Evoking Harmony: Joy and Inspiration through Convergence

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English Practice

English Practice Journal: Call for Articles

Deadline June 15th, 2024
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Landscapes of Story and Reconciliation (Call for Articles)
In line with the 2023 Fall BCTELA Conference theme, English Practice invites you to submit teaching ideas, classroom inquiries and practice - focused research, reflective and critical narratives, poems, fiction and other arts - based renderings, or book reviews for our upcoming issue.

Entitled *Landscapes of Story and Reconciliation*, this issue opens a space for exploration and conversation about how we can transform our English Language Arts learning environments int o landscapes of story and reconciliation for ourselves and our students.

Guiding questions may include: How do we use story to invite students to share stories of their own? Whose stories are important to bring into our classrooms to foster reconciliation? What are diverse ways students can demonstrate their learning? What texts can we bring in to support students' learning and understanding of reconciliation?

We have four sections to assist you in preparing and submitting your writing:

- Teaching Ideas (classroom lessons and strategies)
- Investigating our Practice (teacher inquiry)
- Salon (literary & arts-based pieces)
- Check this Out (book reviews)

Submissions can be emailed to: englishpracticejournal@gmail.com
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Editorial

Evoking Harmony: Joy and Inspiration through Convergence

"Teachings come from everywhere when you open yourself to them. That's the trick of it, really. Open yourself to everything and everything opens itself to you."

-Richard Wagamese

Welcome to our issue *Evoking Harmony: Joy and Inspiration through Convergence*. In this issue, we invited educators to share how they evoke harmony, joy, and inspiration in their learning environments. We opened up space for teachers to share how they create community through relationships and how they honour voices and mutual respect, in teaching English Language Arts. Guiding questions may include: How might we create safe spaces for students to have mutually respectful conversations? What kinds of texts might we bring into our classrooms to ensure diverse voices are being represented and celebrated? What are multi-modal ways students can demonstrate their thinking and learning? How can we design our lessons to spark inspiration from various access points?

In this issue, practitioners engage our thinking with critical literacy, as they engage us with texts that reflect our students' identities and ask us to examine our societal narratives and how that influences our thinking. As well, the ideas of power and positionality are explored through reflection of pedagogical practice and choice of texts.

We are delighted to share this issue and hope that these entries ignite some joy, excitement, and reflection for the practitioner in you. We want to thank our editing circle, for their time and effort in peer reviewing the submissions that were sent to *English Practice*, with a very special thanks to Shelley Van Erp. In addition, we would like to thank all the authors who welcomed us into their world of teaching English Language Arts. We look forward to future contributions from more of you and hope that this journal inspires you in your own practice as an educator.

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Kyle McKillop

BCTELA 2021 Conference Address

The theme of the 2022 conference was "Evoking Harmony: Joy & Inspiration Through Convergence". When I thought about convergences, I remembered the first time I met my wife's family—we were in Trinidad, where they live, and I worried that they wouldn't understand my accent, or I wouldn't understand theirs, and what were we going to talk about anyway? And her family is Black, and she forgot to tell her father I'm white, and in the first moments of our meeting all he could do was laugh and laugh.

But there's always common ground. And because people are good to each other, there's always the potential for a reaching out. When I met my wife's granny, she was sitting on the front porch, waiting for me, so elderly she could barely speak. She held my hand, and she had only one question: "You love that girl?"

I think that's key to our collective exploration of joy and harmony. Joy is a kind of love, a love for the moment, for the ecstasy of living. We immerse ourselves in culture—or rather cultures, plural. Your home culture. Your friend culture. The culture of your other friend group which never quite aligned with the first friend group. Your English teacher culture, with its love of poetic devices or book club questions. And harmony doesn't imply that we're all singing the same note: we know the beauty of the layering of different notes, each voice stretching or pausing to let another feature, each voice speaking to and with and around and within and against another.

I used to think that you had to give up something of yourself to learn a new culture, but you don't: it starts with listening and, if the moment calls for it, sharing. Our cultures converge, and we manage the movement between these cultures because we find joy in them, we love them, we gain something from each of them. When you're ready, you might still give up something of yourself: action is the heart of compromise, of growth. But it starts with letting others honour themselves.

How can we honour our students as they do that same dance? How do we honour the multiplicity of their experience? How do we show them the mirrors and windows and sliding glass doors they need in order to see themselves and to feel empathy for others? How do we guide them into places we have never been ourselves? What lesson will honour an Indigenous grammar, or the knowledge carried by an English-speaking student from Ghana or Jamaica or Gujarat living in BC? Which classroom tool will help our students, whether they're an extrovert or selectively mute, carry their strengths forward into a discussion? How do we converge with our students, briefly flowing beside each other, so that they are buoyed by our guidance and carry it into their lives beyond the walls or fields of our classrooms?

I want to note Faye Brownlie's criteria for effective discussions: all voices must be included; all students must feel included; all students must have their ideas respected; the discussion should move us to new understandings.

This is convergence. It's at the heart of English language arts, with joy bouncing its way through the chambers. I hope that our conference swept you away in your learning, in your discussions, and that the experience brought you new ways of honouring your learners, of treating them with love and dignity, of growing their imaginative and technical powers towards their ultimate independence. I hope you got to cross a mental border and meet something new. That's where the learning is. Remember my wife's granny, her hand on mine? Good teachers like you keep reaching out.

But out of that listening needs to come action. We need to examine our practices and find the current of deep change. We need to consult our students. We need social justice and restorative justice in English Language Arts. We need to fill our shelves with books that sing in our students' voices, relevant books that speak to their moment in time with characters who could be our students, questioning how we do things. We need our students in English First Peoples courses, so that no one leaves school without knowing that pain, that resistance, that joy. We need units in equity. Our students are on Instagram, posting about this. They're in The Tyee, telling us this. We can still do better, and we need to insist on it to ourselves. We can do better. We need to insist. We *need* to insist.

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Salon

Elise Costa

The Nuances of Black Masculinity as Explored in David Chariandy's *Brother*

The following is an excerpt from my Capstone written upon completion of the Masters of Arts for Teacher of English (MATE) program at SFU in the Spring of 2022. The novel Brother by David Chariandy was adapted to a film by director Clement Virgo and premiered at TIFF in the Fall of 2022.

> When a cop with his hand on his holstered gun grabbed Jelly and tried to pull him away, Francis had panicked. "Don't touch him," he'd said, reaching to still the weapon. It was a gesture with history, but unreadable by those around him holding power. (Chariandy 171)

This culminating encounter and the insinuated gesture relay the inability of authority figures to appropriately interpret Queer Black love and is an example of the dangers in reading Black masculinity purely through the lens of the dominant stereotypes that exist. Young people struggling to navigate from the innocence of childhood through the tribulations of adolescence, are inevitably faced with obstacles. However, these barriers are amplified for those who exist in the diaspora, who have been displaced from their homeland, in order to seek opportunity elsewhere. Adolescent Black boys specifically are faced with a bombardment of negative representations of themselves from a young age. Black masculinity is explored in David Chariandy's second novel, *Brother*, through the touching experiences of two brothers, Michael and Francis, born to Trinidadian immigrants, and growing up in an impoverished neighbourhood of Scarborough, Ontario, during the 1990's.

The novel is an example of the many families who immigrated to Canada optimistically seeking a better life for themselves and hoping for a safe haven. *Brother* is specifically about the experiences of two first generation Canadians, growing up in "a wasteland on the outskirts of a sprawling city" (Chariandy 13), two brothers who despite being very different from one another are tight, "shoulder[s] pressed against" one another, from an early age (Chariandy 8). It is notable that these boys are raised by a hardworking single mother, as their father left when they were just toddlers. The absence of Michael and Francis' father undeniably influences their ability to navigate their lives as Black men in Canada. Although their mother, Ruth, was lighter in skin colour and their father described as "Indian" (Indo-Caribbean), Michael and Francis are perceived as *Black* in society, and it is as boys progressing towards manhood that they struggle with their understanding of masculinity because, as noted by author, feminist and social activist bell hooks, "more than any other group of male children in this nation black boys hear stories about adult black maleness that would fill any child with dread" (hooks, *We Real Cool* 117). Knowing that they will grow up to be Black men, is reasonably concerning for these boys. Chariandy's novel reminds us that we cannot make assumptions about someone based on their profile, evident through the differing versions of Black masculinity each brother represents, but *Brother* also enforces the idea that there is more than one way to exist as a Black man in North America, which is integral to understanding the role of educators and allies in honouring these differences and effectively supporting marginalized people.

The story is a reminder to me as a White educator of the premise of Carter and Vavrus' book *Intersectionality of Race, Ethnicity, Class, and Gender in Teaching and Teacher Education which describes that*:

> It is critical for White educators to constructively engage with matters of race and racism to advance beyond their "truth" and work to see, hear, and understand other "truths." To be authentically inclusive and embrace diversity, White educators should view the process as a journey and be vigilant and willing to advocate for what is socially just. (67)

Through this novel, Chariandy imparts the account of being an adolescent in Canada in the 1990's, faced with the additional complications of being Black, male and queer.

Amy J. Samuels advises White educators in her chapter "Elephant in the Room" that:

> It is important to be mindful that one of the greatest forms of oppression is continually placing responsibility for oppression on the backs of the oppressed. Given the reality of White privilege and institutionalized structures that advantage Whiteness, it is essential that White people be held accountable and involved in conversations about race and the implications of racial ideology in education. (Carter & Vavrus 57)

My years as a high school teacher have been spent fighting adamantly for social justice and the rights of Queer youth. As a white settler, both cisgender and heterosexual, I have learned that being an ally to the Queer community means embracing all aspects of intersectionality in an active, intentional manner. I have always considered myself to be an antiracist, but have I been teaching in a way that confirms such truths? Am I effectively offering representations of people of colour and varying identities in my class? As an ally, I advocate for all youth, especially those who are marginalized by society for differing reasons, and who need my advocacy all the more. I must constantly remind myself of the words of Barbara Applebaum in her book *Being White, Being Good: White Complicity, White Moral Responsibility, and Social Justice Pedagogy* stating that: "Even if white people are well intended, even if they consider themselves to be paragons of anti-racism, how might they still be unwittingly complicit in sustaining an unjust system they claim to want to dismantle?" (8).

