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English Language Arts Journal

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**The Alberta
Teachers' Association**

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Editor's Message

Amanda Thomson, editor
English Language Arts Journal

Nothing gives me greater pleasure than checking my English Language Arts Council (ELAC) e-mail account and spying a new submission waiting there for me—perched in anticipation, imploring silently. If any readers out there have volunteered or are volunteering as editors, or if you can even imagine trying to procure writing from teachers who are constantly exhausted and feel as though the last thing they want to do in their free time is write, I'm betting that you can understand my sentiment when I say that I am elated when a new piece of writing graces my inbox, especially when I didn't have to beg, borrow or steal to make it happen. So, to this issue's authors, thank you. Thank you for the time, effort and passion that you put into your writing, and perhaps most importantly, thank you for sharing a little bit about yourself with us. And thank you to the previous and current authors, colleagues, friends and classmates who selflessly volunteer their time to serve as peer reviewers. The integrity of the *English Language Arts Journal* and the quality of the works published would not be what they are without your careful eyes and thoughtful feedback.

Now, without further adieu, I am incredibly happy to share the diverse works of the following authors with you: Brent Saccucci, Karissa L Horne, Kerry B Bernes, Annelise M Lyseng, Jonathan L Roque, Holly Portas, Andrew Thomson, Bryson Dillabough and Julia Sprysak. These authors made me reminisce (and cringe, but in a fun way) about my time as a beginning teacher (Saccucci), contemplate my current Grade 6 classroom and think about where I can incorporate new, fun activities (Horne, Bernes, Lyseng and Roque), reflect on the idea that we rarely study multiple works from the same author or filmmaker and wonder if I

I'm betting that you can understand my sentiment when I say that I am elated when a new piece of writing graces my inbox, especially when I didn't have to beg, borrow or steal to make it happen.

can adapt the study of an auteur to my elementary classroom (Thomson), and last, remember how much I used to love talking and learning about different occupations when I was young (Portas, Bernes, Lyseng, Roque and Horne). And just like the aforementioned authors, the young authors in this issue were also a delight to read. Mr Dillabough, your poem, "Screens," made me feel an interesting mix of both sadness and hope: I feel that you really captured contemporary society's reliance on, and obsession with, technology and social media, but I am so hopeful for the future because there are insightful youth like you who recognize the harm that is taking place. And Ms Sprysak, what an incredibly talented and creative young writer you are. "Adult Napped" had everything: mystery, crime, humour and my personal favourite, a dash of romantic intrigue!

So, for all of the current authors, young and *less young*, thank you again. The *English Language Arts Journal* is lucky to have your work. 📖

President's Message

Chandra Hildebrand, president
English Language Arts Council

If you're anything at all like me, the start of this school year came with even more feelings than usual. The usual excitement and nerves of a new school year along with the lingering uncertainty, anxiety and exhaustion that the last couple of years have wrought are now tempered with a cautious optimism and renewed resolve. And for those of you new to the profession—welcome! What a unique and fascinating time to be starting out! The perspectives and experiences you bring with you are invaluable, and I'm so glad you've joined us.

Whether this is your first or 40th year, it will certainly be interesting once again. And as we inevitably face pressures to get back to normal, help students to catch up, mitigate for learning loss and achieve certain benchmarks or learning goals or test scores, below are the hopes that I cling to for all of us English language arts teachers:

- I hope that we will remember and find joy in what's truly important in our classrooms by connecting authentically with students and making them feel valued; sharing our passion for story; fostering a love of reading; encouraging students to confidently share their voice and perspective through their writing; and nurturing curiosity, critical thinking and compassion. All of these things are far more important than any score on a multiple-choice quiz or whatever other standardized assessment ends up being most trendy this year.
- I hope that we will take care of ourselves and unapologetically protect our work-life balance and mental health. That stack of marking can

I hope that we will remember and find joy in what's truly important in our classrooms by connecting authentically with students and making them feel valued.

stay in the bag or on the desk another day if it means taking some much-needed time with family and friends, getting a good night's sleep or doing activities that fill our tanks.

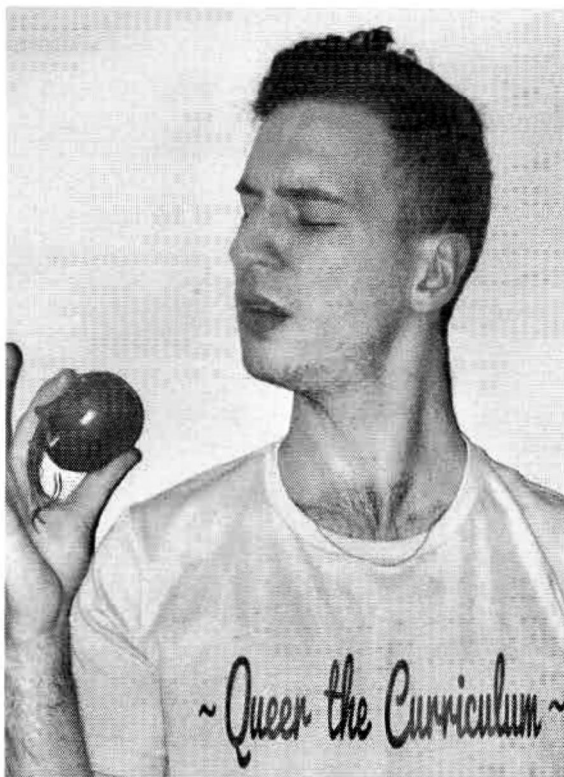
- Finally, I hope that we each have at least one community of other English language arts teachers who will uplift and inspire us, and share support and solidarity. I'm so thankful for ELAC, which has been one of those communities for me for my entire teaching career. I'd like to extend my special gratitude, in particular, to Nicole Court, whose excellent and enthusiastic leadership of ELAC over the past two years has been awe-inspiring!

Thank you for all you do in the service of a continued strong and vital public education system in our province. 📖

The Teacher's Tomatoes:

The Mess of Queer Pedagogy in the English Classroom

Brent Saccucci, high school IB English teacher
Mohkinstsis, Treaty 7



In this visual creation paper, I want to introduce a series of short philosophical essays, or as Anne Carson (2015) describes them “short talks,” with stories that represent my time teaching (and learning to teach). I’ll use narrative photovoice (Sutton-Brown 2014; Simmonds, Roux and Avest 2015) as an artistic methodology to communicate the messiness, queerness and affectively charged performative life of teaching—all through eating a tomato. Drawing heavily on Jaarsma’s (2019) podcast, *The Learning Gene*, I will, like Jaarsma, use a multiliteracy (the visual) to make a mess out of queer pedagogy. I define queer pedagogy from

Halberstam’s (2011) idea of failure, that as a queer pedagogue I already am failing the reproductive futurity of youth and education by bringing my queer, nonreproductive body into the space.

I use the term *tomatoes* to describe the process of pedagogical choices teachers design and employ (Jaarsma 2019). To me, tomatoes are particularly concerned with classroom affects, and as a critical educator, the affects that circulate, sting and are “sticky” (Mulcahy 2016). I find tomatoes to be a generative metaphor for reflecting on my own practice: tomatoes are messy, disgusting and tasty, and dependent on your experience with tomatoes, they hold a story. Just like our own education journeys, our early years thinking through and with tomatoes (pedagogy) teach us what tomatoes taste like. To some, early memories of ripe grape tomatoes sprinkled over a summer salad during a neighbourhood barbecue come to mind. For others, tomatoes may have been slowly cut for their three younger siblings’ lunches late on a Tuesday school night, when they were only 10 years old, acting as a caregiver for their siblings while their parents were away.

Tomatoes, like pedagogy, are full of sticky affects when you eat them without cutting them first with a long straight knife. Diving in and eating a tomato with your hands and body requires a mess, stickiness and some repulsion. This paper will analyze the ripe red desire of tomatoes, their disgust and their taste in a messy food fight of stories crossing my time as student and teacher, queering the temporality of my educational experience. Second, through narrative photovoice, I am attempting to “archive the ephemeral” (Kumbier 2014). Queer mess (Campbell and Farrier 2015), as I will later theorize as the politically affective classroom,

cannot be archived, published or cited. Queer mess is “formations of knowledge that sit outside long-standing institutional hierarchies” (p 83). I extend Campbell and Farrier’s definition by adding that queer mess in the antioppressive classroom queers curricula’s linearity and requires a responsiveness of the teacher’s messy hands.

Within the rise of the increasing pressure to monitor, archive and record teaching practice to be valid research, pedagogy-in-the-moment refuses to be under surveillance. I close my door and the show begins—unrecorded and unarchived.

Taking the unarchivable affect as the gravitational nucleus of the critical classroom, pedagogy-as-performance is always in the moment and always leaving and arriving to us. Within the rise of the increasing pressure to monitor, archive and record teaching practice to be valid research, pedagogy-in-the-moment refuses to be under surveillance. I close my door and the show begins—unrecorded and unarchived. In this way, we cannot archive the tomato. We can reflect on it, after the fact, but in reality, this paper can only attempt as a photovoice and performance art piece of a pedagogy that has already come and gone, and becoming anew as it is experienced now by you, the reader.

The image on the first page of this paper represents the *investigative*. The investigative tomato is the first day of class, both as a teacher and as a student. You are investigating the space, the teacher, your classmates, the syllabus and making a decision (will you take a bite?). As a student, you might be wondering if you should stay in the course or if you should drop it. In my master’s, we used to call this “shopping,” where we would go to several different seminars in the first week of the semester to decide afterward which we would keep in our timetables and which we would drop. Just like at the grocery store, the ripest tomatoes are put at the top of the pile. None of the mess, the disagreement or the rot can be seen. As you decide which tomatoes to put in your shopping cart, you investigate which tomatoes are the highest quality.

My First Day as a Drama Student

I remember my first day of my undergraduate degree at the University of Alberta. It was a drama class titled Oral Communication. It was also a 200-level course (a fact that as a first-year, I never let my friends forget at the time). I had reviewed, colour-coated and examined my timetable at least six times on the bus to campus. I had my first-day-of-school outfit planned; it was a scholar-chic ensemble that consisted of a cardigan, burgundy shirt (casual smart was my Pinterest search) and black skinny jeans (a habit I still can’t kick). I walk into a circular room with a sunken centre and 20-somethings filing in with their Starbucks while my panic increased. Do I look too young to be here? I shouldn’t have taken drama.

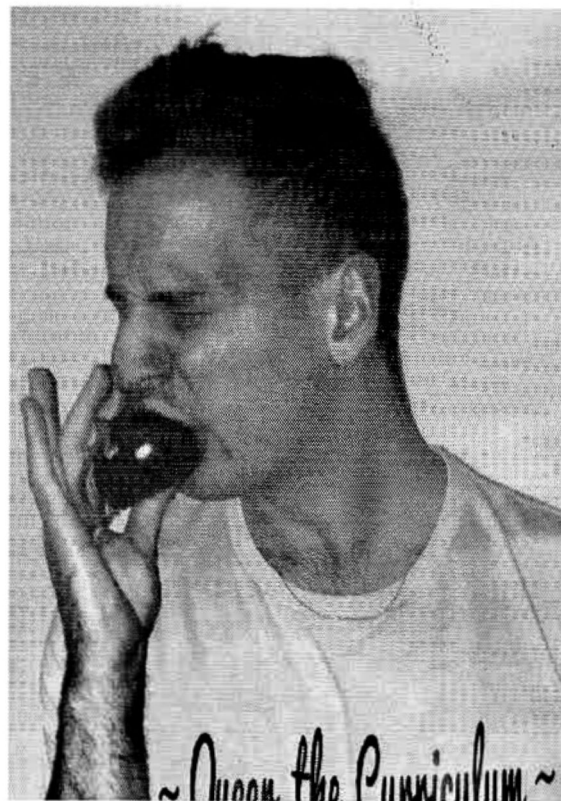
I have been a performer my whole life. From poetry to stand-up comedy I have always enjoyed the stage, which is probably why I enjoy the performance of teaching so much. But I had always avoided the drama classroom—it was a clear (and hidden curriculum) sign that any male-presenting student in drama class had to be queer. In an effort of absolutely-not-a-damn-chance, I had to avoid all costs of being read as gay in my Catholic hockey-culture high school in suburban Alberta. I used to take 20-minute bathroom breaks in Grade 12 and pass by the open-doored drama room and see them acting, playing improv games and laughing. I policed my body to perform straight maleness all day; I wouldn’t risk it for one performance in the school play. Once I got out of here and to university I would take drama.

My First Day as an English Teacher

My first day teaching junior high English I was reviewing my lesson plan for my Grade 7s that I’d written perfectly in my new leather-bound notebook. I had no sleep the night before. I was up all night on PowerSchool (the eLearning system) reviewing student photos so that they would be impressed that I already knew their names on the first day. I was student-teaching at an arts-focused high school, and my presteamed outfit screamed COOLBUTSMARTENGLISHTEACHER. I had my curriculum planned tightly, but the “curriculum-as-lived” (Aoki 2004) had different plans for that class. The students smelled me out. Was my

tomato authoritative? How would my pedagogy taste? As the “shoppers” gaze reversed on to me, I was now on stage to perform the best tomato for them. Different than my own experience shopping for classes in graduate school, K-12 students were getting the tomatoes they got handed regardless of choice. They couldn’t switch out. They weren’t buying the tomato (paying tuition). But, because of this compulsory requirement of both of our bodies forced to stay in the room, they tested me. A sniff. A little bite. A squeeze. When would it pop? I stood round, red, perfectly shaped, and only one small dig into my thin tomato skin would pop my gooey insides all over. And pop I did. I screamed at a student, “Get out of my class!” after he tipped a bookshelf over. He cried and ran out. I hid my tearing eyes as I ran after him, leaving the rest of the class alone in shock.

Below, each line of tomatoes represents a class I have taught, a workshop facilitated or a lecture given. After years of teaching, the students look the same to us—row after row—they start to blur together when you scroll quickly through this document. On pause, we see each tomato as unique. Sometimes a tomato repeats, but each tomato when seen slowly in these images is its own shape, and likely a different makeup of seeds, juices and texture underneath the skin; consequently, each tomato, when eaten slowly, has a different taste.



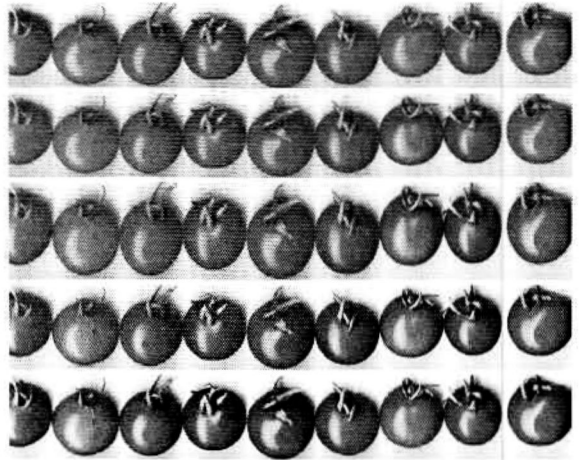
The Second Stage of Tomatoes Is *The First Bite*

In *The First Bite*, both student and teacher dive in. Usually the teacher takes the first bite and offers a taste to the class. The teacher starts talking at the beginning of the class because somebody has to eat or else we will all starve. Within seconds you know the type of tomato you’ve gotten here. It’s immediately sour to your taste buds, but to someone else, immediately savoury. Rotten, ew! Or delicious, fantastic. The first bite is a risk—a jump. In *The First Bite* photo (image 2), I am diving in to risk before I learn. The risk proceeds learning; the learning doesn’t proceed the risk. This first bite is so many things. The first day I taught, the first day of a PhD, the first time I was in drag at an academic conference, the first kiss. These moments were all pedagogical. Tomatoes, in this sense, represent the eating done outside the classroom. The first bite when mom wasn’t looking. The “Send” on an e-mail to a journal publisher of a risky, research-creation piece where I talk about feeling as pedagogy. Like in the photo, the eyes are always closed on the first bite. All senses stop other than that of taste.

This semester I taught my first undergraduate university class. I had set up a red apple and a crisp yellow pencil on each student's desk since I teach in a teacher education program. These apples represented something similar to a tomato: they held a cultural sign of a teacher, they symbolized the purity of a proper teacher. But as red as it looked on the outside, I was never an apple. I was a tomato. I was not Ms or Mrs or Mr, ever. Like my cisgender and straight educator peers, I was red and round on the outside, reading as cisgender man, a strong, Gala-apple teacher. But one sniff, one touch of my skin (one sound of my gay voice) reveals the first bite won't be like an apple. The tomato is the apple-gone-queer, the apple-gone-sour, the rotten apple. Seeds of infertility drip out of the tomato on the first bite. A mess you did not expect, a mistake you made, but is already here. Disgust. I have become so comfortable in my body I forget the disgust and discomfort that people feel when near a flamboyant, flaming, femme gay man. This disgust is "wound up in particular social relations" of power (Ahmed 2004, 85). I think of disgust here as generative disgust. We just have to look at the disgust and sit with it, however ugly it is. Whether that disgust be within ourselves or within our world, the tomato brings about a pedagogical disgust where we are stuck with the queer teacher and must ask, after the initial repulsion has subsided, "Why does this taste the way it does?"

Then there is *the mess*. And all the queer mess of disgust (at that opinion he said) and anger (about why you are talking over her) that comes with it. Suddenly curriculum-as-lived is nonlinear; a student has cried in class, I have cried in class, a student misgenders me repeatedly, and I become red and the tomato drops. The pedagogy and its inherent performance have been puked back up and is now all over the floor. I look around, and regardless of who started this food fight, the only hands that are messy are mine.

In the mess we can choose one of two paths. We can reorient ourselves and straighten out the classroom back to order, and move on with the next slide, ignoring the racist comment (or whatever began the affective food fight). As we hit the right arrow key and read the title of the next topic, the affect stays in the room. Its transmission is here lingering underneath (Manning 2019), and we can perform clean pedagogy, or we can move to the



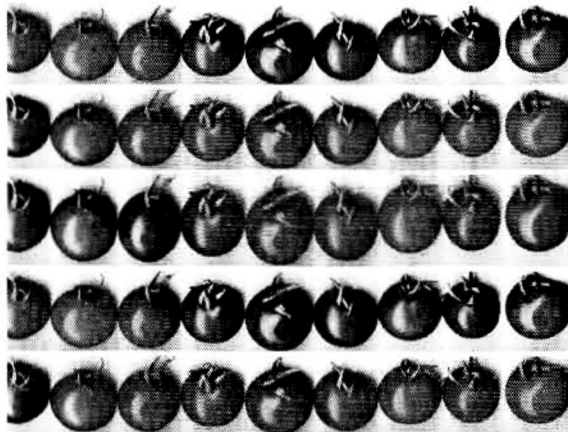
less-pretty-to-look-at option two: We stay in the mess. We don't discipline. We lay inside chatter and chaos, and don't summatively assess. We resist the need for perfectly well lined up tomatoes and get into the affective work underlying antioppressive pedagogy that is always already there. In the mess the teacher's hands are soaked in not responsibility to straighten out the class, but rather, a responsibility to continue the food fight. "My anxiety

is loud today, and that triggered me.” “I know I am your teacher, but that hurt my feelings that you said ‘that’s so gay.’” “No, it’s not OK to say that about immigrants, regardless of who you cite.”

Why not bring the always-already messy feelings into the room? Isn’t that the only way we can truly digest this “difficult knowledge” (Pitt and Britzman 2003)?

After all, it’s only tomatoes.

Like I said, it’s only tomatoes.



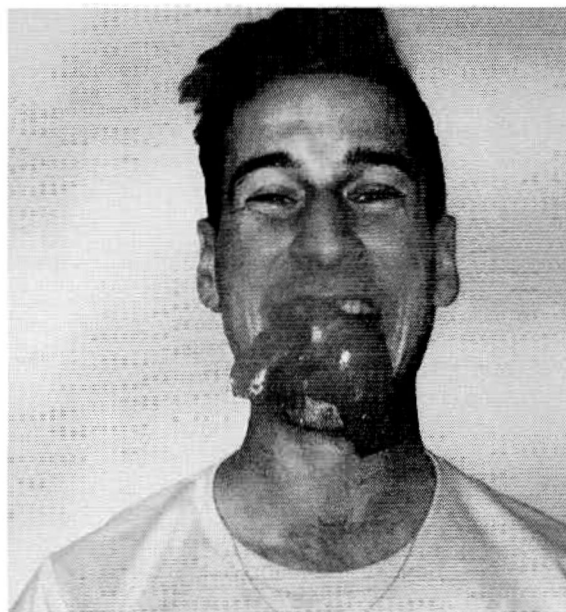
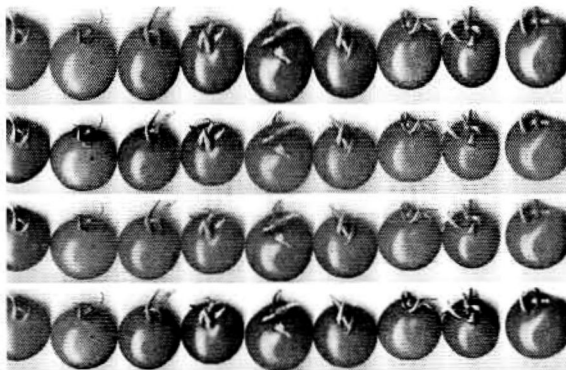
And because much of affect theory tends to be critical of “good” and “bad” feelings, we often, as critical pedagogues, err on the side of “bad” affects. We look at sadness and depression (Cvetkovich 2012), cruelty (Berlant 2012), killjoy feminism (Ahmed 2010), which are all necessary “schol-activism” (Ramsey 2018) that trouble, happiness and good affects as curricular (and state) goals. But messy affects can be funny, silly, and it can be relieving to laugh amid the performance of pedagogy both the learner and the teacher are doing for one another (Jaarsma 2019, 26:40). Take for example the hilarity in *Matilda* when Matilda uses her powers to overthrow the tyrant Ms Trunchbull. The peak of the scene is when all of the other students start throwing food at Ms Trunchbull too, while laughing and shouting. This scene acts as a metaphor for food fights as the messy of revolutionary education and can put the power back in the students’ hands when we all realize we are full of the mess too. Here, the performance of authority pauses and humanity leaks through the sticky coating, and the release of this heaviness comes in the form of a laugh (DeVito 1996).

