

NOTES ON AMERICAN LETTERS



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“Literature ranges from simple songs and sayings to elaborate and extended tales of human deeds. The most compelling literature concerns persons whose feelings, thoughts, and actions engage us in the lived time of mortality. Ideas and abstractions, which systematically separate themselves from persons and from time, do not form the essence of literature and do not surpass it.”

–Roger Shattuck, **Candor and Perversion**

EDITOR'S CORNER

As we conclude its second year of online publication, I offer this brief preview of coming attractions in Notes on American Letters, Volume 2, Number 4, as a guide to its contents and as a confirmation of the basic intention of our journal.

Articles by Robert Lipsyte, the celebrated author of The Contender, and Julia McNamee, an award-winning newspaper writer and teacher, explore a group of texts that center on adolescents and confirm our belief in the power of letters to freshen and deepen readers.

Columns authored by six writers engage texts and teaching in a variety of ways that include explorations of the connection between texts and art, research on teaching drawn from recent journals, and interviews of extraordinary teachers.

Brief Posts appear in each issue to prompt students' critical thinking through serious classroom exploration of controversial issues in such fields as science, health care, religion, and government.

A Film Review by Brianna Brown offers a thoughtful look at "The Darkest Hour" with attendant questions and lists of allied texts providing teachers with new ways to deepen students' viewing and increase their enjoyment of any film.

In this issue we also call attention to the PBS Masterpiece Theater's presentation of Little Women and the webinar accompanying it because the film is so exquisitely presented and so deeply captivating as it addresses issues of love, culture, literature, and engagement with the world of long ago. I recommend it to the teachers and students of today.

I hope that the inclusive breath and variety of features we present are enticing. We believe our brief journeys will "take you miles away."

Joe Milner
Editor

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A LOOK AT ADOLESCENT FICTION

Robert Lipsyte

It was Harry Potter, the little wizard himself, who first alerted me to the magical transformation of Adolescent Literature into Young Adult Fiction. It was more than a name change; it was a generational shift.

The year was 2000 and I was writing a sports column for the New York Times. In describing the pervasive influence of Jock Culture, I mentioned that a great deal of young Harry's acceptance at Hogwarts School for Witchcraft and Wizardry had to do with his talent for the school game, quidditch. In going on about quidditch, I also mentioned in passing that a team captain, the tall, handsome Cedric Diggory, the kind of boy who is usually the hero in old-fashioned teen fiction, was murdered.

There was an avalanche of hate mail, mostly, I figured out, from women between the ages of twenty and thirty. They claimed I had ruined their summer vacations by spoiling Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire, which they had planned to read on the beach. I was less than remorseful, suggesting they get into more age-appropriate books like anything by Trollope or Margaret Atwood.

I wasn't only being snarky. I was appalled that grown-ups were reading books for kids. Had the reading levels really dropped that far, or was this just a lazy new generation? Nah, it was just Muggles' capitalism. As I quickly found out, the children's book editors at the major publishing houses were way ahead of me. They were already talking about "cross-over" fiction that would capture not only teens, but their big sisters. In many cases, I think, by loosening the restrictions on sex, drugs, violence and streety language, they were actually pitching the genre to the older audience. For marketing purposes, they began smudging the "adolescent" tag and punching up the Young Adult label, which means whatever you want it to mean.

It's not as if this was the betrayal of the innocents. First of all, teen fiction in the first half of the Twentieth Century when I would have read it, was dominated by a hodge-podge of boys' sports tales with Jock Culture macho values (John R. Tunis was a rare exception) and romantic treacle for girls (no wonder Nancy Drew seemed like a beacon).

I was personally lucky with teacher parents who let me use their adult library cards as soon as I could carry my own books (I think John Steinbeck and Mark Twain, my earliest faves, are perfect for YA lists).

Then I got professionally lucky. When I wrote my first novel, *The Contender*, the legendary children's book editors at Harper & Row, Ursula Nordstrom and Charlotte Zolotow, were in the process of inventing this new adolescent genre. They scrubbed out my sex scene and plugged me into it. They had been wildly successful with books for very young readers and wanted to hang on to their aging customers.

