



Teaching Writing through Films: A Visual Exploration of Identities

Curriculum Unit 22.01.07, published September 2022

by Brad Pearce

Introduction

Serving a majority minority low-income student population presents teachers with many challenges, especially following a year of virtual learning and a difficult year back in school. At our school, George Wythe High School in Richmond, Virginia, the first challenges are motivating students to engage in difficult tasks and to find meaning in them, or even to motivate students to attend school frequently. Our school is about 50% African American and 50% Hispanic with an increasing EL population: students who can speak very little English alongside groups who are increasingly comfortable with English. Especially among the ELs, but with everyone, there is often resistance to taking on challenging reading and writing tasks.

So, how do we make reading and writing, if not pure fun, then as interesting and as relevant to the lives of our students as possible? A learning style inventory at the beginning of last year revealed that a vast majority of our students were visual learners. This unit proposes teaching cinema as a way to frame interesting writing challenges that will build from narrative to analysis. After small writing assignments, we will conclude with students scripting and making their own documentary or fictional film to be shared with the class. Alternatively, students may revise all of their writing into a cohesive whole, in the form of a personal statement for instance. (Our English 10 ends the year with students drafting personal statements for college applications.) We'll get to the content of students' own creative responses and final project by watching documentaries, foreign films, shorter films, and animated shorts, and also reading flash fiction, poetry, and nonfiction. This unit aims to appeal to the imaginative potential of both aspiring college students and of students with vocational careers in mind, the latter of whom often don't see the point of reading and writing at all, but may with the primer of a way to articulate their ideas about themselves and the world. For the college bound student, the unit presents a unique opportunity to diversify the kinds of writing they do in high school to prepare them for the diversity of writing tasks 4 year or community colleges will ask them to do. Although the unit does not ask students to complete a research paper, we will practice developing an annotated bibliography and introduce students to as many writing tools as possible. The development of written responses is simple: we watch a film, complete an activity and discuss, then write in response to the film in a given mode.

Rationale

Teachers have had success having students write their own screenplays. In the article, “Everybody Wants Somebody to Hear Their Story: High School Students Writing Screenplays,” the two authors had students read screenplays, focusing on writer’s tools like imagery and point of view. To reach the core of their story, the students answered questions like “What is the scariest/weirdest thing that has ever happened to you?” and completed fill in the blanks: “It is the story of _____=character, who goes through _____=conflict.” They then storyboarded their ideas. Their teachers had them think critically about images and non-print media. Given cues for collaboration as well as their own think time, students produced their best ideas. Their personal connection to their stories was important; students often drew from their own experiences; daydreaming led to research. One student commented “If you can see it, you can write it.” According to Peter H Johnston: “People narrate their lives, identifying themselves and their circumstances, acting and explaining events in ways they see as consistent with the person they take themselves to be.” And so, although we will be watching and discussing films from around the world, the final creative project of each student should be close to something in the realm of their own lives. The class covered by the article had judges select the screenplays worthy to be produced.¹ Our local university’s film department may have a professor available to help teach students how to film their stories.

To develop ideas for a screenplay, flash fiction will help students build small ideas from mentor texts. Katherine E. Batchelor and April King taught a unit on reading and writing flash fiction which they describe in “Freshmen and Five Hundred Words: Investigating Flash Fiction as a Genre for High School Writing.” They recall having success in giving students the opportunity to think about issues beyond the text that will later be brought into their own texts. They also used flash fiction to teach inference. Inference is an important skill that can be connected to analysis. The teachers used music that told stories and reminded students that plots are well structured events. At-risk students being taught this 10-day unit enjoyed breaking the rules of the genre. They relied heavily on mentor texts, whereas college prep students enjoyed learning ambiguity. Reading like writers, and writing like flash fiction readers was emphasized. The unit was also connected to research the students were obliged to undertake so they had some facts from which to build their stories. Yet, it is not information that gives ‘flash fiction’ its reputation. Sensual aspects dominate. With the students in this class, an image often led to a story.²

Teaching films has been successful in majority minority schools in the past. In “The Social Uses of Classroom Cinema,” the author examines the teaching of film at a high school in East Harlem from 1936 to 1955. Students demonstrated facility in discussion after viewing films and insight into the problems in the films shown, even challenging the choices made by directors. Youth was conceived as a functional whole rather than according to theories that isolated their various identities. “How can we help [adolescents] to relate [their] personal problems to broad social developments and the culture in which they live?” was a question the instructors asked. Films were selected for their emotional power and complexity to encourage open ended discussion and reflection. Students led discussions. Problems were seen in their complexity, and pat solutions were dismissed. Real world contexts and motives were apparent to the students. In at least one English class, students wrote essays about housing after watching a fictional film. Students reported feeling like “experts” on weighty subjects like racial prejudice and violence, class bias, and intergroup inclusiveness. The author concludes by pointing out that though youth are often absent from official history...