As much as I respect teachers who follow critical pedagogy’s recipe for success, there is nothing like being human, in all its flavours, that helps students learn about how to play in the mud of these difficult and trying times we are in.

Laughter has been so central to my pedagogy. Maybe because I perform as a drag queen and stand-up comic that I have come to understand that through difficult conversations about privilege, oppression and mental illness, laughter is what allows us to play with this difficult knowledge in a creative way, and through this play, we make sense of what this heaviness can mean when we sculpt it, shape it and perform with it (not against it). When we laugh we redistribute the weight of antioppressive pedagogy from our guilty gut into the rest of our body. We mobilize into action and not reaction.

When we play in the classroom, we allow mistakes, failures and wrongness to be pedagogically important—these are all necessary ingredients to any good tomato soup. As much as I respect teachers who follow critical pedagogy’s recipe for success, there is nothing like being human, in all its flavours, that helps students learn about how to play in the mud of these difficult and trying times we are in. Play with your students. Tell them about the time you failed a test. Talk about why you are actually taking off early before class ends. Tell them you are new. You are experimenting. The final stage of the tomato is the *playful tomato*. In order for the mess to be pedagogical, we have to play with it.

A student, after my first round of course evaluations, wrote of my teaching, “All I learned in this stupid class was that my prof is a drag queen and that [discriminatory comment removed].” The next student wrote, “This teacher changed my life.” 🍷



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Brent Saccucci (they/he) is a high school IB English teacher in Mohkinstsis (Calgary's Treaty 7). Brent is a PhD student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Alberta, where his research program investigates the curricular potential of queering and decolonizing the language arts. At the University of Alberta, Brent was a doctoral fellow while also teaching student teachers in literacy pedagogy courses. As an English education specialist, Brent's research in English language arts has been published in the Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies, alt.theatre: cultural diversity and the stage, and ZINES: An International Journal on Amateur and DIY Media. Having taught from Grade 4 to serving as adjunct professor at UBC's Faculty of Education, Brent holds a BEd in English education from the University of Alberta, and an MA in curriculum studies (literacy) from OISE at the University of Toronto where he was a Canada graduate scholar. Brent is passionate about multiliteracies in ELA and social and emotional justice in schools.

Career Education Integration into English Language Arts at the Grade 6 Level

Karissa L Horne, Kerry B Bernes, Annelise M Lyseng and Jonathan L Roque
University of Lethbridge

Implementing career education in the early stages of life is important in helping students develop increased self-awareness and explore different careers. The current paper details the components of a career planning unit that was implemented by a preservice teacher. The unit was integrated with English language arts (ELA) in a Grade 6 classroom of 28 students in southern Alberta. Students completed a variety of career planning activities that involved self-reflection, expressive writing and small-group discussion. After finishing the unit, students completed evaluation surveys to determine the effectiveness of the unit. Students rated the unit and reported on whether it has helped them to learn more about themselves and careers, as well as whether the unit made them excited about their lives and if it made them want to learn more about different careers. The results highlight the effectiveness of this career education project in ELA at the Grade 6 level. The strengths, limitations and future directions of the project are discussed.

Background

To help situate the current research, an overview of how career planning became integrated into the Alberta curriculum is provided. To begin, a comprehensive career needs survey (CCNS) was developed by Magnusson and Bernes (2002) to gain a better understanding of students' career needs. The CCNS is a collaborative initiative between the Southern Alberta Centre of Excellence for Career Development at the University of Lethbridge Faculty of Education, the Chinook Regional Career Transitions for Youth Project and the Southwestern Rural Youth Career Development Project (2002). The aim of the survey was to

capture students' perceptions of career development and planning needs as well as any perceived gaps that might be present in existing services (Magnusson and Bernes 2002; Witko et al 2006). The survey included both quantitative and qualitative responses, and they were distributed to 54 junior high and senior high schools in the southern Alberta region by classroom teachers (Witko et al 2006). The survey results indicated that some of the most pressing needs for junior and senior high school students were finding their interests and abilities, discovering their passions, gaining support for their career plans and postsecondary education, and gaining financial information (Magnusson and Bernes 2002). Additionally, the surveys implied that beginning career planning earlier (in junior high or even before) could be more effective in assisting students through the process of career decision making (Witko et al 2006). Given these results, it was evident that career planning was an important component that was lacking from students' educational experiences in southern Alberta.

Based on the results obtained from the CCNS, a career education pilot project, Career Coaching Across the Curriculum, was created and implemented (Slomp, Gunn and Bernes 2014). Alberta Education and the Canadian Career Development Foundation supported the project by providing funding to train 50 preservice teachers in career education, which allowed them to go into schools in Alberta and implement career education across the K–12 curriculum. The pilot project consisted of two components (2014). First, the Career Education course was provided to the preservice teachers over four weekends (2014). The first three

weekends provided preservice teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary for integrating career interventions into the regular curriculum, and then the fourth weekend allowed preservice teachers to share their lesson plans, unit plans and schoolwide interventions they developed to their classmates (2014). Second, after successfully completing the four-weekend Career Education course, students completed a 12-week internship where they could transfer their newly acquired knowledge and skills into elementary, middle or high schools in southern Alberta (2014). The larger data set has already been published (2014) and thus, the current paper aims to detail an example of one of the specific classroom implementations from the larger study and explore the research question, “What is the effectiveness of the career planning unit in Grade 6 ELA?”

Career Education

Career education is “a systematic attempt to influence the career development of students and adults through various kinds of educational strategies, including providing occupational information, worksite-based experiences, career planning courses, and infusing career-related concepts into the academic curriculum” (Hoyt et al 1972, as cited in Niles and Harris-Bowlsbey 2017, 13). According to Knight (2015), implementing career education in elementary school can assist students in making important connections between their education and potential future success. Moreover, when this connection is realized, it can act as a motivation factor for students’ academic performance (Knight 2015). Given this information, it seemed appropriate to integrate career education into Grade 6 as it allows students to make this connection well in advance before having to make career decisions in high school. In the career planning unit, career education was implemented into the *English Language Arts K-9 Program of Studies* (Alberta Learning 2000) with a series of journal response activities and self-directed exercises. Through individual and small-group work, the students explored their personal attributes and learned more about how they could apply them to potential careers. The intention of the unit was to stimulate students to think about and use their passions and interests and recognize the common themes that held meaning for them in their

lives. Additionally, this unit was designed to help students focus on personal meaning and realize its importance as a guide for a meaningful, rewarding future, as opposed to making a career decision.

Career planning is a lifelong process that assists individuals in making career-related decisions that are personally relevant and meaningful.

Career Planning

Career planning is a lifelong process that assists individuals in making career-related decisions that are personally relevant and meaningful (ALIS 2022). Furthermore, it entails identifying core skills, interests and abilities, as well as feelings about work and life (ALIS 2022). Career planning can be achieved within the context of English language arts because career development is enhanced through storytelling and written expression (McMahon and Watson 2013; Meijers and Lengelle 2012; Lengelle and Meijers 2014). Through storytelling, students can recognize their situations within their ecological systems (for example, family, school, community), engage in self-reflection, and develop senses of meaning making and personal agency. Furthermore, expressing one’s stories facilitates the identification of prominent themes and insights that can then be used to shape career development. Since expressive writing and storytelling are natural features of ELA courses, such processes could be easily integrated into ELA.

According to Super (1984), different vocational tasks can be accomplished at each stage of life. In the growth stage, which occurs from birth to 14 years of age, children can visualize what kind of person they are, develop an orientation toward the world of work and develop an understanding of what work means (Hoffman and McDaniels 1991; Super 1984). Even at a young age, students can make decisions about their interests and preferences, which shape their career aspirations (Magnuson and Starr 2000). Elementary students

benefit from having extended periods of time to explore and investigate potential careers of interest long before they are pressured to make life-defining decisions in high school (Porfeli and Lee 2012). Elementary students are developmentally able to engage in career development, and they are at an opportune stage in their academic career to do so. Thus, it seems fitting to integrate this career planning unit into Grade 6 to encourage students to gain a holistic understanding of themselves before advancing into the next stage of vocational development, exploration, where students will begin to learn more about the different opportunities that are available to them.

Context of the Teaching Environment

In Canada, there is no one standard approach when it comes to teaching career education. Moreover, career education differs significantly across provinces (Connelly et al 2013, as cited in Welde et al 2016). In Alberta specifically, career education is integrated into all levels of education (Welde et al 2016). For instance, in elementary and middle school, it is delivered through the Health and Life Skills (HLS) curriculum, whereas in high school, there is a mandatory course for students known as Career and Life Management (CALM) (2016). Because guidance counsellors do not have the resources to teach career education, teachers often take over this role (Connelly et al 2013, as cited in Welde et al 2016). Thus, career practitioners advocate for teachers to effectively integrate career education (Connelly et al 2013, as cited in Welde et al 2016) into the disciplines they teach to enhance students' career development resources. This integration is important to consider as it serves students with a greater connection to their education and helps them to see the relevance their education has in their future endeavours (Welde et al 2016).

This unit was integrated with a class of 28 Grade 6 students in an urban school located in a large city in southern Alberta. The students were aged 11 to 12; therefore, they were legally too young to work in Alberta, and they were not in a position to make and implement career-making decisions at this time. Instead the teacher felt that the resources and strategies she taught them would aid students in their decision-making process in all areas of their

lives. Throughout the unit, the preservice teacher indicated that it was important for each student to go at their own pace, as this contributed to a more authentic and comfortable learning process.

Cross-Curricular Integration

This career planning unit was combined with the ELA 6 program of studies (Alberta Learning 2000), as the main themes of the career unit were addressed through reading, writing and discussing. To address the ELA 6 program of studies, students completed exercises that coincided with the learning outcomes described below.

Discover and Explore

Discover and Explore is a learning outcome listed in the ELA program of studies. To demonstrate this outcome, students can “read, write, represent, and talk to explore and explain connections between prior knowledge and new information in oral, print, and other media texts [and] engage in exploratory communication to share personal responses and develop own interpretations” (Alberta Learning 2000, 10). These learning outcomes were reinforced by the career planning unit's emphasis on self-reflection and self-exploration.

Clarify and Extend

Another outcome in the ELA program of studies is Clarify and Extend. To express this learning outcome, students can “select from the ideas and observations of others to expand personal understanding [and] use talk, notes, personal writing and representing, together with texts and the ideas of others, to clarify and shape understanding” (Alberta Learning 2000, 14). In a Pride Story activity, students shared stories with one another to express stories of personal meaning and learn from their peers' feedback.

It is imperative that students understand the importance of choosing a path that brings them meaning and purpose.

Career Education Outcomes

The teacher also designed several career education outcomes that students can achieve. During the career planning unit, students

- identified personal interests, passions and hobbies;
- applied processes of career planning to develop and achieve current goals; and
- discovered how their desires, aptitudes, temperament and assets all play a major role in career planning.

Furthermore, the teacher emphasized that each student had strengths that they were encouraged to focus on when determining a career and should not settle for what someone else wants them to be. According to Tiedeman and Miller-Tiedeman (1984), when individuals pursue an action because they want to, they are living a life in align with their own personal realities. On the other hand, however, if individuals are settling for a path that others think they should pursue they are living life according to social reality (1984). If one finds themselves stuck living in a world of social reality, they may experience significant pressures and find that they are unable to fulfill their own meaning in life (1984). Thus, it is imperative that students understand the importance of choosing a path that brings them meaning and purpose. Overall, students learned that career planning is an ongoing and highly personalized process that should consider one's personal characteristics and goals.

Detailed Description of the Unit Plan

This career planning unit spanned over a four-week period with four 85-minute classes each week. There was no shortening or replacement of other Grade 6 units, as the career planning unit was simply integrated with the other Grade 6 curriculum content. Students completed activity sheets (Appendices A–F) throughout the unit that included guided reflection questions, dream exercises, small group activities and free write options. All the activities described below were designed to help students participate in self-exploration.

Introduction

In the introduction lesson, the teacher introduced the career planning unit to the students. The teacher outlined what the unit was about, why it was being taught and an overview of how the unit would proceed. This introduction was followed by an extensive class discussion that addressed the students' perceptions of career planning, fears about career planning and their dreams for the future. The teacher used this discussion to gain an understanding of the students' past career planning experiences and their unique needs and concerns that could be directly targeted throughout the unit. At the end of this discussion, the teacher distributed a list of inspirational quotes, important factors to consider when career planning, and a list of online career planning resources (Appendix A) that students could consider and refer to throughout their career planning experiences.

Holland's Party

In the Holland's Party activity, the teacher introduced students to an activity sheet (K Bernes, personal communication, June 2010) that detailed Holland's (1994) six career typologies in terms of how each type would be represented at a party full of people. On this activity sheet, each of Holland's six themes were represented by a description of what the individuals who adhered to that theme would be like. Each description represented a room full of like-minded individuals that were attending a party. These descriptions, taken directly from the activity sheet, are listed as follows:

- **Realistic:** People who have athletic or mechanical ability, prefer to work with objects, machines, tools, plants, or animals, or to be outdoors
- **Investigative:** People who like to observe, learn, investigate, analyze, evaluate or solve problems
- **Artistic:** People who have artistic, innovating or intuitional abilities, and like to work in unstructured situations using their imagination or creativity
- **Social:** People who like to work with people to inform, enlighten, help, train, develop or cure them, or are skilled with words
- **Entrepreneurial:** People who like to work with people to influence, persuade or perform, or lead or manage for organizational goals or for economic gain

- **Conventional:** People who like to work with data, have clerical or numerical ability, carry things out in detail or follow through on other's instructions

Each student generated a list of at least five careers that would suit each theme. Students then told each other about which room they would spend the most time in, if they were at the party. They then wrote a journal entry to explain their decision. In the journal, students discussed how they decided on which room they would spend most of their time in. They were also welcomed to incorporate their interests, skills, aspirations and so forth.

99-Year-Old Question

In the next activity, students responded to a writing prompt in their journals (Appendix B). This journal prompt asked students to imagine that they were 99 years old and everything in their lives had gone perfectly according to plan. They reflected on their lives and described everything that had happened that they were proud of and happy about. The teacher reinforced that the activity could include anything and everything that students wanted to achieve in life. On completion of the activity, students broke into partners and shared their lists of accomplishments and dreams with their partners. They were encouraged to ask questions and help to provide greater detail to their partners' aspirations.

Perfect Day Visualization

The teacher led students through a guided imagery script (Appendix C), and students imagined every detail of a perfect day in the future. This visualization included elements such as what students were doing, where they were, who they were with and how they felt. Students wrote down the details of their perfect day. The class was divided into small groups of three students to complete this activity so that everyone had an opportunity to share their visualizations with their peers. Group members helped one another to identify aspects of their day that they may not have originally considered and extended their ideas to provide a fuller picture of their visualizations. While students in this class were comfortable in discussing and sharing their perfect day, it is possible that other students in future classes may not be as comfortable. Some

suggestions to adapt this unit to suit the comfort levels of all students include having students read each other's perfect day as opposed to sharing it verbally, placing students in pairs instead of groups to ease the pressure of having to share with multiple people or placing students with peers they are most comfortable with.

Pride Story

In this activity, students wrote pride stories to describe accomplishments in their lives that they were proud of (Appendix D). After writing their stories, students shared them with their peers in their small groups. In each group, students listened carefully to the speaker's story, and when the class returned to the large group, group members shared a pride story that had been told by one of their peers. The teacher noted that students' faces lit up when they heard their neighbours telling the class about their pride stories.

In the next class, students returned to the pride story activity. The students identified positive character traits that came to surface through the pride stories. Students recalled their stories to the class, and then walked around with pieces of paper taped to their backs. Their classmates wrote positive attributes that had been demonstrated by each speaker on their back. The class then returned to their seats and read through the words that their peers had written about them. By doing this activity, students discovered and honed in on what was personally relevant and meaningful to them.

Personality Quiz

Students responded to a series of questions asking them to describe their personal characteristics (Appendix E). These questions addressed how students were best able to learn, their favourite school subjects, and their ideal work situations. This activity was designed to help students think about their personal characteristics that would be important to consider when thinking about possible future careers.

Career Journals

To build on the self-exploration activities that students had completed in previous activities, the students used what they had learned about

themselves to start finding careers of interest. Students brainstormed different careers that suited their personal characteristics and dreams. They wrote about their dream careers through a series of journal prompts (Appendix F). Students also reflected on what they had learned from working with their group members. Students then completed evaluation forms to describe the career unit's overall effectiveness (Appendix G). This activity encouraged students to explore a variety of potential careers they could envision themselves doing in the future, which is a vital part of career planning. According to Magnusson and Bernes (2002), it is important to provide career support all throughout students' K-12 educational experiences. This assists students in learning about their own skills, interests and passions, which help to inform their career decision making before being pressured to decide at the end of high school. Additionally, if children begin to make decisions about themselves at a young age, they will begin to develop skills that are necessary for effective life career planning (Magnuson and Starr 2000).

Method of Evaluating the Unit's Effectiveness

Summative Assessment

On conclusion of the unit, students filled out summative evaluation forms to provide feedback about the unit (Appendix G). The forms evaluated students' participation, ratings of helpfulness, general comments (for example, what they liked most about the unit and what could be improved) and their perceptions of the unit's adherence to four standardized learning objectives.

Results

Summative Assessment Results

A total of 23 students in the class completed the survey. Uncompleted surveys were attributed to student absence. Participation results are presented in Table 1. Helpfulness ratings are described in Table 2, and ratings of agreement with the four learning outcomes are presented in Table 3. Students' open-ended comments are described in the Discussion section.

TABLE 1

Part 1: Completion of Activities

| ACTIVITIES | I DIDN'T DO IT | I DID IT |
|-------------------------|----------------|-----------|
| A. The Party | 0 (0%) | 23 (100%) |
| B. 99-Year-Old Question | 1 (4%) | 22 (96%) |
| C. Pride Story | 3 (13%) | 20 (87%) |
| D. Personality Quizzes | 5 (22%) | 18 (78%) |

Note: 90% of the students completed all the activities (n=23).

TABLE 2

Part 2: Helpfulness of the Activities

| ACTIVITIES | NOT GOOD AT ALL | GOOD | GREAT |
|----------------------|-----------------|---------|----------|
| The Party | 2 (9%) | 8 (35%) | 13 (57%) |
| 99-Year-Old Question | 0 (0%) | 5 (23%) | 17 (77%) |
| Pride Story | 1 (5%) | 6 (30%) | 13 (65%) |
| Personality Quizzes | 0 (0%) | 7 (39%) | 11 (61%) |

Note: 97% of the students surveyed rated the activities as either Good or Great (n=23).

TABLE 3

Part 3: Agreement with Learning Outcomes

| LEARNING OUTCOME | I DON'T AGREE | I'M NOT SURE | I AGREE |
|---|---------------|--------------|----------|
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention helped me to learn a lot about myself. | 0 (0%) | 7 (33%) | 14 (67%) |
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention helped me to learn a lot about careers. | 4 (19%) | 6 (29%) | 11 (52%) |
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention made me excited about what I could do with my life. | 0 (0%) | 7 (33%) | 14 (67%) |
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention made me want to learn more about different careers. | 3 (14%) | 7 (33%) | 11 (52%) |

Note: On average, 60% of the students surveyed agreed that this unit met all of the objectives (n=23).

Discussion**Strengths**

The students enjoyed the career planning unit as 97 per cent of students rated the unit as good or great. Students agreed that the unit had helped them to learn more about themselves and made them excited about what they could do with their lives. Agreement with these objectives reinforces students' comments that they found the unit useful. For example, one student commented, "[This unit gave me] the chance to see who I really was and learn about different careers and my dream job." Such comments highlighted the unit's effectiveness and the potentially powerful influence that it could have on students' career planning processes.

Despite the students' initial reticence toward engaging in the 99-Year-Old Question activity, the teacher reported that this activity ended up being the most effective activity. With the teacher's encouragement, students jumped into the activity and commented on how they had learned things about themselves that they had never thought of before. Their eyes were opened to the multitude of possibilities that they had in their futures, especially if they were willing to align their career planning strategies with their desired life accomplishments. Students also enjoyed being able to share their projected accomplishments with their peers, and one student commented that a highlight of the unit was learning more about their classmates.

Another useful feature of the unit was the format of the activity sheets and journal response activities. With the written, private format, the students felt comfortable sharing intimate details about themselves with their teacher and then engaging in daily one-on-one communication with the teacher. Additionally, this format was highly conducive to ELA learning outcomes, as the teacher was able to assess students' written responses in terms of their stylistic and grammatical conventions, and provide written feedback as appropriate. Therefore, this unit was effective for helping students to share details about themselves in a safe manner while improving their ELA communication skills.

Challenges and Future Directions

One limitation of this project that bears mentioning is that the summative evaluation survey did not capture all of the activities that were completed in the unit. Therefore, the data that were available for analysis did not accurately represent the variety of activities that were included in the unit plan. Future projects should ensure that all activities are adequately addressed in the evaluation survey to ensure that the activities are comparable to one another to assess their relative effectiveness. Additionally, it is important to note that the surveys were distributed by the preservice teacher who also taught the unit, which has the potential for biases and power dynamic influences in students' responses. For instance, students may have felt more inclined to respond positively depending on their

relationship they had with the teacher. Moreover, a teacher is seen to have higher authority and knowledge; therefore, students may have also felt more inclined to say that the unit has helped them learn as that is one of the teacher's main priorities.

Students were less likely to indicate that the Holland's Party activity was good or great. The teacher suspected that students struggled with this activity due to its advanced language and potentially unexciting activity sheet format. In the future, it may be worthwhile for teachers to create physical stations that represent Holland's themes and then provide time at each station. For example, students at the "artistic" station could spend time drawing a picture, whereas students at the "conventional" station could work at solving math equations. This modification would bring Holland's themes to life and make this activity more enticing.