These intersectional considerations became all the more pertinent for me in 2020. To say this year was a trying time for the world would be a gross understatement. We were immersed in the COVID-19 pandemic and for Black people specifically, there were "vast inequities laid bare by the COVID-19 response" (Maynard 71). As the early months of the pandemic trudged on, we were further shaken by the cruel death of George Floyd at the hands of audacious police officers in America. The day of Floyd's murder stands out vividly for me; the images of an innocent man being tortured, suffocated and his life taken before our very eyes, were traumatic, to say the least. The moment was significant, nonetheless. Many of us were left outraged by the injustice done to this innocent man. This was not the first, nor would it be the last, act of senseless violence perpetrated towards a Black man, primarily because he was a *Black man*, but it was a modern-day lynching by vigilante police, perhaps the most graphic example to be captured in our lifetime and that made it historically significant.

Protests against racism and police brutality were sparked worldwide, following the death of George Floyd. Andrea Medovarski explains that these protests "led to an increasingly widespread recognition among the dominant society that persistent systemic racism is a very real factor in the ongoing murders of Black people by police" (35). With the death of Floyd, it became abundantly clear that being a Black man means living in fear of often unprovoked police violence. The days of protests and feeling defeated were not long ago but for me, they also stand out as marking the start of my graduate studies at SFU. Like many, I was disheartened by humanity, repulsed by the goings on across the border and terrified of the future. That this consequential event coincided with my return to academia, could be no coincidence. Stuart Hall reminds us about the importance of authors positioning themselves and that "we all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific" (Williams & Chrisman 392). It is for these reasons that I position myself at the time of Floyd's murder, in order to provide context for the motivation behind my exploration of these themes.

In the summer of 2020, when I first read David Chariandy's *Brother* I was struck by this work of fiction and how it essentially mirrored many of the circumstances for Black people, Canadian and American alike, going on in our very world. I was beginning to realize that for young Black boys, the odds are stacked even more against them and they must fight harder than others to endure, excel and sometimes just to survive in this often cruel and unjust world. Of course, Black boys are just one oppressed group but in looking closely at their specific experiences in navigating masculinity, it will become apparent that:

> People are comprised of many selves that are always operating simultaneously and interactively. To attempt to ignore or deny this reality is a practice in futility, and the results are likely to diminish the human worth, value, and integrity of both students and teachers, and minimize their performance possibilities. (Carter & Vavrus ix)

Instances of police violence committed against Black men have been described by many authors through fiction, David Chariandy and his novel *Brother* being one Canadian example. This novel explores police violence in connection with Black masculinity, through the experiences of the two protagonist brothers.

In the preface of hooks' *We Real Cool*, she incisively declares that "the real truth, which is a taboo to speak, is that this is a culture that does not love black males" (ix). In Chariandy's story, Michael and Francis seem aware of this inequity from an early age, suggested by Michael when he claims "by the age of fourteen, you feel it. You spot the threat that is not only about young men with weapons, about "gangs" and "predators" but also the threat that is slow and somehow very old" (Chariandy 22). The use of these words in quotations marks, implies a direct connotation with the "other", or the Black man. Michael and Francis could not ignore the negative representations of Black men around them, and it would have been difficult to break away from the Black male stereotype, themselves. Ghanaian-Canadian author, Phanuel Antwi, brings a uniquely Canadian opinion to the topic of Black masculinity in his article titled *Rough Play: Reading Black Masculinity in Austin Clarke's "Sometimes, a Motherless Child" and Dionne Brand's What We All Long For*. He compares his own experiences growing up as a Black man in Toronto, to the characters in Clarke and Brand's novels. Antwi speaks of his father's insistence that he separate himself from the Caribbean-Canadian Black men of Toronto, by styling his hair a certain way, because "on every Sunday morning throughout the 1990s, [his father] delivered to many Canadian houses, via the *Toronto Sun,* news of black families mourning their lost sons" (par. 2). The Black brothers described in Chariandy's novel were the very Caribbean Black boys who Antwi's father warned him to separate himself from. For Antwi "it wasn't until [he] learned that when black men are talked about there is a hasty and nasty conflation of masculinity and race...[he] learned then that [he] was never to other people a man *and* black, but that [he] was always to them a "black man" (par. 2). This description rings true for the experiences of both Michael and Francis.

* * *

David Chariandy's *Brother* is a realistic glimpse into the lives of young Black men in Canada, who are forced to traverse through a certain racialized lens, despite holding traits that might not adhere to society's expectations of them. It is an example of a novel giving "credence to positive aspects of intersectionality without diminishing or distracting attention away from the negatives" (ix), a crucial consideration to be made. As described by Walcott, "thinking about a range and variety of black manhoods and masculinities might provide analysts with a set of interesting refigurings of black manhood outside of its current and historical spectacularizations that offer a lens for seeing black manhood differently, and thus thinking about black manhood differently" (77). This "refiguring of black manhood" is what author's like Chariandy, in their thoughtful depictions of Black masculinity, are working towards. These brothers are examples of the intersectional considerations educators must keep in mind and asserts the fact that "school systems and preparation programs must commit to finding approaches to unsilence racialized disparities and implications of racism in schools" (Carter & Vavrus 66). The novel is a valuable reminder of the position of power and privilege teachers hold and how they can have a deep impact on the experiences of oppressed students.

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Carrie Ellis

The Age of Karens and the Carnivalization of Women's Punishments in *The Taming of the Shrew*: Why This Play is Still Relevant to a Modern Classroom

Why is *The Taming of The Shrew*, written by William Shakespeare sometime before 1592, still relevant to modern classrooms? Simply put, The Taming of the Shrew is a play about taming an unruly woman who goes against expected societal roles. This taming is completed mainly in public, much like today, when women referred to as "Karens" are shamed throughout various social media and news platforms. These "Karen" videos are about publicly shaming women that are responding inappropriately in modern society. The similarity between Katherine from the play and the "Karens" online is that both represent women exerting authority publicly who are silenced or shamed for this behaviour. The unwanted behaviour is controlled through public judgement and punishments to force the outspoken woman to be silent and accept the authority placed upon her. The difference between the play and the videos is the women's behaviour. Katherine is outspoken in ways considered acceptable if she were a man; however, she is not and must be silenced. The viral "Karen" videos show women acting abhorrently to others and would not be considered acceptable behaviour by a man or woman. However, their popularity has created a tool to silence women who speak up appropriately and are now suffering the punishments usually reserved for "Karens ."Significantly, men acting in an equally abhorrent manner do not go viral nearly as often or as quickly as their female counterparts.

The modern-day carnivalization, creating a public spectacle for entertainment, of women's punishments occurs across various social media platforms and becomes part of the news cycle. Millions of people can consume, judge, and enjoy the carnivalization of women dubbed Karen. There are six definitions of Karen in Urban Dictionary. Four of them are examples of the actions Karens have become famous for on social media. One of the definitions is an inclusive term of what the label "Karen" has evolved into today:

> Karen is a pejorative term used in the United States and other English-speaking countries for a woman perceived as entitled or demanding beyond the scope of what is appropriate or necessary. A common stereotype is that of a white woman who uses her privilege to demand her way at the expense of others.

Seth Cohen writing for Forbes, calls Karens "unashamed exploiters of white entitlement." Before settling on Karen, commentators had several alliterative names, such as "Permit Patty" and "Barbeque Becky." It remains the same that Karen has become the police of people of colour, especially black people, trying to live their everyday lives. It should be noted that a Karen is often not only a white woman but a white woman who is at least in her forties up to her seventies. This does not mean that a younger woman cannot be labelled a Karen, but it does imply that younger women may not speak up in public as often in an assertive manner as they have not yet reached that level of comfort that comes with age. The danger here is that some people will see any assertive middle-aged or older woman as unacceptably entitled regardless of context or situation.

The punishments doled out to women are various and could fall under the slang term "cancel culture." Cancel culture is defined by Merriam-Webster as "the practice or tendency of engaging in mass canceling...as a way of expressing disapproval and exerting social pressure...Cancel culture is supported as a tool to stop offensive and harmful behavior, while others find it problematic and toxic." Accounts have risen across social media, capturing Karens being arrested or tased on video for their behaviour. TikTok has viral accounts with names such as "Karens Gone Wild" and "Karen Lives Matter" dedicated to showing Karens in all their entitled glory and then receiving the punishment the viewing audience feels they richly deserve. It is hard to sympathize with women using their privilege to oppress and endanger others. It is difficult for people to see the downside of punishing with this type of societal control over women who thought nothing of exerting their power over others with tyrannical precision when one only considers how these women, themselves, are affected. The issue is using the punishments levied against them against other women that are outspoken and behaving appropriately. Women in positions of prominence, such as celebrities, politicians, and even royals, now face the reality that if they speak up appropriately, their assertiveness can be punished as "Karen-like" behaviour.

Women being punished publicly for being outspoken is not new or modern. In the Renaissance, such were labelled unruly, a scold or a shrew. This type of woman is characterized as "any woman who verbally resisted or flouted authority publicly and stubbornly enough to challenge the underlying dictum of male rule" (Boose 189). The belief of why this was so important is summed up simply in a quote by Jean Calvin, who "saw the subjection of wife to the husband as a guarantee of the subjection of both of them to the authority of the Lord" (Davis, 128). In short, maintaining the social order of the marriage kept the social order of society. These women in Renaissance England had two public punishments that were commonly used against them, the cucking stool and the scold's bridle. It should be made clear that since these punishments involved carting a woman publicly through a town or village, it was a punishment for lower-class women. Upper-class men could not allow their women to lose their authority over the lower class by being paraded in front of the villagers whom these upper-class women were supposed to be superior to and have dominion over. The men would also be humiliated as it appeared they did not have authority over the women within their household. In The Taming of the Shrew, Katherine, the "shrew" character is a young gentlewoman, and neither the cucking stool nor scold's bridle is used; however, references are made to both punishments by the male characters regarding Katherine.