Their stories are indeed there to be found, and they are worth telling because they provide insight on youth both as significant social groups (laborers, consumers, etc.) and as active participants in the emergence of new structures of power that concern them...Franklin teenagers brought their local understandings of social problems of unemployment, delinquency, substandard housing, ethnic intolerance, and racism to HR film discussion. This expanded their agency as students—their ability to have a voice on the most pressing issues of their culture and times—and expanded the role of film, a powerful tool for helping students explore the social and cultural roots of human behavior.³

The students featured in this article were able to recognize their own culture and the dominant one.⁴

Schools and students can learn about themselves and societal problems from film, but can creativity be taught? In “Teaching Creativity: A Practical Guide for Training Filmmakers, Screenwriters, and Cinema Studies Students,” the author asks that question, although his subjects are college-aged students. The author helps us narrow down the elements of creativity:

Besides native intelligence, attributes such as (1) “fluency,” defined as “an unusual and spontaneous flow of images,” (2) “receptivity” and “insight,” which are akin to what William James called “sagacity,” and (3) the motivational ingredient, “zeal,” the passion and enthusiasm that keep the artist up all night to solve artistic problems.⁵

We’re getting closer to a notion of an individual artist’s identity and culture when the author states that artists succeed “by creating a personal idiom or aesthetic, an “individual code that deviates from the conventional rules” but that has some relation to the human condition and all its fixed formulas, codes, and clichés.” This article is worth revisiting as it asks “what are the extant pedagogical barriers that prevent the emergence of latent talent?” noting that it may have to do with the combination of ideas, which students will be asked to practice recursively in their writing for this unit.⁶

Lastly, good vibes will direct student interest. Perhaps as much weight should be given to the feeling involved in the films, as to a film’s logic and thought. In “FEELING CINEMA: Affect in Film/Composition Pedagogy,” Colleen Jankovic begins by discussing a Hal Hartley film and states: “Does *Surviving Desire* mean to suggest that learning destroys pleasure? Or perhaps that pleasure, when it too closely touches scholarly inquiry, becomes complicated, diluted, and unmeaningful?” She continues:

All we can say for certain is that the emotion felt by the spectator will emerge from the totality of formal relationships she or he perceives in the work. This is one reason why we should try to notice as many formal relations as possible in a film; the richer our perception, the deeper and more complex our response may become.⁷

Jankovic also juxtaposes “analysis” to passive spectatorship, suggesting both are needed to appreciate film. She emphasizes the movement of film, comparing it to the movement of emotion. Her thinking may be important to this unit in that she asks questions about film and learning, such as: “Teaching cinema challenges us to consider with our students: can we be critics and spectators at the same time?” and “How

might student affect (particularly when drawn from and explored through personal experience) be seen as a productive and even productively disruptive motor of critical thinking about film?" This article also asks us to consider structuring the process of viewing films:

As a result, the primary challenge for students became writing, reading, thinking, and viewing analytically and emotively.... Asking students to keep a log of their personal responses, such as laughter, confusion, and boredom, to a film viewed in class is one way to incorporate and draw attention to their viewing experience that can lead to more in-depth discussion of particular moments of the film that can then be formally analyzed.⁸

Jankovic sees in film, "An opportunity to interrogate affective response and to show the relationship between seemingly private opinions and broader cultural positioning."⁹ She uses descriptive writing assignments and otherwise delays analysis to teach film. She is interested in films showing, and students making, value judgments.

Jankovic believes that the understanding of affect in student responses to film is important to delaying their judgements, and she suggests having students complete descriptive writing responses.¹⁰ I take up her suggestion for this unit as an opportunity for students to discover themselves and their cultures, to begin to talk about social problems, and to connect their home identities to expressive and academic identities.

Content Objectives

The ultimate objective within the course is for students to create a fictional or nonfiction film of their own, or a summative revision of their journals. To get there, students will write narrative, analysis, persuasion, exposition, and description in responses to films and parts of films. Students will deepen their reading skills, by practicing theme analysis, first with a flash fiction piece, then with a film, students will be encouraged to create a film around the themes of identity, culture, class, and social justice similar to the films we are watching. "Challenge for Change," a Canadian project in 1967, trained and equipped members of Navajo and Mohawk tribes to create films that "promote citizen participation in the solution of social problems.". In his book, *Documentary*, Erik Barnouw refers to this type of filmmaker as a catalyst, where documentary directors not only observe, but provoke action.¹¹ Overall, the goal is to get students to write in complex ways daily in order to pique their interest and encourage the development of a creative final product that provokes change. Completing something this new and complex will prepare students for college because of the level of writing challenge. It also can raise social issues of concern to them and bring to their understanding and task a measure of social agency.

More directly, the unit aims to develop in students the skill of close reading of narrative and other forms of writing that they will then apply in their own writing. Flash fiction will teach narrative, description, and reflective writing. Flash fiction is the step of saying one thing quickly, a gesture of narrative that can be immediately identified and analyzed. Flash fiction pieces and theme analysis will reduce the intimidation factor of viewing the combination of factors that may make films overwhelming. Although there is much overlap, documentaries will prepare students to write analytically and persuasively.