Students recommended that future versions of the project include more activities, games and hands-on activities. The revised Holland's themes activity above would likely help to address these recommendations. The unit could be further enhanced if the teacher could include even more interactive, enjoyable activities. The activities described in this unit plan could be easily integrated into other areas of the Grade 6 ELA program of studies. For example, the 99-Year-Old Question could be tied into novel studies or stories that the students were examining. Furthermore, the activities could be completed individually or as a string of cohesive lessons. Even if students were only exposed to one of these activities, they would still be better prepared for career planning skills than if they had not completed the activity. To maximize the benefits that career education has to offer, it may be helpful to expose students to career planning activities across different courses over an extended period.

Conclusion

Students recognized their common life themes, passions and interests that encourage them to make better decisions regarding their option classes and core streams in middle and senior high school. Students are better acquainted with the career decision-making process and more equipped to make career decisions. The findings from this unit also carry implications for curriculums outside of Alberta and across the globe. For

instance, other provinces and countries may integrate career education into their ELA programs and align (and modify if necessary) the activities within this unit to match their own ELA outcomes. Furthermore, teachers may view alternative ways to integrate this unit into other subject areas aside from ELA. Taken together, career planning is an important integration that helps to enhance students' self-awareness, their meaning and relevancy of the curriculum and their exposure to the variety of opportunities that are available to them. 📖

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Appendix A

List of Inspirational Quotes

What would you attempt to do if you knew you would not fail?

—Robert Schuller

The supreme accomplishment is to blur the line between work and play.

—Arnold Toynbee

Do not follow where the path may lead. Go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Destiny is not a matter of chance. It is a matter of choice: It is not a thing to be waited for, it is a thing to be achieved.

—William Jennings Bryan

Your work is to discover your work and then with all your heart give yourself to it.

—Anne Bancroft

The future belongs to those who believe in the beauty of their dreams.

—Eleanor Roosevelt

The secret of success in life is to be ready for opportunity when it comes.

—Benjamin Disraeli

The best career advice: Find out what you like doing best and get someone to pay you for doing it.

—Katharine Whitehorn

I've missed more than 9,000 shots in my career. I've lost almost 300 games. 26 times I've been trusted to take the game winning shot and missed. I've failed over and over and over again in my life. And that is why I succeed.

—Michael Jordan

Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it.

—Henry David Thoreau

Things to Consider During Career Planning

- Fits with personal values
- Connects with personal interests
- Matches satisfying skills
- Team or independent environment
- Future growth potential
- Matches with personal satisfaction
- Fits with long-term goals
- Work-life balance
- Responsibilities and duties
- Required education
- Cost of education
- Available educational facilities
- Location
- Advancement opportunities
- Mobility
- Benefits available
- Vacation time
- Peak times of business
- Ongoing training available
- Time commitment
- Salary
- Hours

Useful Websites for Career Planning

- www.youth.gc.ca
- www.uwaterloo.ca
- www.usask.ca
- www.jobbank.gc.ca/home
- <https://alis.alberta.ca/>
- www.ulethbridge.ca/career-bridge
- www.uottawa.ca/en

Appendix C

Guided Imagery Script

IDEAL LIFESTYLE VISUALIZATION

Script

This is your visualization. It will help you to dream of what you truly want in your career and lifestyle. Try to imagine that anything is possible. Visualize whatever it is that makes you truly happy.

Close your eyes, take a deep breath and relax. Notice if you have any tension in your body. If you do, let it go.

Think of yourself as an adult. You have completed any education or training needed to get your dream job.

Imagine that you are waking up in your bedroom in the morning. Look around the room before you even get out of bed. What does the room look like? Is there anyone else in the room? Now, imagine yourself getting out of bed and head down to the kitchen for breakfast. What does your kitchen look like? Is there anyone else in the kitchen, a spouse or children perhaps?

[Pause for 10 seconds.]

Now that you have eaten, it is time to get dressed for work. Go to your closet and look through your wardrobe. What are you going to wear to work today? Casual wear, a business suit? Perhaps you will be wearing a nurse or police uniform.

[Pause for 10 seconds.]

Now it is time to go to work. Choose whether you prefer to go to a workplace or work at home. If you choose to stay at home, think of what this area of your home might look like. If you leave home, think about the type of transportation you will use to get there. Think about what the trip to get there looks like; is it a long scenic trip or a short trip? What do you see along the way to work?

[Pause for 10 seconds.]

Now you are in your place of work. Before going in, look around your place of work. Is it a small building or a large building? Do you work inside or outside? Is it an institution such as a university or a hospital? As you enter your workplace, envision who you will see there. Who greets you? Who do you talk to? What is the atmosphere like? Is the atmosphere slow paced and relaxing or fast paced and hectic? Are there a lot of people at your workplace or only a few people? Perhaps you work alone.

[Pause for 10 seconds.]

As you start the day's activities, think about what you will do at work that day. Do not try to think of a specific job title, but rather the types of tasks you will be doing and the skills you will be using. Will you work with people: teaching, curing, managing or consulting? Are you doing something more hands-on: designing, writing or drawing?

[Pause for 10 seconds.]

Now it is time for lunch. How will you spend your lunch hour? Consider the options: you bring a lunch to work or you meet up with friends for lunch. Are you so busy that you work right through your lunchtime? Do you have a specific activity you would like to do?

[Pause for 10 seconds.]

The afternoon has begun. Will you return to work? Will you return to the same place of employment or will you do a different job? Consider where you will go and what you will do. What types of activities and tasks do you perform? How do these differ from the ones you did in the morning? Who surrounds you at your workplace?

[Pause for 10 seconds.]

It is the end of the working day. See yourself getting ready to leave. Think back over your day and come up with one thing that gives you a sense of accomplishment.

[Pause for 10 seconds.]

How will you spend the rest of your evening? Will you go out to dinner or go home? Do you spend your time with others or are you alone? Think about all the activities you could do in the evening. Have you brought work home? Will you take a course or maybe teach a class?

[Pause for 10 seconds.]

Now it is time for bed. As you turn off the lights in your home, have one last look around. As you drift off to sleep, think of one thing you look forward to doing tomorrow.

[Pause for 10 seconds.]

The visualization is now finished. Take a moment to come back to reality. When you are ready, open your eyes and write down what you imagined during the visualization.

Appendix E

Personal Characteristics Exercise

Your personal characteristics tell you what kind of person you are, and in what kinds of situations you are most productive and satisfied. The following questions will help you to better understand your personal characteristics.

1. Do you learn best when you hear explanations from a person or when you read explanations that are written out?

2. Do you learn best through working with others and engaging in the give-and-take of discussion, or do you learn best when you are left alone with a problem?

3. Do you learn best when you see the whole picture or when you see step-by-step procedures?

4. Do you learn best when you are allowed to adapt to the outcome of doing things or when there is one clear "right way" to follow?

5. What was the last subject that you learned a lot of information in?

6. What is your favourite subject?

7. What do you like about it?

8. Do you work best alone or as part of a team?

9. Think of your ideal work situation:
 - a) What are you doing? _____

 - b) Are you alone or with others? _____
 - c) Are you talking or silent? _____
 - d) What is the setting? Indoors Outdoors Urban Rural
 - e) Are you in a big room? _____ Do you have your own office/space? _____

Appendix F

Career Journal Prompts

What have I learned about myself during this unit?

My group members have taught me...

I am excited for the future because...

One thing that scares me about the future is...

One career I would like to learn more about is...

Appendix G

Student Evaluation Survey

Thank you for participating in this lesson/unit plan/schoolwide intervention! I would like to know if it was helpful and how it could be made better. Please answer the questions on this sheet to help me with this.

Part 1: Please let me know if you did the activities.

| ACTIVITIES | I DIDN'T DO IT | I DID IT |
|----------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| The Party | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 99-Year-Old Question | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Pride Story | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Personality Quizzes | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |













Part 2: Please let me know if you thought the activity was helpful by circling whether you thought it was “not good at all,” “good” or “great.”

| ACTIVITIES | NOT GOOD AT ALL | GOOD | GREAT |
|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| The Party | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| 99-Year-Old Question | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Pride Story | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Personality Quizzes | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

What did you like about this lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention?

How could this lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention be made better?

Part 3: Please tell me how much you agree with the following statements by putting a checkmark in the box that best tells me how you feel.

| | I DON'T AGREE | I'M NOT SURE | I AGREE |
|---|---|---|---|
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention helped me to learn a lot about myself. |  |  |  |
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention helped me to learn a lot about careers. |  |  |  |
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention made me excited about what I could do with my life. |  |  |  |
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention made me want to learn more about different careers. |  |  |  |

Thank you very much for your help!

Dilettantes, Virgins and Queens: Postfeminist Auteurship in English 20-1

Andrew Thomson, doctoral student
Edmonton

Introduction

Saddled with another upcoming quarter amid the enormous stresses and pressures of in-person teaching during a global pandemic, I quickly decided to completely revamp my program for English 20-1. Over the years, I have refined, revisited and reshaped my teachings in this course several times: rolling through new texts, incorporating new ideas for poetry (such as the exploration of concept albums that were written about for Volume 1, Number 1 of this journal in the article “Tear Down the Wall: Increasing Student Engagement with Poetry, Pink Floyd and Concept Albums”), or creating a new overall theme for the course in an attempt to keep it

For many years I have admired the films of Sofia Coppola, and I consider *Lost in Translation* (2003) to be both my all-time favourite film and one of the best made films ever.

fresh, invigorated and (hopefully) engaging. The levels of success in these changes have—at times—fallen admittedly short of perfection. Some texts, ideas or assignments enjoyed a mere one-semester stay in my program; others have emerged to become staples of my teaching. However, another shift was needed, something new that would attempt to engage not only the students in a new way but me as well. Something that was to go beyond the small tweaks and changes usually undertaken prior to a new group of students entering the room was needed, something that shifted the

fundamentals of my 20-1 program while, of course, maintaining the required ties to traditional text and curricular outcomes.

For many years I have admired the films of Sofia Coppola, and I consider *Lost in Translation* (2003) to be both my all-time favourite film and one of the best made films ever. For its revered position both in my musings on its merit and personal attachment to the film, I had always made the conscious decision *not* to teach it in the classroom. Concerns about the students not enjoying it as much as me overrode the value I believe it held as a text for the classroom setting, and I simply did not want the film to be marred if they did not enjoy it, engage with it or get it.

Instead of incorporating one of Coppola’s movies into my quarter plan as a new film study, I decided to take it a step—or, more accurately, several steps—further. It has been an ongoing concern for me that in the study of literature, students are typically only afforded the opportunity to engage with one text per author before moving on to something new, another story, another author, another era.¹ They are provided with a snapshot of the lives of the author, connect their writings to that moment in time, that precise era of their lives, and then they move on. Might the deeper study of one author and their career development allow students to engage more significantly with that work, and would this be demonstrated in their own critical thinking and writing? I sought a method for the study of a career, not simply of one text. Sofia Coppola presented me with this opportunity. She offered a divisive filmography that is controversial for their artistic pacing, immediately creating points for what I thought could be engaging areas of discussion for students. Her work is unique and interesting in that it “defies

I made the choice to use Sofia Coppola's seven feature films as the basis of study for my entire English 20-1 class: *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), *Lost in Translation* (2003), *Marie Antoinette* (2006), *Somewhere* (2010), *The Bling Ring* (2013), *The Beguiled* (2017) and *On the Rocks* (2020).

easy labelling—her brand, as a female director, is without clear precedent” (Smaill 2013, 159).

I made the choice to use Sofia Coppola's seven feature films as the basis of study for my entire English 20-1 class: *The Virgin Suicides* (1999), *Lost in Translation* (2003), *Marie Antoinette* (2006), *Somewhere* (2010), *The Bling Ring* (2013), *The Beguiled* (2017) and *On the Rocks* (2020). Each film would be connected to a more traditional text to create a comparative literature class that would allow space for the study of Coppola's entire career. The hope was that students would see growth in her work, her development as an auteur and how the themes of her oeuvres connect beyond a single story. Students would have the chance to fully engage with this artist and their career, (hopefully) able to critique their work with more depth and understanding by using the examples from a rich career instead of a single snapshot. Further, this should allow students to understand an author beyond pigeonholing them, or stereotyping them and their work, to a single narrative from their career.

Structure of the Coppola Course

Prior to embarking on this classroom experiment, it was important to see if there were matches for Coppola's films to more traditional texts. This is not a film studies course, and I was aware of the perception that would have been created had I only used her filmic works as the textual substance of the class. There needed to be traditional written text; I wanted there to be written text. My goal was to go through Coppola's work chronologically to afford the opportunity to witness her growth

as a storyteller, the highs and lows of her career. This meant that I would try to attach text to her films in the order in which they were released. The connections that I was looking for were primarily thematic as well as being related to a set of literary and scholarly definitions that would guide the course (these are explored below). Clearly, there would be no perfect matches based on character or setting, but there were definite and surprising connections between the films and some of the texts that I would traditionally use at this level or are commonly used at the 20-1 level.

In the end, the following was the text list that I decided on for the course that would be taught chronologically with her films: *The Virgin Suicides* would be combined with the short story “Seraphim,” by Gaye Jee (2002). The primary connection here is the notion of parental constraints and limitations and the impacts that it has on the development of identity and decisions. Much attention can be placed on the significance of the male gaze in both texts and how this establishes gendered regulations that create rebellious desires. *Lost in Translation* is paired with Ernest Hemingway's (1927) “Hills Like White Elephants” and focuses on the notions of being lost at different stages of our lives and the sense of ennui prevalent among the privileged. *Marie Antoinette* is combined with “My Last Duchess” (short story), by Margaret Atwood (2006), and “My Last Duchess” (poem), by Robert Browning, exploring the constraints of social conventions and their impacts on women in different eras. *Somewhere* serves as a contrast to the feminine ennui of her prior films by focusing on a male protagonist and is matched with the film study of *Almost Famous* (Crowe 2000) to examine differing views of fame and its impacts on the human condition and ego.² *The Bling Ring* pairs with *Macbeth* to examine the notions of ambition and the endless desires created by materialism. Her more recent films, *The Beguiled* and *On the Rocks*, are combined with the novel *Half Blood Blues*, by Esi Edugyan (2011), and a selection of poetry that can include classics such as Walt Whitman's “O Captain! My Captain!” The connections here stem from the controversies and problematic nature of some of her films, and then the emotional connection and struggle between parents and their children, specifically the complex relationships between fathers and daughters.

Over the duration of the course, the intention was to incorporate typical assessments that the students would need as they advanced further in their academic careers. The focus would be on critical writing and responding, as well as engagement with the personal response. In this course, there would be a broader array of texts to choose from in the creation of their larger writing pieces. As a final assignment, my intention was to have the students create a critical assessment of Sofia Coppola's career encompassing her life's work and her development as a filmmaker and auteur.

The goal of this research is twofold: to examine the study of an auteur to see if it engages students further and if this familiarity is revealed in their work.

Structure of This Paper

The goal of this research is twofold: to examine the study of an auteur to see if it engages students further and if this familiarity is revealed in their work. This examination will run parallel with the examination and analysis of postfeminist text in the English 20-1 classroom. The paper is written through a combination of research styles. During the first attempt at running this course, I kept detailed notes and observations on the reactions and discussions with the students based on the films viewed. I was interested in which films they would be drawn to, which ones they would reject, and if their overall understanding and critical thinking were enhanced by examining multiple texts from the same creative source. These will be reviewed, reframed and rewritten to be incorporated as brief ethnographic observations intended to bolster the philosophical and academic analysis. The focus on this paper will be primarily on Coppola's first three films and their connecting texts. There will be mentions of the other films and their paired texts, but they will serve as complementary elements to the first three films, which are associated within the realm of Coppola's career as a "nameless trilogy" (Handyside 2015, 1), tied together through the thematic connections of girlhood. The

intention of this paper is not to suggest a radical change, it is simply an effort to demonstrate an alternative way in which a course can be delivered in an attempt to not only reinvigorate students' joy of learning in unprecedented times, but to reinvigorate the joy of teaching in a time when the levels of stress and lack of control is unlike anything experienced in recent memory.

Choosing Coppola

Typically, teachers seek texts that will garner as much interest and engagement as possible: when selecting films, the teacher (typically) hopes that students will enjoy the film, engage with the film and learn from the film. A risk with the auteur study of Coppola is the awareness, even before starting the study, that many of her films will simply be disliked by the students. Aware of this upon entering into this study, this prediction was worked into my lessons and discussion points for the texts. I wanted to discuss their interpretations of validity. There was little doubt that many students would struggle with the slow, deliberate creation of the story, the lack of dialogue and action, and the abrupt endings of the movies. Through her storytelling and directorial style that highlights the importance of silence and privileges the image over the spoken word, she "manages to code into the details of her films' sensory triggers, evoking feelings that can't be paralleled through words" (Deschanel 2020). Simply, students are used to dialogue filling in any blanks in the stories they consume. Coppola does not spoon-feed the audience with intention and meaning but insists that the viewer engage in this search themselves. She does this primarily through her attention to the visual, to the "process by which an image comes to be meaningful culturally" (Backman Rogers 2019, 7).

With her visuals, she has created a "dreamy, feminine look [to] her light-saturated films that deliberately linger on girlish pleasures" (Handyside 2015, 10). Coppola is considered a "pioneer of the delicate, the beautiful, the gloom of being a female" (Deschanel 2020), and her films generally focus on the female experience in a male-dominated world. Her focus on feelings—or the affective results of an image—are essential in the understanding of her films, even if "bittersweet is not a quality that is easily defined; it is felt" (Backman Rogers 2019, 16).

The moods she creates with her images are felt by students, if they allow it. There is a heaviness, a longing, an emptiness.

Her work is divisive, and this was an important component to the selection of her work. Often, thought evolves from controversy.

Many of the themes she tackles in her work are mature and out of reach for the average teenage student. The sense of misguidedness and aimless wandering postcollege or the struggle of being in a lengthy, loveless marriage; the recognition of being trapped by fame or awareness of gender constructs and their limitations—perhaps these are issues that will be tackled in their lives at some point, but in high school they are distant unknowns. These themes are not new, but Coppola does not simplify them in hopes of reaching a wider audience: she creates the stories she wants to tell and that are important to her; those who engage with it often feel a deep sense of connection, while those who do not, do not. She can provide the sensations that she has made a film specifically for you, capturing your own sentiments, or that she has made a film that is pretentiously unrelatable. These disconnects and struggles create points of conversation that may not have been available to a text that is universally adored by students. It is important to explore these tensions while continuing to attempt to draw value and learn from a disliked text. This is a unique challenge and twist to teaching: it is not the selling of a text to those who have liked it, but it is the creation of understanding in students that meaning can be gleaned from anywhere, even—or perhaps especially—when we do not enjoy a text.

Background and Style

Sofia Coppola burst onto the scene with *The Virgin Suicides* and has since made a name for herself over years of filmmaking, moving out of the shadow of her famous father, Francis Ford Coppola, to compile her own list of accolades and awards.³ Her work is (generally) highly regarded, having been called “instant classic” (Brewster 2019, 1), as she creates modern cinema that incorporates many European and French New Wave elements, including slow pacing, lengthy shots and minimalist dialogue. Reviewers alternate in their observations of her work, crediting her films as

both “exploring sophisticated humanist questions and as overly concerned with image, fashion and frivolity” (Smaill 2013, 149). Her films are artistic, with an “eclectic and highly pleasing visual style” (Backman Rogers 2012, 80), and literary in their viewings, generally without significant action, instead offering a slice-of-life snapshot of the lives of her characters. Her stories are told through the

Coppola demonstrates many tenets of auteurship (repeated themes, actors appearing in multiple films, similar camera shots and angles, soundtrack style and so on) in her work.

visual. Her signature style evokes controversy and debates among students who argue its validity in comparison to the films typical of their viewership. An argument for using Coppola’s films is their distance from the Hollywood blockbuster or feel-good films that are the central purveyors of popular culture. They are different and offer students an alternative view of what film is and what film can be. Her films are a challenge to the normativity of film text, yet offer the opportunity for a novel-esque level of study and analysis.

Coppola demonstrates many tenets of auteurship (repeated themes, actors appearing in multiple films, similar camera shots and angles, soundtrack style and so on) in her work. Her films focus on similar themes such as the “emptiness of living in excess, alienation, girlhood” (Deschanel 2020), ennui, a sense of being stuck in circumstances, and “characters caught in moments of transition” (Smaill 2013, 151). Throughout her filmography, she uses similar film shots and angles, general storylines and styles of music. She also has used several of the same actors in her films: Kirsten Dunst appears in four films (including a cameo in *The Bling Ring*), Elle Fanning in two, and Bill Murray in two, along with him being considered as Coppola’s muse for *Lost in Translation*. However, the most apparent commonality of her films is her use of pacing. Coppola prefers a slow-moving film, a sparseness that allows the viewer the opportunity to use their own

imaginings and intellect to fill in the blanks. There is “considerable attention paid to dead time: the films are marked by everyday events” (Handyside 2015, 5), by the realistic events that we all face instead of the overblown and hyperbolized Hollywood-ification typical of film. Her work is directly opposite of the big moment-driven Oscar vehicle, the *Forrest Gump*-style film that offers a series of unrealistically important historical and cultural events thrown together into one narrative. Coppola engages, and thrives, within the mundane. Her first three films form a “very particular kind of trilogy, formed in the crucible of reception and self-conscious auteurist assertion of personal creative autonomy and individual style” (p 1). These three films, that serve as the primary focus of this paper, demonstrate a connection to one another that is important in the study of an auteur: they demonstrate the start of a career and the beginnings to the development of her style.

Controversy

Sofia Coppola’s work is riddled with critical and academic controversy, and she has frequently been accused of whitewashing her films, only portraying lives of privilege, and ignoring people of colour in what has been deemed an “association of femininity with whiteness” (Kuperman 2015, 3). This critique has become more frequent recently, especially in retrospective viewings of her work and in light of modern social and antiracist cultural movements. Many connections can be made to very modern issues, including discussions of Asian stereotyping and racism in *Lost in Translation* and her removal of a central Black character in her adaptation of *The Beguiled*. Coppola seems to “waver (it seems deliberately, in hindsight) between insight into the comedy of cultural differences and cliched cultural stereotyping” (Takemura 2017, 2). These are important elements of controversy that open the auteur to discussion and debate on her intentionality of including elements of her films that could be viewed as racist, or as the overperpetuation of stereotypes that, while perhaps meant to be ironic or hyperbolized, are in fact harmful. Even if those scenes “have likely happened, over and over” (p 6), it does not remove their basis for critique.