This was in the late Sixties and the genre exploded with Paul Zindel and S.E. Hinton. Soon to follow were M.E. Kerr, Robert Cormier, Judy Blume, Walter Dean Myers, Chris Crutcher, and Francesca Lia Block. They all understood their responsibility to tell kids the truth no matter how complex and painful it might be. There was a reaching out from one generation to another, assuring youngsters they could survive this scary time of life. Through the Seventies and Eighties there was still a strong element of teaching in the books, sometimes so didactically heavy-handed that they were dubbed "problem novels" or "the D's". There was a lot of divorce, death, depression, disability, and dysfunctional families. For all the criticism, many of those books offered hope. They saved lives.

In recent years, coming-of-age novels addressing topics like rape, racism, and sexual identity with happy endings extended the teaching reach. But they were joined by a rash of dystopian novels, largely popular, I think, because they mirrored teen-agers' insecurity and discontent. The earliest of those novels, including Lois Lowry's 1993 *The Giver* and the first of Suzanne Collins' bestselling 2008 *The Hunger Games* series, are genuine classics, but many that followed read like by-the-number derivatives. They diluted the genre.

In general, I find current YA less interesting and innovative than in the past but more stylishly written. My theory is that the winner-take-all sweepstakes of contemporary publishing has all but wiped out traditional adult mid-list literary fiction as a middle-class livelihood for young novelists (they would still need to teach, of course). Thus, many graduates of the ever-growing MFA industrial complex have either turned their talents toward the increasingly character-driven and complex series on cable television and streaming services like Amazon and Netflix or to YA, which continues to be a lucrative market. There's even a YA sub-genre called *New Adult*, an advanced marketing pitch for those post-teen readers who find James Patterson too challenging. It's less about life coaching than entertainment. But there is a silver lining on the book jackets. The best and most promising of these more often than not coming-of-age novels express the fresh and long-suppressed voices of minority women writers.

And that's a magical gift that may renew the early promise of Adolescent Literature.

REVIEWS OF YOUNG ADULT LITERATURE

Julia McNamee

Teenagers' lives are notoriously challenging. Family struggles, peer pressure, confused priorities and, of course, the threat of contemporary tragedies like opioid addiction, police violence, and school shootings. If they're lucky, they find books that speak to them and that shepherd them through to adulthood.

I had a pretty "woke" teacher for the early 70s, in seventh grade, Mrs. Clausen, who assigned *The Outsiders*, published just a year or two beforehand. I cried when Johnny died, I cried when Dally died. And the reading was so easy, it was like breathing: these were characters who lived and breathed like my friends. To read a whole novel, quickly, and one that spoke so truly to a near-teenager's heart; that was a miracle.

Those years were the birth, really, of Adolescent Fiction. There literally weren't others in my education; we made our way through *The Grapes of Wrath* in later years and *Julius Caesar*, and I found Agatha Christie and Sherlock Holmes on my own.

The Outsiders, perhaps, was step one on what we have over time offered our teenagers: books that were not just about teens -- after all, we'd had Tom Sawyer and Nancy Drew, and even *Romeo and Juliet* -- but books with an adolescent mentality, representing a teen's perspective. *The Outsiders*, remember, was written by SE Hinton when she was just 15.

It was a gigantic shift. Today, students continue to read *The Outsiders* and, from all accounts, are still loving the novel. Friendship, vulnerability, loss -- these are the topics that dominate conversations.

But the novels that fly off the shelves today represent another shift: in them, teenagers face the bleakness of the contemporary problems that surround us, issues that headline news hours and that fuel marches and political movements.

The best example is probably *The Hate You Give*, which swept my school system like a virus. Teachers found themselves reading through the night, finishing the book within 24 hours, and students plowed through it in a couple of days. With really good writing and wildly contemporary issues, it met so many needs. Unusually, it was both long -- more than 400 pages -- and scored at a relatively low Lexile level, meaning that despite its rich writing, complex characters, and diverse settings, it was relatively easy to read.

So how did the Adolescent Fiction hitters evolve to the Young Adult novels of today? Are they really different? What compels students now versus 50 years ago?

Like students from the past, today's students are most of all interested in realistic fiction, according to Hamden Middle School Library Media Specialist Elisa McCulley. The difference today is that the highly diverse students at her school want to see characters wrestling with the challenges they face in their own lives; both *The Hate You Give* and *13 Reasons Why* are extremely popular.

"Heavier themes, darker topics," McCulley explained.

