

Fairytales in Secondary English Classrooms?: Exploring Multimodality, Visual Literacy and  
Student Resistance

by

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## **Abstract**

The overall purpose of the project was to examine how multimodal texts could be used effectively in the Secondary English classroom. The fairytale unit included in the project, which was created for an English 11 course, featured exploration of student resistance to mediated and popular culture texts through critical reading and producing of original texts. The fairytale unit reflected the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Rosenblatt's transactional theory, feminist theory, semiotic theory, multimodality, and multiliteracies such as visual literacy, critical literacy and media literacy. In Chapter 1 I discuss the rationale for and purpose in creating the fairytale unit as well as outline the activities and assessments that reflect the British Columbia English Language arts curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007). The review of relevant theories and research in Chapters 2 and 3 revealed that students need time and opportunities to foster a skill set for reading multimodal texts and explicit, framed instruction to learn how to navigate and construct multimodal texts. Review of the literature also showed that an intertextual approach to critical literacy instruction can deepen student understanding of textual representation. In Chapter 4 I outline the fairytale unit and make connections to the key theories and concepts discussed in the literature review.

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Table of Contents.....	ii
Dedication.....	v
Acknowledgements .....	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction.....	1
Intentions and Rationale for the Unit.....	1
Choice of Genre: Why Fairytales?.....	2
Literary Concepts that Framed the Unit.....	2
Connections to the British Columbia Language Arts Curriculum.....	3
Theoretical Foundations of Teaching Pedagogy.....	5
Key Learnings from the Literature.....	6
Choice of Formats.....	8
Project Overview .....	9
Chapter 2: Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks.....	10
Sociocultural Theory.....	10
Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory of Reading.....	12
Intertextuality.....	14
Post-structuralist Feminist Theory.....	15
Semiotic Theory.....	16
Multimodality.....	18
Design.....	19
Multiliteracies.....	22

Visual Literacy.....	23
Critical Literacy.....	26
Media literacy.....	28
Conclusion.....	30
Chapter 3: Review of Literature.....	32
Multiple Literacies and Multiple Texts: Reading Multimodal Texts in the Classroom....	32
Reading the Word Reading the World: Reading with a Critical Eye.....	37
Feminist Theory and Gender Construction.....	43
Students as Designers: Negotiating Semiotic Resources.....	46
Art Education in English Classroom.....	54
Assessment of Multimodal Projects.....	57
Conclusion.....	61
Chapter 4: Fairytale Unit and Connections to the Literature.....	63
Components of the Fairytale Unit.....	63
Response journals.....	64
Unit Outline.....	65
Connections to the Literature.....	74
Socially constructed learning .....	74
Semiotic theory.....	75
Multiliteracies.....	76
Reading with a critical eye.....	77
Reading multimodal texts.....	78
Students as designers: Negotiating semiotic resources.....	79

Assessment of multimodal texts.....	80
Reflections and Suggestions for Future Pedagogy.....	82
Final Reflections.....	83
References.....	86
Appendix A.....	96
Appendix B.....	102
Appendix C.....	104
Appendix D.....	105
Appendix E.....	106
Appendix F.....	109
Appendix G.....	110
Appendix H.....	111
Appendix I.....	112
Appendix J.....	115
Appendix K.....	117
Appendix L.....	119

## **Dedication**

**To my daughter, Parker Josephine**

### **Acknowledgements**

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

#### Intentions and Rationale for the Unit

In today's classrooms teachers work with students from varied cultural and socio-economical backgrounds, who have diverse value systems and literacy skills. It is no longer appropriate for teachers (of any discipline) to use a single textbook in their classes or to use only one method of teaching. Similarly, it is no longer appropriate for an English teacher to treat reading and writing as the dominant forms of literacy. With the increase in user-friendly sites of Web 2.0, more adolescents are creating or producing their own texts rather than just consuming texts; students are no longer passive victims of Debord's *spectacle* (concept by French Marxist theorist, Guy Debord, which refers to the lack of autonomy and free-thinking amongst people in a capitalist society whose social relationships are mediated through consumerism, advertising and popular culture) (Trier, 2007). Because their worlds are consumed with non-linear visual multimodal texts (I have adopted the British Columbia Ministry of Education's 2007, definition of "text" to include forms of media, print text and art) and social media sites, such as Instagram<sup>TM</sup> and Pinterest<sup>TM</sup>, it is imperative that students are visually literate. Because English is a required course for all high school students, it is sometimes difficult to keep them engaged and excited about the material, especially for those students who do not like to read or write. I decided to create the fairytale unit after hearing a student complain about how English class is the same every year: short stories, poetry, novel study, Shakespeare and writing. I wanted to do something different and, I hoped, more engaging while still teaching the core literary concepts of the British Columbia English Language arts curriculum (2007).