Her role as a female filmmaker has also created

an interesting spot for dissection as her films do not necessarily encompass the feminist lens that many may envision or hope for. Despite the feminine aesthetic of her work, the women in her films “take on a passive, observed role while men serve as the active observers” (Kuperman 2015, 7). Coppola has created films in which her characters often demonstrate the tenets of postfeminism, opening her to critique that she does not portray revolutionary or gender role-defiant characters, but women disaffected or uninterested in using their voices and advancing women’s causes. It has been noted that her “films make little effort to subvert mainstream representations of femininity and thus end up at times reinscribing harmful systems of power” (p 17). This argument could be made in many of her films, yet countered with her gender power struggles depicted in *The Beguiled*. The controversial elements to Coppola’s work create conflict and tension for student discussion after viewing her films.

To begin the Coppola study, an examination of her personal history provides context to her films and sets the stage for the many autobiographical (or semiautobiographical) elements within her work. These “biographical details have become bound up with the reception of her films in ways that dismiss her films as too preoccupied with frivolity and privilege” (Smaill 2013, 148). Coppola has dabbled in many artistic ventures aside from filmmaking, stating that “I only want to make a couple of films in my lifetime. I don’t want it to be like a job” (Coppola quoted in Smaill 2013, 151), providing ammunition to the accusations of her being a spoiled dilettante. She has spent time as an actress,⁴ model and fashion designer, encompassing a life of youth, money and beauty that is portrayed in her films and equally serves as fuel for critique. Prior to her film career, she was perhaps best known as being among the generation of “celebutantes”—Hollywood kids born into privilege—and starting the trend of girls wearing baby tees, literally T-shirts made for babies. She exists in a “privileged position that allows her to change her career at will, a position that serves to enhance her reputation as a dilettante” (Smaill 2013, 151). This invites controversy as to how well she can represent the lives of girls and tell their stories, as Coppola’s life has been dramatically unlike those who are her audience.

Critics recognize the autobiographical elements to her work, and many of the attacks of her films use unnecessarily (or excessively) gendered language that “links the feminine aesthetic of [her] films to [a] frivolity and irrelevance” (Kuperman 2015, 3) unseen in the critiques of her male counterparts. Rarely would film critique focus on a director being “too masculine” in their work, or that a film has no value because the aesthetics are “too manly.” She has personally been critiqued as being a “shallow, spoiled daughter of privilege who spends excessive amounts of her father’s money on frivolous girlishness” (Handyside 2015, 3), and opinions on her personal life frequently bleed into opinions of her films. Personal attacks are ironically acceptable in critique of Coppola films, yet not for the disproportionate number of male directors whose work manages to be separated from their real-life crimes that are far worse than Coppola being born privileged (the example here is Roman Polanski, still considered a directorial genius and frequent award nominee despite being a statutory rapist). Her work has consistently been labelled as “girly,” but to “call them all girly is to dismiss the content of each individual film, and the person making them” (Deschanel 2020). Critics often point out the feminine qualities of her films in a derisive manner, even likening them to “cinematic pastry, a delightful cream puff, full of delicious air but lacking in meaty (and masculine) substance” (Backman Rogers quoted in Deschanel 2020). Her films are often problematic for the overly traditional male viewer, as Coppola offers a “kind of cinema that is not merely made by, but for women; that is, it places the male spectator in the position of feeling the *affects* to which a patriarchal regime of images subjects the female body” (Backman Rogers 2019, 14, original emphasis). Her films have the ability for the male viewer to understand the impact of a male-dominated society and the male gaze on young women. This threat to the patriarchal structure can be difficult to acknowledge or understand for many.

Marie Antoinette, specifically, garnered much critical derision that was specifically aimed at the feminine aspects of the film: the female focus; the soft, pastel colours; the observation of traditionally female hobbies such as shopping, clothing and sweets. The film was accused, by different critics, of being “tedious vacuity, uncritically rendered; only for girls

and gays; like a manicurist claiming to capture the inner experience of your pinkie” (Deschanel 2020). These serve as examples of critiques that are overly gendered, used only because she is a female director.

Further, despite her own successful career, she remains connected (or inseparable) from her father. The review of *Lost in Translation*, by Masaaki Takemura (2017), for example, mentions her Hollywood lineage in the very first sentence of the review. Students analyze reviews and critiques of her work (both positive and negative) to observe the focus on her sex and her famous father that is unseen in review of films directed by men. For years, specifically following her derided acting performance in *The Godfather: Part III*, “Sofia’s name was the butt of a cultural punchline, synonymous with nepotism” (Deschanel 2020). This adds another layer to conversation surrounding feminist texts and a woman who has achieved success in a traditionally male-dominated field.

Her work is frequently critiqued as much for its content as it is critiqued by a patriarchal establishment seemingly defensive that its traditional values have been breached by a woman. An example here is the cringey interview Coppola was subjected to on the *Late Show with David Letterman* on February 13, 2004. Coppola had just received four Oscar nominations for *Lost in Translation*, including becoming only the third-ever woman to be nominated for Best Director and the third woman to be nominated for Best Original Screenplay. Her nominations were groundbreaking, yet rather than focus on her work or accomplishments, Letterman repeatedly asked questions concerning her father: if she “received advice from her father, and if her father visited the film set, rather than posing questions about her own style, technique, or decisions” (Handyside 2015, 14). The interview is obvious in the undertones that a woman is unable to accomplish anything of significance in the film industry on the merits of her own work, especially without the help of a man.

Theoretical Underpinnings and Definitions

In this study of Coppola, several definitions are discussed and established with students to serve as a guide through the theory and understanding of her work. These terms become an expected part of

Postfeminist ideals can be applied to all Coppola films, therefore serving as an essential philosophical lens for this course.

their vocabulary in discussion of the films as well as with the texts that they are associated with. The goal with them is to provide students with a graspable theoretical framework for critique and ongoing themes to serve as a touchstone for their analysis.

The definitions are created and discussed at the beginning of the study and developed through the rest of the course. The majority of Sofia Coppola's works engage with all of these theories and definitions. The students have generally found strong points of connection to the theories and by the end of the study are incorporating these notions of their own accord, without prompting. The terms have not only entered their vocabularies but also their consciousness as a continual point of reference in their discussions and work. They work as something the students can continually return to in the study of all their texts during their 20-1 year and onward.

The Auteur Theory

The Coppola course uses auteur theory as its primary theoretical underpinning. Here, a filmmaker has had the opportunity to develop a recognizable style of their own through their career, and this has been aided by the “development of a cult of personality that makes directors into stars” (Handyside 2015, 9). In contemporary filmmaking, “the cinematic auteur functions as a brand” (Backman Rogers 2019, 5). People, perhaps more than ever, will view a film because of the director making it. The established director brand has become a major draw for audiences. The auteur theory was developed and introduced by reviewer Andrew Sarris, who established three primary tenets for auteurship in a film director. These are the three “criteria of value” (Brewster 2019, 1) that allow a director to be considered an auteur. These criteria are technical competence, distinguishable personality and the “interior meaning, the ultimate glory of the cinema as art” (p 2). The auteur typically uses common elements in their films and generally takes on more roles than director—their

fingerprints and style are all over the final film product, allowing them to be considered the true *author* of their project—the primary creative force, not just the person bringing the script of another to life on film. Film auteurism has “been traditionally constructed as masculine” (Handyside 2015,11), yet these constructs are being defied by the likes of Sofia Coppola and Kathryn Bigelow. Commonly referenced auteurs would include the likes of Alfred Hitchcock, who developed a unique style of filmmaking that was revolutionary in his era. He often used common elements in his films, such as themes of mistaken identity, the use of the McGuffin, his own cameos and his repeated use of blonde actresses. While his themes contain many similar—or at least somewhat related—themes and plotlines, his work also has the *feel* of a Hitchcock film in its writing and directorial style. A modern auteur is Quentin Tarantino, who has created a mood and tone in his work that is unmistakably Tarantino, down to the use of similar actors, lengthy monologues and the glorification of artistically excessive violence. When watching a Tarantino film, the viewer knows that they are watching a Tarantino movie. The same is true for Coppola.

Postfeminism

Postfeminist ideals can be applied to all Coppola films, therefore serving as an essential philosophical lens for this course. Postfeminism is a controversial and “somewhat ambiguous political and theoretical” (Kuperman 2015, 16) term in that it does not have a firm definition, but one that is continually developing or is somewhat fluid. There are three dominant accounts of what postfeminism is: an “epistemological or political position in the wake of feminism’s encounter with difference [...], a historical shift within feminism, or as a backlash against feminism” (Gill 2007, 148). It is typically employed as a pejorative term, a noncomplementary view of people or characters that live their lives without consideration for the advances that feminism has made on their behalf, a taking for granted of the struggles of women that have

provided what semblance of equality that does exist in their worlds. This can be manifested as being “uninterested in women’s rights and gender equality or taking these for granted” (Kuperman 2015, 16). It creates a disaffection from the characters and the realities in which they exist. This is the view that is typically attributed to Coppola and her films among those more critical of her work: that she herself can succeed in Hollywood as a woman simply because of the power her father wields and that she has not been required to face the struggles of a normal woman facing an uphill climb in a male-dominated industry. That her privilege outweighs any struggles she may have experienced as a woman.

Yet, postfeminism also “promotes an image of femininity in flux” (Handyside 2015, 4), of a woman that is always partially an adolescent because the “postfeminist woman is always in process, always using the freedom and equality handed to her by feminism in pursuit of having it all” (p 4), yet never quite “managing to attain full adulthood” (p 4). This is evident with many of Coppola’s characters, from the eternally teenaged Lisbon sisters, their ages frozen in time due to their deaths at a young age, to Charlotte’s stagnant development, or Marie Antoinette’s perpetual living a life of youth.

Rosalind Gill (2007) offers a view into postfeminism through her view of media culture that explains it as “best understood as a distinctive sensibility, made up of a number of interrelated themes” (p 147). These themes offer many connections to the works of Coppola and provide innumerable points of conversation within the classroom setting. The connecting themes include femininity as bodily property; a shift from objectification to subjectification; an emphasis on self-surveillance; a focus on individualism, choice and empowerment; dominance of the makeover paradigm; a resurgence of the ideas of sexual difference; the sexualization of culture; and the commodification of difference (Gill 2007). These important ideas relate to the texts as well as serve as important observations relevant to their current teenage realities.

Sofia Coppola’s place, rather than “being a feminist, anti-feminist, or ever quasi-feminist, [she] is strongly located in the current climate of postfeminism” (Handyside 2015, 3). This lens

offers interesting points of consideration and discussion—who we are and who we are supposed to be, especially in a society allegedly more open and considerate than ever before. Within this are there questions of “girlhood itself as an affective state that privileges serial repetitions, [and] visible performance of the self” (p 2)? Does Coppola need to be a feminist director simply because she is a woman? Does she need to perform the expectations associated with her gender? Or, does her work offer more inroads for analysis as “what makes contemporary media culture distinctively postfeminist rather than pre-feminist or anti-feminist, is precisely this entanglement of feminist and anti-feminist ideas” (Gill 2007, 161)? Perhaps her work offers more cultural insight than initially credited for: instead of offering a stereotypical feminist oeuvre simply because she is female, her films are exploring the tensions within feminism. The exploration of the definition of postfeminism as a part of this study offers a point of critical thinking for students and the expectations that are placed on them and on the text creators that they study or interact with.

Shoegaze

Shoegaze is an indie musical subgenre that features extremely loud bands playing catchy music that sounds pleasant, but in which instruments blend together amid the volume. Shoegaze bands focus more on the overall sound of the music than its individual distinctive pieces. This includes the lyrics, in which the melody and cadence of the words are more significant than the words themselves. It is the sound over the substance. The subgenre was so named because shoegaze bands, when performing live, tended to stare at their shoes due to the amount of effects pedals they were required to control with their feet while playing. This gave an appearance of disinterest or disaffectedness to the audience, as though they were bored by their playing instead of attempting to put on a good show for the crowd. Important bands within this subgenre include The Jesus and Mary Chain, My Bloody Valentine, Slowdive and, more recently, Deafheaven.

Coppola often uses shoegaze music, along with “indie classics and 70s radio singles” (Brewster

2019, 3) to score her films, and “music is central to the overriding sensibility of the films and Coppola’s signature style” (Smaill 2013, 163). Yet, the connections between shoegaze and Coppola go beyond her music choices in her films; the music is also representative of her style of filmmaking. It is not the individual components that necessarily make her films interesting—the acting, the dialogue, the scenery, the music, the plot points—but the sum of all these parts. The final image, and the feeling created by it, is of the utmost significance. The feel of her work encompasses the ideals of this subgenre as her stories contain an icy coolness, a disaffected tone similar to the performance of the music her work emulates. Shoegaze music and the shoegaze cinema of Sofia Coppola “blends sub-cultural cool and art house aesthetics” (p 173) providing her work with the tone that spans her entire career.

Ennui

Ennui—more specifically female ennui, which has been “central to women’s lives and culture” (Handyside 2015, 5)—is a central theme in *The Virgin Suicides*, *Lost in Translation* and *Marie Antoinette*; therefore, ennui is an essential definition for students to understand and apply to their demonstration of knowledge. While ennui is often considered as interchangeable with boredom, it is important to expand the definition to indicate that it is a listless state in which an individual feels lodged within their own circumstances. Ennui is not a depressive state but a phase when one feels stuck to the point of being unaware of how to escape, or are unable to escape, the circumstances that have trapped them. Ennui can be considered a chosen boredom caused by a lack of inspiration to try to not be bored. Her films offer a “growing sense of claustrophobia and despair [that] characterizes the emphasis on repeated actions that become increasingly futile and meaningless in their very repetition” (Handyside 2015, 6). Her characters are frequently stuck—literally and metaphorically—inside rooms that represent the claustrophobic containment of their hopes and dreams. The rooms take on varied appearances: a bedroom, a hotel room, the many rooms of Versailles, an old school. They serve a similar function of entrapment and ennui.

Hauntology

The original notions of hauntology stem from Jacques Derrida and his discussion on the return of elements from a social past to cast a shadow over the present. To Derrida, hauntological elements are like a ghost: present, yet invisible, but still able to exert power over our lives. However, in the context of this study and the Coppola course, the definition of hauntology is more closely aligned to the ideas of Mark Fisher, who applied the term to discussion of music theory. His notion of hauntology is that of a nostalgia for lost futures, a sadness for a future that never happened. Students generally show interest in this idea—they have a grasp of how a person can be haunted by their past, but are intrigued by the possibility of also being haunted by a future that has not yet happened—and perhaps never will.

Hauntology saturates Coppola’s stories. An example from *The Virgin Suicides* are the adult recollections of Trip Fontaine, the high school dreamboat and the only person to get truly close to Lux Lisbon (Kirsten Dunst). After he leaves her alone on the football field after their first—and only—sexual encounter, Tripp is left with a hauntological life, tortured by what could have been had his choices been different. The notion of a potential life with Lux truly cast a shadow over the rest of his (presumably average) existence. He is forced to be consumed by what could have been. The film contains within it a “dark desire to return to the half-light of a past that never really existed in actuality—and for that its nostalgia is insidious and troubling and desperate” (Backman Rogers 2019, 26)—it is hauntology.

Iceberg Theory of Writing

Also called the theory of omission, this is a style of writing most often attributed to the works of Ernest Hemingway. The iceberg theory indicates that an author deliberately withholds the metaphorical elements of a narrative, allowing the reader to fill in information and significance themselves. The author will provide the basic details that are required to tell a story, providing only a minimalist level of detail. Iceberg writing will not include rich descriptions, symbolism or motifs, nor will it discuss the underlying themes. Hemingway believed that in good writing, the theme and meanings should shine through implicitly, and the reader would not be

required to be reminded of details that the author deemed important—the intelligent reader would be able to decipher the meaning and intentions themselves. Hemingway’s “Hills Like White Elephants” (1927) is an excellent example of this style, as the narrative features very minimal description or context of a conversation being held between two young travellers. Even the details of their discussion are not mentioned explicitly, leaving it up to an intelligent reader to assign their own meaning and purpose to the conversation, discovering what the couple is discussing.

Sofia Coppola frequently uses this restrained style in her work, including the famed closing scene of *Lost in Translation*, in which Bob (Bill Murray) whispers something unintelligible to Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson). The unheard line is of great significance to both characters, changing the tone of their departure and altering the ending of the film from a tone of sadness and loss to one of hope. Coppola withholds what is said, however, crediting the audience with the ability to create their own interpretation. The style of this scene forces us to think of what those perfect words might have been. Her plots are often an “alternation between what happens and what fails to happen” (Smaill 2013, 169), offering a realism unseen in many films. She is a filmmaker “of the void, of the empty moment, of absence” (Backman Rogers 2019, 52) and the credit for the interpretation of her work is provided to the viewer, as the iceberg theory intends.

Male Gaze

Notions of the male gaze originate within feminist theory and examine the way in which women are portrayed through an idealized male perspective that typically represents women in a sexualized manner. This becomes of particular interest in the study of Sofia Coppola because she is a female who often incorporates the male gaze into her directorial style, whether it is a part of the story or a subconscious addition to her style. Conversely, perhaps her “films are important above all because of their reformulation of the gaze” (Handyside 2015, 3)—the male gaze as interpreted through the literary eye of a female. This manipulation and interpretation of the male gaze has allowed Coppola to develop an “aesthetic that simultaneously invokes foundational gaze theory [and] pushes

back against societal devaluation of the feminine” (Kuperman 2015, 2). Her work serves a dual role in this sense.

In *The Virgin Suicides*, the story is told through the eyes and narration of a middle-aged man looking back on his teenage years when he lived across the street from the doomed Lisbon sisters. The story often focuses on the manner in which the girls are idealized and sexualized by the boys on the block, becoming their objects of affection and obsession. They construct a narrative around the Lisbon sisters as “an attempt to lay claim, to possess and to control” (Backman Rogers 2019, 39) them, or at least control their story. As noted critic Roger Ebert stated, in a way “the Lisbon girls and the neighborhood boys never existed, except in their own adolescent imaginations. They were imaginary creatures, waiting for the dream to end through death or adulthood” (quoted in LeCheminant 2019, 6). They were creations of the male gaze, an “indefinite and anonymous holding space or void for the boys’ most intimate projections” (Backman Rogers 2019, 35). The story concerns “male midlife yearning for youth as much as it does the plight of its girl protagonists” (Handyside 2015, 12). They were mysterious creatures misunderstood by the boys but viewed as the pinnacle of the feminine aesthetic regardless of their individual personalities or damaged psyches. It mattered not how the Lisbon sisters actually looked, but what is important is “how the teenage boys in the neighborhood thought they looked” (LeCheminant 2019, 6). Within this perception of the girls lies the tensions and points of discussion as Coppola—through the gaze of the boys—tends to lump the girls together instead of affording them individuality.

The Virgin Suicides and “Seraphim”

Outlines

The five Lisbon sisters appear as though they could have it all; if only they had wanted it, or if their ultra-strict parents would have allowed it. This film tells the story of the doomed family and the attempts by the boys across the street to piece together the contexts of their suicides, trying to understand why all five girls decided to take their own lives when there appeared to be infinite possibilities. It “revels in beautiful surfaces, but works to subvert those surfaces and reveals them as brittle,

hollow and false because it is about a regime and ideology of images [...] that forces upon the female body a form of internal death” (Backman Rogers 2019, 27). It is a film of sadness and remorse, an attempt by the boys to understand themselves by attempting to gain some small piece of understanding of the Lisbon sisters. *The Virgin Suicides*, despite its controversial central theme of death, offers instant connections for many students: the strong—and seemingly always unfair—rules imposed on their lives by their parents; the struggles of “the girl coming-of-age within the specific production context of the postfeminist auteur film” (Handyside 2015, 2); the desire for human connection; notions of infatuation; masking the reality of the self; the veneer of beauty; the desire for rebellion; the quest for individual recognition. The film wants to “explore and display the confusion and transformative years of adolescence” (LeCheminant 2019, 3) and explore the “underbelly of femininity, how it can be dark and grotesque, and she does it with subtlety” (Deschanel 2020). The demise of the sisters is tied to the economic demise of their suburban town, again making connections between beauty and neoliberalism.

The film that “hovers on the mundane and trivial aspects of suburban life” (Deschanel 2020) is connected to Gaye Jee’s short story “Seraphim,” the tale of a mother (Josephina) and daughter (Katarina) attempting to escape the abuse and absurdity of Josephina’s failed-artist husband, Jakub. When Josephina, forced to resort to prostitution to pay the family bills, accidentally kills herself falling from the Charles Bridge in Prague, she attempts to fulfill her promise to Katerina to “always be together” (Jee 2002, 3) from beyond the grave. The moody story, thick with colour imagery and female archetypes (witch, temptress, good mother, terrible mother), focuses on the question of what it is to be a good mother and how far someone must go to protect who they love the most.

Points of Connection

The obvious connections between these two texts, and what drew me to place them side by side initially, was the inclusion of suicide and death in each of the texts. The connections, however, run much deeper than this, and both stories can serve as an evaluation of the complex mother–daughter (or parent–child) relationship that many teens understand. “Seraphim” observes a mother

making questionable decisions (such as prostitution, the possession of her daughter and forcing her to die) that can be argued both as for the good of her daughter or as completely selfish. *The Virgin Suicides* provides a view of a mother who “represents the ideals of a bygone era, a declining society” (Deschanel 2020). Her overbearing and highly regimented rules are intended to protect her girls while doing the exact opposite, playing a major role in their decisions to end their lives.

Both texts provide insight into a matriarchal family structure in which the mother is the dominant parent, taking the lead from weaker men who struggle socially, professionally and as fathers to daughters. There are interesting points of evaluation and reflection embedded in the familial structures presented in the texts. Students have noted how it is interesting that in both cases when the mother essentially serves as the head of the household, there is a tragic ending. What commentary is being made by the author and director of these pieces, both women (despite the novel *The Virgin Suicides* being written by a man), regarding a world controlled by women? Through her first three films, Coppola reveals a “sympathetic approach toward older male figures [that] is in stark contrast to a hostility toward middle-aged women” (Handyside 2015, 12). This is developed in the nearly pathetic and powerless depiction of Mr Lisbon (James Woods) as a man destroyed by the death of his youngest daughter.