Kristin Schultz, School and Library Marketing Team Manager at Random House Children's Books, went a step further. "I feel like YA used to mean a simplified version of a story, or something to that

degree. That's not the case by any stretch of the imagination now. YA is for adult and teen readers because of the relationships, characters, and questions; the scenarios, the dialogue, the struggles--they're all very real, very timely, and very complex."

This matches well with what McCulley said she sees. "They're looking for their own personal truths in reading."

Reading *The Hate You Give* plants you firmly in a very specific world that might literally exist a couple of miles away from where you live. The protagonist might be a girl in your Social Studies class. But the drama that explodes in her life when her best friend, like her African-American, is shot and killed during a routine traffic stop is more the stuff of CNN and mothers' nightmares. The novel is a mix of the personal and the political.

This new version of realistic fiction also sits squarely at the heart of English teaching for pre-teens and teens. Southern Connecticut State University professor Meredith Sinclair loved realistic fiction when she was younger, especially Judy Blume. Like McCulley, Sinclair believes that today's realistic fiction has evolved: it often packs a powerful social justice message, she said. Sinclair's classes -- both one focusing on Young Adult fiction and others teaching future English teachers "Methods" for teaching English -- often include students who haven't liked reading in the past.

Sinclair believes YA authors go about writing books differently today. "They are very intentionally thinking about how Young Adult literature can engage with the world," she said. There are books, for example, like *All-American Boys*, that "hit you over the head with a message," while others, like *Shapeshifter*, are much more complex and require some work to get to topics like cultural appropriation and gentrification.

Sinclair's students, even those who didn't love reading when they were younger, really gravitate to contemporary novels, she said; current college students want to grapple with important issues as they read for pleasure or for school.

A perfect example is the novels written by Nic Stone. His New York Times bestseller *Dear Martin* featured the complexities of race, police brutality, the importance of teens finding their voice. Stone's newest novel, arriving on shelves in October, according to Schultz, will be *Odd Man Out*, asking readers to think about who we're told to be attracted to and why, and how wrong we've been. "Odd Man Out deals with issues that are happening right now in our lives -- labels, identity, relationships, everything," Schultz said.

YA fiction, according to Publishers.org, is more popular than ever; both revenues and numbers of titles published are experiencing double-digit growth. Getting more books into more students' hands is happening at an astonishing rate. In McCulley's school, the numbers are impressive: as teachers allow students time to read in class, as the media center opens its doors to students seeking books, circulation numbers have continued to rise.

It's more important than ever for students to have choice in reading materials, both to increase their volume of reading -- aligned with gains in reading skills -- and to boost the likelihood that students will develop a passion for reading, every English teacher's secret hope. No one is suggesting that the canon be eliminated, but some teachers are pairing canonical works with YA fiction.. Schultz, a former high school English teacher, sees *Romeo and Juliet* as a natural pair with Nicola Yoon's *The Sun is Also a Star*, for instance.

series, McCulley said. They fall in love with characters and want to continue to read. As she put it, "they say with a point of pride that they've read the whole series." Most encouraging of all, perhaps, is that students are increasingly recognizing their own taste in reading, McCulley said: they see themselves as lovers of mysteries, as lovers of fantasy, as lovers of historical fiction. That strong sense of identity, like finding one's voice as a writer, can be life-changing and reflect a permanent entry into a life of reading.

What's the role of the teacher today? Sometimes, we teach directly from YA books, using their fire and power to engage and deepen.

I had the privilege of listening to a sixth grade teacher in our poorest school reading aloud the most powerful scene from *The Hate You Give* to her students. The students were still, spellbound by the novel and its tensions. At the high school down the road, a secondary teacher working with struggling readers taught Tupac's poetry with the novel, (the novel's author says the novel was inspired by a Tupac song).

But as readers who love books, as readers who love our students, we have another role to play, as well.

"My best piece of advice for teachers would be to read as much YA as they can, and tell their students about the books that opened their eyes, the books that made them reconsider an opinion, and the books that kept them up all night," Schultz said. "Just watch what will happen."

POETIC EXERCISE
Rachael Duane

I am not good at sitting still. Like most people these days, I am distracted. It is so much easier to be a busybody — to go about life accomplishing tasks, finishing assignments — than to look and to listen. And yet, it is clear to me that our world needs thoughtful people more than ever. I've come to believe that the most valuable concept I've inherited from my own education is the practice of paying attention, which came to me in the form of poetry. Reading and writing poetry helps draws my attention to the world. When I read a poem about a corkboard, I see the corkboard in my room as if for the first time. I appreciate the strange objects that make up my life, and like a muscle that's been exercised, I am better able to pay attention to people, too. Poetry makes me a better writer and, more importantly, a better friend.