### **Choice of Genre: Why Fairytales?**

Over the past few years, a surge of fairytale film recreations has been produced in Hollywood. Tatar (1999) believes that fairytales' enduring popularity is due to the "significant social function – whether critical, conservative, compensatory, or therapeutic" that they serve (p. 11). From a semiotic perspective, fairytales help shape or naturalize our culture: stories are repeated and transformed over time, reinforcing ideological values, attitudes and beliefs until they become "normal" or self-evident to the reader; thus, readers, children in particular, unconsciously become indoctrinated into a cultural ideology (Chandler, 2007, p. 145).

I chose to work with the fairytale genre because fairytales were a familiar genre to the majority of my students and these tales have recognizable archetypes and plot. This familiarity offers the perfect canvas to create fractured fairytales that challenge and subvert the reinforced ideological values mentioned above. Tatar (1999) writes, "fairytales derive their meaning through a process of engaged negotiation on the part of the reader" and of the producer (p. 14). In other words, the meaning of a tale is created by the reader's interpretation. Despite the association of children and fairytales, I felt that students of all ages could take to the challenge of analyzing and reinventing the fairytale. After all, storytelling is inherent in all of us and narratives provide students with a way to process and work through material that may otherwise be difficult to talk about. Within a fairytale's "minimalist style" lies a plethora of issues to analyze, challenge, discuss and deconstruct (Tatar, 2015, p. 6). The often-formulaic plots allow a flexible framework for students to be creative with their reinventions.

### **Literacy Concepts that Framed the Unit**

As mentioned above, it is important for students to be visually literate. Visual literacy is the ability to create and interpret meaning from visual images (Metros, 2008). To strengthen the

visual literacy skills in my students, I introduced the elements of visual art and design, using the appropriate metalanguage. If learning in school is to become relevant to students, then educators need to practice a pedagogy of multiliteracies, reflective of the multiple literacies and modes of representation, beyond language (New London Group, 1996). In addition to visual literacy, my goal for the unit was to develop students' critical literacy skills. Critical literacy is viewing texts, and the world, through a critical lens: examining social constructs and hidden agendas or power structures (Wallowitz, 2008). I wanted students to think critically and globally about the texts they read. In my opinion, the best way to approach the building of these multiple literacy skills is through the analysis of and production of multimodal texts. Multimodality is the process of using multiple modes, or culturally shaped resources, to communicate and make meaning (Wyatt-Smith, 2009). For my project I explored how multimodal texts can be used to support literacy learning in a high school English classroom. Incorporating popular multimodal texts, such as film, into the curriculum can enable students to question and critique gendered representations and stereotypes that dominate media. The designing of multimodal texts and exploration of visual arts "develops complex literacy practices" as students learn to manipulate text and navigate through modes and semiotic resources (Cowan & Albers, 2006, p. 124).

### **Connections to the British Columbia Language Arts Curriculum**

It is important to note that despite recent changes in British Columbia curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education Draft English Language Arts, 2013, Learning Standards), the most recent curriculum document published for Grades 10, 11, 12 remains the 2007 version; thus, my unit reflects the core concepts of the British Columbia Ministry of Education English Language Arts Curriculum 2007 document. In Chapter 4 I provide a detailed chart describing each prescribed learning outcome supported by the lessons within the fairytale unit.