There is also an important connection related to voice in these texts. In “Seraphim,” the young Katerina is mute for her entire life, until she discovers a hauntingly beautiful singing voice after she is possessed by the spirit of her dead mother. Lux, on the other hand, has a loud voice that is silenced by the strict rules under which she is expected to abide. In both cases, the “girls are without a voice in their environment” (Brewster 2019, 3) and are attempting to find it and learn how to use it appropriately. Neither succeed, casting doubt over the author commentary of girls growing up—that they need to embrace a life of silence as they will be muted in one way or another.

Students have demonstrated an attraction to the commentary of individuality among the five girls lumped together because of their similarly idealized slender and blonde physical appearances. Their looks, in the eyes of those around them, replace the need for individualized personalities.

There also is a connection to Trip Fontaine, the male object of desire in the school who seeks out Lux because she provides the illusion of unattainability, the girl who is too good for everyone, the “dream girl who is forever unreachable, unattainable and lost to the boys” (Backman Rogers 2019, 44). Trip was recognizable to all; he is a high school archetype that has changed very little over the course of time. He is the “consummate high school ‘jock’ [who] must seal his status as such by sexual conquest” (Backman Rogers 2019, 37). Students sympathize for Lux as she crumbles as the film moves forward; Lux is crushed by the rules imposed by her mother and she cannot be saved through her increasingly rebellious acts. She becomes more confined instead of liberated, and there is empathy for her character, something that can be difficult to foster in modern students. Lux, by the end of her downfall, is more Blanche DuBois than homecoming queen, and it is a sad plight to watch. Coppola does well to capture the “confusing mixture of emotions teenage girls were experiencing but lacked the tools to navigate” (Deschanel 2020).

Lux attempts to rebel against the strict regulations of her house in a similar fashion to how Josephina attempts to rebel against the financial constraints of her failing marriage: through sexual experimentation. Lux, once the hard-to-get teen queen of her school, engages in several illicit rendezvous with random men on the roof of her house. Josephina, on the other hand, turns to the selling of sex in order to pay the bills and serve as a final defiance to her husband and their marital vows. In both cases, the women allow themselves to be objectified, for different reasons. This “sexual objectification can be (re-)presented not as something done to women by some men, but as the freely chosen wish of active, confident, assertive female subjects” (Gill 2007, 153). Are the women truly empowered, or have they fallen in the patriarchal trap where they believe their actions are assertive, yet end up further catering to the male gaze?

Outside of classroom discussion, the primary activity for these texts was a comparative analysis in which students focused on certain connections between the two texts. They are provided with choice on where to make these connections: between the characters, the themes, in viewing the texts as feminist readings, the role of death, the perceptions of traditional gender roles or patriarchal roles. Students tend to connect the most with

The Virgin Suicides, as the age of the characters is similar to their own. Living under strict rules and the teenaged search for freedom is an easily recognizable connection for students to make.

Reactions and Observations

Over the course of this study, The Virgin Suicides ends up being the students’ favourite of the Coppola films. In running this course more than once, I assume that at the end of the day, this is because the story and the themes are more directed toward teenagers. At this point, they enjoy the idea of connecting text to film all through the year, and perhaps there is some initial excitement about this—a way to look at English class differently, and a way to look at text in a fashion that is more in line with the way that they themselves consume text: so many students are visual learners, and they absorb and consume massive amounts of text in their daily lives. Streaming videos and films in pretty much every waking moment, they need to be taught how to think about what they are consuming. Simply, students do not read books like we would want them to, yet their formal education spends the majority of its time teaching them how to dissect and analyze the written word. If their focus is more on the visual, then it can become our responsibility to adapt our teaching to their needs. And at this point, they need to learn how to “read” a visual text.

There was some initial trepidation with the teaching of this text—even the title itself could serve as a trigger or as a difficult point, but the students have been strong with this. Unfortunately, suicide has become a part of their lives, and they are willing to discuss the deaths of the Lisbon sisters in a mature fashion. I am sure to provide a preamble to the study of the film to ensure they know that it indeed involves young people taking their own lives and offer explanations on the services available for help related to the topic.

In both attempts with this Coppola course, I am buoyed by the initial reactions to the film and story. At this point, there is hope that the course will run seamlessly and the students will be constantly engaged in every text, that they will be able to deeply analyze the texts and that by the end of the course they will not only be stronger readers and writers but also Coppola experts, art film buffs and multimedia critical thinkers, all with a desire to visit Tokyo or study French royalty.

The best laid plans, to be sure.

***Lost in Translation* and “Hills Like White Elephants”**

Outlines

Ernest Hemingway offers up a minimalist look at a young American couple as they wait at a train station during their travels in Spain. The couple is at a literal and figurative crossroads in their lives as they discuss an unnamed procedure that could alter their lives forever. Sitting, talking and drinking alcohol, the couple euphemistically dances around—attempting to delay or avoid—the life-altering choice before them. Hemingway creates a very simple story that is embedded with much deeper symbols and themes upon analysis, very much in the vein of the iceberg theory of writing.

Conversely, Sofia Coppola tells the story of two Americans at vastly different points in their lives spending their time in a Tokyo hotel in her acclaimed film, *Lost in Translation*. Bob is an aged actor clinging to his career and clinging to his relationship with his distant and passive-aggressive wife while in Japan to film a commercial for a whiskey company. Charlotte is in her early 20s and in the third year of her marriage, visiting Tokyo with her photographer husband. She feels a displacement in her life that goes beyond the foreign land she is visiting, as she is unsure of who she is, what her marriage is and who she is meant to be. The story speaks to “solitude and loneliness even in the bustling, noisy, super-frenetic context of Tokyo; alienation in the midst of frenzy” (Takemura 2017, 6). *Lost in Translation* is the story of two people who are very much lost, finding an unlikely friendship with each other as they attempt to figure out their lives and figure out how to get some sleep, along the way demonstrating that perhaps there is “no perfect translation” (p 4). For Coppola, this film is a part of an “ongoing metaphorical autobiography” (Handyside 2015, 1), and many of the elements of the film are derived from her own young marriage.

Points of Connection

Both texts tell of people who are at a crossroads in their lives, whether this is literal, metaphorical or both. The stories demonstrate that people are continually attempting to discover themselves, to

continue their becoming, regardless of age, and that there are many instances that can set these considerations in motion.

All characters face big decisions that will guide their lives from that point. In “Hills Like White Elephants,” the characters are discussing an unnamed operation that analysis reveals is an abortion, a revelation that is initially lost on most students but once revealed, offers them a renewed perspective on the story and its events.⁵ The abortion is the missing element to Hemingway’s minimalist puzzle. The confusing back-and-forth conversation becomes clear as the text warrants multiple readings once the nature of the operation is revealed. Bob and Charlotte are both faced with choices regarding their careers and their marriages, important aspects of their lives and their identities. They must decide what may be worth fighting for. All grapple with the crossover theme of talking versus communicating and the chasm created between people when they believe the two are equal or contribute to a successful relationship. Travel through a foreign land adds a dimension to the feelings of being lost for all characters. They are not at home, they are immersed in the foreign and lost in the language and the unfamiliar. The sensation of being alone in a foreign land is enhanced through the iceberg theory, as the audience, given the lack of information provided, can feel lost as well. The stylistic choices made by the authors enables the engagement of the audience to experience their own sensations of lost alongside the characters.

Hemingway and Coppola have created characters perceived as dilettantes permitted by lives of privilege. Charlotte, for example, has a philosophy degree from Yale but is unable to put this Ivy League education into practice. She has attempted a variety of artistic ventures, such as writing and photography, yet is hesitant to commit to them for her own fear of failure and desire to attempt something new and temporarily exciting once again. Charlotte does not want to commit to something that she is not instantly good at. There is a sense that she feels that her work should be representative of what she views as a superior intellect—but she does not want to work for it. She exists in a self-created ennui that protects her against failure by never truly trying at anything. The couple in “Hills Like White Elephants” are embroiled in ennui despite the exciting appearance

of their jet-setting lifestyle. They are bored by the repetition of travel and drinks despite the new opportunities this affords them. Even the exotic taste of licorice has become unexciting for them (Hemingway 1927, 2). Both texts offer views of “young women who are trying to find their place in the world and to map out their own identities” (Backman Rogers 2012, 81), yet remain mired in ennui as they choose to do nothing to change their circumstances.

The texts offer the stories of people attempting to find their direction while in foreign places, Spain in “Hills Like White Elephants” and Tokyo in *Lost in Translation*, and there is a disconnect between the characters and the places where they travel. There is very little to demonstrate a desired connection to the world of travel or the exotic locales of their stories: they play the roles of tourists, of casual observers to worlds unlike their own. They desire the excitement of the foreign, but want the familiarity and comfort of home. The protagonists of *Lost in Translation* have been accused of not wanting to “understand different cultures, nor encounter real cross-cultural experiences. They were only interested in each other” (Takemura 2017, 2). This self-focus and disconnect from the environment is echoed through their disconnect from their partners, and in the end, from themselves.

Both women, to a certain extent, fall into Gill’s (2007, 156) “makeover paradigm,” that “requires people (predominantly women) to believe, first, that they or their life is lacking or flawed in some way” (p 156). There is a sense in both characters that an incompleteness to their lives must be remedied. In “Hills Like White Elephants,” it is starting a family that could fill the void in the girl’s life of ennui, and in *Lost in Translation*, it is the discovery of one’s calling that will rectify the perceived lack. The quest for these “solutions,” which follow the “production of toxic shame” (p 156) backhandedly engineered by their husbands, are intended to drive them to become “more ‘successful’ versions of themselves” (p 156). There is a system that exists within their own marriages and relationships that tells them they are broken. They are left to work within that system in an attempt to “fix” themselves, even if the women are smart enough to understand that there is “nothing wrong with [them]. [They] feel fine” (Hemingway 1927, 4). The system points out these

flaws despite their resistance that there are flaws at all. There are societal pressures placed on women that they must have children or must have a career to be considered complete.

Students engage easily with Hemingway’s story but struggle with *Lost in Translation*. The slow pacing of the film is difficult for them, and they struggle to connect with Charlotte. While her character is only a few years older than them, she is at a far more adult place in her life. This disconnect was surprising upon first teaching this film; there was an expectation that the students would recognize their own feelings of ennui or notions of being stuck somewhere they do not want to be (in high school) in Charlotte; this has proven to be rarely the case. Perhaps they are too well versed in plot-driven filmmaking, or perhaps they struggle with a film that attempts to capture a series of moments of reality between two people. In Coppola’s films, “mood and form are of far greater consequence [...] than narrative” (Backman Rogers 2019, 20), counter to what students would typically view or consider as enjoyable. Perhaps even they struggle with recognizing their own ennui in Bob and Charlotte on the screen, and it is a startling revelation that they don’t want to watch an uncurated version of their own lives stripped of Hollywood grandeur.

I wanted them to recognize their own lives in the characters, to show them that they are the same, and that if they don’t do something to not be bored, they will always be bored.

Reactions and Observations

They didn’t like Lost in Translation. Of all the texts I have taught in my career, I wanted them to like this one, to feel the importance of seemingly simple moments, to understand what it is to be lost and the simple things we cling to when we want to be found. I wanted them to not only be challenged by a text, but embrace the challenge and rise up to it, to move beyond their constant state of existence that is too focused on

“being bored.” I wanted them to recognize their own lives in the characters, to show them that they are the same, and that if they don’t do something to not be bored, they will always be bored. At this point, it is as though they do not know what it is to not be bored or that there are choices to escape this. Yet, they return to their phones to continue scrolling through images they aren’t really looking at and are not really seeing. Sometimes I wonder if they have become so adapted to their own choices of boredom that they are no longer aware of what it is that makes them not bored, what it is to be excited about something again.

Despite the majority of students disliking this film, I do not feel like it was a lost cause in teaching it. They were challenged, and I believe that the film offered them an opportunity to see a different way that the medium of film can be created, a different version of text. Teachers, blessed/cursed with optimism, can feel as though this film is one that students will appreciate. Down the road. Five years from now. Or ten years from now. Just not now. Now it is too much for them—perhaps it is too frightening that the sense of being stuck that they feel now in their lives is something that they may never be able to shake.

For me, Lost in Translation is a film of moments, within the film itself, but with our connection to it as well. I truly believe that there will be a moment in their lives when they will remember the film and see themselves in that place, that things will click and that they will finally get it.

Marie Antoinette and “My Last Duchess” (and “My Last Duchess”)

Outlines

Canadian author Margaret Atwood tells the tale of a female secondary student nearing the end of her schooling and facing the uncertain future in “My Last Duchess.” As she studies the Robert Browning poem “My Last Duchess” under the tutelage of her tough, but inspirational, teacher Miss Bessie, the girl realizes the difficult decisions that lay before her and the need to move on in her life. She recognizes the importance of “lasts” as she breaks up with her steady boyfriend and faces the rigid gender conventions of her mid-19th century upbringing. She struggles with the tensions between her femininity and her cutthroat manner

of thought when faced with obstacles that stand in between her and her aspirations.

Marie Antoinette was also faced with rigid gender structures, absorbed in the “mechanistic procedures that maintain[ed] Versailles as an institution” (Handyside 2015, 6). A divisive and controversial historical character, Marie Antoinette, stars Kirsten Dunst in the title role of the doomed French queen. Always distrusted as a foreigner to the court of France, Marie Antoinette eventually—and very briefly—clawed her way into public favour before this joy quickly turned to disdain, then pure vitriol, as her life progressed. She is frequently blamed as a primary cause of the French Revolution and the dissembling of the French monarchy and the Bourbon dynasty. Coppola’s pastel-soaked interpretation of Antoinette is a “deliberately anachronistic and flagrantly postmodern” (Backman Rogers 2012, 81) look at prerevolutionary France as the queen attempts to grow into her role while faced with a difficult marriage and enormous public pressure influencing all aspects of her life. This includes the aspects of her body that become public knowledge and a primary source of gossip and rumour. Her child-bearing and her sexual exploits (whether true or complete fabrications) were common topics of conversation both within the walls of Versailles and on the streets of Paris, often fuelled by the cruel pamphlet makers of the time. Coppola, instead of using the “female body as the site of spectacle” (Backman Rogers 2012, 82), as is traditional in film, “delineates how that body is harnessed and regulated via ritualistic processes” (Backman Rogers 2012, 82), processes that stifle not only femininity, but individuality.

In Coppola’s interpretation of her life, Marie Antoinette is dubbed the “world’s first rock star” because of her extravagant living that is frequently misaligned with historical fact. A sense of impending doom weighs over the film: we know what happens to her in the end, even if Coppola does not take us up to the conclusion of her life. We know her brutal ending; instead, Coppola paints a humanizing portrait of a dehumanized historical woman, an appeal “to the viewer’s empathetic capacity and also reveals the historical figure of Marie Antoinette as a creation” (Backman Rogers 2012, 83) of half-truths and historical inaccuracies. Instead of aiming to provide an accurate historical

depiction of Marie Antoinette “the ruler, Coppola gave us a depiction of Marie Antoinette the girl” (Deschanel 2020).

Points of Connection

Atwood writes in a style completely opposite of Hemingway’s theory of omission; she writes a text rich with metaphors and detail, engaging the reader with a judgmental female character who scrutinizes her high school milieu, the actions of others and the gendered biases that are heaped upon her. “My Last Duchess” provides an alternate view of a young woman facing the struggles of rigidity and uncompromising patriarchal structures in a different way than Coppola’s subdued iceberg filmmaking in *Marie Antoinette*. The main point of connection with these texts is the methods in which the two central women of the stories attempt to rebel and escape the structures meant to keep them docile and reined in. They hope to combat the “repetition and domesticity [that] suggests not only tedium, but also isolation and alienation as a gendered experience” (Smail 2013, 170). Both women, against the normativity of their respective eras—postwar America and prerevolutionary France—recognize that they are being held down by the power structures of their times. Their “female identity [...] is constructed and imposed” (Backman Rogers 2012, 82) instead of being created on its own, or from their own interests. Both texts invite the readers to “laugh at the sheer stupidity of treating banal activities such as getting up in the morning with such high ceremony” (Handyside 2015, 7) or the consumer-driven face cleansing rituals of the teenage girl. For Marie Antoinette, her “body is contested terrain. It becomes a cultural battlefield” (Backman Rogers 2012, 82), whereas Atwood’s girl must deal with, unfortunately, typical male advances and commentaries on her body and its features. This leads them both to flirt with sentiments of ennui, finding their own methods to escape the dreary expectations of their gender. Both texts use “retro imagery and nostalgia [as] a key device in the construction [and recognition] of contemporary sexism” (Gill 2007, 160). Audiences can laugh at the nearly ridiculous stereotyping before recognizing that many of these structures remain in place in modern times.

The queen is in an endlessly losing situation, as the rejection by her husband (and subsequent lack of an heir) drives her to her excesses to alleviate loneliness and ennui. The perception of this excessive lifestyle (shoes, exotic dresses, elaborate desserts and ever-growing hair) triggers the French people turning against her. She perceives this shopping and extravagance as a manner to please herself, of “using beauty to make [herself] feel good” (Gill 2007, 153), but her actions could be questioned as catering to the male gaze, as attempting to garner the attention of her husband. This serves as a “deeper form of objectification—one in which the objectifying male gaze is internalized to form a new disciplinary regime” (Gill 2007, 152)—Marie Antoinette is trained to blame herself for the struggles in her marriage, driven toward outside sources to attempt to rectify the situation. This is the beginning of the domino effect that leads to her public downfall and death.

Marie Antoinette finds solace in the Petit Trianon, her home away from home on the Versailles grounds, where she can explore her interests—sexual, creative and intellectual—with a freedom unavailable within the walls of the palace. Here, she becomes a “liminal entity” (Backman Rogers 2012, 82). Atwood’s girl finds a similar escape in her own literary pursuits, and in consideration of nonconformist futures, defiant of typical female expectations. They both struggle counter to the moments that when “female creativity is expressed, it is also contained within an immature or daughterly model” (Handyside 2015, 5); they are attempting to create their own path. They are also attempting to show they can be mature without the help of a man.

The stories are divergent in their conclusions, however. Marie Antoinette is forced to flee Versailles, rejected by France and hated by its people as a symbol of all that is wrong with the monarchy. To the end, she remains by her husband, trapped by the expectations placed upon her not only as a queen, but as a wife. She submits to the will of the people, bowing before them as they storm the palace as the only world she has ever known crashes around her. Despite attempting to defy convention, to try and rebel “against many of the rituals that are associated with the performance of idealized femininity” (Kuperman 2015, 12), she is “pulled down

by and dissolved into her environment; [...] she disappears into the very structure of the institution whose norms and codes govern her life” (Backman Rogers 2012, 92). The life and expectations placed on Marie Antoinette are not only unjust but ironic: “As the queen, she’s expected to shine—be better, prettier, more stylish, more vivacious—until she’s vilified for it” (Deschanel 2020). The very thing that she becomes known for, and is expected of her, leads to her demise.

Coppola leaves us with a vision of Marie Antoinette’s bedchamber, looted and destroyed, the decadent chandelier crashed to the floor and a bird invading through a broken window. It is the final destruction of her existence. Her defiance, her rock star lifestyle, in the end, did nothing to improve the conclusion of her life. Her body was always a “political bargaining tool between countries” (Backman Rogers 2012, 85) and her execution is the final bargain. The girl in “My Last Duchess” rides her defiance to opportunity, the chance to step into the great unknown, to possibly follow in the footsteps of her English teacher Miss Bessie: off to college, perhaps graduate school. That her mind questions the structures around her and her place within them, she demonstrates not only the desire to escape them, but the mental fortitude required to run counter to conventions. The girl has opportunities that Marie Antoinette did not.

The two protagonists run a counter narrative regarding their identities. The girl spends the story building her identity, the person she feels is the true representation of herself, by shedding that which is unnecessary around her: her boyfriend who offers very little for her, and her female classmates who she looks down upon for being facsimiles for the male gaze, for being “dumb bunnies and floozies” (Atwood 2006, 72). She adds to herself through the subtraction of others. Marie Antoinette experiences the opposite, as she is continually stripped of her literal and metaphorical identity in order to leave behind all aspects of who she was as Austrian archduchess to become the queen of France. She is a possession, the fate which the girl in “My Last Duchess” hopes to avoid at all costs. Marie Antoinette is owned; she is “owned firstly by the court of Versailles and, finally, by the state and the people to whom she must sacrifice herself” (Backman Rogers 2012, 94). Everything is

removed from her through “disturbing rituals that function as a form of control over the female body” (Backman Rogers 2012, 90) to provide an identity suitable to her position, and she struggles, and ultimately fails, through the film to carve out a version of herself that she believes is the authentic one. The film, in a sense, is about “the politicization of the female body” (Backman Rogers 2012, 80) and the losing battle faced when attempting to defy those who control the politics. The battles faced by both characters provide interesting points of comparison regarding the societal battles that people face and the different ways in which control is put upon them and the possible reactions to it. Students tend to recognize this quest for independence at a time in their lives when their individuality is being both encouraged and suppressed: they are at the age when they are faced with the dichotomy of being told to “grow up” and warned not to “grow up too fast.”

Reactions and Observations

Marie Antoinette is one of those real-life people that comes across as the perfect literary character: misunderstood, hated, beheaded. Yet, she is a character with a completely different side than the one history has typically painted her with, providing an alternative point of analysis. Like any good character, she has layers and lies associated with her that must be interpreted and uncovered to provide her life and character with a fair assessment by the reader. For her film representation, students agree that this Coppola film is the most attractive one to look at—the soft colours, the elaborate period pieces, the stunning scenery of Versailles palace; it is all there to make for a stunning film.