"We have to try to cure our faults by attention and not by will," the French philosopher Simone Weil wrote (from her posthumous collection *Gravity and Grace*). With this quote in mind, I'll share a two-part poetic exercise for students and teachers, alike:

- First, read the following poems by Jane Hirschfield (from her collection *The Beauty*), which serve as an example of how a poet has paid attention, stopping to observe everyday objects and their meaning. Consider these questions:
 1. What are the concrete observations the speaker makes about the object? What details has she noticed and chosen to talk about?
 2. What does the speaker associate with the object? Does she admire the object? Critique the object? What is her perspective?
 3. Do you share the speaker's perspective? If not, what would you say about the object?

My Corkboard by Jane Hirschfield

*However many holes are in you,
always there's room for another.*

*However much you carry,
you can hold more.*

*Like a saint making a joke,
imperfection of surface
suits you.
Your seams
remind of quiet tectonic plates.*

*Chthonic corkboard,
always beneath
even when hung on your vertical side,
your waiting thumbtacks
seem to me
a glittering affection,
the *mi casa, su casa*
of a door standing open in every weather*

of invitation.

*I apologize to you, corkboard—
I, who would like
to be more like you in spirit,
cover you over
with maps, plans, bills.*

*Even these words that praise you
further disguise you.*

Quartz Clock by Jane Hirschfield

*The ideas of a physicist
can be turned into useful objects:
a rocket, a quartz clock,
a microwave oven for cooking.
The ideas of poets turn into only themselves,
as the hands of the clock do,
or the face of a person.
It changes, but only more into the person.*

- Now, get out a pen and paper for the following poetic “still life” writing exercise:

Pick your favorite object or trinket on hand at the moment — in your purse or backpack, from a shelf or a drawer. Set it before you on a table, somewhere you can write. Then sit. Sit still. Look at the object. Don't jump to any conclusions or descriptions yet. Just look. Look harder. Sit for five minutes, then go ahead: begin to describe it.

After several minutes, swap papers with a peer. Consider those same reflective questions of your peer's observations and discuss.

TEACHER INTERVIEW

Joan Mitchell

Interview with Katie TeKippe

1. How would you describe your instructional philosophy? What are the theories or central ideas that undergird the decisions that you make each day in the classroom? Explain the why behind what you do. Consider details such as your classroom arrangement and practices that encourage student engagement.

My instructional philosophy is multifaceted. I believe everyone learns best and more when you understand why you are being taught something. I remember thinking in high school that we were learning in a vacuum. Applicability for the students is very important to me, and I try daily to tie in things we learn in class to “real” life. I have my room set up so the students face each other and not me. If the room or class size permits, my preference is a circle. I firmly believe I am not the only teacher in the classroom; they all are, and I am a student too. I learn a lot from them. The other idea that is central for me is that we all are humans first and everything else second. I tell all my students this on the first day.

2. What is your favorite text to teach and how do you teach it?

The Scarlet Letter – I teach it as one of the greatest love stories ever written. The twist, of course, is the love between a mother and daughter. I taught it very traditionally for many years (at least a decade), but once I became a mother and had that point of view, I read the story differently myself and then tried it out with my students. It changed everything—our conversations, analysis, and enjoyment. That experience reinforced for me the importance of tackling a novel or text from a different angle, and, perhaps, anticipating the “blind side.” I never thought of The Scarlet Letter in such a light until I felt that way with my own daughter. I hope I empower my own students to see what they couldn’t see before and thus alter the experience entirely.

3. What forms of media and technology enhance or facilitate instruction in your classroom?

Google Classroom has been extremely helpful to post announcements, homework, scan in handouts and resources, post videos, give assessments, and interact with students through assignments easily. I also use TED Talks and educational videos to support and augment regular instruction. Additionally, all my students have a Chromebook. This helps tremendously with writing. I have them write in class and “share” their documents. Then I can help them in real time and project it for others to see as well. I love this aspect of technology – before you would have had to write it all out on the chalkboard (yes, I’m that old), white board, or overhead projector. Now, it’s so easy, and they can see it, read it, and then I can share it with all of them so they all have the notes and examples to apply to their own writing.