Teaching Strategies

The instructor can displace attention away from the accustomed superficial analyses of plot and character to show students the often-hidden or ignored deep structure of artistic activities. Jacques Hadamard said that ‘discovery . . . takes place by combining ideas,’ and he further pointed out that etymologically, the Latin word cogito (to think) means ‘to shake together’¹²

“Reading to write” is the primary strategy. “Reading to write” exposes students to different text types, forms, and genres to learn how writers and directors convey meaning in different ways, for different audiences and purposes. Isolating distinct writing modes according to Barnouw’s historical types of documentaries will further the strategy of “Reading to write” by encouraging students to recognize the concrete role of the writer for each task. (See the footnote for all of the types)¹³ . Reading flash fiction thematically will be related to the fiction films we study and will reinforce “Reading to write.”

More precise techniques will give students the scaffolding with which to prewrite and draft responses. These include brainstorming, notice and wonder, think-pair-share, think-pair-write, and think-write-share. During each film viewing, students will annotate and brainstorm. For most films, they will be given a worksheet with twenty blank spaces and asked to write down ten things they notice and ten ways the content applies to their own lives, or what it means to them. In other words, the “wonder” part of the “notice and wonder” strategy encourages students to look at texts or multimedia and come up with questions about historical significance, the meaning, or the purpose of what they see. Students will also be asked to 1. Describe what they see. 2. Infer what makes this distinctive and 3. Give their reaction. Further scaffolding will be provided for EL students. Sentence frames will help students discuss what they see and what they wonder about in the films, as suggested by the screenplay writing article mentioned above.

At the conclusion of the film screenings students will think-pair-share, think-pair-write, or think-write-share according to the prompts given to them and the annotations they made. Think-pair-share creates a classroom environment where all students are given an opportunity to speak, as opposed to one student or a few students answering all the questions. Students are given an opportunity to formulate and share ideas, which immediately gives them a sense of belonging. Think-pair-write moves them immediately from conversation to solid articulation. This activity also helps students individuate their response rather than have it exist in the cloud of conversation that first ensued after the film or reading. Think-write-share will motivate the sharing of connections between the ideas of a whole class of students.

Elements of film and film terminology will be taught explicitly at the beginning of the unit and will be reinforced as they come up in films and as they relate to writing. An analogy can be drawn between the elements of film and parts of the writing process. Students will be asked to match cut-outs of these terms:

Theme: Thesis Statement/ Main Claim

Screenwriting: The drafting process

Mise-en-scene: laying out details and staging evidence

Cinematography: Using multiple points of view

Editing: Revision

Acting: Using people and emotion to tell a story

Directing: Author's Purpose and its mode of implementation

Sound and Music: Tone

Thinking through senses will help us develop the skills of imagery and tone to be developed in student writing. Students will be asked to look for exposition and subtlety and think about how the films and other media relevant to them can be a stimulus. For each film we will introduce writing strategies and tactics, such as varying sentence length (like scene lengths), before viewing. On the largest scale, students will be asked to project onto their own experience the growth of experience in film, and the growth of ideas necessary for the writing process. Limits will encourage students to focus (i.e. write a scene on a bus, or interview a family member), which is essential for giving each student a start for the creative final project, yet brainstorming as a class will allow students to take on bigger and smaller picture ideas. Students will be encouraged throughout to think visually and narratively about something they care about. They will decide whether or not to have an omniscient narrator after we review point of view. Task cards will be used to remind students of the elements of both fiction and nonfiction.

Activities: The Order of Films

Our 10th grade curriculum emphasizes writing analytically and persuasively, yet this unit will explore other modes of writing, including creative writing. This unit may be used in a class that explores world literature, our 10th grade focus, or creative writing. Keeping in mind limitations of time, this unit may last 4-5 weeks for a creative writing class, or 3-4 weeks for an English class, in which case, some films will have to be omitted.

The long-term project is for students to produce a short film. Alternatively, students may revise their journals into a cohesive whole, or elaborate on one journal into something longer, for instance, a personal statement. Framing the unit will be "La rivière du hibou" (Robert Enrico, 1962), an adaptation of Ambrose Bierce's "Occurrence at Owl Creek Bridge" that will be seen in the first and last sessions of the course. We will also read the story after the first viewing. This film will set the expectation for the final project, with the help of a graphic organizer that details shots, effects, and concepts in the film. In between, we will watch both documentaries and fictional films, and students will write in response to each film with a journal prompt and/or assignment. Toward the end of the unit, they will begin writing and filming their ideas. The goal will be that the film will aspire to around 35 shots, half the amount in "La rivière du hibou."