Students enjoy this film more than Lost in Translation, yet they continue to struggle with Coppola’s minimalist style. They want to see more shown on the screen; they want more detail. There is a genuine difficulty with them filling in the blanks to a story. Film is traditionally a medium that reveals all that they need, or want, to see in a story. Simply put, I don’t know if they are used to thinking as much with film as with other forms of text. Perhaps there is something traditional and more scholarly about a book, a novel in particular. A challenge in its completion. This challenge does not really exist on film. One just pushes play and in a couple of hours, it is over. The story has been signed, sealed

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The Rest

Somewhere

Somewhere somehow feels like Marie Antoinette for men. The story focuses on famous actor Johnny after he has completed his latest film and is working the press circuit prior to its release. Johnny is bored with life, riddled with ennui: his “life is replaced with indifference and detachment from feeling” (Backman Rogers 2019, 101). He spends his time with his broken arm, Coppola's exploration of “the masculine body in crisis” (Backman Rogers 2019, 90), aimlessly driving his Ferrari, and watching twin sisters pole dance⁶ for him in his hotel room. The dance that the twins perform, that which should be highly sexual in its nature as it encompasses a cliched male fantasy, is “captured in static framing that works to de-eroticize their dance as a sexual display” (Backman Rogers 2019, 96). He stays at the Chateau Marmont, his own personal Versailles, where his life is ordered and regulated by the requirements of his fame and his team of handlers.

Johnny is eventually snapped from his repetitive lifestyle—often literally going in circles as evidenced by the minutes-long opening scene in which he drives his car in an endless loop—when his daughter comes for an extended stay with him. There is a sweetness to their relationship, a reality of the bonding between father and daughter over seemingly mundane events: a lengthy

figure skating routine, eating together, playing in a swimming pool. There are interesting points of reference to the lives of students as Johnny is a man “constantly waiting for something to happen to him” (Backman Rogers 2019, 103). He does not seek life, but sits back expecting life to seek him. This can easily be paralleled with student reliance on cellphones and other technological devices that serve as a replacement for traditional social lives. There is a passivity to their existences that removes them from engagement with possibility and an expectation that excitement will simply occur.

Students struggle with *Somewhere* primarily because Coppola extends her usage of lengthy scenes, moments of “‘dead’ time in which nothing is quite literally made to happen onscreen” (Backman Rogers 2019, 108). This creates difficult viewing, more so than her other works. The aforementioned figure skating scene takes the viewers through an entire child's routine lasting several minutes. The scenes with the strippers are several minutes long, forcing their awkwardness to the forefront creating viewing that is laughably uncomfortable. There is a scene where Johnny is being fitted for a prosthetic mask for an upcoming film of his in which he sits with putty poured all over his face for an interminable amount of time. While these scenes serve their function in advancing the tone of the film, they are a difficult sell for students. Simply, *Somewhere* pushes the boundary of their ability to view film as art to, and beyond, its limits.

Through the second iteration of the Coppola course, I chose to omit the viewing of *Somewhere* for both the purposes of time and based on the gauging of the particular group of students in front of me. While the first group of students engaged with each of the films understanding that they were text for analysis, the second group consistently struggled with the notion that films were more than media for pure entertainment. Despite the study of auteurship in the course and the knowledge that Coppola

clearly has a distinctive style over her career, it felt as though students still expected something wildly different from the next Coppola film. *Somewhere* has merit, both as a film and a text for analysis. It is an award-winning exemplar of both Iceberg filmmaking and a shoegaze-style film, but as an unpaired text, it is more likely to be cut from the course.

The Bling Ring and Macbeth

Many students enjoy *The Bling Ring* (the based-on-a-true-story retelling of a Hollywood crime spree in which a group of young people robbed vacant celebrity houses while they were out of town, taking millions of dollars worth of cash and apparel) because of its connections to real-life celebrities, fashion and partying. While they recognize the vapid and unsustainable lifestyle exhibited by the young thieves in the film, they place value on their materialistic pursuits and enjoy observing their “rise and fall on their own shocking sense of apathy and greed” (Kuperman 2015, 13). There were deep revelations within the study of this film, the understanding how powerful the media and celebrity culture is in students’ lives. Typically, these ideas would come through in personal writing and classroom discussions, where the students often felt comfortable sharing their own, often blind, quest for materialism. They acknowledge their nearly reckless pursuit of trends, even aware that the trends are merely temporary. Yet, there remains a dramatic importance for them to continue the pursuit, as material goods are deeply ingrained as representations of our value and our own sense of worth. This provides connection to the boundless ambition of the characters of *The Bling Ring* and the celebrities they steal from. There is an endless pursuit for more. *The Bling Ring* is an “unmitigated celebration of vapidness, superficiality and consumerism” (Backman Rogers 2012, 94), and it could demonstrate how “pre-feminist ideals are being (seductively) repackaged as postfeminist freedoms” (Gill 2007, 162). This film differs from Coppola’s prior work, and she has stated that her films prior to *The Bling Ring* were “really slow and quiet so I was just in the mood to do something obnoxious and faster, and something kind of in bad taste” (Coppola quoted in Kuperman 2015, 13). Despite many recognizable tenets of auteurship, *The Bling Ring* is her most plot-driven film in that it provides a distinctive beginning-middle-end structure.

These ideas were connected to research into celebrity culture, how many people acquire their money and what they do with it. The primary theme of ambition was easily connected to Macbeth and his fatal flaw, and there are also interesting connections between the perceptions of women, as the “long-standing associations between femininity and frivolity” (Kuperman 2015, 14) are directly opposed by the bloodthirsty, unsexed ambition of Lady Macbeth.

The Beguiled and Half-Blood Blues

Two powerful stories collide in this comparative unit that focuses on telling the stories of the marginalized. The Civil War-era gothic drama *The Beguiled* demonstrates a matriarchal world, where a group of girls are left behind while war rages all around them in the South. When they stumble across a wounded Union soldier, they take him in and the manipulations for power within the household begin. There is a “dynamic within which men and women are always trying to second guess one another’s motives and outwit or outmaneuver their opponent or enemy” (Backman Rogers 2019, 49). In a sense, *The Beguiled* is the “Lisbon sisters [...] reborn [to] have their bloody revenge on the patriarchy” (Backman Rogers 2019, 46). The film revisits notions of ennui, sisterhood, feminism, the male gaze and male dominance, but is most significant for this study because of Coppola’s removal and ignorance of any nonwhite characters in the adaptation from the novel to the film. The novel contains a Black enslaved character who serves as the servant to the school and a biracial woman as the teacher for the girls. Coppola removed the enslaved character entirely and cast white actress Kirsten Dunst in the role of the teacher.

Coppola has attempted to explain her rationale behind excluding people of colour from her film adaptation of *The Beguiled*, stating that “young girls watch my films and this was not the depiction of an African American character I would want to show them” (Coppola quoted in Deschanel 2020). This writing and directorial decision is problematic, however, as it “shows there is no strength to be seen in Black female slaves, [and] she also demonstrates she is unable to write these characters with nuance or care” (Deschanel 2020). Coppola is essentially suggesting that “all female experience can be reduced to the white female experience”

(Backman Rogers 2019, 51). Through her films, Coppola has demonstrated that she writes what she knows and rarely veers outside of this comfort zone. The inclusion of a Black and biracial character would have provided positive results, as “Black women and girls would be able to see themselves in the soft femininity they are so often excluded from in media” (Deschanel 2020). The question is raised and discussed as to whether Sofia Coppola was better off writing out a Black character, as she did, to protect perceptions of African American characters, or to write a Black character as a wealthy white woman. Questions arise of who has the right to tell the story of others, specifically the stories of the marginalized written from positions of privilege. This falls into the critique of feminism that “only those who have it can play with not having it” (Backman Rogers 2019, 10), in terms of the privileged attempting to reveal the plight of the underprivileged. Only because she has not experienced the same struggle has she gained position and power to be in a place to tell the story of others. There are struggles within the feminist ideals here, exposing conflicts and areas of tension within the quest for equality. Is there true sisterhood, or warring factions of feminism that will stall the cause? Is it Coppola’s duty to attempt to tell the stories of highly marginalized women only because she is also a woman?

Students, upon learning of the removal of the characters of colour in this film, combined with their observations of previous Coppola films (specifically *Lost in Translation*) generally demonstrated interest in these conversations. They grasp the problematic nature of these directorial decisions, and there is ample space in our modern society to place these discussions. Generally, they enjoyed the film and some of the intrigue and manipulation that play out between the female characters. At this point in the course, and having a strong understanding of feminist and postfeminist ideas, they can strongly critique the motivations and actions of the characters through these lenses. In a simple analysis, they enjoy that something happens in the film.

The Beguiled is countered by the harrowing tales of the Black jazz musicians facing the increased influence of the Nazi party in prewar Germany in *Half Blood Blues* (2011), a story of sin and redemption among a group of great musicians attempting

to save their own lives and their music in the face of endless hardships.

Author Esi Edugyan provides an exciting read that enables the reader to witness the layers of struggle and racism faced by the characters. While tackling the racial issues head-on, Edugyan provides a text that directly opposes Coppola’s whitewashing of the issues of the American South. The author brings us right in to the struggles of the musicians as they face discrimination in every aspect of their lives, including among themselves. Students tend to struggle getting into *Half Blood Blues* because it is not written in a linear timeline, and much of the dialogue is written in the slang of the era and of the jazz world. However, once they provided the text with an opportunity, many of the students were quite engaged and enjoyed the novel. The ending provides particular points of discussion among them.

Students can compare Edugyan’s writing to the issues first witnessed in *Lost in Translation* and the Asian stereotyping. They see that while Coppola (presumably) does not intend to be a racist in her film, her privilege often creates a difficult or oversimplified relationship with characters of non-European descent.

On the Rocks and Poetry

Coppola’s most recent film (as of this writing) features the return of Bill Murray and a more light-hearted film to end the study of her auteurship. The tale, which for the first time features nonwhite actors in primary roles, focused on themes of mistrust and family relationships. Murray and his daughter (played by Rashida Jones) investigate the possible infidelities of her husband, rediscovering the importance of their own relationship along the way. This film can be connected to any number of poems thematically, a selection that has changed for me with each reteaching of this final unit.

There are interesting points of conversation with this final film, in that Coppola has seemingly accepted some of the criticism her work has received and adapted to it. She includes people of colour in her work as well as those outside of privilege. In this sense, she is attempting to connect with a wider swath of her potential audience. Students, at this point, recognize the growth (or at least attempted growth) in Sofia Coppola’s work. *On the*

Rocks also works well as a final film as it is not as thematically heavy as much of her work. Despite the lighter tone to the film that blurs its deeper intentions and very human struggles, it offers strong thematic connections to a variety of poems that are far weightier. For example, notions of leadership and questions of who we look up to can be explored in connecting to Walt Whitman's "O Captain! My Captain!" or his tone of loss and disaffection following betrayal in "Manhattan Streets I Saunter'd Pondering." The themes of family in *On the Rocks* are fairly universal, providing a variety of poetic inroads, allowing the teacher to make connections to the poems that they enjoy or have used with success before.

The Study of an Auteur

Through the observation of an entire career, it is possible to see those moments in which we get stuck: themes that we can never seem to shake, never fully reconcile in our own lives or our work, stories that we are never truly done telling. The issues can be observed from any number of different angles and perspectives, to shine a light on that which we have found to be the most significant aspect of our ever-changing personality and identity. We are a never-ending becoming; this is reflected in the stories that we tell and the art that we create. This is the filmmaking of Sofia Coppola—she continually returns to the themes and stories that she is still working through in her own life. As she reconciles elements of her past on film, viewers are taken along on this attempted experience of growth.

Students viewed her growth as a filmmaker in her consistent return to similar stories and themes: the ideas of the feminine within the postfeminist and the ideas of ennui within a world of adventure and excitement. Students recognized Coppola's struggle with her own famous father through the development of Laura in *On the Rocks* and Cleo in *Somewhere*. They can witness the tensions in her young marriage through Charlotte in *Lost in Translation*. And they can see that she has felt stuck in her own gilded life, through rules and expectations, like Marie Antoinette. This life is viewed through the art that it created. All of Coppola's work was viewed for dissection, the triumphs and the missteps.

Most significantly, seeing all of her films can "encourage us to interpret them according to auteurist principles—as part of a body of work" (Handyside 2015, 4) instead of as a standalone text. We get to know Sofia Coppola through her work, as she is reflected in every film. This is a significant advantage to the study of a whole career—there is a new knowledge of the person behind the camera, the creator. Through this knowledge there is a gained intimacy with their work, whether it is liked or disliked, because we have become more open to the connections of someone we feel close to. This familiarity was the key component in this experiment, to see if it enhanced the connection between author and reader. Regardless of the struggles with the texts themselves, this sense of familiarity was evident among the students—they spoke about Coppola as though they knew her, which in a sense, they did.

The elongated study of one text creator has, overall, been beneficial for students. In their writing, they have demonstrated the acknowledgement of growth—both in the actual creation of the films and in the development of themes across multiple texts. There has been more maturity in the writing, more thought and understanding, and students have been stronger at analyzing multiple texts within one writing piece, at writing comparatively, and creating arguments that function across multiple texts. They know the stories because they know the storyteller. There is a stronger ability to predict the work because they know who is creating it and their tendencies. This enables students to move beyond the basic comprehension of the text—because they already know it—to engage in more thought, consideration and analysis. In discussion of these texts, this proved to be invaluable to their arsenal of textual conversation, adding layers of depth to their analysis. There was enhanced use of textual evidence, given the many available sources; there was the incorporation of newly familiar vocabulary and there are interesting connections made to philosophical theories. This was noticeable in the conversation of students who traditionally struggled: they were armed with a familiarity that was helpful, providing them with ideas and terminology not just to fall back on, but to apply to new text after new text. They were aided by consistency in style and theme.

Success and Failure—Conclusions

As with any teaching unit, there is a hope that it will be perfect: it will be planned and executed to perfection, the students will be engaged throughout, and will be able to touch on every possible topic related to the films and their corresponding texts. But this is not the case; this is never the case. Many of the notions and theories that have been discussed in this paper are items that have transpired in the teaching of the Coppola course; some of them are wishful thinking in that they were not topics yet broached in the first attempts to teach this class. There is always planning ahead, considering the next time something is taught: what can be improved on, what could be scrapped completely, what could be added. I hope that there are more opportunities to teach this class, to further incorporate all the ideas that have been discussed in this research and beyond. There is an astounding amount of scholarship on the work of Coppola, inviting this class to become even richer and more elaborate in the future.

An important aspect with teaching controversial, or even unpopular, text is for students to engage in intelligent critique, to provide reasons, rationales and evidence to why they like or dislike something that they read or watch.

The Coppola course is not complete. There is a need to build more activities and have less reliance on student discussion and conversations on the topics. The course, as is, is predicated on the ability of a class to openly discuss and debate issues and ideas related to the films. Strong options for activities throughout the study would offer a helpful backbone to the course, as well as a potential fallback should the conversational aspect of the course not always work seamlessly.

To hear students discuss, and write about, the trappings of the male gaze as ironically perpetuated by a female director is a success in this

course and in Grade 11 as a whole. To read about the hauntological impacts on character development, or how the use of shoegaze music is reflected in the visual aesthetic created by Coppola, or how ennui is connected to notions of postfeminism, these are the victories that can be taken from this course. These ideas developed in student thought and writing have moved beyond many of the typical responses in Grade 11. Through these experiences, I have noticed a definite increase in the complexity, or at least attempted complexity, of responses and ideas among the students. They push their boundaries of thought in their critical writing, perhaps due to the comfort with the subject matter that is clearer to them through the auteur-ish repetition.

An important aspect with teaching controversial, or even unpopular, text is for students to engage in intelligent critique, to provide reasons, rationales and evidence to why they like or dislike something that they read or watch. This reveals a critical viewer; this our intention at the end of the day. Through this course, particularly because of the divisive nature of Coppola's films, I push students to elaborate on their likes or dislikes; they cannot complain that something is boring when it is intentionally created to evoke emotions of ennui in the viewers through the characters. They need to move to the next criticism and consider how it can be elaborated on and defended with evidence from the texts themselves. Often, students have found it difficult to determine what it truly is about the film that they disliked besides the slow pacing. This creates further points of discussion and analysis.

The course will be altered and revamped for each class that engages with it. I will tweak the assignments, find new connecting texts, find other strong secondary texts (reviews, academic articles, interviews) to aid in the development and understanding of the stories. Students will engage more frequently with academic texts and scholarly reviews of films, to continue to become better critics themselves. I will continue to learn and read about Sofia Coppola, and learn and read the texts she has based her films on.

The Coppola course, despite its flaws and areas for improvement, will continue to run and continue to grow until that teacherly desire for

change sets in once again. There is value in the extended study of one text creator as it becomes more than the study of a text; it becomes the study of a person and how that person—their very humanness—is reflected through art.

My hope is that in the future, students will connect with these films, be “entranced by the beauty of these films and struck with melancholy for days after” (Deschanel 2020). 🍷

Notes

1. Of course, many teachers create thematic or era-focused units to incorporate more literature from a specific period of time, such as the literature of the Roaring '20s, the Beat Poets or Victorian classics, for example.

2. I have also used *Somewhere* as a stand-alone text, using it to examine the tenets of film study or the modern play.

3. Her award nominations are highlighted by three Oscar nominations related to *Lost in Translation* (Best Picture, Best Director and Best Original Screenplay—the latter which she won), winning the Golden Lion at the Venice Film Festival for *Somewhere*, and a Best Director win at the Cannes Film Festival for *The Beguiled*.

4. This includes her critically derided role in her father's film, *The Godfather Part III*, for which she was “awarded” two Golden Raspberry (Razzie) Awards for Worst Supporting Actress and Worst New Star. She was also nominated for a Razzie for her small role in *Star Wars, Episode I: The Phantom Menace*.

5. In all the years that I have taught this text, there are only a handful of students who have deciphered that they are discussing an abortion without referring to Google to provide them with the answer. While it seems very obvious after being told, Hemingway's use of the iceberg theory of writing buries this idea pretty deeply in the subtext.

6. Teachers note: There is no nudity in these scenes, but the dancers are scantily clad and the scene lasts several minutes. While it is integral to viewing Johnny's ennui and boredom with that which may have once been perceived as thrilling and exotic, it should be addressed prior to viewing.

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Andrew Thomson is a doctoral student at the University of Alberta. His research explores the intersections between dark texts, living encounters with death and the potential that these encounters may have for students in imagining the possibility of futurities or, alternately, the absence of a future.

Integrating Career Education into the Grade 2 English Language Arts Curriculum

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In this project, a series of five career planning activities was integrated into the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education English language arts 2 program and delivered to 21 Grade 2 students at an urban school in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The career planning unit was designed to encourage students to improve their language skills, engage in self-exploration, connect academic learning to the world of work and foster positive relationships with older students. The career planning activities were rated highly by students, as 97.2 per cent of students rated the activities as good or great. According to student evaluations that were administered at the conclusion of the unit, 75.0 per cent of students indicated that the unit had helped them to learn a lot more about themselves, 100.0 per cent felt that the unit had helped them to learn a lot more about careers, 100.0 per cent reported that the unit had made them excited about what they could do with the rest of their lives, and 100.0 per cent felt that the unit had made them want to learn more about careers. Reasons for this career planning unit's effectiveness and recommendations for future projects are discussed.

Background

To help situate the current research, an overview of how career planning became integrated into Canadian and international school curriculums is provided. To begin, a comprehensive career needs survey (CCNS) was developed by Magnusson and Bernes (2002) to gain a better understanding of students' career needs. The CCNS is a collaborative initiative between the Southern Alberta Centre of Excellence for Career Development at

the University of Lethbridge Faculty of Education, the Chinook Regional Career Transitions for Youth Project and the Southwestern Rural Youth Career Development Project (2002). The aim of the survey was to capture students' perceptions of career development and planning needs as well as any perceived gaps that might be present in existing services (Magnusson and Bernes 2002; Witko et al 2006). The survey included both quantitative and qualitative responses, and they were distributed to 54 junior high and senior high schools in the Southern Alberta region by classroom teachers (Witko et al 2006). The survey results indicated that some of the most pressing needs for junior and senior high school students were finding their interests and abilities, discovering their passions, gaining support for their career plans and post-secondary, and gaining financial information (Magnusson and Bernes 2002). Additionally, the surveys implied that beginning career planning earlier (in junior high or even before) could be more effective in assisting students through the process of career decision making (Witko et al 2006). Given these results, it was evident that career planning was an important component that was lacking from students' educational experiences.

Based on the results obtained from the CCNS, a career education pilot project, Career Coaching Across the Curriculum, was created and implemented (Slomp, Gunn and Bernes 2014). Alberta Education and the Canadian Career Development Foundation supported the project by providing funding to train 50 preservice teachers in career education at the University of Lethbridge, which allowed them to go into schools across Canada and

abroad internationally to implement career education across the K–12 curriculum. The pilot project consisted of two components (2014). First, the career education course was provided to the preservice teachers over four weekends (2014). The first three weekends provided preservice teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary for integrating career interventions into the regular curriculum, then the fourth weekend allowed preservice teachers to share their lesson plans, unit plans and schoolwide interventions they developed to their classmates (2014). Second, after successfully completing the four-weekend career education course, students completed a 12-week internship where they could transfer their newly acquired knowledge and skills into elementary, middle or high school (2014). The larger data set has already been published (2014) and thus, the current paper aims to detail an example of one of the specific classroom implementations from the larger study.

Students need to have opportunities to connect their school learning with workplace reality and learn that academic courses are related to real-world problems.

Career education is essential at the elementary school level (Harkins 2000, 2001; Schultheiss 2008). In elementary school, career education usually involves developing students' self-awareness (Harkins 2001; Herr and Cramer 1996; Schultheiss 2008), supporting students to develop positive attitudes, habits and competencies (Harkins 2001; Herr and Cramer 1996), and helping students to develop a sense of relatedness to others, the ability to empathize and a coherent set of values (Schultheiss 2008). Career education allows students to link classroom learning with real-world applications (Harkins 2000; Herr and Cramer 1996; Schultheiss 2008). Harkins (2000) argues that until students acquire concrete knowledge about the world of work, the idea of having a job remains abstract. For this reason, students need to have opportunities to connect their school learning with workplace reality

and learn that academic courses are related to real-world problems. Since education aims to prepare students for the future, children need to start developing work-readiness skills at an early age (Harkins 2000).

Harkins (2001) concludes that "literature provides context and is a logical source for additional information on almost any subject ... it can also be an important first step in creating a life plan" (p 32). Therefore, the use of literature in career education with children is highly beneficial, and it is easily integrated into subject areas such as English language arts.

