

to the beginning of the line and start bopping around in random fashion, walking down the line for a while, then jumping to the end, then back to the beginning, then to the middle, thus signifying nonlinear reading. We then brainstorm about how nonlinear reading is different than linear reading. What does it mean to the author of a screen-based (Web-based) text when there is no ability to predict how the reader will read that text?

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Of course, it could be argued that we have always had the ability to read texts in a nonlinear fashion by reading the last page first, for example. Many students mention how they read the final chapter of the final Harry Potter book first because they wanted to find out if he lived. Or the plot of a book may also be organized in a nonlinear way, with flashbacks and flash-forwards. Sometimes when students are still lined up, I demonstrate how some works deliberately place the last chronological event first in the story, such as *Citizen Kane* with the opening scene of the protagonist on his deathbed. This opens up a discussion of flashbacks, made so popular now by the television series *Lost* and *Heroes*. So it has probably always been appropriate to talk about the nonlinearity of “reading” texts, but with more texts now being screen-based and embedded with hyperlinks, this distinction between nonlinear and linear reading is more appropriate for discussion than ever.

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Think about how you normally read a book. Do you normally read it from beginning to end, or do you sometimes skip to the end?
2. How do you think it changes the writer’s task when the text being written will be read in random order—for example, a Web site?
3. How is reading on the Web different than reading a book?
4. Do you prefer one style of reading?
5. Does it confuse you or entertain you to read a text that seems to proceed in random order? What might the author’s purpose be for writing something in a nonlinear fashion (such as in films such as *Citizen Kane* and *Crash*)?

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I have used the next assignment to get students to think about how to create hybrid texts. Since so many new media texts contain elements of different forms of representation, it is worth exploring with students how hybrid texts become more than the sum of their parts. This simple assignment can be adapted to many different texts—it obviously isn’t confined to *Julius Caesar*!

## ACTIVITY TWO: JULIUS CAESAR, THE MUSICAL

The objective of this assignment is to provide the students with a reason to go back and look over the play *Julius Caesar* by William Shakespeare, which they have just finished reading. This helps them see it as a unified entity, as a theatrical work that Shakespeare wrote with playgoers in mind, as a story that progresses from ideas to action to results, as a literary work that explores both internal and external conflict. Students must select five musical works, one for each act of the play. Each musical selection should reflect an event, incident, character, or mood in that particular act. Musical selections must be school appropriate, but they may represent any musical genre. For example, “The King’s March” by Jeremiah Clarke could be used for Caesar’s triumphal march into Rome in Act I, Buddy Miller’s “Worry Too Much” could convey Brutus’s internal conflict at the beginning of Act II, and “Belle Watling” from the *Gone With the Wind* soundtrack could represent the sadness of Portia’s death as Brutus reveals it as the source of his emotional outburst in Act IV. Students should be prepared to share their selections with the class.

Source: From Karen Barta, Black River High School.



“It allowed me to take a risk. I am not usually an artistic person.”

—Diane

✓ Tom Romano’s multigenre paper project is another similar way of getting kids to think across genres as they are writing on a defined topic (Romano, 1995, 2000). In a multigenre paper, students must write in several different genres—such as an obituary, a journal entry, a

painting, a song—as they explore a certain topic, such as “Injustice in the American West” or “Growing Up in China.” Having students create a “hybrid text, such as “Julius Caesar, the Musical,” or a multigenre paper gets them thinking about how works of art in different media still get at some of the same themes and that, in a new media age, many texts we encounter contain multiple forms of representation (music, print, image) within the same text. Sometimes, after students are given the freedom to

create these kinds of hybrid texts, they continue to ask if they can add music that they themselves create or some visual art they have made in reaction to a page-based text. Other students report being challenged by the experience of working in hybrid forms.



“I got the opportunity to play with art, which is something I don’t usually do.” —Ariel

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. How did it change your opinion of *Julius Caesar* (or whatever text you used) when you added music to it?
2. What can “hybrid” texts get across that a text written in a single genre cannot? What can single-genre texts do that hybrid texts cannot?

3. Would you prefer to create a hybrid text rather than a single-genre piece? If so, why?
  4. What are some examples of texts that could be considered hybrid?
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When we talk about “hybrid texts,” that often leads to pulling the components of that hybrid apart and focusing on the different forms of representation that make up the whole. This can lead to a discussion of the affordances with each medium. I often start this discussion with the form that brought me into the new literacies research in the first place: film, an inherently hybrid text that includes speech, music, and images.