The first feature length film we will begin to watch is "Hoop Dreams" (James, 1994). This film provides a hook to which students can relate. Students, particularly males, identify strongly with basketball as players, spectators, fans, and even historians. Moreover, this film features two African American high schoolers who excel at basketball (See Image #1 for one of the students) and see this as their way to a better life, and most students will identify with the setting and conflicts. That the documentary takes place in an urban setting (and also in public and private high schools) will remind students of their own problems: personal, social, and academic. We will watch the first 15 minutes, pausing while students answer a series of questions related to

their own lives. We will then read the flash fiction piece “The Teacher’s Son” to encourage students to think about character and conflict. Students will then write 2 paragraphs of Narrative in the role of “Chronicler,” responding to the prompt: *Write the order of the events, including potential obstacles, that will lead you to being successful at your dream. Include a setting and conflicts. Write as if explaining your path to a middle school student.*

Time at the end of classes and during state testing will be used to see this long documentary through to the end.

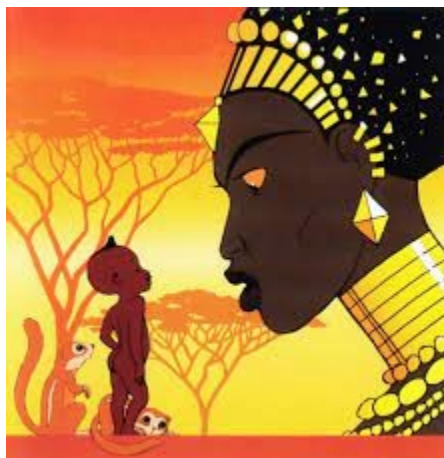


(Image # 1, *Hoop Dreams* (James, 1994): a young Arthur Agee looks onto a basketball game.)

The next assignment will introduce filmmaking. Students will view the “I Like/I Don’t Like” scene from the *The Class* (Cantet, 2008) and complete this as an assignment. In the film, students write down three or more things they like and three or more things they don’t like. Students will download a film-making app on their phone. We will then record and share student presentations, and with permission, post these for all classes to see.

As a follow-up to the realism of *Hoop Dreams* we will take a turn to the mythic, as a way to analyze society at large, with the West African folklore inspired *Kirikou and the Sorceress* (Ocelot, 1998). This animated tale develops an allegory where a newly born child takes on the evil embodied in a sorceress (see image #2). The film is much shorter than *Hoop Dreams*, so we will read two flash fiction pieces, and nonfiction on African myths, to complement our viewing. The flash fiction called “Inherited Tastes” has a hint of allegory around a family that consumes themselves. This will precede our viewing. “Three Things I Never Did After That Summer” is quite short, introducing a woman who believes her uniqueness attracts benign monsters. Students will be asked to write in imitation of the flash fiction pieces. They will be asked to play the role Barnouw calls “Poet,” working with symbolic meaning, allegory, and developing Creative Writing skills: *Begin with a moral (i.e. good and evil, kindness, justice) and create a fable, a story with a lesson around this. Make sure you have two characters and a problem that is resolved, or well developed.*

At the end of the first two assignments, students will write reflectively a brief statement on what they’ve learned from their written efforts so far. We will then watch “I Could Tell You About My Life”, a short film by a student director (Michael Martin), to set students up for planning and writing their own film. More student films are available at this website: <https://bykids.org/our-films/>.



(Image #2. *Kirikou and the Sorceress* (Ocelot, 1998): Although an infant, Kirikou often asks the sorceress why she is so “mean and evil.”)

Flash Fiction will also help us make transitions between films. “Greetings from Tel Aviv,” a flash fiction piece about terrorism in the Middle East told from one person’s point of view, will lead to viewing *Turtles Can Fly* (Ghobadi, 2004), an Iranian film rich in symbolism and character development, but very troubling. The teacher will make students aware of the issues of suicide and rape in the film before viewing. “Prodigy” by Charles Simic will help us think about the difficulties and memories of war. The film is set in the north of Iraq among the Kurdish people in the weeks leading up to the invasion of Iraq by the United States, and presents, or even adopts, the lives of children trying to survive economically and prepare for the war. To lighten the mood, we will watch an animated short, “The Small Shoemaker,” after starting *Turtles Can Fly*. Students will be asked to describe how to tie their shoes in preparation for the journal in order to practice the logic of exposition. After completing the film, students will be asked to focus on expository writing in the role of Reporter: *Tell the story of a conflict you’ve been through as if you were a news reporter. Be sure to include the who, the when, the what, the why, and the how as journalists do.*

Additional flash fiction pieces may be relevant: “Corporal” and “Thud” will remind students of the theme of thinking about war in everyday life, and reflections on mortality, respectively. Because this is about half way through the unit, this will be a good time to introduce students to screenwriting: we will read pages 36-56 in *Screenwriting from the Soul*, and both view and read important scenes from *Rushmore* (Anderson, 1998) and *Do The Right Thing* (Lee, 1989).