In the current project, career education was integrated into English language arts (ELA) in a Grade 2 classroom to promote literacy development and cross-curricular competencies. Throughout the project, the teacher aimed to help children explore their uniqueness and develop an increased self-awareness. In doing so, it could help them realize that, even at an early age, they can define who they are and build a strong future for themselves, their families and the community. This project enhanced the school's literacy program to help students make connections between their community and the skills, interests and ideas that they have for the future. This project included lessons to focus on all six areas of language arts: reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing and representing.

Context of the Teaching Environment

This career education project was implemented into the Grade 2 ELA program of studies (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education 2010) in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. The class consisted of 21 students who had a wide range of learning abilities; therefore, some students completed activities with modified writing components and/or assistance from a scribe.

Cross-Curricular Integration

This project targeted several ELA (Saskatchewan Ministry of Education 2010) learning outcomes, which are provided on the next page.

| GENERAL OUTCOME CATEGORY | LEARNING OUTCOME |
|---|---|
| <p>Comprehend and Respond (CR) Saskatchewan Ministry of Education 2010, 15</p> | <p>Students will:</p> <p>CR2.1 Comprehend and respond to a variety of grade-level texts (including contemporary and traditional visual, oral, written, and multimedia) that address: identity (e.g., Just Watch Me) community (e.g., People and Places) social responsibility (e.g., Friendship) and make connections to prior learning and experiences.</p> <p>CR2.2 View and explain (with support from the text) the key literal and inferential ideas (messages), important details, and how elements (such as colour, layout, medium, and special fonts) enhance meaning in grade-appropriate visual and multimedia texts.</p> |
| <p>Compose and Create (CC) Saskatchewan Ministry of Education 2010, 15</p> | <p>Students will:</p> <p>CC2.1 Compose and create a range of visual, multimedia, oral, and written texts that explore: identity (e.g., My Family and Friends) community (e.g., Our Community) social responsibility (e.g., TV Ads for Children) and make connections to own life.</p> <p>CC2.2 Use a variety of ways to represent understanding and to communicate ideas, procedures, stories, and feelings in a clear manner with essential details.</p> <p>CC2.4 Write stories, poems, friendly letters, reports, and observations using appropriate and relevant details in clear and complete sentences and paragraphs of at least six sentences.</p> |
| <p>Assess and Reflect on Language Abilities (AR) Saskatchewan Ministry of Education 2010, 16</p> | <p>Students will:</p> <p>AR2.1 Reflect on and assess their viewing, listening, reading, speaking, writing, and other representing experiences and strategies by participating in discussions and relating work to a set of criteria (e.g., "What did I learn?").</p> <p>AR2.2 Set personal goals as a result of group discussions (e.g., "What did I do well?", "How could I be a better viewer, listener, reader, presenter, speaker, and writer?").</p> |

This career planning unit was also intended to meet several career education objectives. Students were to learn more about themselves and careers, become excited about what they could do in the future and would want to learn more about different careers. If met, these learning outcomes would speak to the degree to which the career planning unit was able to inspire and educate students.

Detailed Description of the Career Planning Unit

This unit was also designed to encourage students to engage in self-exploration, consider the occupations within their communities and develop positive relationships with students in Grades 7 and 8. The career planning unit involved five activities

that were implemented over several weeks. The following activities were chosen because they emphasized goal setting, self-exploration and relationship building that are all essential in career planning and meeting career education objectives. Simultaneously, students were able to engage in ELA content through these activities by reading, writing and learning about vocabulary that is personally relevant to themselves and their interests.

Activity 1: Goal Setting and *Unstoppable Me*

The purpose of this activity was to teach students about goal setting and taking steps to reach one's goals. In the first lesson, students read *Unstoppable Me* (Dyer and Tracy 2006) as a class. The book highlights various ways in which children can reach their goals. The book includes 10 major principles: (a) You're great—no matter what, (b) Persistence pays off, (c) Welcome to the unknown, (d) You have a choice, (e) Farewell to worry, (f) Peace begins with you, (g) Enjoy the here-and-now, (h) Healthy me, (i) Creativity is the key and (j) What can you give. Each principle is described in the text using situational examples of how children may apply these principles in their own lives. For example, the second principle "Persistence pays off" describes the importance of hard work, persistence and seeing a goal through to its finish. In the situational example for this section, a child is learning to play the guitar, and he acknowledges that he will only get better at playing it if he continues to practise and persist in his efforts. At the conclusion of this book, there is a section that asks the reader about how they could use each of the 10 principles. As a class, students came up with ways in which they could use each of the principles in their own lives.

After reading *Unstoppable Me* (Dyer and Tracy 2006) and answering the questions together, the teacher helped students to create booklets with monthly goals and targets to reach. At the beginning of each month, students would colour a bull's eye to illustrate whether they had met their previous month's goal. Students then wrote statements about a specific goal that they would like to achieve for the following month. Midway through the month, the class revisited their goals and discussed the actions that they had taken to achieve

them. This exercise was designed to provide students with an understanding of the positive impacts that arise from taking action to follow through on one's goals. Students monitored their progress by writing about their action or inaction throughout the goal-setting process.

Activity 2: Acrostic Poems

The purpose of this activity was to improve students' vocabulary and encourage students to think of new ways to describe themselves. In this activity, students brainstormed descriptive adjectives as a class. These adjectives were to be words that students could use to describe themselves. As a class, students created an A to Z alphabet listing of descriptive adjectives. Students then wrote acrostic poems to describe themselves using these adjectives. For example, a student named John could have written: Joyful, Open, Honest, Nice.

Activity 3: Photo Story

This activity was designed to have students think about their life stories and practise writing descriptive paragraphs. Students created a digital photo story of their lives using photos that depicted their lives from birth to present day. Students brought photos from home that were personally meaningful and/or tied to significant life events. For each photo, students wrote at least one paragraph by making jot notes, drafting, revising and then writing a final copy. The teacher assisted students to correct each rough draft before they wrote their final copy. The photos were then scanned and imported into the Microsoft Photo Story program. The teacher then recorded students' voices as they told the story of their lives with each photo. When all students had completed this activity, the class watched the photo stories together.

Activity 4: My Community—Discovering Jobs and What Is Important to Me

This activity was designed to expose children to a variety of occupations and encourage them to consider areas of personal interest. Prior to the activity, the teacher gathered several books that detailed various careers and created a mini classroom library. Each day, the teacher read aloud a section

of Priddy's (2003) *ABC of Jobs People Do*. This book offers explanations and vivid illustrations of professions and occupations for each letter of the alphabet. Once students had the opportunity to read various books, they naturally began to choose books based on self-interest. To supplement the library, the teacher also created a classroom wiki website to allow students to access videos, vocabulary lists, interactive games and virtual tours of their careers of interest.

Activity 5: Completing Posters with Care Partners and Career Day

For the first part of this activity, students created posters about occupations held by "community helpers," adults in their neighbourhoods who were in helping roles. For example, some students described individuals who were police officers, nurses or veterinarians. To complete these posters, students first answered the following questions:

- Where does your community helper work?
- What does your community helper do?
- How do they dress?
- Who do they help?
- How do they help people?

Students answered each question in paragraph form using the books available in the classroom library and the classroom wiki website.

At this point, Grade 2 students were matched with care partners from Grades 7 and 8 to complete their community helper career posters. Care partners were referred to as older students who provided support to younger students by guiding and directing them in completing assigned tasks (for example, assignments, projects and so on). The older students assisted the Grade 2 students by helping them edit their work, find relevant photos and display the career posters. This helped to ensure that the Grade 2 students were able to finish their posters in a timely manner prior to the career day. For instance, some Grade 2 students might find that searching for information on the computer is time-consuming if they are not comfortable with technology; therefore, the older students were able to show younger students how to navigate this process. In return, the older students were given the opportunity to enhance

their social and helping skills, which are also vital skills for career planning. Moreover, having both groups of students collaborate encouraged greater connection among the school community.

The school held a career fair in the school gym to give students an authentic learning experience by bringing the community helpers to the classroom. The students rotated from station to station to learn about various occupations, and the career posters that students had created were proudly displayed on each table. The invited guests brought the tools of their respective trades and/or professions as well as gifts for each student. A highlight of the career day involved an entire crew of firefighters that came with their truck, and students were invited to go inside of the fire truck and talk to each crew member. To incorporate English language arts into the career day activity, students wrote thank you letters to each career day volunteer.

Summative Assessment

Upon completion of the career planning unit, students completed brief evaluation surveys (Appendix A). This survey was designed to (a) assess which students participated in each activity, (b) indicate whether each activity was perceived as helpful, (c) highlight aspects of the unit that students enjoyed, (d) collect students' recommendations regarding how the unit could be improved in the future and (e) collect student ratings as to whether the career planning unit had met the four standardized learning outcomes.

Results

The results from the student evaluation surveys are presented in the following tables. It should be noted that five students did not complete the first page of the survey, and the numbers in each column fluctuate because students apparently had difficulty completing the survey. In many cases, boxes and/or smiley faces were either left blank or more than one option was selected. When this happened, the response was not included in the summative count.

The first table presents students' levels of participation in each activity.

Table 1: Participation

| ACTIVITY | I DIDN'T DO IT | I DID IT |
|---|----------------|-------------|
| Goal-setting: <i>Unstoppable Me</i> | 0 (0.0%) | 15 (100.0%) |
| Acrostic Poems | 0 (0.0%) | 14 (100.0%) |
| Photo Story | 1 (6.7%) | 14 (93.3%) |
| My Community: Discovering Jobs and What Is Important to Me | 0 (0.0%) | 15 (100.0%) |
| Completing Posters with Care Partners and Career Day | 1 (7.1%) | 13 (92.9%) |

Note: 97.2% of the students who responded to this question completed all activities.

The following table presents the extent to which each activity was perceived as helpful by the students. Students' responses to the open-ended questions are described in the Discussion section.

Table 2: Perceived Helpfulness of Each Activity

| ACTIVITY | NOT GOOD AT ALL | GOOD | GREAT |
|--|-----------------|-----------|-------------|
| Goal-setting: <i>Unstoppable Me</i> | 0 (0.0%) | 4 (28.6%) | 10 (71.4%) |
| Acrostic Poems | 0 (0.0%) | 1 (7.1%) | 13 (92.9%) |
| Photo Story | 1 (7.1%) | 1 (7.1%) | 12 (85.7%) |
| My Community: Discovering Jobs and What Is Important to Me | 1 (7.7%) | 1 (7.7%) | 11 (84.6%) |
| Completing Posters with Care Partners and Career Day | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 11 (100.0%) |

Note: 97.2% of the students reported that all activities were good or great.

The career planning unit's perceived adherence to four standardized learning outcomes is presented below.

Table 3: Adherence to Learning Outcomes

| | I DON'T AGREE | I'M NOT SURE | I AGREE |
|---|---------------|--------------|-------------|
| These lessons helped me to learn a lot about myself. | 0 (0.0%) | 5 (25.0%) | 15 (75.0%) |
| These lessons helped me to learn a lot about careers. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 21 (100.0%) |
| These lessons made me excited about what I could do with my life. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 20 (100.0%) |
| These lessons made me want to learn more about different careers. | 0 (0.0%) | 0 (0.0%) | 20 (100.0%) |

Note: On average, 93.8% of students agreed that all learning outcomes had been met.

Discussion

Overall, this career planning unit had excellent results. However, these results must be interpreted with caution, given the number of students who did not fully or properly complete their evaluation forms. Based on student data, 97.2 per cent of students felt that the activities were good or great and 93.8 per cent indicated that the unit had met all of the learning outcomes. The career day and completing posters with care partners activity was rated most helpful, as 100.0 per cent of students indicated that the activity was great.

Many of the students' open-ended comments on the survey indicated that they enjoyed working with their care partners and they would have liked more time with them. This highlights the influence that older adolescents may have on children in early elementary school. This career planning unit was able to build community within the school by pairing Grade 2 students with Grades 7 or 8 students and encouraging them to collaborate. Students also enjoyed the career day aspect of this activity, and many students' comments highlighted

Specifically to English language arts, this career planning unit appeared successful in allowing students to develop their language skills while describing themselves and the world of work.

their positive experiences with guests such as police officers, chefs, veterinarians, nurses and fire personnel. It was useful for students to read about various occupations in their classroom career library, but having the opportunity to meet with various professionals and learn more about their work was an engaging and eye-opening experience.

Students particularly enjoyed the acrostic poem activity perhaps because it was relatively simple, as students only needed to select one descriptive adjective for each letter of their name, and it also allowed students to come up with words to describe themselves. Students also rated the goal setting, photo story and my community activities to be helpful. Each activity incorporated English language arts outcomes into their design and allowed students to become more comfortable in describing personal attributes and examine a variety of potential career options. Students commented that they enjoyed learning new words to describe themselves, and they also appreciated seeing and showing pictures of themselves. In this way, students were able to celebrate their individuality during activities such as the acrostic poem and photo story.

Specifically to English language arts, this career planning unit appeared successful in allowing students to develop their language skills while describing themselves and the world of work. Students were able to assess and reflect on the texts that the teacher read aloud and demonstrated comprehension. After the read alouds, students contributed insightful responses to the discussion questions. For instance, in reading *Unstoppable Me*, students were able to use their newly acquired knowledge about the 10 principles and communicate how it would be relevant and applicable in their own lives. The Grade 2 students were also able to compose several writing pieces (for example, thank you letters to volunteers, photo stories

and posters) to communicate their ideas in paragraph form. Additionally, students created visual representations (for example, posters and photo stories) that accurately represented their understanding of career planning concepts (for example, self-exploration and job opportunities).

On their open-ended responses, students indicated that they would have liked to have more time to complete their activities and more time with their care partners. The teacher echoed this statement, as she had planned additional career education activities that were not implemented due to time constraints. Other students indicated that they wished the classroom had been quieter when they were trying to write, or alternatively that they could have listened to music while they were writing.

Limitations and Future Directions

Despite the successful implementation of the career planning unit, it is worthy to note some existing limitations and recommendations for future career planning projects. First, using an interview format instead of relying on paper-pencil surveys might have made it easier to validate students' thoughts and experiences regarding the career planning unit. Considering Grade 2 students are still working on developing their writing and comprehension skills, they might not have had the time or capacity to express all of their ideas on the survey. Moreover, it is difficult to be certain if students actually understood the information on the survey; therefore, using an interview format may also be helpful for the teacher in collecting deep, authentic and meaningful responses from students regarding the unit's effectiveness. Second, colouring a bull's eye to track goals may be a difficult concept for Grade 2 students to conceptualize. Therefore, using a chart where students can check off goals or place a sticker beside the goal may be more developmentally appropriate. Third, as previously mentioned, because Grade 2 students are still expanding on their writing abilities, having them write jot notes, a draft version with edits and a final copy could be very time-consuming and beyond their developmental capacity. This process could be shortened by inviting students to simply write one copy using a pencil so that they are able to erase and correct their mistakes afterward. Last,

future assessment of a career education project like this one would also benefit from taking separate measurements for the care partner and career day activities. This would allow for more certainty with regards to which activity was perceived as most helpful by the students.

Taken together, these limitations and recommendations may be able to offer additional insight and opportunities in developing future career education projects.

Throughout this career planning unit, students were given opportunities to learn more about themselves, the world of work and working cooperatively with others.

Conclusion

The students enjoyed engaging in self-exploration and learning more about the world of work. Students benefitted from experiential learning, as they were able to take what they had read and then interact with professionals from various occupations. Students celebrated their individuality through photo stories and were mentored by older students to conduct career research and create posters. Throughout this career planning unit, students were given opportunities to learn more about themselves, the world of work and working cooperatively with others. Each of these areas involves critical life skills that will undoubtedly benefit students for years to come. 📖

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Holly Portas is a former education student from the University of Lethbridge. She has been teaching for over 10 years in Saskatoon. In addition to her education degree, she completed a business degree and a graduate degree in education from the University of Calgary. Over the years, she has worked in a variety of diverse school communities to focus on literacy and languages as a classroom teacher and as an additional language teacher (EAL). Holly has also previously taught in Malaysia and Indonesia as a project English teacher with the Malaysian Ministry of Education.

Kerry B Bernes is a professor of educational and counselling psychology at the University of Lethbridge.

Annelise M Lyseng is a registered psychologist and Canadian certified counsellor practising in Alberta, who works primarily with university students. Annelise also operates a private practice, Heroic Counselling, to support individuals with challenges related to trauma, anxiety and perfectionism. Annelise is an executive member of the Post-Secondary Counsellors Chapter of the Canadian Counselling and Psychotherapy Association.

Jonathan L Roque is a registered psychologist who resides in Lethbridge, where he operates as a generalist in private practice and facilitates counselling groups in the community for those struggling with bereavement and trauma. He also provides treatment and assessment for individuals with concerns related to family violence in the department of justice services at Alberta Health Services. He is a proud alumnus of the University of Lethbridge, where he previously worked as a research assistant in the department of education for over three years.

Karissa L Horne is an MEd student in counselling psychology at the University of Lethbridge. Prior to entering her master's, she completed a bachelor of science in psychology at Dalhousie University, and a bachelor of education at Memorial University of Newfoundland.

Appendix A

Career Coaching Across the Curriculum: Student Evaluation Survey

Thank you for participating in this career planning unit! I would like to know if it was helpful and how it could be made better. Please answer the questions on this sheet to help me with this.

Part 1: Please let me know if you did the activities.

| ACTIVITY | I DIDN'T DO IT | I DID IT |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| Goal-setting: <i>Unstoppable Me</i> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Acrostic Poems | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Photo Story | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| My Community: Discovering Jobs and What Is Important to Me | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Career Day and Completing Posters with Our Care Partners | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |













Part 2: Please let me know if you thought the activity was helpful by circling whether you thought it was not good at all, good or great.

| ACTIVITIES | NOT GOOD AT ALL | GOOD | GREAT |
|--|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Goal-setting: <i>Unstoppable Me</i> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Acrostic Poems | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Photo Story | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| My Community: Discovering Jobs and What Is Important to Me | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Career Day and Completing Posters with Our Care Partners | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

What did you like about this lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention?

How could this lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention be made better?

Part 3: Please tell me how much you agree with the following statements by putting a checkmark in the box that best tells me how you feel:

| | I DON'T AGREE | I'M NOT SURE | I AGREE |
|---|---|---|---|
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention helped me to learn a lot about myself. |  |  |  |
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention helped me to learn a lot about careers. |  |  |  |
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention made me excited about what I could do with my life. |  |  |  |
| This lesson, unit plan or schoolwide intervention made me want to learn more about different careers. |  |  |  |

Thank you very much for your help!

Celebrating Words

As a supplement to the *English Language Arts Journal*, *Celebrating Words* serves as a platform for sharing students' work and teachers' ideas.

EDITOR'S MESSAGE

Self-Expression Through Poetry and Narrative

Amanda Thomson, editor
Celebrating Words

Celebrating Words was conceived of as being a judgment-free space where the brilliance, eloquence, intelligence and creativity of our students could be showcased. The pieces need never be perfect—if such a thing even exists. The thoughts and efforts of the students and the willingness of their teachers to, in a way, put their ideas and practices on display are what is important and the heart of this publication.

If you have student writing that you would like to share, submit it to *Celebrating Words* at editorelajournal@gmail.com along with a brief explanation of the assignment. As a thank you for your hard work as a teacher and the initiative that you are showing in celebrating student work, you will receive a \$100 gift card to go toward your classroom.

Student Assignment Details

Bryson Dillabough's assignment was to first study and view six spoken word poems and complete a writer's response to one of the poems, then to write a spoken word poem on a subject that is meaningful to the writer. The poem had to be at

least 14 lines and incorporate a minimum of three poetic devices to enhance his feelings toward his subject. He was required to analyze his structure and use of poetic devices and how each contributed to meaning and engaged the reader. He also had to record or read his poem aloud. Bryson was very passionate about writing his poem, and he told his teacher that he didn't realize he was a poet until he wrote two of his own in class. He was incredibly proud of his abilities, and it gave him another avenue to express himself that he hadn't previously explored. At the time of writing, Bryson was taking English 20-2 with Jaylene Lyons (teacher).

After learning about the mystery genre through various short stories, texts from Donald J Sobol's *Encyclopedia Brown* series and *The Hardy Boys* television series, Grade 6 students at Brookside School in Edmonton were asked to craft their own mystery short stories. Julia Sprysak, the author of "Adult-Napped," seamlessly embedded clues, generated reader interest, built suspense, incorporated humour, and, last, but certainly not least, sprinkled in a touch of romance in order to create this highly original and enjoyable mystery. 📖

Editorial Note—In editing the pieces in *Celebrating Words*, we correct simple spelling and punctuation errors but leave in word choice, paragraphing and sentence structure to reflect the age and development of each author.

Screens

Bryson Dillabough, Grade 12 student
Lethbridge

Screens, these screens. So obsessed
All these people are really just a mess

Fake this fake that
I swear some of them treat it like crack

Insecurities, there's really no security

People altering themselves for Instagram
Teens think they can't eat a gram
"You're fat" "You're not all that"
Why can't they just relax

These internet trolls really just play the role
Causing people to roll into a state unescapable
I know people who've felt incapable

Social media isn't very social
It's just all for show
Now nobody knows how to say no

Say no to these bullies, say no to these unrealistic
standards
I swear these people have no manners

You're beautiful just the way you are
I know it's hard
But these screens are just bottomless ravines
And some one needs to intervene 📖

Adult Napped

Julia Spryask, Grade 6 student
Edmonton

Part One: Just a Normal Life

At the University of Victoria, in room two hundred forty-six, nineteen-year-old November Azwul was studying for an exam. Sure, she was named after a month. Her family had habits of doing weird things, like naming their children after months, days of the week, and seasons. Little did she know, her life was about to get weirder.

That didn't bother her, though. She was on the couch, her dark hair and skin standing out against the white pillow. Her good friend Beth Roonibul was studying beside her, also on the couch. "November," Beth asked, "This one's pretty hard. I'm having a little trouble with it."

"Don't worry about it." November replied. "I've done stuff like that plenty of times."

Beth scooped over and showed November her worksheet. "Fifty-six billion five hundred million eighty-four thousand three hundred twelve divided by two hundred." November read. "I'm not sure. And by the way, does your brother prefer brown eyes or blue eyes?" She had a small crush on Beth's brother Seth, and she hoped he liked blue eyes more, since that was her eye colour.