## HOW DO WE RESPOND TO FILM TEXTS? X

Helping kids learn to respond to texts is probably one of the most crucial tasks we need to accomplish with them. With print texts, many students, sadly, are stuck at the decoding stage, just struggling to make sense of whatever text they are reading. But for those students who get past the decoding stage, there is the question, “Now what?” This response process gets more complicated when we are now responding to both page-based and screen-based texts and when our response itself can be formed using both page-based and screen-based texts. C

My interest in new literacies really was generated when I started showing short silent films to my high school English students. As a new teacher, I struggled with how to make the literary canon that I was expected to teach relatable to the urban teenagers I was working with. Because of my own love of film, I stumbled upon using silent films in my language arts classroom. One of the most memorable moments I had as a teacher was showing my students Charlie Chaplin’s *The Kid*, a silent film that was made in 1921. This silent film traces the ups and downs of Chaplin’s attempts to help an orphan child of about six or seven, played by child star Jackie Coogan. I showed it to my students one day because film as a genre was tangentially mentioned in my curriculum but mainly because I loved it and wanted to show it off to an audience that had never seen a silent film. I was soon amazed to see how my students loved it too. They were transfixed by the story, especially at the part in the film when the child welfare authorities come to take the child away from Chaplin. I saw my tough urban kids melt as the orphan boy is thrown in the police wagon and taken away, leaving Chaplin desolate. The kids were truly engrossed in the film. This classroom experience with a Chaplin film was one of those moments that teachers have when we know we are onto something big. That one teaching moment is one of the key events in my career that has led to the book that you are reading at this very moment. L

I knew that my students were responding to this film, and I knew that they could also respond to Shakespeare and Dickens, and I knew that they

could respond to Miles Davis and Jackson Pollock and all the other great artists who create texts. In my classroom, I began to break down the hierarchy of texts, so that we discussed Poe's "The Cask of Amontillado" at the same time we discussed *The Addams Family*. Before I even went to graduate school to learn what I was doing, I was creating a postmodern classroom with the result that, to this day, I run into former students who comment on how they still remember some of the things we did. I ran into one of my former students recently who wondered if I still had a copy of the video adaptation they had done—an urban street video version of "The Knight's Tale" from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. Fortunately, I did still have a copy of their video, and I burned a copy for him. He and his group of friends now have careers in business and law enforcement, but he later told me they regressed to their teen years when they got together to watch their old video—work they had not seen in 10 years. I always think of this story when I hear people suggesting that the new media are "dumbing down" the curriculum—I challenge any British literature teacher to name a project that would have the students still talking about Chaucer 10 years later.

But I betray my print-centric background as an English teacher, as I talk about returning to Chaucer. A breaking down of this kind of hierarchy of symbol systems probably begins by helping kids to respond to texts, both print and nonprint—and not necessarily tied to print texts—in a thoughtful manner. To launch such a discussion, I use an activity I took from noted media educator Frank Baker of the Media Literacy Clearinghouse (<http://www.frankwbaker.com/default1.htm>).

### ACTIVITY ONE: ANALYZING FILMS ELEMENT BY ELEMENT

Show the students the first seven minutes of Steven Spielberg's *E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial* with no introduction. All they have to do is watch the clip. After the clip is done, break them into small groups, and give each group a "Film Analysis Card" with printed directions that ask them to watch the clip again but to concentrate on one element of the film production.

#### Lighting

What time of day is it?

What are the clues?

What effect does lighting have?

Use two or three adjectives to describe the lighting.

#### Sound Effects

Close your eyes.

You are only to listen to the scene, after which you will be asked to make a list of everything you heard and then share.

### **Music**

Describe the music at the beginning, middle, and end of the scene.

What happens and why?

How does the music contribute to the mood or feel?

Is the music effective?

What might happen if there were no music in this scene? How would that impact your impressions?

### **Camera: Movement**

Document when the director or cinematographer uses the following:

Pan (left or right move)

Tilt (up or down move)

A crane shot (high above)

What is the purpose of these actions?

### **Editing**

Count the number of edits in this scene. What impact does editing have?

### **Camera: Lens**

Document when the director or cinematographer uses the following:

Wide shot

Medium shot

Close up

Zoom in or out

Why does he or she use these shots when he or she does?

### **Mood**

What mood does this scene put you in?

How do you feel?

Why do you feel this way?

What has the director done to push your emotional buttons? (Be specific.)

Just by asking students to concentrate on one element of a film, it opens their eyes to see how many formal elements go into the production of the film and that a film can indeed be looked at as formally as can a

sonnet or a painting. Students report that it is difficult to go back to watching films casually after looking at scenes in a very focused way after doing this exercise. Sometimes students confess that they didn't realize that watching movies "counts" as participating in a serious art form. Frank reports, "It is my experience that students are most anxious to share what they now see, hear, and feel" after doing this activity. "It is empowering to hear their newly discovered understandings of what the director of the film was attempting to do."

Similarly, Heidi Whitus, communications teacher at Communications Arts High School in San Antonio, uses specific prompts to help her students think about different aspects of a film's message and appeal. She uses the following prompts to get her students thinking and writing analytically about film as a medium worthy of thoughtful response.