Slavery by Another Name (Pollard, 2012) will be our next film in a return to documentary. Pollard’s film reminds the viewer of the exploitation of African American workers in post-Reconstruction history, and will be used to teach argumentative and persuasive writing, asking students to write as Prosecutor: *Research five parts of a given social issue and put the culprits on trial. Research at least three of these aspects and write an annotated bibliography for three articles you find. Argue about how to fix this problem and end with an indictment to say what we could do better, a call to action.*

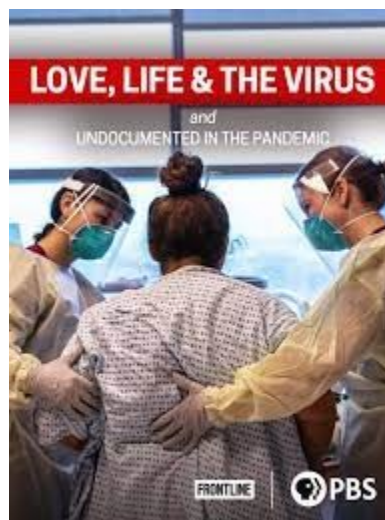
“The Flowers” by Alice Walker will be a grim reminder of the brutality of this time. Another flash fiction piece, “History” will remind us of the importance of evidence and details in academic writing. All of the flash fiction pieces can be found in the two collections listed in the bibliography.

Perhaps the least important film could nonetheless provide a break from the realism of the preceding films and remind students of the openness of cinema for poetic and not narrative focus. Students will be asked to

play the role of Painter in this descriptive writing challenge. *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren, 1943) is an avant-grade short film with dream logic in the place of plot development. After viewing, students will be asked to write a journal: *Write the story of an afternoon out of school, your perfect day, or a dream sequence, using at least five objects or things you see that correspond to your mood. Write as quickly as you can.* Before writing we will read “I Would Like to Describe” by Zbigniew Herbert and the flash fiction “Imitation of Life” which will help students think of an object that creates a mood for descriptive writing.

We will continue the unit with a Frontline documentary set during the Covid pandemic: “Love, Life, and the Virus” (Oscar Guerra, 2020), (see Image #3.) Students will be asked to play the role of Catalyst and to practice Analytical Writing. The response will take the form of a college level memo in which the students advocate for improving a given social issue. Students will: *Write about 5 problems in the world, or in our communities, and how they intersect. Write a memo about a hypothetical organization that addresses all of these problems.*

The flash fiction pieces “Wanting” and “The Quinceanera Text” will remind students of the urgency of the Covid quarantine and the importance of culture in all stories and analysis. “No Wake Zone” tells the story of immigrants. “Undocumented in the Pandemic”, another documentary from Frontline, may be shown to complement students’ understanding of the importance of how analysis fits in with narrative.



(Image #3, “Love, Life, and the Virus” (Oscar Guerra, 2020): Zully contracted Covid, then gave birth, and is here seen recovering.)

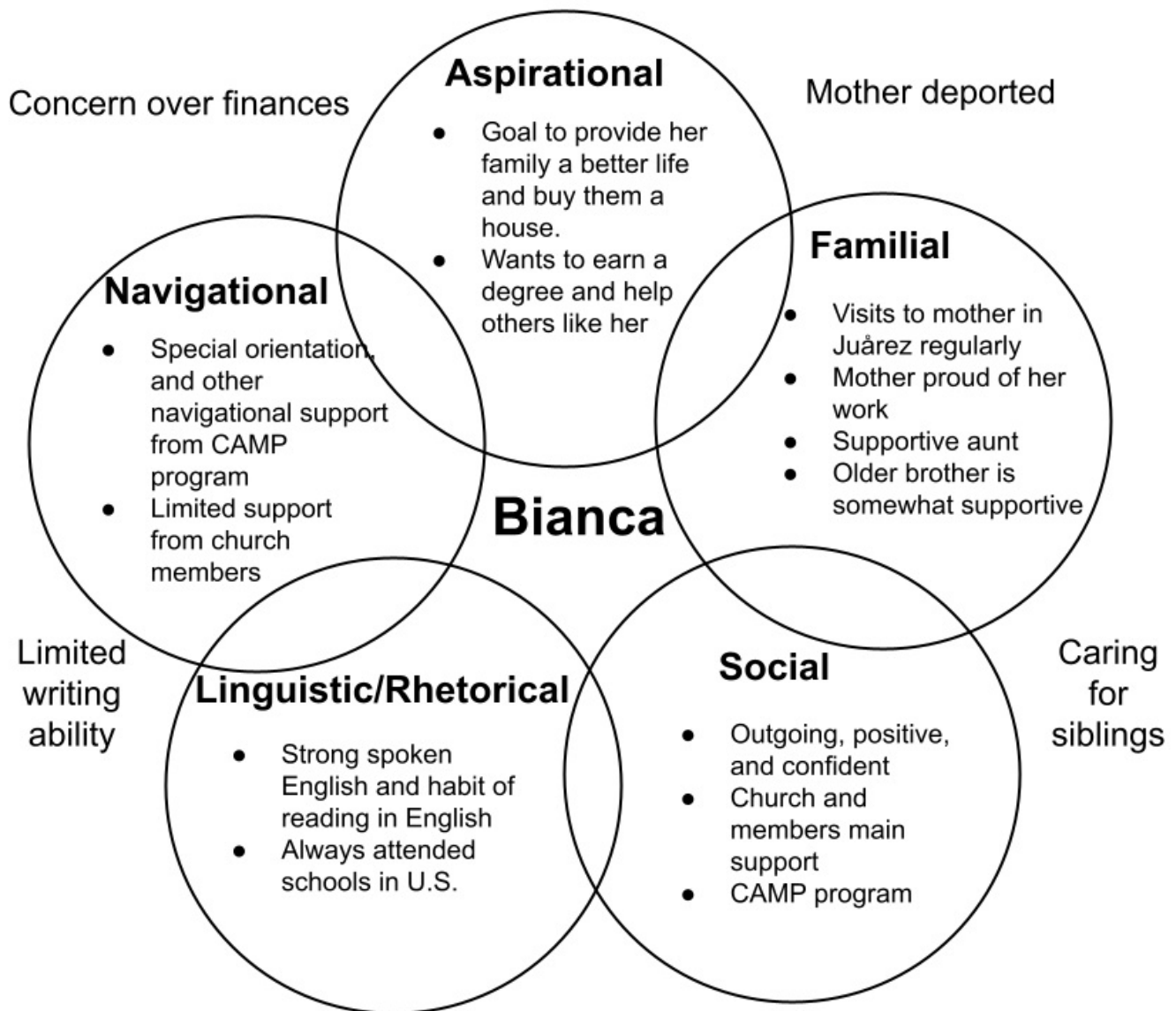
“Half Sleep” is a flash fiction piece about drug use and young people. “Last Cuts” tells the story of a young man who hopes to make a basketball team. Completing viewing of *Hoop Dreams* with these flash fiction pieces will give students closure on the unit, and space to continue thinking about their own stories. We will also re-watch “La rivière du hibou” to remind students of how narrative writing can lead to film, and how film can help us understand the complexity of writing.