"Look, I'm not sure what kinds of girls Seth likes, since he's awfully secretive about that stuff." Beth answered. "I'm still curious about it though. Like, does he like tall or short or smart or dumb? I just don't know, even though he's one month older than me."

There was a knock on the door. "That must be him." November said calmly. The door opened and Seth came in, handsome as always, with one strand of brown hair over his bright green eyes. "Just so you know," He told them, "Your break's

over. Let's get to Business class." November didn't mind Business that much, except for the fact that a problem was in it with her.

As they were walking to class, Beth and November got shoved on the way there. November had no trouble recognizing the person. Isabell Rever, the only redhead in college and November's arch-rival, pushed past them and started to stomp over to class when Beth interrupted. "Excuse me," she called to Isabell, "Shoving classmates isn't nice." Isabell turned around, her big eyes glaring at them.

"I know that, if you didn't know," she snapped. "What would *you* do if you were going to your least favourite class?"

"One, that's none of your business," November sighed. "Two, why don't you like business?"

"It's none of *your* business why I don't like Business," her nemesis replied.

"Heck with the business!" Beth groaned. "You guys are just saying 'business' too much." Isabell, looking confused, walked away, scratching her head.

"Why on earth does she major in Business when she hates it?" November asked.

"I have no idea," Beth shrugged. Later, when business began in the classroom, Professor Luckswuck strode in, looking like he had a great idea about what to teach, and had an expensive new haircut, since he was the richest teacher in college.

"Good morning, class. Today's lesson will be focusing mainly on debates," he announced. Everyone looked excited, except Isabell. November fidgeted in her seat, worried that she would make a fool of herself.

If I say something stupid in front of Seth, I'm dead, she thought. It was true, Seth was sitting at the very back, behind November. She held her breath and got out of her desk, to the university's own debating room. The debate went by quickly, and it was about whether daylight savings should or shouldn't be happening. November didn't talk much in it, since almost everyone was focused on their own arguments. Seth glanced at her occasionally, which made her feel a bit better.

At lunch, Seth, Beth, and November sat together at a table in their university's local restaurant, The Old Cow. "Nice job in the debate, November," Seth told her after finishing his sandwich. "Thanks, but I didn't do much," November replied, blushing a little. "Actually, you did. You were the one who announced what the debate was about in the first place."

Beth reached over and grabbed the ketchup. "It was a bit like kids complaining at one point, though," she added.

"For once, you're right," somebody said behind them. They turned around to find Isabell standing there, with her textbooks on the table.

"Beth's been right many times before, if you didn't notice," November objected. Isabell quickly changed the subject.

"I heard you two talking about me behind my back." Beth looked weirded out.

"You heard that?" she asked.

"OK, I literally have no idea what's going on here." Seth blurted out.

"One, you'll get it later," Isabell told him. "Two, I major in Business because of my parents. They're the type who suck up to the rich teacher, if you know what I mean." With that, she picked up her books and walked back to her table, which nobody else was at. November noticed that as soon as her nemesis said "rich teacher," someone else walked toward their table.

It was Dr Gracs, November's least favourite teacher, and she was his least favourite student ever since she arrived. "Our university doesn't tolerate the harassment of fellow students, the last time I checked," he said. "I caught you in the act." November rolled her eyes. Dr Gracs always got things wrong about her.

"Excuse me, but we weren't harassing anyone," Seth protested firmly.

"Then what happened with you three and Miss Rever?" Gracs shot back.

"Well, *she* was—" November never got to finish.

"Detention," her teacher interrupted. Then he strode away.

"Well, I guess after detention, at least you can get some sleep," Beth reassured.

The next day, November looked in the mirror and she looked fine, except for the fact that her hair was totally messed up. She was just brushing it when she got an e-mail from the board. *Your business professor just got kidnapped, so classes will be in your dorm all day until he has been found.*

Part Two: Everyone's a Suspect

November's life was now weirder than ever. Seth burst into her room with a look of shock on his face.

"Did you hear?! Professor Luckswuck's gone!"

"I know, I just got the message. This is horrible, even though he's not my favourite," November replied.

"What do you think we should do about it?" Seth asked. "I don't know." November thought about it. "My first instinct would be to stay out of it and be safe, but I feel a strong pull to investigate." Seth was deep in thought for a moment and then nodded decisively.

"Alright. I'll get Beth and tell her what we're doing. It'll just be the three of us on the case." Suddenly, a man with light hair and dark eyes came in with a notepad.

"When was the last time that either of you saw Carter Luckswuck?" he asked.

"Who are you?" November questioned. "Officer Adam Lunabur, Victoria Police Force," their visitor explained quickly. "You didn't answer my question." Seth and November looked to each other, then at Officer Lunabur.

"Well, first, the last time we saw him was in business class yesterday," Seth told him. "Second, we happen to be working on the kidnapping as well".

"More like adult-napping," November muttered.

Later, Seth, Beth, November, and the newly acquired Officer Lunabur met up in the debating room, where nobody else was. "So let me get this straight," Beth told November. "Professor Luckswuck was kidnapped, you guys were gonna check it out, then this guy got pulled into the mix?"

"You got it," November said. Beth looked to Officer Lunabur. "You're a cop, right?" she asked.

"Cop gone rogue," Lunabur corrected. "The chief doesn't know I'm here, and another officer was on the case, but I got tired of typing down mission overviews." Seth tilted his head.

"Wait. *Was* on the case?" he asked.

"We switched places," Lunabur explained. "Officer Aftanas was tired of getting all the good missions, so I made a deal with her." Beth hopped off the desk she was seated on and clapped once.

"OK," she announced. "Now that everything's explained, let's search the classroom." November nodded.

"Sure. Searching the crime scene is always the first thing to do." Lunabur gave her a thumbs-up. "Good work," he told her. "Now let's get started."

The four walked into Luckswuck's classroom, avoiding the desks. "So what should we call ourselves?" Beth asked eagerly. Her companions looked at her, a bit confused. "Come on," she pressed. "Every good team of people going through a ton of action scenes has to have a cool name for themselves."

"We aren't going through action scenes," Seth admitted. "And besides, I found something." November jumped off her seat.

"You did?" she asked. "What?" Seth pointed to the file cabinet.

"That scratch of black chalk wasn't there before." November looked, and there was, in fact, a line of black across the side of the cabinet. "Interesting," Officer Lunabur commented. He took out his phone and took a picture of the scrape. "You know, kids, I was an artist before becoming part of the police force, so I'm pretty good at this kind of thing." *Who was using black chalk yesterday?* November thought. Then a memory sparked in her mind.

"That's it!" she exclaimed. "In science, Dr Gracs was using black chalk against the white chalkboard!"

"Do you think it's him?" Seth asked. "He does have a rivalry with Luckswuck, after all."

"Maybe," Beth called from across the room. "But not for sure, since he wasn't wearing white yesterday." Lunabur looked a little suspicious of Beth. "How do you know the kidnapper was wearing white?" he asked.

"Well, it's obvious," Beth responded. "I found some white fabric attached to this coat hanger." They speedwalked over and snagged on the hanger was a piece of bright white fabric that wasn't there before.

"Hey, wait a minute," Seth thought out loud. "Isabell was wearing a white shirt yesterday, so maybe it's her!"

"She was also wearing a pink cardigan," Beth added. "Perfect to cover up rips. And besides, she *hates* Business, so what better way to stop attending the class than getting rid of the teacher?" November snapped her fingers. "We can question her. And Dr Gracs, too. Where were they at the time of the crime?"

"Oh, I almost forgot." Beth told the rest of them. "How about we call ourselves The Case Breakers?" November shrugged. "Not bad." Seth and Lunabur agreed.

The Case Breakers, as they were newly named, got to Dr Gracs' office, where he was grading tests from his third period class. The office, where November had been to thrice in her four months at college, had grey, clean walls, a smooth black floor, and the desk was also grey, with a few streaks of brown that matched Beth's and Seth's hair. "Excuse me," Lunabur told Dr Gracs, "I was wondering where you were when your colleague Carter Luckswuck was abducted." Gracs looked up from his work, flicked a straight grey hair out of his eye, and then adjusted his glasses. "And what gives you the right to ask that?" he asked sternly. Then he peeked over Lunabur's shoulder and saw November there. "She set you up, hasn't she? Miss Azwul has always despised me, and she's somehow convinced you that I kidnapped Luckswuck." Dr Gracs added to his first comment.

"To answer your first question," Lunabur replied calmly, "I'm from the police department, and I don't think November here set me up." He pulled out his badge to prove what his job was.

"I'm not trying to blame you," November told Gracs. "We just saw a black chalk scrape in Luckswuck's classroom, and you happened to be using black chalk yesterday." Dr Gracs' face softened, and for the first time, November could see something gentle in him.

"You wouldn't believe me if I told you where I was when my colleague was abducted," Dr Gracs answered.

"Well, spit it out or we'll turn you in," Beth ordered. Gracs took a deep breath.

"Fine," he confessed. "I was on a date with Ms Gendal, our janitor."

"That's cute," Seth admitted. "And there's no reason to hide it." Beth still seemed suspicious of Gracs.

"How do we know if he's lying or not?" she asked.

"Trust me, I can tell when someone's lying, and he's telling the truth," Lunabur told her.

"Sorry about that," November informed Dr Gracs.

"It's alright," Gracs responded. "I seem like the type of person who'd kidnap, at least to you, November. I'm sorry about how I treated you. I just got the wrong impression."

"It's OK," November told him. "As long as you don't give me detention for no reason again."

The Case Breakers speed walked out of the science classroom down the hall. "So who's Isabell anyway?" Lunabur asked.

"She's hated me ever since high school," November replied. "I don't exactly know why, but she still does. And as Beth mentioned, she hates business class, even though she majors in it."

"And where's her room?" Lunabur questioned. Beth had to think about it before saying it.

"Fourth floor, room four hundred eighty-five," she answered. After a long time of walking through the hallways, the small group eventually found the elevator.

"We're on the third floor right now," Seth informed

the rest. "So we better move up a floor." One of the many things that November admired about him: always paying attention to detail. Maybe he got that quality from basketball, where you always had to be on alert (November came to all of Seth's games). Once they reached the fourth floor, November noticed Isabell going straight into her room.

"Isabell?" November called out. Her enemy turned around, her face red and her eyelashes soaked.

"Let me guess," she said somberly. "You're gonna interrogate me, or try and arrest me, or try to knock me out like everyone else." November was a bit shocked. She had never seen Isabell this sad before.

"Well, we just wanted to ask you a question," Beth informed her. "Were you out of your room at night, or perhaps, near the coat hanger in Luckswuck's classroom?"

Isabell rolled her eyes, still looking depressed. "For the eleventh time, no. Everybody thinks I kidnaped Luckswuck just because I hate Business. I've had six groups interrogate me, and a football player was so convinced that I did it, he broke my arm trying to knock me out." Isabell opened the door fully, revealing that her arm was in a cast.

Seth looked at Officer Lunabur. "Well, is she lying?" he asked. Lunabur scratched his chin.

"Let's take a look at that arm first," he declared. Later, in the infirmary, the Case Breakers were giving Isabell's arm an X-ray. November looked at the computer and confirmed the result.

"Yep. Broken bone," she told the group.

"I *told* you so." Isabell announced. Seth wasn't so sure.

"How do we know she didn't, like, break her arm herself to look innocent?" he asked. The rogue officer shook his head.

"Nope," he confirmed. "She's honest." Isabell sat up in the bed.

"I didn't do it, but I *do* have a little information," she told the Case Breakers. November's eyes widened.

"What?" "Remember yesterday, when I told you my parents are the kind of people that suck up to the rich teacher?" Isabell tried to get November's memory going.

“Yeah.”

“Well, they actually suck up to Luckswuck, and the last time they saw each other, Luckswuck was planning to visit Alberta by train. Edmonton, to be exact.” Beth looked eager.

“Since there might be some clues on that train, who’s ready to go to Alberta?”

Part Three: The Road Trip of Shocks

After getting permission to leave, (their excuse was that they were going on a normal road trip with Lunabur as their guardian) all four Case Breakers went in Lunabur’s car to Edmonton, Alberta. “Look, I know you all have driver’s licenses,” Lunabur told the students when they were packing. “But it would look less suspicious with a thirty-three-year-old driving than it would with a nineteen-year-old driving. Some people think teenagers are always up to something.” November nodded.

“Yeah. Once, when I was fifteen, supervising my younger sister December, plenty of people wanted me out.” Lunabur looked confused.

“Is everyone in your family named after months?” he asked.

“No, some are named after seasons.” Seth seconded.

“And days of the week,” Beth thirded. A few hours later, when Lunabur was driving, Seth was looking at the view, and Beth was sleeping. November wondered if she had got it all wrong about the case. She imagined that Luckswuck wasn’t kidnapped at all, but on a vacation, and didn’t want a substitute. *That would be so humiliating*, November thought.

“Hey, Officer Lunabur,” Seth snapped her out of her thoughts. “Why are we stopping off at Fort Edmonton?”

“Trains are deeply involved there, so I’m hoping we can find some clues,” Lunabur replied. “In the model train section.”

They got out of the car to the parking lot, and quickly walked through it. At the stand, a worker was there, about to examine the guests.

“Name?” the worker asked. She had a very bored tone, like she couldn’t stay awake for much longer.

“Derek Johns. And here’s my pass.” Lunabur was using a fake name, so he wouldn’t get noticed by anyone who was a threat to him.

“You are currently being accompanied by Kelly Kanpon, William Shester and Linda Shester?” the worker questioned him.

“Yes. They’re my students.” Lunabur had told November, Beth and Seth earlier that they would be under fake identities, and that they had to try their best to not act like themselves.

“Come on,” Seth snapped. “When are we getting past this stupid process? And why are we on this trip anyways?” November was a little shocked about his change. At one point, she had forgotten that William Shester was actually Seth Roonibul.

“Will, don’t be rude.” Lunabur told him calmly.

“But I’m starving!” Beth exclaimed in a different voice from her own. “Like, waaaaay too much. I need food!” November tried to give acting a shot. For these few moments, she was Kelly Kanpon.

“I get it,” she told Beth in another voice. “But I’ve run out of nail polish. Worst day ever.” Lunabur gave them a thumbs-up behind his back, indicating that the students were doing well.

Later, after their access was granted, the Case Breakers followed an old man with two girls to the model train area. It was deserted. “OK,” Seth thought out loud. “Here’s Victoria’s university,” he pointed to a model of it. “And the closest train station is right here, so chances are, Luckswuck probably got onto his train there.” Lunabur nodded.

“Good thinking. But why would he want to go to Edmonton anyways?” November shrugged.

“I don’t know, but this tells us that he was most likely kidnapped at night, since I saw him in the hall yesterday.” They went over to the rest of the track to see where the train might have gone.

“Well, there’s two paths,” Beth said. “But we don’t know which one he took, if he even made it.” November thought she heard very quiet, slight footsteps coming toward them.

“I thought this area was reserved,” someone claimed behind them.

The Case Breakers whirled around to find a girl there, who they followed. She didn’t look very

intimidating at first. Her dark hair was in pigtails, she was pale for her age, and was wearing mostly purple. "What do you want?" she asked.

"I don't mean to be rude," Seth told her. "But how old are you?"

"Seven," she snapped. "But I'm not your typical seven-year-old girl. I don't believe in unicorns, you know." Beth and November looked at each other. This girl might tell anyone close, and catch them in the act.

"Look, we're not committing any crimes," November told their captor. "In fact, we're doing the opposite."

"By the way, did a train come by anytime recently?" Beth added. The girl's chocolate brown eyes didn't soften for one minute.

"Promise you're not criminals? I'm smarter than you think." Lunabur closed his eyes, then opened them again.

"Here's my police badge to prove it," he took it out. The girl tilted her head to one side, then straightened it.

"A train *did* go to the outskirts of Edmonton just yesterday," she informed them.

"Thanks," Seth replied. "I owe you this." He took a one-dollar coin out of his pocket.

"Julia, you have to see this!" someone called.

"I better get going," the girl told them. "Promise I won't tell anyone you were here." Then she took off, taking the coin with her.

"I like her," Beth admitted.

Later, after eating a bit of ice cream and exploring the area, the small group left Fort Edmonton, since they got what they needed from their underage informant. "Well, that was more successful than I expected," Lunabur said as he got into the car. "Never thought I'd find a potential recruit here." They drove in the direction of the track, hoping to find who they were looking for.

"I'm thinking this all might be wrong," November told the Roonibul siblings. "About the kidnapping. Maybe Luckswuck's just on a cruise somewhere and wants all the classes postponed because he's away. Just for attention."

"November, you've got it all wrong about getting it all wrong," Seth put his hand on hers. "I know for a fact." November, on the other hand, knew for a fact that she was excited about Seth touching her.

"Yeah," Beth added. "Like I always say, being paranoid means what you're worried about is more likely to happen." November considered that.

"I guess you're right," Lunabur tapped the back of the passenger seat.

"We're here. DP Trains," he announced. They hopped out of the car, and just looking at DP Trains made November feel sick. The buildings were all mahogany with black accenting and dirt all over them. The trains were the darkest grey they could get, and when November looked in one, there were plenty of hay bales. The sky seemed to turn grey just as the Case Breakers walked to the station.

"Man, this place gives me the creeps," Beth echoed November's thoughts.

"Well, it's the best we can get," Seth sighed.

"Alright," Lunabur declared. "I search the north trains, Beth the south, Seth the west, and November, the east. If anyone needs help, call out 'boogie boog boog.' If anyone found your teacher, call 'baggie bag bag.' Got it?" All his companions nodded. November eventually found the east trains with the help of a compass. Most of the trains were deserted, but there were some muffled sounds coming from one of them. November peeked in, then walked down the hall.

"Hello?" she called. "Is anyone there?" As she came closer, the sounds became clear.

"Hate this," a voice muttered. "I've been here for, what, three days?" It was Luckswuck's voice. November walked closer and saw her teacher in a small room with bars.

"Professor?" November asked him. Luckswuck stood up.

"Finally!" he told her, annoyed. "I've been here forever, calling out for help, and nobody comes until now." November took a deep breath.

"How do I get you out of here?" Luckswuck gestured to a ring of keys on a shelf. "Sixth one," he informed his student. November got the keys and unlocked the door. "Good. you're free-" she

started. A foot kicked November into the cell and took the keys back, locking the door again. Locked up, she saw the kidnapper's face. "You," she gasped.

Part Four: The Definition of Traitor

Seth stared back at her, looking proud of himself. November's friend, her crush, had turned out to be the culprit all along. "I must say, for a smart girl, you sure can be clueless," he confessed. "You were right where I wanted you." November just couldn't believe this.

"Why?! Why did you kidnap him?!" she exclaimed devastatingly.

"Well, the Seth you knew *did* exist once," Seth explained. "But not anymore. In the middle of my senior year of high school, I got tired of girls like you hitting on me and my parents being so proud of me. It was too much, the attention I got, but I managed to live through it. I couldn't get from math to science without an airhead trying to ask me out. I was also tired of coming from a family where the parents are too busy to do the housework, doing chores and trying to be nice while everything was piled on top of me." November was confused.

"But what does it have to do with being a sociopath?" she asked.

"It's just, you know, the stress kept coming," he continued. "Especially the poor part of things. I was overwhelmed trying to keep everything in balance, and my job didn't pay me that well, so I decided to make money the hard way. Your dear Luckswuck's insurance will all go to me, and that'll give birth to Roons and Buls, a construction company that'll come as soon as I get out of college." November no longer blushed whenever Seth was around. She hated him.

"You're crazy. And a traitor," she said firmly.

Seth rolled his eyes. "Can't you see, Month Girl?" he asked. "The definition of 'traitor' is someone who was on someone else's side, but turned against them. I'm not a traitor, since I was never on your side in the first place." Luckswuck banged his fists on the bars.

"Can I be let out now or what?!" Seth turned away from him.

"So," November told Seth. "Are you going to kill me now?" Her captor shook his head.

"No," he confessed. "I've never been a killing kind of person. And besides, I hear your family has a few thousands." He turned back and grinned at her.

"Really!?" someone shouted. Seth turned around to find Beth there, with Officer Lunabur. "I can't believe you!" Beth yelled. "You're my brother! I thought I loved you! But you had to be a money-craving psycho!" Lunabur took a gun out of his coat.

"Seth Roonibul," he announced. "You're under arrest." Seth took the keys.

"Not yet," he told them, then sprang up and punched his sister in the chest. November gasped. *This* was who she liked. Lunabur threw away his gun and swept Seth's legs out from under him and slapped him in the nose.

"Really!? Really!? Really!?" Beth screamed at him, and she kicked him, but her foot slipped and kicked November as well. She blinked, not able to see anything, and then everything went black.

November woke up in her bed, in her pajamas, like nothing went wrong. *Was it all a dream?* she thought. Beth rushed in, followed by Lunabur. "November, I just got the message!" she exclaimed. "There's gonna be a party in *your* honor!"

"Wait, what?!" November couldn't believe this.

"In fact, she's right," Lunabur added. "With an award; 'University Defender.'" November's jaw dropped.

"No way." Beth nodded.

"Yes way." she said.

"But what happened to Seth?" November asked.

"He got kicked out of here," Lunabur informed her. "Got sent to jail." November felt like dancing. This was the best day of her life.

At the party, November stood back, trying her best to keep out of sight. Beth and Lunabur stayed with her. "Just so you know," Lunabur confessed. "Lunabur isn't my real last name. It's

my code name. *Bur* is the backward spelling of 'rub' since I love rubbing my back for some reason." Beth looked a bit impressed.

"And where did *Luna* come from?" she asked.

"I got the name a year ago, when my daughter Luna was born." November thought it was nice.

"So, what's your real last name?" she questioned. Lunabur twitched a bit.

"I don't want to talk about it right now, but you can just call me Lunabur," he said. Then he disappeared into the crowd.

"Huh," Beth whispered. Then she turned to November. "I better get some punch for us," she told her friend. Then she went to the punch stand. November turned around, relieved and disappointed that the case was over. Suddenly, a hand grabbed November's shoulder and pulled her out of the room.

Great," she thought. *Not again...*

To be continued... 📖

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