Katherine could not be made to suffer these within the play, as a gentlewoman being punished would not fit with a Renaissance audience's expectations for the reasons mentioned in the previous paragraph. However, this does not stop the men of the play making references to Katherine needing to be tamed. There is mention of the cucking stool by Gremio, for instance. Gremio speaks of the cucking stool when he says that Katherine "should [be] cart[ed]" (1.1.55). The cucking stool was a punishment meant to tame a "woman who offend[ed] public order and peace through her speech" (Dolan, "Shrews" 288). The reference to carting is a recognizable precursor that alludes to Katherine eventually being cucked as "[whenever] local practicalities made it possible...[women were] ridden or carted through town" (Boose 189). While physically demeaning, shameful, and terrifying, carting did not seem to cause any permanent physical damage. Therefore, while Gremio is not suggesting bodily injury to Katherine, a gentlewoman, in society, he is implying that Katherine is such a disruption to the public spaces of Padua that she needs to be publicly tamed to restore the balance. Gremio has shown great disrespect for Katherine, which her father, Baptista, allows by not admonishing him. Gremio is attacking both Katherine's class by recommending a punishment reserved for lower-class women and her gender through the suggestion of a punishment enacted solely upon females.

The second public spectacle of punishment referred to in the play is the scold's bridle. The use of the bridle was never legal, and there are no court documents of its usage, according to Boose. However, she does credit T.N. Brushfield's research about the bridle, who gathered thirteen physical bridles in Cheshire County, as well as "an appallingly large number of references to their use" (197). While "English legal history is proud to boast...torture was never legal" (Boose 196), using the bridle on women implies that the illegality did not mean torture was nonexistent. This device again carnivalizes the punishment of women. Once again, this is not a punishment used

upon Katherine in The Taming of the Shrew. It would not fit with the romanticization of taming a shrew or scold if Petruchio were to cause actual physical harm to his wife. However, Boose explains that the "horse references or horse representations made throughout the play are "an almost standard component of English folklore about unruly women" (199). Grumio makes it very difficult to ignore the references to a bridle when he gives a "horse heavy description of the journey home and the ruination of Kate's 'bridal'" (Boose 199). Specifically, Grumio describes his "master riding behind [his] mistress" (4.1.48) which leads Curtis to question if they were on one horse. However, they are on separate horses, with Katherine in the lead down a muddy hill which causes her to fall in the mud. Grumio recounts how Petruchio leaves her trapped in the mud beneath her horse to go and berate Grumio for allowing the accident to happen. As Grumio recounts the aftermath of this, he says, "how the horses ran away, how her bridle has burst..." (4.1.58) The audience knows it is the bridle of the horse that Katherine was riding that has been broken; however, through the word "her" there is an implied possibility in that line that it is Katherine's bridle that broke. Boose continues to argue that the playwrights and playgoers of London would have understood these references and been very aware of the scold's bridle. The bridle may seem extreme as a punishment for talking excessively, except "Women's excessive talkativeness...signified by the imagery of a tongue...[represented] complaints and unruliness..." (Komine 3). Komine said this idea was "a verbal rebellion against patriarchy, and both woman and tongue had to be controlled and enclosed within their proper place" (3).

Maintaining authority over the female population was considered imperative for private and public social order. Punishments discussed above, the bridle and cucking stool, were used as punishments for women that tried to disrupt this order. A more proactive method of maintaining this social order was through plays and songs with an unruly woman character for the audience to learn from. These were often considered comic plays that show a "disorderly woman...who gives rein to the lower in herself and seeks rule over her superiors" (Davis, 133). These plays are not meant to challenge the social hierarchy but maintain it, as the punishments inflicted upon the shrewish or unruly woman is so violent or awful there is no question the woman made the wrong choice by challenging society's expectations for her. These women were physically harmed, died in prison, died unmarried, or were shunned from their homes, and it was done for a purpose; maintaining the proper social order in the home was believed to lead to appropriate public social order.

This is shown in The Taming of the Shrew, with Petruchio making judgements about Katherine and deciding how to engage with her, which is not very different than women dubbed Karen that are made into a public spectacle across many online platforms. This phenomenon has only increased during the Covid pandemic as people have spent more time at home and online. Shaming was used to control unruly women, scolds, and shrews in the past, and it is now used against women labelled as Karens. The label "Karen" has evolved to become another way to control all women who are simply outspoken or unliked. Famous women are often objects of polarization, with the media sharing pictures, information, and ideas of what these people may be thinking, giving the general public, who have never met them, a false sense of intimacy or insight. One of the very polarizing examples would be the hypothesized feud between Meghan Markle and Kate Middleton. While there has been vitriol spewed at both women based on their supposed behaviour, a clear connection to labelling was an article written by an author identified only by her first name, Irene. She writes for Meghanpedia, which claims to be about "fact-checking misconception and preconception ."That idea aside, the article "The Royal Karen Has Come Out to Play" is an opinion piece labelling Kate Middleton as a Karen for apparent behaviours through her school years and her marriage to Prince William, which climaxed in her alleged dislike of Meghan Markle. The article is written with many adjectives and colloquialisms, "[Kate] wants the moon with no stars in the sky" (Irene), which refers to not sharing the media and press spotlight with Meghan. This kind of commentary replaces actual facts that might show Middleton to meet the previously stated definition of a Karen as "a woman perceived as entitled or demanding beyond the scope of what is appropriate or necessary" (UrbanDictionary.com). It needs to be stressed that there is no factual evidence that Kate Middleton has engaged in "Karen" like behaviour; this opinion piece conflates Middleton with a "Karen" due to the author's dislike of her. In reality, Kate has behaved as expected for someone in the royal family and married someone in line for the throne, fulfilling many royal duties placed upon her.

Female politicians receive some of the most "Karen" like punishments or online responses for the crime of being outspoken. Even when their physical appearance and behaviour do not match the definition of what makes a Karen. A specific example is Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who has taken a lot of backlash online and, based on her background, does not match the definition of a Karen. That did not stop one user from posting on the Quora site, "Why does anyone like that Karen Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez?" Due to many responses posted in defence of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the question was re-written later, and the word Karen was removed from the question; however, the answers still show the original wording of the question in the replies. Equating this politician with the term Karen is especially problematic. She is not abusing her privilege or class for her own gain or to terrorize another. She is trying to create change that would better the lives of others through a legal, regulated, democratic system that she was elected into to make that said change. The negative posting is an attempt by someone that objects to her politics or the presumption of a young Puerto Rican woman speaking in a historically white and male space. People do not object to her behaviour; they are threatened by Ocasio-Cortez's gender, ethnicity, age, ideas, and willingness to be outspoken against the older white males she works with daily. Ayanna Pressley is another prominent politician based in the United States. Again, she is a woman of colour with progressive ideas at the federal level of the American government, making her a target for her opponents. Sarah Groh, her chief of staff, stated, "The reality is that these death threats, violent phone calls, the need for private security hires, coordination with Capitol Police and the FBI, this has become part of our daily negotiation of how to serve the people who sent us to Washington" (19thNews). Ayanna Pressly was targeted as an outspoken woman and judged harshly for working toward change that would benefit others. Pressley and Ocasio-Cortez were performing duties specific to the expectations of being politicians and working within a democratic system. It is unlikely that they would have received gendered-based threats if they had been outspoken men. They have been ridiculed across social media with memes that have mocked their gender, intelligence, and suitability for their positions. While male politicians face backlash, no one questions their ability to perform their jobs based on gender. The comfort of attacking prominent politicians or other famous women based on gender stems from the same willingness to aggressively pursue punishments for women labelled as Karens on social media, using the same tactics of spreading videos, ideas, or opinions through social media and making threats.

Closer to home in Canada, former Alberta Premier Rachel Notley has faced the threat of online violence by people that do not like the NDP or her policies. While not liking a politician's views is common and complaining about their policies is normal in a democratic society, these comments are not targeted at her views or policies. The remarks that caused concern for MLAs Karen McPherson and Marie Renaud were violent and sexist enough that both women reported them on behalf of the premier to Facebook and the authorities. The comments were called "shocking and sexually violent, taking specific aim at the premier's gender" (CBC) by gender consultant Cristina Stasia. To clarify, Stasia explains, "They're not calling her an idiot, they're calling her the c-word... They're not saying she's too progressive, they're calling her a bitch" (CBC). The comment that appeared to truly concern her security detail showed a rise from "dissatisfied to action focused" (CBC) when the commenter suggested "taking over the government would require a 'lone gunman' [and] 'bad things happen to bad leaders'" (CBC). The name-calling was no surprise to either MLA that reported the comments, as both have also suffered their own list of derogatory remarks. Still, violent comments made with seemingly no consequences embolden more people to continue propagating this alarming trend against outspoken women in politics and other publicly viewed spheres. While none of these women have lost their jobs, it does not mean that will not happen to them or another outspoken woman who says something those that would silence them do not like.

Every day women are not entirely safe from the Karen trend, though it may target them in other ways. One specific example is an attempt to monetize the Karen trend by Karlos Dillard. Dillard's video went viral in which he claims a woman flipped him off while driving. Dillard "followed her home and filmed her as she melted into hysterics, posting the video online, which included her home address and licence plate" (Murphy). Dillard monetized the viral video and began to sell Karen t-shirts afterward. The main problem with the video is that no one sees the woman flip him off, nor does anyone hear her use a racial slur, which Dillard later added as a claim. Dillard expected to be believed because the woman in the video was white and middle-aged. She fit the physical

description of a Karen. Internet sleuths instead began researching Dillard and discovered a history of posting Karen videos online, within which Dillard claims after the fact that they used racial slurs. However, the words are never actually caught on video. Then people discovered more of his personal history, “it was discovered that, in 2019, he had a restraining order placed against him for harassing a woman. The order specifically bars him from harassing her online” (Gremore). In 2008, Gremore states, Dillard admits on the show “Divorce Court” that he ran over his ex with a car. Dillard’s past has brought a problematic issue to the surface. There are undoubtedly many Karen videos in which women act in reprehensible and racist ways to exert power over others, but is this phenomenon allowing people like Dillard to create fake videos simply because they do not like a woman’s behaviour?