Transiciones

The book length study *Transiciones* provides a way to think about high school student writing that will benefit students as college writers. The basic idea is that students at a particular high school were asked to do only two types of writing (narrative and analysis) in high school, and so were overwhelmed by the types of writing they were asked to do at 4-year and community colleges.¹⁴ Students at this high school wrote narrative

essays, indeed they focused on narrative a lot, due to their state test asking for this mode. Likewise, in Virginia, there is much focus on persuasion, as our state tests for that mode of writing. The problem in the book is that the students were not prepared for more complicated writing assignments in college.

Ruecker also develops the idea of “cultural capital” that shows how students were more or less likely to have the support they needed to succeed in college (see image #4). Ruecker’s students, those from another study, and our students’ identities are often not academic: “the multilingual students in her study grappled with very different identities moving through the environments, labeled as excellent students by high school teachers, but considered slackers in college.” Ruecker’s thinking about cultural capital, the strengths and resources students *do* have, can be applied to this unit in the sense that they can build through writing a combination of their home and personal identities, including class and cultural identities, with an academic identity.



(Image #4, Bianca’s cultural capital is given with strengths within the Venn diagram, and challenges outside.)

To reiterate, an understanding of the complex challenges faced by these students will suggest how we develop identities, thus we will talk about and complete an activity on Ruecker’s use of the notion of cultural capital. As well as aspiring to college level writing, students will be asked to complete their own cultural

capital “maps”, like Bianca’s, towards the end of this unit. And, if the dynamic daily writing habit proposed by this unit can be combined with specific writing tasks that the colleges in the study asked for (see image #5), the unit will accomplish getting students prepared for college writing, and implicitly for college in general.

<i>Fall Semester Classes</i>	<i>Writing Assignments</i>
Writing Developmental	Community assignment/discourse Application essay Review essay Opinion piece Learning journals (ongoing)
History	2-3 page analysis essay on Pocahontas and the <i>Powhatan Dilemma</i> 2 essay exams 2-3 page argument/analysis essay on Incidents in the <i>Life of a Slave Girl</i> 2-3 page extra credit paper comparing PBS documentary with textbook
Reading (Developmental)	Writing assignments coordinated with history class
First-Year Seminar	10-page research essay on topic of choice (she chose Mexican folklore and dance)
<i>Spring Semester Classes</i>	<i>Writing Assignments</i>
FYC	Homepage portfolio 2-3 page agency discourse memo 3-5 page rhetorical/visual analysis 7-10 annotated bibliography 4-6 page community problem report
History	Paragraph summarizing and discussing a historical document from <i>Voices of Created Equal</i> , Vol. 2 2-3 page essay comparing and contrasting Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. Dubois views on black life Essay on <i>Farewell to Manzanar: A True Story of Japanese American Experience During and After the World War II Internment</i> 2 essay exams
Math	No writing
Sociology	2 page essay on “A Class Divided” video

(Image #5, Bianca’s first year college writing assignments.)