4. Describe your approach to meeting the needs of diverse learners in your classroom. Consider student differences in culture, race, gender, learning styles, and academic ability.

This year has been one of my most challenging. Our class sizes are large, and all learning styles and abilities have been completely combined and mainstreamed. I also have openly transgender students for the first time. The diversity enriches the classroom, but at times it can present challenges for me as well as the students. I try to select all sorts of material that reflect their realities. Literature

may be the only medium through which you can transform into a different gender, race, mental capacity, age, or culture just by opening a book. If students can “walk around in someone else’s skin,” it creates understanding as well as fighting fear and hate-mongering. Many times I will ask them to write on an issue that is in the text and offer their opinions--then I ask them take the opposing viewpoint. Talking about it is one thing, but actually writing about it and considering it creates an opportunity for reflection and growth. That doesn’t always happen, but it’s important to try. One of my favorite things is when students come back or email me and let me know how their views have changed. Sometimes, when I’m lucky, they credit me for making them consider different perspectives--and that’s the best.

5. Where do you find your best new teaching ideas? Do you rely on web content generated from other teachers, conversations with teachers you know, journals, professional conferences, or other resources.

I think all of those facilitate growth. Many times failure is the best teacher. Sometimes, something I believe will go swimmingly just sinks. And, many of my best ideas come from the students themselves. They will say or react to something in a way I could have never predicted, and that spurs more development and discussion. Later, it cultivates planning and inspiration. The most difficult aspect of teaching for me is timing. I’ve had at least one new prep almost every year since I began teaching 20 years ago. Sometimes I have taught the course a few years before, but many times the texts or expectations have changed significantly. Or, it might be the same text but a different level, which changes everything. With each new prep, I have to seek out new sources and inspiration. If I’m bored, I know for sure they will be too.

WRITERS' WORDS
Lucy Milner

The Writers' Words feature offers snippets from the writing of miscellaneous observers who have something evocative to suggest to educators (particularly those of English language and letters) and their students. Readers report using these fragments as prompts for essays and discussions and as catalysts for aspiring and reluctant readers and writers.

I learned long ago that being Lewis Carroll was infinitely more exciting than being Alice.

Joyce Carol Oates (b. 1938)

One must be drenched in words, literally soaked in them, to have the right ones form themselves into the proper patterns at the right moment.

Hart Crane (1899 - 1932)

Every novel is a failure in that "you can never achieve what you truly want to achieve. That thing you dreamt on the riverbank is never the thing you achieve when you are back at the writing table, or when the paper is coming out of the printer."

Colum McCann (b. 1965)

One forges one's style on the terrible anvil of daily deadlines.

Emile Zola (1840 - 1902)

I don't need time. What I need is a deadline.

Duke Ellington (1899 - 1974)

Ultimately, literature is nothing but carpentry. ... With both you are working with reality, a material just as hard as wood.

Gabriel García Márquez (1927 - 2014)

Words are the only things that last forever; they are more durable than the eternal hills.

William Hazlitt 1778 - 1830)

Art is like baby shoes. When you coat them with gold, they can no longer be worn.

John Updike (1932 - 2009)

EXHIBIT OF THE WEEK: GRANT WOOD: AMERICAN GOTHIC & OTHER FABLES
Katie Womack

Journal/Book Title: *The Week*

Journal/Book Author: *The Week* staff

Source: Page 25

Publication Date: 23 March 2018

Basic Concept:

This article provides insight into the life and work of artist Grant Wood by drawing from some of the many recent reviews of the exhibition Grant Wood: American Gothic and Other Fables, which is on view at the Whitney Museum of American Art, March 2 – June 10, 2018. The reviews cited discuss how the exhibition explores the ways in which Wood’s experience as a gay man living and working in the Midwest in the 1930s informed his work. There is an ambiguity in many of Wood’s nostalgic images of rural American life, such as in the painting American Gothic (1930) referenced in the exhibition’s title. The iconic painting shows a solemn man and woman, commonly interpreted as a farmer and his wife, who viewers may see as virtuous and hard-working or as old-fashioned and judgmental.

Comment:

Learning about an artist’s personal history and the time period in which they worked can certainly provide valuable insight into that artist’s work. Likewise, viewers may also see a work of art through the lens of their own history, values, and understanding of the world. Grant Wood’s public persona was one he created of himself as an overall-wearing painter/farmer. However, more recent scholarship, focused on his personal life, suggests a more complex identity. In what ways do you think viewers today might look at Grant Wood’s work differently than they did when it was created? How do exhibitions like this change the way we engage with and understand a work of art?