Attacking women online for behaviour considered acceptable for men and not women is not new. This is, in fact, the actual definition of a shrew. A shrew is a woman demonstrating behaviour tolerated in a man that society has decided should not be tolerated in a woman. Shakespeare’s Katherine is this more realistic definition of a shrew, and the criticisms of her behaviour are based upon her gender. Shakespeare also romanticized his shrew, where other shrew-like figures were old, ugly, and lower class; Katherine is young, pretty, and noble. Boose states that Shakespeare “[reshaped] the trope of the shrew/scold from an old, usually poor woman or a nagging wife into the newly romanticized vision of a beautiful, rich, and spirited young woman” (198). From the first introduction of her, the audience will want Katherine to have a happy ending with Petruchio, which in the context of this play means she needs to be tamed and begin to behave in a way acceptable within the patriarchal society of Padua. Shakespeare further romanticizes the story by creating attraction between Katherine and Petruchio. By the end, Katherine becomes the perfect wife, as demonstrated through her final monologue, during which she chastises every woman in the play and the audience. While this romanticizing will lead to more ‘humane’ types of taming within the play, the public spectacles that occurred within England at this time are not absent; as mentioned, male characters within the play refer to cucking and bridling.

This play continues to be performed and recreated in contemporary society. Modern audiences continue to enjoy, watch, discuss, analyze, and critique The Taming of the Shrew. It is no longer viewed as a tool to establish social order or teach men a non-violent way to subjugate their wives. So why do we continue to watch it in various forms and media? It continues to be performed on stage and has even been adapted for movie theatres, Ten Things I Hate About You, released in 1999, stars Julia Stiles as Kat and Heath Ledger as Patrick. Kat lives on the social fringe of her high school, and while Patrick also lives on the periphery, he is bestowed a social legitimacy that Kat is not afforded. He is sexy and desired.

On the other hand, Kat, who is interested in women’s equality, strong feminist indie pop bands, feminist poetry, and is outspoken in her school and at home, needs to be tamed and brought in line. Patrick is hired to tame Kat so that her little sister Bianca will be allowed to date. Throughout the film, Kat’s outward appearance is softened, her personality made quieter, and she gives herself to Patrick to create the happy ending that allows Bianca to date the boy (Cameron) that set up Kat to be tamed in the first place. Kate’s music choice is made fun of by the male students, and Kat is referred to as a shrew. Even in her English class, when another student, Joey, is insulting and rude, he is made fun of by the teacher, but when Kat speaks, she is sent out of the room. Kat is unliked and scary; an interview process to find a candidate to date her has male students mocking her, screaming in terror, and refusing to attempt the challenge. It requires the scariest male student, Patrick, in Padua High School to take on the challenge of dating Kat. Patrick is gentler than Petruchio and makes some of his own changes, such as giving up smoking and attending a band concert that Kat likes to gain her interest. He also does not punish Kat to tame her, but Kat is put into situations where she is publicly shamed. Patrick takes Kat to a party where there is drinking, and Kat becomes so drunk she dances on a table in front of people that judge and mock her. This mocking continues beyond the party when everyone returns to school on Monday. There is a moment when Kat wants to kiss Patrick and becomes embarrassed when he refuses, and they do not kiss in the movie until the end when Patrick initiates the kiss. It is publicly at prom that Kat finds out why Patrick is dating her;

other boys wanted to date her sister Bianca, who was not allowed to date unless Kat dated. Kat leaves the prom ashamed and embarrassed. All these scenarios Kat finds herself in were Patrick's ideas, whether to attend the party, rebut the kiss, attend prom, and not be honest about his motives. However, by the movie's end, there have been definite changes to Kat's image. She had attended prom, when earlier in the film, she spoke of prom with scorn and something to be skipped at all costs. Her sense of style has been maintained; from the beginning, Kat wore pants and tank tops, but she has gone from denim pants and black tanks to tan-coloured khaki pants and a white tank. Her face has shifted from a permanent grimace to a smile, and her "angry demeanour," ever present at the movie's beginning, is replaced by someone willing to be vulnerable in public. This vulnerability culminates in Kat's English class when she stands at the front of the room and reads her sonnet that reveals her feelings about Patrick to him and the room, but she also cries while reading. Kat may still like feminist indie pop rock bands and feminist poets, but she wears softer colours and has a softer, more "socially pleasant" demeanour. This movie shows that despite our evolving ideas about the capabilities of women in society, we still enjoy carnivalizing women's punishments much more than men's. Patrick made no permanent outward changes for the rest of the student body to see, whereas Kat's physical and personal changes were public. Since the 1990s, with the rise of social media, the punishment and taming of unruly women have moved from the fiction of plays and movies to the real world and real women.

The Karen trend means any woman can be labelled, threatened, abused, and put at risk if someone with a phone does not like how she is acting or speaking. While there are male counterparts to these videos, the videos featuring men go viral less often, and there are fewer of them. The male videos of the same theme do not have a unified name. While some are dubbed "Ken," others are only known in their relation to the already famous "Karen," known as "Karen's Husband" or the "Male Karen ."This shows that while we may disapprove of the abuse of entitled power in men, there still needs to be some relation back to the woman metaphorically standing behind him. The man did not act alone; there was a Karen somewhere encouraging him.

The existence of fake Karen videos and the harassment of outspoken women like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Ayanna Pressly, who are trying to create positive change, leads to another problem that goes back to William Shakespeare's Taming of the Shrew and its controversy. While Shakespeare's play uses the gendered politics of his time that exerted control over women as entertainment for playgoers, Karen videos are far more viral than their male equivalents dubbed by the various names of Karen's Husband, Ken, or Kevin. Meghan Murphy goes so far as to say that Karen memes have moved beyond social justice and into "woman-hating as political virtue-signalling." If the term was not about woman-hating or being used by misogynists to control women who share opinions they do not like, then women such as Hadley Freeman, writing for The Guardian, would not be attacked online for questioning the use of the term Karen. She states that while people of colour responded in frustration that the term's original meaning was lost, she also received an equal number of comments from "men gleefully calling me a Karen ("OK, Karen") and telling me to make them a sandwich" (Freeman). Quiet women do not give people looking for targets to shame a reason to be filmed or called out on social media, as they do not provide film-worthy action that will attain the desired likes or viral spread. Women that speak their minds, even respectfully, are a target for men that disagree and are easy to capture on video in a snapshot that can be edited to achieve the video taker's desired effect.

The most significant difference between Katherine and a Karen video or meme on social media is where these women start before society tries to control them. Katherine's behaviour would be acceptable if she was a man. The women in the Karen videos behave so reprehensibly that it is inappropriate for a woman or a man; however, women are punished at much higher rates. Katherine's taming is a romanticized version of harsher taming happening to lower-class women in Renaissance England to maintain their obedience and, therefore, the compliance of all hierarchy levels within Renaissance England. The status quo of social order and patriarchal governance is maintained thereby. The Karen videos have evolved in more nefarious ways as a warning to any outspoken woman of the power of social media and how they can be punished. Even prominent women speaking

up for those who do not have a powerful voice, women who would be considered to be acting appropriately if they were male, are viciously targeted and threatened. Women of all colours can be targeted with Karen-like threats and punishments by the misogynists seeking to keep them bridled in our modern world. The continued popularity of The Taming of the Shrew shows society's continued focus on silencing outspoken women, whether their behaviour is abhorrent or justified. Society continues to want its strongest women to be silent.

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Carrie Ellis has been an English teacher at Fraser Academy since 2014. She earned her Master's of Arts for Teachers of English (MATE) in May 2022. This article is an abridged version of her Master's Thesis, that was thoroughly reviewed and edited by Ronda Arab, an expert in Shakespearean works. Carrie is a strong believer in using modern and historical texts in her classroom to show how society has struggled with social justices throughout history and while the face and conveyance may have changed, the themes of power and control have not. If interested in reading the full version that contains more historical and informational background on The Taming of the Shrew and the evolution of "Karens" please feel free to contact Carrie at cellis@fraseracademy.ca

Kyle McKillop

Lavender

A plane sings overhead. This scent
sings in my hand. Across 122 Street,
a man and his cigarette cough
their codependence. The grade 12s
roam the garden like it's their first,
hesitating to touch before plucking
leaves and running fingers
through new growth. The ants
cultivate chaos in their willingness
to sit. Harmony isn't something
to manufacture. I place a dandelion
flower on my tongue and it tastes
like attention-seeking. When we walk
by the playground after, they have to swing
because we're just kids until we die,
kid brains in failing bodies. When I ask
them to sniff the daffodils,
the only one who dares says it smells
like flowers. The bluebells
they call purple. The pines
smell like lavender too, they say,
not having washed their hands.
And the pink salmonberry blossoms
we barely notice, a hummingbird
popping overhead, a chip bag
discarded on the mossy soil below.
It doesn't matter. When we go back inside,
like bees to a hive, everything is tinted
a new shade of ease.

Kyle McKillop is the past president of BCTELA and the English Lead Learner at LA Matheson Secondary, on the traditional and unceded territory of the Katzie, Kwantlen, Semiahmoo, and other Coast Salish nations. https://mistermckillop.wordpress.com/for-teachers/

Sara Sjerven

Listening to Others, Learning about Ourselves Autobiography Literature Circles

Rationale:
We live in a complex world where disagreements quickly become personal and even mean. Where the ability to listen with the goal of understanding has been lost. Where our conversation skills are diminished because things happen in an online world, and we cannot see the impact that our words are having on the humans at the receiving end. We need to counter these trajectories with a renewed focus on our crucial communication skills. We need young people who can listen carefully and thoughtfully to each other. We need young people who can build a shared understanding through constructive conversation. And we need young people who can disagree in productive, careful ways.