Further detail from *Transciones* also guides this unit. In college, one student was asked to make a short documentary on an iMac. Students in the study appreciated receiving feedback, being asked questions rather than receiving lectures, and appreciated strict and methodical teaching both in high school and college. This unit may be useful for students who aspire to attend college in that they build ideas over multiple writing assignments, as in a college research paper. Cultural capital was also developed through assignments that asked them to engage problems in their communities, and to complete a writing assignment based on interviewing their parents. One of the more successful students complained of being unprepared, lamenting “the fact that she wrote more during her freshman year than all of high school.” College level assignments often ask students to “connect themes”, rather than just developing one. The present unit asks students to connect themes and to write daily. One college professor emphasized freewriting and encouraged students to mix genres, allowing that a descriptive essay “needed to be informative but explained that it could have some personal elements and personal viewpoints, and could also be persuasive in some ways.”¹⁵ As influenced by *Transciones*, this unit will focus on the blurring of genres and modes, and researching the writing regime at our local universities and community colleges may help.

Prompts and Scaffolding

The book *Documentary* by Erik Barnouw, although specifically about non-fiction films, provides a great guide for the types of writing the unit asks students to do. His categories are listed next to the writing mode, followed by a film or excerpt to be viewed, followed by a prompt for the students.

Chronicler/ Narrative Writing, *Hoop Dreams*, (Steve James, 1994) *Write the order of the events that will lead you to being successful at your dream. Include a setting and conflicts. Write as if explaining your path to a middle school student.*

Poet/ Creative Writing, *Kirikou and the Sorceress* (Michel Ocelot 1998). *Begin with a moral (i.e. good and evil, kindness, justice) and create a fable, a story with a lesson around this. Make sure you have 2 characters and a problem that is solved.*

Reporter/ Expository Writing, *Turtles Can Fly* (Bahman Ghobadi, 2004). *Tell the story of a conflict you've been through as if you were a news reporter. Be sure to include the who, the when, the what, the why, and the how as journalists do.*

Prosecutor / Argumentative Writing *Slavery by Another Name* (Sam Pollard, 2012). *Research five parts of a given social issue and put the culprits on trial. Research at least 3 of these aspects and write an annotated bibliography for your three articles. Argue about how to fix this problem and with an indictment to say what we could do better, a call to action.*

Painter/ Descriptive Writing/ *Meshes of the Afternoon* (Maya Deren, 1943) *Write the story of an afternoon out of school, your perfect day, or a dream sequence, using five objects or sights that correspond to your mood. Write as quickly as possible.*

Catalyst/ Analytical Writing "Love, Life, and the Virus" (Oscar Guerra, 2020). *Write about 5 problems in the world, or in our communities, and how they intersect. Write a memo about a hypothetical organization that addresses all of these problems.*

"What is the scariest/weirdest thing that has ever happened to you?"

"Fill in the blanks: It is the story of _____=character, who goes through _____=conflict"

Appendix on Implementing District Standards (Virginia Standards of Learning)

10.2 The student will examine, analyze, and produce media messages.

- a) Create media messages for diverse audiences.
- d) Analyze the impact of selected media formats on meaning.

Emphasizing that not only is the teacher their audience, students will share with classmates, and be encouraged to share with family and friends. Analyzing and discussing the mentor text films will lead to discussions about student writing and films.

10.4 The student will read, comprehend, and analyze literary texts of different cultures and eras.

- b) Analyze the similarities and differences of techniques and literary forms represented in the literature of different cultures and eras.
- c) Interpret the cultural or social function of world and ethnic literature.
- d) Analyze universal themes prevalent in the literature of different cultures.
- f) Critique how authors use key literary elements to contribute to meaning, including character development, theme, conflict, and archetypes.
- g) Interpret how themes are connected within and across texts.
- h) Explain the influence of historical context on the form, style, and point of view of a literary text(s).
- k) Compare and contrast how literary devices convey a message and elicit a reader's emotions.

Themes from the 2 international films will be compared with themes in the United States films. Students will be encouraged to think about how literary techniques add up to create theme in the mentor texts and the student work. Interpretation of cultural and social function will be key point of discussion after viewing each film, as well as a discussion point for the students' purposes in making their films. Literary and film techniques will be analyzed through their application in student writing, emphasized through discussion and scaffolding.

10.6 The student will write in a variety of forms to include persuasive, reflective, interpretive, and analytic, with an emphasis on persuasion and analysis.

- a) Engage in writing as a recursive process.
- b) Plan and organize writing to address a specific audience and purpose.
- c) Adjust writing content, technique, and voice for a variety of audiences and purposes.
- e) Objectively introduce and develop topics, incorporating evidence and maintaining an organized structure and a formal style.
- f) Compose a thesis statement for persuasive writing that advocates a position.
- i) Show relationships among claims, reasons, and evidence and include a conclusion that follows logically from the information presented.
- j) Blend multiple forms of writing, including embedding a narrative to produce effective essays.

Theme will be connected to making a thesis statement, loosely in the case of a fictional student film. Narrative will be common to all stories told, blended with the other forms. Structure will be emphasized in the

development of students' film ideas. Students will be asked to identify their audience and purpose early in the process. Claims, reasons, and evidence will be introduced in the context of the documentaries.