Quotations:

“In Grant Wood’s art, ‘it’s hard to separate homage from mockery, nostalgia from bitterness,’ ...”
“...Wood ‘ennobled the Bible-bound agricultural life he was raised in,’ but ‘as a gay man, he also experienced its menace.’”
“A hint of fame’s toll can be seen in a self-portrait Wood completed in 1941. The painting seems tragicomic: a show of macho resolve from a baby-faced sensitive man who would die of cancer a year later at 50. ‘The longer I look at the picture, the more I feel that its subject is about to burst into tears.’”

Questions:

The Whitney Museum’s description of this exhibition states that “By depicting his subconscious anxieties through populist images of rural America, Wood crafted images that speak both to American identity and to the estrangement and isolation of modern life.”
In what way do artists, musicians, writers, and others depict American identity today? Do you think feelings of estrangement and isolation are more or less common today than they were in the 1930s?

How does having knowledge about an artist’s character and background change the way one views a work of art by that artist? Is it then possible to philosophically separate the aesthetics of an artwork from the creator of the artwork? Many modern and contemporary works of art are inextricably tied to the artist’s identity and the artist makes their intent clear; how is the experience of viewing these types of works different from viewing a work by an artist such as Grant Wood? How is it similar?

Grant Wood painted scenes of rural American life in the 1930s. What subjects do you think he might paint if he were working today?

Allied Texts:

Thornton Wilder's "Our Town"

F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby"

Walt Whitman's poetry

HEALTH SCARE OF THE WEEK

Guy Hill

Title: "The Cost of Skipping Breakfast"

Author: Editorial Staff

Source: Health & Science; page 19

Publication Date: 20 October 2017

Basic Concept:

The article discusses the importance of eating a hearty breakfast as opposed to eating a very light breakfast, or no breakfast at all. A study involving 4,052 healthy men and women showed unhealthy repercussions from eating either a light breakfast, or no breakfast at all, in the form of atherosclerosis (plaque-filled, clogged arteries). The people included in the study were middle-aged, but were twice as likely to develop the aforementioned health problem, as well as problems like being overweight, smoking, and having high blood-pressure.

Commentary:

This article is likely to spark controversy over what is meant by the term "hearty breakfast". Surely there is a fine line between a "hearty breakfast" and an unhealthy, fattening one, but that line was not explored, so this description was left to the reader's interpretation. In addition, the study does not address other factors that may contribute to the health of the 4,052 participants of the study. Do they exercise regularly? What are their other eating habits and lifestyle choices that may contribute to their health? Are there hereditary or environmental factors involved that may play a role? Neither of these vital questions are addressed in the survey, nor in the accompanying article.

Quotations:

". . . researchers found that those who generally ate a light breakfast or skipped the meal entirely, had more plaque in their arteries than those who ate a hearty breakfast."

"Skipping breakfast in the morning by itself is not the problem. The problem is what you eat afterward."

Questions:

1. What do research and statistics really tell us?
2. How can we accurately interpret and analyze data in a way that can inspire change in how we live our everyday life?
3. How do we effectively process and incorporate new information into our daily practices and habits?

THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Elizabeth Davis

Journal/Book Title: Artificial Intelligence: A Threat to Humans?

Journal/Book Author: Editorial Staff

Source: The Week, page 18

Publication Date: 8/1/17

Basic Concept:

This article covers the debate about the regulation of artificial intelligence (AI) between technology figureheads Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg. While Musk argues that deregulation will end in a dystopian society, Zuckerberg claims that AI will only enhance humans' quality of life. However, other experts note that AI is only as good or evil as its users.

Comment:

In light of the recent Cambridge Analytica scandal and the implementation of the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), this article serves as an excellent discussion starter about how humans use and misuse technology. Moreover, students can consider what a posthuman society might look like, considering how the definition of what it means to be human might apply when the distinction between human and artificial intelligence is blurred.

Quotations:

"...just like nuclear fusion, 'the dangerous aspect of technology will always come from people and their use of it, not the technology.'"

"...if Musk is being irresponsible, so is Zuckerberg, for sugarcoating 'the very real lion's den we're walking into.'"