But these are difficult skills. It's hard to listen without interrupting, speak without being right, and change one's mind because of a new perspective. So, it's critical that we ask ourselves, "How can we help students become people who know, understand, and care about themselves, others, and more-than-human others?" One of the key tools we can use to help students build these foundational tools of emotional intelligence is literature circles. And, I would suggest, it is our role as teachers to help students learn about the challenges of working in groups because during their lives, the most important things they will do will involve being in relationships and working with others. So, we must engage in this messy work and help students learn the skills they need to get better at being group members and possibly learn the key skills of conflict management and forgiveness.

In their book *Potlatch as Pedagogy: Learning Through Ceremony,* Haida educator and scholar Sara Florence Davidson and her father, Haida master carver and artist Robert Davidson (2018) describe the importance of relationships in learning. Sara Davidson tells us:

> There are nine *sk'ad'a* principles that teach us from where learning emerges, how learning occurs, and what learning honours. Learning emerges from strong relationships, authentic experiences, and curiosity. Learning occurs through observation, contribution, and recognizing and encouraging strengths. Learning honours the power of the mind, our history, and our stories, as well as spirituality and protocol." (Davidson & Davidson, 2018, p. 13)

My hope is that this unit will touch on and further students' abilities in a number of these areas, particularly their ability to learn from other's stories and to learn about themselves as they listen to each other, support each other, and are responsible for contributing to a positive group dynamic. As well, it's imperative and mandated that we begin to understand and synthesise Indigenous Ways of Knowing in our curriculum planning and design. So, this unit will attempt to investigate "where learning emerges, how learning occurs, and what learning honours" (Davidson & Davidson, 2018, p.13).

In practical terms, in this unit, students will read autobiographies so they come to understand how others have overcome both inner and outer adversity; at the same time as they read about character growth, they themselves will be growing and building tools for both managing themselves and managing their relationships. As well, the autobiographies selected for this unit are deliberately as diverse as possible so that we can offer students a wide variety of choice and so that students see themselves reflected in the selections; however, for some students, the challenge will be to read about and come to understand and empathise with people who may appear to be quite different from themselves.

Furthermore, in the Communication Core Competency, the BC Curriculum requires that: "Students engage in informal and structured conversations in which they listen, contribute, develop understanding and relationships, and learn to consider diverse perspectives. This facet of communication is closely linked to the building and sustaining of relationships at home, at school, in the community, and through social media" (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2023). By giving students very deliberate tools for "informal and structured conversations," and by helping them understand how to become good listeners, make strong, meaningful contributions, and be considerate of and thoughtful towards their classmates, students will slowly develop and build foundational communication skills.

Step 1: Hooking Students, Choosing Books

One of my biggest hopes when organising a unit like this is that I will capture all of my students in some way and reach their interests. Here are the books that I am currently using, as well as a few further suggestions:

1. *Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution* by Ji-Li Jiang (2018)
2. *Becoming Kareem: Growing Up On and Off the Court* by Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Raymond Obstfeld (2018)
3. *They Called Us Enemy* by George Takei and with illustrations by Elsinger Scott Becker (2019)
4. *Playing the Long Game*: A Memoir by Christine Sinclair with Stephen Brunt (2022)
5. *Every Falling Star: The True Story of How I Survived and Escaped North Korea* by Sungju Lee and Susan McClelland (2017)
6. *Permanent Record: How One Man Exposed the Truth About Government Spying and Digital Security* by Edward Snowden (2021)
7. *Reaching for the Moon: The Autobiography of Nasa Mathematician Katherine Johnson* (2020)
8. *Courage to Soar: A Body in Motion, a Life in Balance* by Simone Biles (2018)

This selection of books was made with a number of criteria:

- They needed to be of high interest to Grades 8 or 9.
- They needed to be of interest to students of different genders and sexualities.
- I wanted to include one graphic novel (*They Called Us Enemy*) as an option for students who preferred this genre.
- We have a high proportion of students from Asian backgrounds, and I wanted those students to see themselves reflected in the selections.
- We have a lot of student athletes, so having books about both male and female athletes felt important.
- What's missing is an Indigenous autobiography that is age appropriate. I have been looking for one and explored a number of options, but I've found the stories have been either too advanced (possibly too much sexual violence for students reading these on their own) or were sometimes aimed at a younger audience.

I do a book talk about each of the stories, and then either print a few copies of **this handout** for students to peruse, or share it online. The blurbs about the books are taken from Amazon, but I've read them all and my book talk reflects not only my perspective and reasoning for choosing the books, but also the challenges that students may face while encountering difficult subjects. I usually give students one class to think about this and maybe talk to their parents/guardians about their choices; I also send a letter out to parents/guardians letting them know that this unit is coming up and sharing the selections with them so that they are aware of what their child is reading and also so that they could read along for dinner conversation!

In order to put kids into groups, I ask students to write their name on top of a sticky note and then give me their top three choices. Then I take a bit of time to create groups of four students. As Davidson and Davidson state, "Learning emerges from strong relationships," (2018, p. 14) and these groupings will determine, to a certain degree, how much learning actually happens. When they state that "the most meaningful learning emerged from those strong connections," (Davidson & Davidson, 2018, p. 14) they are describing strong familial ties, but I would suggest that we need to do our best to build those connections and create communities of learners that feel responsible to each other and that learn together because of their shared connections. How we create our groupings will impact this. So, here are some things to consider as we put students into groups:

- I've found that a group of three students can be a problem if one or even two students are away, so four feels like the best size.
- How do you want to divide groups?
    - Similar reading levels together?
    - Or combine stronger readers with students who may struggle a bit with the text? This will help overall comprehension.
    - I sometimes like to create a group of really strong readers together so they can take off in their conversations. This will often depend on the makeup of the class and the choices students make. (The literature on gifted students reminds us that these students sometimes can be grouped together so they have the occasional opportunity to move quickly and go deep.)
- I like to break up genders in the groups so that there is a mix although I've sometimes put a group together with a single gender if I think they can work well together and if they are the only ones choosing a book. For a myriad of reasons, I find that boys often won't pick stories with female protagonists. So, sometimes a group of girls reading a book about a young girl is an excellent choice.
- If I know I have struggling readers, I may ensure they get the graphic novel (although I do warn students that this particular graphic novel is quite historical and informative and not so much character driven. So if they are interested in World War 2 and Japanese Internment, this is a good choice. But I warn them that it's not a comic book).
- A struggling reader might also do better with *Red Scarf Girl* which is probably the simplest choice in terms of reading comprehension. Not the simplest topic by any means.

Tip: I usually do this before a school holiday/break so that I can order extra copies if we have different groupings. I don't tell the students who their group will be until we start the actual literature circles because kids will try to move in and out of groups and I like to keep things simple for myself!

Step 1 Continued: Opinionnaire and "The Why"

Before we dive into our Opinionnaire about autobiographies, I like to pose the following questions to students:

- When was the last time you told a friend or family member a story about something that happened to you?
- What was your story about?
- Why do you think you told them?
- Why do we tell each other stories about ourselves?

These questions get students thinking about "the why" of autobiography. In terms of the Opinionnaire that I'm sharing here, the idea behind it comes from one of Jeffrey Wilhelm's co-authored books, *Inquiring Minds Learn to Read and Write* (2009); this text is at the heart of many inquiry units that I have created. One of the tools he recommends is an Opinionnaire which helps students form opinions about an upcoming topic of inquiry and then, through discussion, share their opinions, listen to the thoughts and opinions of their classmates, and possibly change their minds as they discuss and write about the topics (Wilhelm et al., 2009). I have included a link **to the Opinionnaire** that I have created for this unit. This is an opener to the unit and a great way to get the juices flowing.

Autobiography Opinionnaire

Why do we tell stories about ourselves?

These questions must be answered with either a Yes or No. No exceptions. Be prepared to justify your answers.

Statements:	YES	NO
Reading an autobiography helps me understand why other people do things that I might disagree with.		
When I read about how someone else solves a problem I can then solve the same problem myself.		
I don't feel empathetic with other people when they tell me stories about themselves.		
People tell stories to themselves in order to process their emotions.		
Telling a story about what's happened to you can help you understand what happened.		
You have to be a good writer to write an autobiography.		
Only people with big historical events in their lives should write an autobiography.		
Real-life stories are more interesting than fictional stories.		
If I write an autobiography, I think I have something important to share with the world.		
It's better for someone else to tell your story (a biography) than for you to tell your own story (an autobiography).		
Sharing stories about ourselves is a human need.		

As well, on the first day, I have students read a quick article about the importance of how we tell stories to ourselves. What is the impact of repeating negative stories about ourselves to ourselves? Can we frame a story in a different way in order to support a future-focused, more hopeful, resilient outcome? I don't want to suggest that we simply "turn that frown upside down" which is not helpful. But it is possible that when we look back on stories from our lives, we can find a way to reframe the narrative so that it highlights our resilience and growth. In an article from *New America Resilience: A Digital Magazine Exploring the Boundaries of Resilience*, Emily Esfahani Smith explains this kind of thinking:

Emily Esfahani Smith

> The psychologist Dan McAdams has studied the stories people tell about the whole arc of their lives, and in his research has found that people leading meaningful lives tell stories defined by redemption, growth, and love—for example, getting fired was terrible but it helped me discover my true calling as a nurse helping others. People who believe their lives lack meaning tend to tell what he calls "contamination stories," where the good is ruined by the bad, like I got my dream job, but it made my marriage fall apart. (*New America*, n.d.)