Annotated Bibliography

Barnouw, Erik. *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2005.

This book provides a clearer purpose for student writing and shows how documentary has changed along with historical contexts.

Batchelor, Katherine E., and April King. "Freshmen and Five Hundred Words." *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy* 58, no. 2 (2014): 111-21. <https://doi.org/10.1002/jaal.324>.

That these teachers completed the unit in two weeks reminds us of the limitations of time for the present unit. Very significant was students' various responses to the writing challenge.

Bedard, Carol, and Charles Fuhrken. "'Everybody Wants Somebody to Hear Their Story': High School Students Writing Screenplays." *The English Journal* 100, no. 1 (September 2010): 47-52.

Having actual screenplays that students read was important in this article. Giving structure and time are also important supports to be remembered.

Jankovic, Colleen. "FEELING CINEMA: Affect in Film/Composition Pedagogy." *Transformations; University Park* 22, no. 2 (2011): 86-103.

Most significantly, this article reinforces the notion of timing for emotional reaction in both watching films and writing in response.

Krevolin, Richard W. *Screenwriting from the Soul*. Renaissance, 1999.

Written in the style of Rilke's *Letters to a Young Poet*, this book shows not only the frustrations of trying to write something complicated, but also the cultural aspect of storytelling.

Perkins-Hazuka, Christine, Tom Hazuka, and Mark Budman. *Sudden Flash Youth: 65 Short-Short Stories*. New York: Persea Books, 2011.

The more literary of the two flash fiction books, this collection features famous authors writing stories with children as protagonists.

Rabin, Lisa M. "The Social Uses of Classroom Cinema." *The Velvet Light Trap* 72 (2013): 58-71. <https://doi.org/10.7560/vlt7206>.

This article gives not only the benefits but the struggle inherent in getting students to appreciate film. Notably, students criticized some of the films they saw.

Rogin-Roper, Leah, Stacy Walsh, and Dustin Dill. *Fast Forward Presents, Flash 101: Surviving the Fiction Apocalypse*. Denver, Colo.?: FF>> Press, 2012.

Typically shorter and less formal, these stories show the range of the flash fiction genre.

Ruecker, Todd Christopher. *Transiciones: Pathways of Latinas and Latinos Writing in High School and College*. Utah State University, 2015.

This book may be most important for implementing this unit in how much the college bound students differed in skills, cultural capital, personality, and their interest and reasons to motivate as writers. The author was also a great benefit to the students as they progressed through high school and college.

Tomasulo, Frank P. "Teaching Creativity: A Practical Guide for Training Filmmakers, Screenwriters, and Cinema Studies Students." *Journal of Film and Video* 71, no. 1 (2019): 51-62.
<https://doi.org/10.5406/jfilmvideo.71.1.0051>.

Tomasulo reminds us of the unconscious and conscious processes of artistic creation. Made relevant to this unit, students will be asked to find out the hidden process of their own creativity

¹ Carol Bedard and Charles Fuhrken, "Everybody Wants Somebody to Hear Their Story."

² Katherine E Batchelor, and April King, "Freshmen and Five Hundred Words."

³ Lisa M. Rabin, "The Social Uses of Classroom Cinema."

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Frank P. Tomasulo, "Teaching Creativity: A Practical Guide for Training Filmmakers, Screenwriters, and Cinema Studies Students."

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Colleen Jankovic, " FEELING CINEMA: Affect in Film/Composition Pedagogy."

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ Erik Barnouw, *Documentary: A History of the Non-Fiction Film*.

¹² Frank P. Tomasulo, "Teaching Creativity: A Practical Guide for Training Filmmakers, Screenwriters, and Cinema Studies Students."

¹³ Barnouw's Documentary Genres (developed chronologically around international cinema):

Prophet, Explorer, Reporter, Painter, Advocate, Bugler, Prosecutor, Poet, Chronicler, Promoter,
Observer, Catalyst, Guerrilla

¹⁴ College Level Writing Assignments from Ruecker's *Transiciones*: Memo about a community organization, Annotated Bibliography, Rhetorical Analysis (ethos, pathos, logos), Community problem report, History response essays, Research papers, Response postings, Book reviews, Genre analysis, Literature review,
Curriculum Unit 22.01.07

Applications, Learning journals, 5-6 minute documentary, Opinion piece, Advocacy Website, Essay exams, Research question, abstract, annotations, Compare/contrast essay, Definition essay, Article summary, 6-7 page autobiographical analysis, Paragraph assessment, Discourse community map

¹⁵ Todd Christopher Ruecker, *Transiciones: Pathways of Latinas and Latinos Writing in High School and College*.

<https://teachers.yale.edu>

©2023 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University, All Rights Reserved. Yale National Initiative®, Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute®, On Common Ground®, and League of Teachers Institutes® are registered trademarks of Yale University.

For terms of use visit https://teachers.yale.edu/terms_of_use