night, man, noise, stick, and something. After the list is exhausted and all answers are underlined on the board, I require the students to work again with their partners to find more precise and vivid words to replace the boring underlined nouns. I highly encourage the students to use the thesaurus when they feel stuck. After roughly ten minutes, answers are shared with the class. The students decide on the best nouns given and add them to their Google Doc. If the students have practiced zooming in effectively, I ask them to look over one of their own pieces of writing and highlight boring nouns which they will later change for more precise words. The revision strategy of zooming in is also especially effective for editing out ordinary verbs but can be used for any part of speech that a teacher may want to emphasize to students during the revision process.

Layering with Sentence Branching

In *Image Grammar,* Noden (1999) describes the revision strategy of layering as painting with words. Each revision is like a brush stroke that adds depth and dimension to a piece of art. By combining the method of layering with the tactic of sentence branching, students learn the skills of revision that lead to greater sentence variety and sophistication.

To begin the lesson, I start by putting a paragraph composed of simple sentences on the board (See Fig. 2). I read the paragraph and ask the students what they notice; most students are quick to mention the repetitive nature of the sentences. At this point, I give the students a handout on sentence branching and layering with participles, absolutes, appositives, and out of order adjectives (See Fig.3). Students often need to be reminded of these types of phrases, and providing several examples is helpful for retrieving students' past grammar knowledge.

> *I drove the car to the beach. It was a sunny day. The waves were breaking on the sand. I went to a calm spot and put down my towel. The clouds and wind helped to keep the temperature cool. I pulled sunglasses from my bag. I was happy to be away from work.*

Figure 2.
Example Simple Sentence Paragraph

> **Sentence Branching Handout**
> There are three places a sentence can be branched: beginning, middle, and end:
>
> *_______________, I drove the car to the beach.*
> *I drove the car, ________________, to the beach.*
> *I drove the car to the beach, _________________.*
>
> - Participles: an -ing verb placed at the beginning or end of a sentence.
>   *Feeling the weight of work lift off my shoulders, I drove the car to the beach.*
> - Absolutes: combining a noun with an -ing participle.
>   *I drove the car to the beach, radio blasting.*
> - Appositives: a noun that adds a second image to a preceding noun.
>   *The drove the car, a piece of junk, to the beach.*
> - Out of Order Adjectives: shift the adjective(s) and place them after a noun.
>   *I drove the car, rusty and dented, to the beach.*
>
> *Taken from*
> *Gallagher, K. Teaching Adolescent Writers, 2006.*

Figure 3.
Sentence Branching Handout

Rubric for Zooming In and Layering with Sentence Branching

Zoom on 5 nouns	**___________/5 pts**
Zoom on 5 verbs	**___________/5 pts**
Layer/Sentence Branch with 2 participles	**___________/4 pts**
Layer/Sentence Branch with 2 absolutes	**___________/4 pts**
Layer/Sentence Branch with 2 appositives	**___________/4 pts**
Layer/Sentence Branch with 2 out of order adjectives	**___________/4 pts**
Total Pts	**___________/26 pts**

Taken from Gallagher, K. Teaching Adolescent Writers, 2006.

Figure 4.
Strategy Rubric

I ask the students to choose one simple sentence from the paragraph, and I model layering with the different phrases while branching from the three different areas of the sentence. This step is repeated until I feel students are ready to try the strategy independently. Using structured practice, I choose a sentence from the paragraph and ask students to use a specific type of layering and a specific type of branch (i.e. For the second sentence in the paragraph, please write a participle branching from the front). Students are given roughly one minute to compose their sentence and then are asked to share with the class. This step is repeated until the students are able to prove their proficiency with the strategy. The students are then asked to skim a piece of their own writing for simple sentences and highlight the sentences they will revise using the layering with sentence branching technique.

Guidelines

I have noticed in past writing assignments that students make minimal revisions to a piece of writing unless they are given structured guidelines. Therefore, a rubric of revision expectations (see Fig. 4) is given to students as a guideline for their final draft.

Final Thoughts

Research shows that the way teachers revise their own writing is not the way they teach revision in the classroom (Witte, 2013). Thus, students will never be proficient with revision unless educators pointedly teach tested strategies in the classroom. Intensive revision techniques, such as zooming in and layering with sentence branching, have the potential to revolutionize the way students understand revision and the methods they employ to revise their own writing. While revision is still a relatively under-researched topic, educators can begin to make strides in the classroom by adding these strategies to their students' revision toolbox.

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Mary Schreuder *holds a Masters in Education and has spent the past twelve years teaching high school English in Nashville, TN; Oxford, England; and Anderson, SC. She is currently a doctoral student at Clemson University in the Literacy, Language, and Culture program. Her poems have appeared in the National Gallery of Writing, Unbound Magazine, and The Broad River Review.*

Sofia's Story

Mary-Celeste Schreuder
For my student

Write that I was born in Russia
to a family that abandoned me.
Say the orphanage was my first home.
No, there wasn't enough food.
No, there wasn't enough heat.
No, there wasn't enough love.

But write that at age five,
I was saved,
adopted to America.
My sisters and I bundled up
into a world of light and warmth.