Attached here is a handout that I use with students as we read this article together. This activity does two things: it helps us understand the "why" or the "so what" of reading autobiographies and writing our own stories, and it also frames the "how." While reading, I ask students to use a number of the reading comprehension skills that

we will use in our literature circle. So, although students don't know yet that these are building blocks for their discussions, we are already planting seeds for this next step on our journey of working together to build a shared understanding of a text.

Step 2: Setting Up the Lit Circles and Introducing the Bookmark

One of the goals of literature circles is to help students understand what it means to be a good group member. What is helpful in group work? What is not helpful? I like to brainstorm those two categories and have students write their answers on sticky notes. Then I will share those out–first the "What not to do," and then the "What to do" in group work. This helps to air out the usual suspects of group projects: one person does all the work, people feel resentful, some kids do nothing, etc. There are a lot of frustrations and hidden dynamics. I want to raise all of these issues and shine a light on them so students know that I know and so that we understand that we are all going to be accountable to make this work. To have a successful conversation, students need to come with their reading done and their preparation complete. I also make time on the first day for creating group agreements in which each literature circle answers the following questions:

1. What happens if a group member comes without their reading done?
2. What happens if a group member comes without their bookmark complete (see below)?
3. What happens if someone has read ahead in the story?
4. Anything else?

In the Collaboration Core Competency: Working Collectively, it states that "As members of a group, [students] appreciate interdependence and cooperation, commit to needed roles and responsibilities, and are conscientious about contributing. They also negotiate respectfully and follow through on plans, strategies, and actions as they share resources, time, and spaces for collaborative projects" (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2023). These are key skills for students of all ages, and it's critical that we build their capacities in group work and that we don't avoid group projects because of the natural imbalance that seems to arise in terms of the amount of work students do. For this reason, it's imperative that students are held responsible and accountable not only for their own work, but also for their group to have excellent conversations because they have done the work ahead of time to make this happen. By making a group contract, students acknowledge that some participants might not do not do their share of the work and there are consequences for this. (It's interesting, I often find that the students are harsher with their consequences than I would be. My only limits are "no shaming.")

After setting up the groups and handing out texts, I introduce the main tool for our literature circles: The Bookmark. I created this handout as a concise way to do the following: share the tools, reflect both before and after, explain the why, and what to do if things move too fast. The ideas for the bookmark and the mini-lessons that I conduct all come from Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles by Harvey Daniels and Nancy Steineke (2004). I can't recommend this book enough, and I strongly suggest getting it and reading it before you begin your unit.

Here's how I use The Bookmark:

a For each day of lit circles, hand [a bookmark] out to students during their previous English Language Arts class.

b. Let students know that in their groups they need to decide on four tools (from the following selections) they will use for their next discussion: Passages, Reactions, Connections, Craft, Questions, Illustrator. I ask that students always choose Passages as this is one of the key

Tool #1: ____________________

Tool #2: ____________________

Possible Tools:

Passages: Write down any words, lines or sections of the story that "stick out" for you. These passages might be important, puzzling, curious, provocative, dubious, or well written–whatever grabs your attention.

Reactions: What were your feelings and responses to these chapters? Did you agree or disagree with something the author did or didn't do?

Connections: Did it remind you of past experiences, people or events in your life? Did it make you think of anything happening in the news, around school, in other stories or books you have read?

Craft: What did you notice about the author's style, language, point of view, literary devices, or structures they used to create the story?

Questions: What questions came to mind while you were reading these chapters? Were there things you wondered about, doubted or didn't understand? What would you ask author if you could talk to them?

Illustrator: Draw a picture of one of the powerful moments in these chapters. Be prepared to explain why you thought this was a particularly important scene.

Other:

Name: ____________________

Date of Lit Circle: ____________________

Why these tools?

- The purpose of these tools is to create a springboard for interesting conversations in your groups. It is up to you as group members to come to your literature circles with your thoughts somewhat organized so that you can participate in a dynamic conversation. This bookmark should help you to that.
- You will decide as a group which 4 tools you want to use for your next conversation. After your lit circle, you can discuss how things went and what might have made the conversation better. Then you can choose the same or different tools depending on how things have gone. You can also create tools of your own as long as they create interesting, engaging conversations.
- Once you have decided on your 4 tools, it will be up to each group member to finish the required reading and come to the next lit circle meeting the the 4 tools ready and filled out on the book mark.

skills for analysis. So, on the day of the first literature circle, each student in the same group will arrive with the same four tools prepared in order to share with their partners.

c. On the day of the literature circle, I ask students to do a pre-reflection on their preparation. I use this collaboration rubric from the Buck Institute to assess their reflections and their group work overall. Students should look over the rubric before their reflection and pick one of the topics to discuss. I emphasise that they will be assessed on their accuracy on where they are at, on problem solving, and on their growth mindset.

Questions to extend the discussion

1. What's your favourite part from the book so far?
2. Based on what we've read so far, how do you think it's going to end?
3. Who is your favourite person? Why?
4. Everyone rereads a page and finds a new passage or vocabulary word to share/discuss.
5. How do you fell about the story now compared to when we first started reading it?
6. What advice would you give the author?
7. If this story were made into a movie or TV show, how would the story need to b changed?
8. Other suggestions?

Good Questions:

- are not easily answered-make you think
- have more than one possible answer
- lead to different opinions/viewpoints
- make people interpret why something happens or a character does something
- make you predict the ending or future problems
- pose comparisons
- get you emotionally involved
- make you fill in details from your imagination
- bring up controversial ideas
- make you notice something you didn't before
- make you see something in a different way
- help you understand the book better
- pull different parts of the book together
- make you put yourself in the character's shoes
- lead to more follow up questions
- connect the book with personal experiences
- focus on important parts of the story
- are interesting and get attention

Pre Book Club Reflection:

Post Book Club Reflection:

Tool #3: ____________

Tool #4: ____________

d. While they are doing the pre-reflection, I do a quick homework check to see who is prepared or not. I send an email home to parents that day if the work is not done. I find that if I hold students accountable right away, and their group members also hold them to account, students very quickly learn to show up with their work done because it has such an impact on their group if people aren't prepared.

e. Before students start their first literature circle, I share a few things that may seem obvious to us, but that are not so obvious to students:

1. For each of the tools, students will go one at a time and share their thoughts/findings.
2. After one student shares, other students are responsible for asking follow up questions (we have a mini-lesson on this).
3. This is not a race to the finish! The idea is to have a conversation.

For the graphic novel team, I also give them a copy of **this handout** about Graphic Novel Terms from **readwritethink.org** and I don't let them use the "image" tool on their bookmark as this is a little reductive (NCTE, 2023). Instead, they can choose one of the graphic novel terms to discuss. Alternatively, students could do the colour or symbol from **Colour, Symbol, Image** taken from *Making Thinking Visible: How to Promote Engagement, Understanding, and Independence for All Learners (*Ritchart et al., 2011).

Step 3: Literature Circles!

The first day that students receive their books and find out their groups is always exciting. I like to hand out the books and let students peruse them for a few minutes and chat with their new group members about what their hopes are. I then give students a calendar with all of our class dates on it. I share with students all of the days that they will be with me in class, and the four to five days that we will devote to actual literature circles which happen once a week (I usually have 2-3, 70 minute English classes/week). Students need to go through their books and break it up into these 5 chunks. So, they will have 5 chunks of reading that coincide with the dates that we meet in groups. I ask students to hand in a copy of this calendar to me, or to take a picture of it and send it to me so that I have a way to create accountability if necessary. I also glance through their breakdown to make sure it's reasonable. As well, I'll talk about making things realistic for themselves–maybe giving themselves a bigger chunk to read over a long weekend, and recognizing when big events might be happening (like track meets) and going easier on those weeks. This is project management 101, and it's useful for students to get to experience making these choices and seeing the whole process play out (especially because we, as teachers, usually create these deadlines).

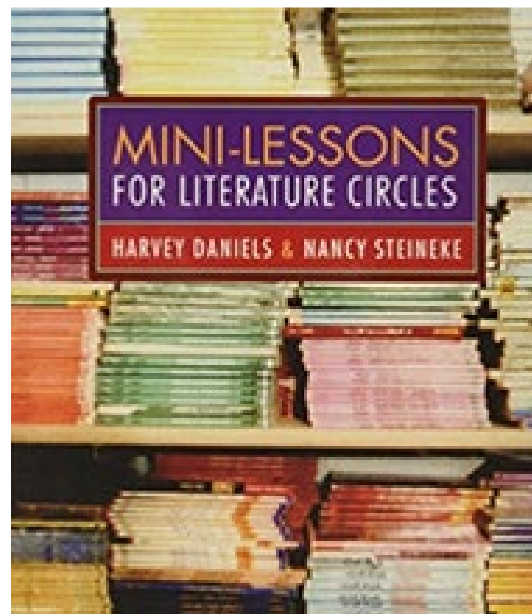
On this first day with books, I usually have students decide on which tools they will use for their first literature

circle, then I give students 20 minutes to read. From now on, I will start every class with silent reading and I make sure to have a book of my own so that I can participate in the reading. I also do bookmark checks and other homework checks during this time. As well, I will walk around to see where students are at in their reading. It will quickly become apparent that a few students are not keeping up with their reading. I will invite students to come to sit with me at lunch time to read or to find some other way to help them stay caught up with their reading. If I take a non-punitive approach to this and just try to support their efforts to read, come prepared, and be a solid group member, students respond well. The big trouble comes when a student really doesn't like their book. In this case, there are a couple of options. Possibly switching to another group, but struggling readers will really struggle to catch up. An audio book might help this student. One of the purposes of literature circles is the joy of reading, so I am loathe to have a student hate what they're reading. This will be a case by case process with you and the student brainstorming best case scenarios.

The beautiful thing about all of this preparation, is that when the literature circles are actually happening I circulate, listening to the conversations, and noting which groups are having trouble as I will target a mini-lesson to the whole class depending on what is tricky for students. The heavy lifting for the teacher is in the preparation and planning. So when the conversations are in progress we should be able to enjoy (hopefully, to some degree) the fruits of our preparation, planning, and design.