Questions:

- 1. How could artificial intelligence alleviate existing societal inequities or compound them?*
- 2. How do we define the difference between human and robot, and in what circumstances could these lines be crossed?*

Allied Texts:

"The Minority Report" and Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep? by Philip K. Dick

"The Veldt" by Ray Bradbury

"Generation Why?" by Zadie Smith

FILM REVIEW: THE DARKEST HOUR (2017)

Brianna Brown

The Darkest Hour is a biopic focusing on Winston Churchill's interactions and decisions surrounding the United Kingdom's involvement in World War II during what Churchill himself coined "The Darkest Hour": the time period from May 1940 to June 1941, when mainland Britain faced the greatest threat of invasion by Germany. Conveniently, it presents a view of the diplomatic history coinciding with the military action depicted in the film *Dunkirk*, also released in 2017.

The film emphasizes Churchill's notable relationships during this period, both personal (most notably with his wife, Clementine) and political. The cast of characters includes those working for him (such as his personal secretary, Elizabeth Layton and his future successor Sir Anthony Eden) and with him (such as his colleagues in Parliament, Neville Chamberlain and Viscount Halifax). A particularly poignant scene even depicts a phone conversation between Churchill and President Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

Special focus is placed on three of Churchill's most controversial decisions as prime minister—his initial lie to the British people about the true state of the war, his attempt to draw fire away from British forces at Dunkirk by sacrificing British forces garrisoned at Calais, and his refusal to consider peace negotiations with Hitler. To this end, the film strikes an impeccable balance between humor and gravitas in its depiction of one of history's most colorful and influential figures.

Suggested Film Pairings

- Atonement* (2007)
- Churchill* (2017)
- The Crown* (ongoing Netflix series)
- Dunkirk* (2017)
- The Gathering Storm* (1974)
- The Gathering Storm* (2002)
- The Imitation Game* (2014)
- The King's Speech* (2010)
- Into the Storm: Churchill at War* (2009)
- Their Finest* (2016)

Suggested Text Pairings

- Atonement* by Ian McEwan
- Code Name Verity* by Elizabeth Wein
- Darkest Hour* by Anthony McCarten
- Dead Wake: The Last Crossing of the Lusitania* by Erik Larson
- Dreadnought* by Robert K. Massey
- Goodbye to All That* by Robert Graves
- The Second World War* (Series) by Winston Churchill
Especially: *Their Finest Hour*, Volumes I and II
- Testament of Youth* by Vera Brittain
- The Zimmerman Telegram* by Barbara W. Tuchman

Suggested Online Resources

BBC iWonder: "Lusitania: Who was to blame for the deaths of 1,201 people?"

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/guides/z2vj7ty#z9mgcdm>

Churchill Allies: "One Search: Churchill on the Web"

<https://www.churchillallies.org/>

Encyclopædia Britannica: "Winston Churchill"

<https://www.britannica.com/biography/Winston-Churchill>

International Churchill Society: "For Educators"

<https://winstonchurchill.org/resources/for-educators/>

Scholastic: "Discovering Winston Churchill: Teaching Ideas and Resources"

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/discovering-winston-churchill-teaching-ideas-and-resources/>

TeachingAmericanHistory.org: "Lesson Plans – Churchill and America"

<http://teachingamericanhistory.org/past-programs/churchill/lessonplans/>

Winston Churchill: "Their Finest Hour" (Complete Speech)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jB5wZtV1MWM>

Questions to Support Classroom Analysis

1. The film flips the usual script in its depiction of those striving for peace (Chamberlain and his allies) as the villains. Do you think it is possible that war/violence can be the morally correct option?
2. How do the leadership styles of Churchill and Chamberlain differ?
3. In selecting his War Cabinet, Churchill elects to surround himself with his political enemies? Why do you think he does this?
4. How does Churchill's relationship with the king evolve over the course of the film?
5. Clementine says, "These inner battles have actually trained you for this very moment. You are strong because you are imperfect, you are wise because you have doubts." Do you agree? How can imperfections and doubts make one a stronger or better leader?
6. How does Clementine appear to view Churchill in the film? What means does she use to sway him in ways that others cannot?
7. In the beginning of the film, Churchill is unwilling to tell the public the actual truth: is this morally right? What are his reasons? How important is it for a leader to be truthful?
8. How do the scenes in Parliament differ from images and footage you've seen of American Congressional sessions?
9. What do you think of Churchill's willingness to sacrifice the 3,000 men stationed at Calais in an attempt to save the 300,000 at Dunkirk?
10. What potential dangers or problems could texts that depict "Historical Fiction" generate?