### ACTIVITY TWO: FILM PROMPTS

- We watched several films in class in which the main characters are not exactly "good guys." Unlike George, the quintessential "good guy" in *It's a Wonderful Life*, they violate basic societal rules on a daily basis. Think of another film you have seen (not one we have watched in class) in which the protagonist is a bad person in the eyes of traditional society yet is still a likeable character. Describe how you felt about the character; what made that character "bad," and how did the film resolve the issue (think about what happened to the main characters in *The Public Enemy* and *Bonnie and Clyde*).
- Westerns are easily identifiable by their location: typically the American West, usually in the 19th century. However, some of the markers that identify a Western can be found in films with different settings. Describe a film you have seen that has the markers of a Western but takes place elsewhere. Explain the markers that make this film a "Western."
- Compare and contrast a remake of a horror classic with its original (e.g., *Psycho*, *The Haunting*, *The Fog*, and many more). Write 200 words in which you explain which version you thought was a more interesting and effective film. Consider such factors as the following:
  - how the film was changed to satisfy a different audience,
  - technological developments since the original, and
  - our society's evolving standards for how much gore and violence is acceptable (or required) in a horror film.

*Alternate question* for those who have not seen any horror film remakes:

- We are viewing four black-and-white films in a row in class (*The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari*, *Bride of Frankenstein*, *Psycho*, and *The Haunting*). Many people say they hate black-and-white films; others love them. Describe how you feel about black-and-white films compared to color films and whether your opinion is changing as you get older. Use specific films you have seen as examples.

- *The Abominable Dr. Phibes* is considered a cult classic, a film that has a small but devoted body of fans. Describe the elements of this film that you believe make it beloved by some fans but at the same time prevent it from achieving wider popularity.
- Also, if you have any favorite “cult classic” films, talk about them here.
- *New requirement:* In addition to your initial response of *at least 150 words*, you must also *respond* to at least one of your classmates. This means that you must have at least two entries for this week.

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Source: From Heidi Whitus, Communications Arts High School, San Antonio, Texas.

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO REPRESENT AN IDEA VISUALLY?

Once we have looked at the moving image, we begin to look at the static image. Many English teachers (and other subject matter teachers) may believe that this kind of activity is more fitting for art class. In English class, we have traditionally focused on the printed word as our communication medium. Both the reading and writing of print have been the focus of this field since it began around the beginning of the 20th century (Eagleton, 1983). Now, we face an age in which we are shifting to a screen-based society (Kress, 2003) in which much of our reading will be from a screen, and therefore, reading will not only encompass print but also images, sound, and motion as well. Visual literacy skills should be included if we truly want to prepare students for this new kind of reading. I think many teachers approach this by looking at paintings and visual art, and I have done this also. But I have also used a very old parlor game that has been suggested by Jeffrey Wilhelm (1997) to get kids visually representing what they read.

### SNAPSHOT OR TABLEUX DRAMAS

1. Form students into groups of three to five and assign each of them a scene from a book, a historical event, or a scientific process.
2. Explain that each group is going to have to visually represent this event somehow using their bodies. That is to say, they will not be permitted to draw a picture or use sign language. They must somehow reenact the event in such a way that it is somewhat recognizable.
3. Groups should be given time to “rehearse.”

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4. Once they are ready to perform, each group will take the stage and freeze in a tableaux representing the event they are supposed to be depicting.
5. A variation on the activity allows audience members, if they can't guess what the event being depicted is, to ask one or more of the actors "yes or no" questions about what is being represented.

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Source: Adapted from Wilhelm, 1997.

One of the main reactions I get when doing this activity is from the shy students—they just feel uncomfortable standing up before the class and representing some scene with their bodies. Of course, there are many outgoing students who may even have some theatrical experience who love such an activity. So this opens up a discussion (after the students are done presenting their tableaux) about what we can do as teachers to make our classrooms places in which all students can thrive no matter what their modality of choice is for expressing themselves. What is the point of trying to represent an idea or an event visually?

### QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

1. Discuss the challenges of this activity. Are there some things that are more difficult to represent visually?
2. Why would someone decide to represent something visually?
3. Is a picture *really* worth a thousand words?
4. Think about a time in your life when you have appreciated having a picture of something more than you might have appreciated having words to describe it.
5. Think about a time in your life when you were glad to have words. What are the commonalities between the things we tend to represent verbally and the things we represent visually? What are the differences?
6. What were your feelings about getting up and presenting your tableaux in front of the class?

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### WHAT DOES "GENRE" MEAN, PARTICULARLY WHEN WE ARE WORKING ACROSS TEXTS?

Genre study has been a mainstay of the English classroom for many years. Whether creating entire courses or units around genres such as science