Step 4: Mini-Lessons

In their book, *Mini-Lessons for Literature Circles,* Daniels and Steineke (2004) provide practical ideas for running literature circles; I only explicitly taught four of their mini-lessons, although I incorporated a number of their other lessons in the bookmark and in our class conversations, depending on what difficulties groups were experiencing. Once again, I strongly recommend reading this book to flesh out your understanding and rationale for all of the steps I have shared here. I will give a brief description of each of the mini-lessons I use and what I have learned from these lessons.



A) Friendliness and Support

I tweaked one of the book's mini lessons called "Defining Discussion Skills" (Daniels & Steineke, 2004, pp. 48-54) and boiled it down to "Friendliness and Support." The rationale for this mini-lesson is obvious to any teacher of teenagers. Frequently, we hear students being less than kind to each other. In a literature circle, we want students to feel free to express themselves without fear of reprisal from classmates (although this will likely never entirely happen). So, this lesson is an opportunity for students to explicitly think and talk about what they need to do in order to show "friendliness and support" to each other. I would have students sit in their lit circles for this lesson so they can listen carefully to members in their group and hear about what they need to feel supported. Students are asked to create a T-Chart with "Looks Like" on one side, and "Sounds Like" on the other. We work together to create a few examples, and then I ask students to continue building their ideas here; finally, we come back for a class discussion to build on the document.

B) Written Conversation

The written conversation is a way to develop conversation skills and at the same time ensure that every student is responsible for holding up their side of the conversation (Daniels & Steineke, 2004, pp. 128-132). In order to set up the conversation, once again, students need a short story to discuss. I like to use Sherman Alexie's "The Joy of Reading and Writing: Superman and Me" (1997). This is another autobiographical text and there is a lot to discuss here; students are intrigued by Alexie's attitude towards his school and reading: "I refused to fail. I was smart. I was arrogant. I was lucky. I read books late into the night, until I could barely keep my eyes open. I read

books at recess, then during lunch, and in the few minutes left after I had finished my classroom assignments (Alexie, 1997). While reading, I suggest students highlight passages they find interesting as this will help them in their written conversations. Before beginning the activity, ask students to put their name and their partner's name on the paper, indicating who started the convo; as well, let students know that you will be collecting these and reading them. This will help to keep things on track and also will help you see which students might be struggling to participate with their peers.

For the written conversations activity, I follow these steps:

1. For the first written conversation, I would give students the following prompt: "What are your first thoughts about this story? What do we learn about Alexie? What did you find particularly interesting or surprising? Maybe ask some questions. Remember your reading strategies: ask questions, make predictions, make connections, or notice craft. Write for 3 minutes." Then I set a timer. If students start talking, I tell them to write it down! Remind students to keep writing for the whole 3 minutes.
2. Tell students to swap papers. Their next step is to read over what their classmates have written. Then students can either respond to the questions or respond in any way (appropriately) to the thoughts and ideas that their partner shared. Were they surprised and intrigued by the same passages? Carry on writing. If students get stuck, I recommend that they pull a passage from the text and write about the passage. I again ask them to create a critical thinking question. This is a question that starts with a why or a how and that cannot be answered with a simple yes or no. Set a time for 3 minutes.
3. Swap papers again. Continue the conversation. If students get stuck, simply go back to the text and find an interesting passage.
4. Swap 1-3 more times depending on how things are going.
5. When the written conversation is over, give students time to talk to their partners. This should be a lively conversation!
6. Finally, finish with a whole class discussion. Hopefully students are interested and engaged with the text and the exercise as a whole.

C) Asking Follow-Up Questions Activity using "Eleven" by Sandra Cisneros

Learning to ask questions is a critical skill for every student. And it might seem simple, but if you sit alongside a literature circle and listen, you will soon discover that students are not particularly adept at asking questions of each other. So this mini-lesson helps students understand what makes a good follow-up question (Daniels & Steineke, 2004, pp. 133-137). I start the lesson by brainstorming. They could have a piece of paper with them, folded down the middle, with "good questions" on one side and "bad questions" on the other (ibid, pp. 128-132). I then have students read Sandra Cisneros's short story, "Eleven"(1992). Some students might already have encountered this story, but I always say that good literature can be read more than once! Once students have read the story, they each must write down three questions. Here's what to do next:

> For the next step, each student works with a partner. One partner begins by reading his starter question aloud to his partner. The partner listens carefully to the question and then answers. The person who asked the question must ask another question based on something that was in the partner's answer. After asking the second question, the questioner writes the follow-up question in the right-hand column across from the starter question that it corresponds to. The partner who has been answering cannot answer the follow-up question unit it is written down. Instead she must think about the answer she is going to give. Once again, the questioning partner listens carefully and then must come up with another follow-up question. This process is repeated until three follow-up questions have been asked. Then it is the other person's turn to ask the questions and write them down. (Daniels & Steineke, 2004, p 134)

This is a lot to take in! The purpose is that students are learning to ask follow up questions and also listening for what kinds of questions make good follow-up questions and which ones flop. Once I've done this mini-

lesson with students, I ask that during their literature circles, one follow up question is asked after each person shares something from their bookmark. This should, theoretically, increase talking time by at least double. I remember being surprised on the first day of literature circles at how fast they went! So much work for such a brief conversation. But we slowly built up the talking time and made the conversations meaningful with these mini-lessons and strategies.

D) Off-Task Behaviour Mini-Lesson

The rationale for this mini-lesson is obvious: each group at some point will likely get off-task in some way or another. While students are building relationships and getting to know one another, some goofiness and side conversations are inevitable and even encouraged–we develop new friendships and acquaintances this way; however, some of this behaviour will eventually become too distracting and will need redirecting.

Daniels and Steineke have a great mini-lesson for this which I employ in my literature circles (Ibid, pp. 174-177). It is quite simple, and it helps students develop awareness, problem solve, and take responsibility for solutions. Ask students to create 3 columns: Off-Task Behaviour, Reason, and Solution. Start them off by having them brainstorm all of their possible off-task behaviours such as talking to other groups, not paying attention, tossing their books, etc. Once they have listed them all, have them come up with reasons which might be lack of preparedness, easily distracted, etc. The groups can then come up with solutions such as checking in the night before about getting the work done, using a fidget toy, etc. Once the groups have done this on their own, ask each group to share their favourite solution as they may feel proud about their problem solving skills as a group. Ideally, once students have started to recognize their off-task behaviours, they may simply self correct without needing a laborious process.

Step 5: Final Essay

I have students write a traditional literary analysis essay for this unit using the following essay questions:

1. In what ways does the author show growth and change and how does this relate to their purpose in writing their autobiography?
2. How does the author overcome adversity and why is this important for them to share with readers?

In retrospect, these questions are quite similar, but the second one may add a layer of complexity that is missing from the first. In the future, I might create a different question that pushes student thinking, although I do want them to consider why these are important stories to share.

Here are the questions that I pose for their first brainstorming sessions:

1. What are your first thoughts about these questions now?
2. If you are going to write about the first essay topic, answer these questions:
   a) In what ways does the author show growth and change and how does this relate to their purpose in writing their autobiography?
   b) What was your character like in terms of their personality or character at the beginning of the book?
   c) What are they like at the end?
   d) Why did this transformation happen?
   e) What are some specific events or moments that showed or forced this change?
   f) Why do you think those specific events or moments are important?

3. If you are going to write about the second essay question, respond to the following questions:
   a) In what ways does the author show growth and change and how does this relate to their purpose in writing their autobiography?
   b) How does the author overcome adversity and why is this important for them to share with readers?

c) What kinds of adversity does the author have to face? Remember, conflict, or adversity can be internal (like a struggle with yourself), it can be with the government, or with racism. It can also be with people?
d) In which moments or events in the story is the adversity the clearest? What happens?
e) What or who helps them overcome it?
f) How do they show resilience?
g) In what other ways do they overcome adversity?

I chose these topics because they support one of my goals as an educator which is to help students adopt that growth mindset and to see how much adversity people can face and overcome. As well, I do a lot of scaffolding and step-by-step work with students at this age for their essay writing. I'm also shifting parts of my practice now because of ChatGPT. As well, one of my colleagues suggested that at the end of the literature circles, students do a talk show where we divide up the groups and students come in character from each of their stories. Then they would be interviewed and have a chance to share their learning with each other and also share the stories between groups. I ran out of time to do this, but I will definitely add in some kind of performance when I do literature circles next year. When I asked students for feedback, some of them commented that they wished that they'd had a chance to talk to other students about their books, so clearly this last piece could be very powerful.

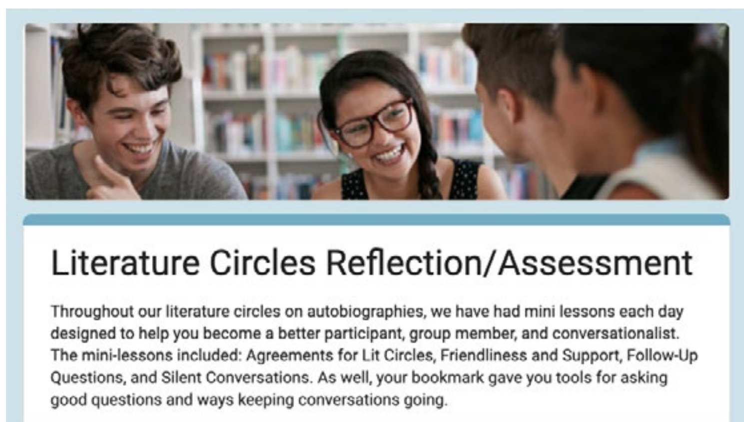
Reflection

Student Reflections:

In a Google Form, I asked students the following three questions for reflection:

1. For our literature circles, what do you think was the area that you needed to grow the most in and why?

Mostly, students responded that they needed to work on asking good questions and keeping the conversation going. For example, one student said:


Literature Circles Reflection/Assessment

Throughout our literature circles on autobiographies, we have had mini lessons each day designed to help you become a better participant, group member, and conversationalist. The mini-lessons included: Agreements for Lit Circles, Friendliness and Support, Follow-Up Questions, and Silent Conversations. As well, your bookmark gave you tools for asking good questions and ways keeping conversations going.