FEATURED AUTHORS

Robert Lipsyte

A finalist for the 1992 Pulitzer Prize in Commentary who won the 2001 Margaret A. Edwards Award from the American Library Association for lifetime contribution to Young Adult Literature. His best-selling teen-age novels include "The Contender" and "One Fat Summer," recently made into a film with Donald Sutherland, "Measure of a Man."

Rachael Duane

Received her BA in English from Wake Forest University, with a focus on creative writing. She is currently an MFA candidate in poetry at Seattle Pacific University.

Joan Mitchell

A part-time assistant professor in the Department of Education at Wake Forest University. She is co-author of the English education textbook Bridging English (now in its 6th edition), and her current research focuses on writing pedagogy in the secondary classroom. She is a regular presenter at both NCTE and the North Carolina English Teachers Association annual conferences.

Lucy Milner

Began her teaching career in urban high schools in Georgia and North Carolina, continued teaching English methods classes at Salem College, and simultaneously, was passionately engaged in North Carolina's innovative summer program, the N. C. Governor's School, first as an English teacher and then as its Director. She has written book reviews and features for newspapers and educational journals, two books on children's literature and English pedagogy (as co-editor), and six editions of Bridging English (as co-author).

Katie Womack

The Assistant Director of Collections Management at Reynolda House Museum of American Art. Katie holds a BFA in Ceramics from the University of North Texas and an MA in Museum Studies from Syracuse University. She has worked in the museum field for 13 years, with a focus on collections stewardship and exhibition management.

Guy Hill

An English teacher of regular and honors ninth and tenth grade English, as well as Advanced Placement Language and Composition, at Triton High School, in Harnett County. Having a Bachelor's Degree in English from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and a Master's Degree of English/Education from Wake Forest University, he has completed his 22nd year teaching. He has been a member of the Board of Directors and President of the North Carolina English Teachers Association.

Elizabeth Davis

A graduate student in the Master Teacher Fellows Program in Graduate Education at Wake Forest University. You can contact her at davier17@wfu.edu.

Brianna Brown

A graduate of the NC Teaching Fellows program at UNC-Chapel Hill and the WFU MA-Ed. program, Brianna Brown is in her eighth year of teaching. Brianna taught 10th grade English (World Literature)

in Davie County and Wake County public schools for 7 years before making the radical shift to teach at a private middle school. She currently teaches 7th grade (Medieval) and 8th grade (American) Literature courses and coaches Middle and High School Cross-Country at Thales Academy in Rolesville, NC.

SUBMISSIONS

Call for Articles and Posts

NAL is an online quarterly journal that is inclusive of multiple disciplines. NAL seeks articles that explore engaging literary texts or basic ideas from diverse fields such as art, religion, politics, natural sciences that engage students in the classrooms of grades 6–12.

In addition to the Articles published in each of the four issues, readers are encouraged to submit wide-ranging, shorter Posts that follow a simple template.

Template for Posts

1. Title of Post
2. Post writer
3. Basic bibliographic information: Text's Title, Author, Source, Publication Date, Internet Link
4. Brief concept of the Post
5. Comment
6. Two or three crucial quotes from the text
7. Two or more probing questions about the text
8. Two or more allied texts that support or counter the same topic

Submission Process for Articles and Posts

- Manuscripts should be sent electronically to Rachel Adjami, Assistant to the Editor (adjara15@wfu.edu).
- Submissions should range from 600 to 1000 words. Authors should use the most important word from their title on the bottom right side of each page alongside the page number of each page. Pages should be double spaced throughout (including quotations, notes, and works cited) with standard margins.
- A brief statement should be provided that states that the manuscript has not been published or is not submitted elsewhere.
- Copies of everything you send us should be saved. We cannot return any materials to authors.
- Authors' names should not appear in the text or the reference list. Substitute 'Author' for citations in the text and in the reference list.
- Two Submissions Editors review submitted manuscripts within 20 days of their receipt. If the manuscript is accepted, the editors will provide suggestions for revision and return the revised text within 20 days to the author.

Publication and Submission Deadlines

Fall, September 15: Submit by July 15
Winter, December 15: Submit by October 15
Spring, March 15: Submit by January 15
Summer, June 15: Submit by April 15

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