Tell them I learned slowly,
my English halting and harsh,
my mind a sieve,
my heart a broken music box.

Tell them I learned with my body,
rushing the soccer pitch,
throwing balls with dad.
Tell them I was good, maybe
even great at only this.

When you write my story
leave nothing out:
my baggy t-shirts,
my makeup-less face,
my boy-cut jeans and hair,
even my ball cap.

Tell that this was me...
a young man in a girl's body.
Say that I wanted to fight
when taunts came my way.
Say that I wanted to cry
when teachers withheld compassion.
Say that I wanted to laugh
when I held a girl's hand.
Say that I wanted to die
when I wasn't like everyone else.

No, this is not my whole story,
an unfinished work of art.
Say that someday I will be home
in a body I cannot understand.

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Survival

Stephanie Harbulak

The reality of my dying pumpkin plants
overshadowed my daydream of being a farmer.

My hope for
acre after acre
of vibrant life.

Instead,
my 4 x 8 patch
of urban farmland
wilting,
drooping.

Not my fault, yet no one else's.

One by one, I yank the stalks, unbury the roots.
I slice once green, firm flesh.
Remove the wormy invaders.

They wriggle and writhe
until I smash them.
Decimated like the crops.
Destroyed like my harvest dreams.

Even though the sun burns my skin
and the sweat drips off my nose,
the extermination continues
until each
o
n
e
of them
has spilled their guts – literally.

As the land is emptied,
one spot of hope, hidden and doomed until
now.
A tiny seedling, unharmed.
Maybe this time.

Stephanie Harbulak *teaches for Greenville County schools. This is her 13th year in education. She has an MFA in writing popular fiction and lives with her husband, five dogs, and two cats.*

Cleaning Windows

Mary-Celeste Schreuder

I am the man
behind the glass.
My hair long past
my shoulders,
limp rags hanging
off my jeans,
invisible to the larger world.

On the street,
a symphony of people
rush past,
living within their minds.
While I, shrouded by the
glare of glass,
peer outward.

Every day the immense
windows bear the
smudges and smears
of restaurant patrons:
whole handprints,
fist splots,
children's fingertips,
a staccato across the pane.

If I were a musician,
I would play the tune
of these marks,
an orchestra of
desire, love, heartache,
and laughter.

Then maybe someone
would notice the
harmony of beauty
in every moment,
taking even one second
to stop and listen.

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sums and differences

Stephanie Harbulak

Twenty-nine.
That's just my go-to answer.
It's what I feel in my head.

Truth is
twenty-nine
plus five.
plus three.

No one tells you that
you can get lost.
No compass.
No map.
Daily routine
numbing the passage the time.
Years slipping by unnoticed.

Twenty-nine
plus five
plus three
plus sixteen.

A stopping point,
his expiration.
The sum of all his years.

Fifty-three
minus thirty-seven.
His age when he made the grandfather clock
that stands in the corner of my living room
audibly marking the passage of every hour.

A chime for an hour gone.
The sum of all my time
minus one hour.

Stephanie Harbulak *teaches for Greenville County schools. This is her 13th year in education. She has an MFA in writing popular fiction and lives with her husband, five dogs, and two cats.*

Remembrance Day

Angela M. Byrd

When my grandfather forgot my
grandmother
She never stopped remembering
him.

When he forgot he had a bride,
She kept her vows for better or
for worse.

Love does that.

Love remembers even when ...

The man, who always wanted
to hold her,
Morphed into the man
who wanted to be far away
from her

And she remembered whom he
was beneath the surface
of unraveling memories.

Like Penelope
She wove the fraying threads
of logic
Over and over again
Into a beautiful tapestry
Of tear-stained prayers
To stay her through the storm
To keep the missing at bay

She was determined to love
my grandfather
in the same way
he would love her
if his mind were intact and the
tables were reversed.

I learned so much she didn't
know she was teaching me.

I learned what it means to love
someone through anything,
even when
they can't love you back.

I learned how you remember
enough for the two of you
to hold things together,
even when only one of you
is in your right mind and
doing most of the work.

I learned how to see what true
love is, made plainly visible in
one million concrete ways
how love looks past what things
look like on the surface
to what can only be known
heart to heart.

I learned God alone
creates love that will last
beyond its dying breath.

One day, so deep in that
dreadful disease that he
was primarily silent and
rarely moved the slightest...

One day after so many days
when his voice had been grating
instead of grateful...

One day after the same hands
that had only ever before this
disease
reached for my grandmother
tenderly—
stopped striving to lash out at
her...

One day after many days
where his eyes had searched
my grandmother's face
in anger or confusion,
with the perpetual looks of either,
"Who are you?" Or
"Stay away!"

For one fraction of one
glorious day
God's love and grace
exponentially surrounded us.
He remembered her
At a time all of his memories
Of her
whom she truly was to him
Should have faded forever away

The hands reached out in
gentleness

The eyes brimmed full with
affection.

The lips parted to ask for a kiss
and
to tell her,
 "You're my
wife...I love you."

There is power in being
remembered well and
being loved completely for it.

even when love came and left

Before it flew back home to stay.

Angela M. Byrd
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