> "I think I need most growth in expanding off of other group members' ideas. During the conversation, I felt that a lot of times we had numerous good questions, passages, or responses. However, there would only be 1 response or numerous responses containing a bunch of repeats. A way I could work on this is by listening more carefully and branching off of someone's ideas as opposed to saying new ones when a topic could be continued for a longer amount of time."

2. How did you use information from one of the mini-lessons to improve your literature circles?

Overwhelmingly, students said that they used the lesson on asking follow-up questions. I think as teachers, we know that kids struggle to listen closely enough to ask good questions, but this is a key, critical skill for being a group member, a critical thinker, and a friend. As one of the foundational skills for being in relationships, this is a skill that we must continue to help students get better at.

3. What do you need to continue to work on and how will you go about doing this?

One student responded with this:

> “I have decided to now pre-plan for when I am going to do my homework! - instead of jamming it in during my breaks! From now on I will set several reminders saying I must do this or that before I do that and this. For example, before I binge anime I must complete my homework. If it will take me too long or I lose focus or it’s just not working out, I shall divide and conquer! 10 minutes working 5 minutes break! :D”

What I love about this response is the honesty and the self-awareness. I wonder how this student is now faring with their homework planning? If I teach them in future years, I will follow up with some questions! But the responses to this question were far-ranging, from being more diplomatic, to getting reading done on time, to simply getting more involved in the conversation. Another student responded with this:

> “I think in the future I need to continue to use comments that add to the discussion. For example, even though I tried to improve on this skill, I found myself saying things like ‘I agree’ and ‘I was impressed by’ a lot. These comments don’t really add to the discussion as they leave no room for interpretation/thoughts, and it makes the conversation come to an abrupt stop. I can work on this in the future by asking questions more frequently, for example, saying ‘why do you think this?’ instead of something like ‘yeah, I agree’. While comments can be helpful, I will work hard to decrease the amount of comments I make that do not add to the discussion, by practising in my everyday conversations with my friends and family.”

My Reflections:
I have experienced so much satisfaction from these literature circles, and each year I’m on the lookout for new books to add to the list. I am disappointed that I have not found an Indigenous story that works in this mix, and I will continue to search for this. Student feedback has been excellent, and I have adjusted my book talks depending on what students have said. I only ran the lit circles for one year, and then in my role as Instructional Coach, I oversaw a group of Grade 8 teachers who did them again this year. The response from my colleagues was overwhelmingly positive, although I think there was a wish for some kind of final group activity like the talk show mentioned above. This request came from students as well.

In terms of challenges, I sometimes found it worrisome and irritating that students would race through their literature circles, particularly after all the prep and work I had put into setting them up! But I learned to adjust my expectations, and help kids come to see how challenging and important it is for them to learn to carry on an interesting discussion. And I also have learned to let go a little bit and not feel like I’m wasting time if I see a group off task or somewhat disengaged. Most students (I had 84 of them do this the first year) were eager, engaged, and usually focused. And I think it’s because of voice and choice. Students’ voices, their choices, their questions, and their slow and steady community building are at the heart of this unit.

I want to return finally to what Sara and Robert Davidson said:

> There are nine *sk’ad’a* principles that teach us from where learning emerges, how learning occurs, and what learning honours. Learning emerges from strong relationships, authentic experiences, and curiosity. Learning occurs through observation, contribution, and recognizing and encouraging strengths. Learning honours the power of the mind, our history, and our stories, as well as spirituality and protocol (Davidson & Davidson, 2018, p. 13).

We worked on building strong relationships in our groups. We worked on the authentic experience of talking about a book (or movie, or TikTok, or podcast, or TV series) with friends. We helped students become more curious and ask questions. We asked students to listen and observe each other. We asked them to recognize the strengths and resilience of the characters they read and wrote about, and we asked them to “be friendly and

supportive" with each other as they built their strong conversation skills. We asked them to use the power of their minds, and to listen and learn from history and stories. We developed protocols for our literature circles and helped students decide each day how they wanted to go about their conversations. Was this a spiritual experience? I'm not sure. I wonder if learning through stories, sharing our thinking, listening to each other, and creating bonds is a form of spiritual experience? Perhaps, perhaps not. But maybe we have opened doors for some students to a new way of learning alongside each other that will keep them engaged and even excited to enter the English Language Arts classroom for another day.

Finally, I want to invite any and all teachers, students, administrators, and parents to reach out with their thoughts, suggestions, experiences, and questions. Please contact me at sarasjerven@gmail.com. I look forward to hearing from you.

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Kyle McKillop

Poem Prompts from an EFP12 Class

A writing prompt is just an idea meant to help a writer get started. We can use the prompt as it is, or we can twist the idea into something uniquely ours. And of course, we can always go off-script and come up with our own ideas—that independence is ultimately the goal, anyway!

In my class, we gravitate toward free verse and lyric poetry. I am particularly drawn to these forms, so inevitably I collect and share them the most. However, my young writers find power in these forms too. They learn to emphasize a poet's most effective tool, imagery, and they get to play with metaphor (and its comparitive kin), the most powerful of the figurative tools. In the end, we tend to focus on idea over sound, though I also show them recordings of slam and other performance poems in case they find a vision of themselves there. And we aim to show and to tell, though we know that showing trusts the reader to make meaning for themselves, creating space for feelings that we don't even have to say directly.

This year, I noticed my students were often diving into a single moment in time and then quickly running out of things to say about it. For example, we took a walk to our school garden, followed by a detour to a nearby playground, and kids were writing poems about being on the swings. A useful piece of advice turned out to be: what one other moment in time can you add to your poem, so that the two moments overlap like a Venn diagram? How does today on the playground connect to you at age seven on the playground? When you ran your hands through the lavender earlier, how did that connect to a moment you had with your grandmother in a different garden, your twenty fingers like worms in the dirt, wiggling to bury seeds?

The following prompts were inspired by our in-class reading and discussing of poems by Indigenous poets. I've linked the original poems, because they are wonderful and readily available. Our goal is not to impersonate or appropriate, but we do want to see how skilled writers make engaging texts, and of course we want to make our own engaging texts from our own understandings and experiences—it is human to make art, and it is empowering to find our voices.

A quick note on crediting sources: poets have their own protocol for citing when they borrow a form or germinate an idea from another poet. Say, for example, I read Dallas Hunt's poem "kinanaskomitin" and want to make my own gratitude poem. I'm going to make one that reflects my own family culture, rather than appropriating Hunt's: perhaps I call it "míle buíochas" to bring in the Gaelic thread of my ancestry. (Notice that I'm not capitalizing my title either—for fun? as a rejection of colonization?? from the sheer fatigue of pandemic teaching??? Every choice carries meaning!) But having been inspired by Hunt's form and content, I want to be sure to give credit to the original source, so I add the italicized subtitle "*after Dallas Hunt*". The final title will look something like this, with the poem following:

míle buíochas
after Dallas Hunt

I might even bold the title, to help it stand out from the rest of the poem. This is just an aesthetic choice, though, and does not ultimately affect my poem's impact. The citation in the subtitle, though, does matter and links directly to our course's curricular competencies. Once we know the unofficial Poetry Style Guide, we can use it to honour the creator of the original, our inspiration. However, if I took my poem a different direction and didn't use Hunt's title or form, there would be no need to credit it in this way, even if I found a little spark of inspiration within.

Poem Prompts

Thank you
List things you are grateful for. Be a little sweet and a little sassy. Use imagery and story. See: "kinanaskomitin" by Dallas Hunt.

Love is...
"What is love? Baby, don't hurt me; don't hurt me no more." Make your own series of metaphors for love. Get wild and imaginative. Stretch yourself and your reader. See: "Love Is A Moontime Teaching" by Billy-Ray Belcourt.

Family/cultural tragedy
What great tragedies have you or your family or ancestors experienced? What resulted? What does the future look like? See: "The Kwantlens" by Joseph A. Dandurand.

Mix tape/playlist
Think of an overall idea, like family or love or loss. Then list your songs. Then write a tiny poem inspired by each title and matching the overall theme. See: "mixed tape" by Katherena Vermette.

Loss
What losses have you experienced? What might be a metaphor for that loss? Extend that metaphor through a whole poem. See: "tumbling" by Jónína Kirton.

Place
Write about a place that is important to you. Describe the place but also the feeling, the history, the reason for its importance. See: "The Kwantlens" by Joseph A. Dandurand.

The blood in my veins
What about the blood in your veins? What problems does it represent for you? What joys? Who are you? See: "War" by Lee Maracle.

Tradition
What traditions do you or your family have? How do you feel as you take part in that tradition? See: "sacred" by Billy-Ray Belcourt

Colonization & resistance
What was your family's experience of colonization? Of post-colonization? Of capitalism? What is the role of resistance in your lives? See: "i am graffiti" by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson.

Nature
Describe a moment or a series of moments when you were immersed in nature. What did you see/hear/smell/touch/taste? What was going through your mind? In what way did those experiences mirror the other things going on in your life? See: "April 30, 2014" by Louise Bernice Halfe.

Vastness
When do you feel small? Overwhelmed? Insignificant? Anxious? Or when are you the vast thing, enormous, significant, strong? Explore those moments and how they connect to the wider world or the rest of your life. See: "Such a Tiny Light" by Philip Kevin Paul.

FPPL
Consider one of the First Peoples Principles of Learning: what stories come to mind from your own life? Turn those into a poem. (This prompt was preceded by extensive work with the FPPL, which we used as a lens for analyzing texts.)

Your own inspiration
Poems can come from anywhere. What in your life do you want to write about? Write it!

To find more poems by amazing Indigenous writers, check out the sites linked above or visit my collection of links to powerful contemporary poems, Capillaries.

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