The three curricular key elements supported in the unit are: “oral language,” “reading and viewing,” and “writing and representing” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 72). In support of the *oral language* prescribed learning outcomes, the unit afforded many opportunities for collaboration and partners/group work where students expressed ideas, interpreted and analyzed texts, synthesized ideas, and discussed different perspectives and opinions (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007). In support of *reading and viewing* prescribed learning outcomes, students read, analyzed and critiqued a variety of texts including advertisements, picturebooks, graphic novels, poetry, film, and prose (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 58). Students read these texts to both comprehend and challenge ideas, bias, and form. Also, in support of the curriculum, students made predictions, drew inferences, and contextualized ideas from the texts.

In support of *writing and representing* prescribed learning outcomes, students wrote imaginative narratives and personal responses to various ideas and texts in journals. Students also wrote an analysis or “purposeful information text” of a fairytale (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 60). The culminating project involved the designing of a multimodal fairytale text. The creating of “original texts help [students] to appreciate the artistry of language” as well as visual imagery (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 74). Producing of texts also enables students to see that meaning is intentionally constructed. Throughout this document I have used the term *reading* to include both reading prose text and viewing visual texts and the term *writing* to include both writing print text and representing multimodal compositions.

Two foundational components of the curriculum are gradual release of responsibility (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) and metacognition (Flavell, 1979). As such, through the various unit

activities and assignments, I scaffolded student learning through “teacher modeling, guided practice, and independent practice” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 72).

“When students become aware of their own thinking processes, their ability to take responsibility for and control over their own learning increases”; thus, throughout the unit I encouraged student metacognition around learning tasks and strategies via exit slips, response journals and goal setting (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 85). These tools were also helpful in assessing student understanding.

In the curriculum document the importance of formative assessment (assessment *for* learning and assessment *as* learning) in student learning is stressed (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007). I provided constant feedback (written and verbal) throughout the unit on various assignments, classroom participation and response journals. I also believed it important for students to become involved in their learning and evaluation; thus, the class collaboratively generated the criteria for their projects including a criteria checklist and interview questions so students were explicitly aware of expectations. In regards to summative assessment, I evaluated assignments and the multimodal project. If students did not do very well on a particular assignment, they were given the opportunity to revise the assignment and resubmit it.

### **Theoretical Foundations of Teaching Pedagogy**

In addition to the English Language Arts curriculum, my pedagogy in developing the literature unit on fairytales was informed by sociocultural theory, transactional theory, semiotic theory and feminist theory. Keeping Vygotsky’s (1978) sociocultural theory in mind, I tried to develop a community in my classroom where students collaborated with and mentored one another on various activities and their projects. Also in line with Vygotsky’s beliefs on cognitive development, I encouraged metacognition amongst my students by checking for understanding

and KWL (**K**now, **W**ant to learn, **L**earned) exit slips. I also scaffolded student learning through various activities and by accessing student prior knowledge and understanding. Both sociocultural theory and Rosenblatt's (1994) transactional theory substantiate the idea that reading and learning are social. I considered Rosenblatt's work on the transactional theory of reading, looking at both the aesthetic and efferent stances that readers adopt during the reading event. People make meaning from texts through transacting with both the text and their cultural environments. Similarly, a tenet of semiotic theory (Chandler, 2007) is that a reader brings context and meaning to signs within a text by organizing them into an understood cultural context or code. Signs hold meaning when interpreted in conjunction with other signs or text. As a class, we conducted semiotic analysis of various texts (e.g., advertisements, film) in anticipation that once students were able to recognize that their mediated world is constructed (through message, audience and design) then they will be less likely to be passive consumers. I extended this constructed worldview by introducing students to feminist theory so they could identify and challenge societal gender constructs and patriarchal ideologies (Jones, 2010).

### **Key Learnings From the Literature**

In Chapter 3 I discuss various case studies that helped guide me through the construction and teaching of the fairytale unit. As mentioned above, the class read a variety of multimodal texts to gain familiarity with and to practice navigating through multiple modes. Findings from studies by Groenke and Youngquist (2011) and Graham and Benson (2010) demonstrated the need for students to be taught how to navigate through various sign systems within non-linear texts. Connors (2012) and Pantaleo (2012a) explored how students read and made meaning from multimodal texts, showing the importance of going beyond just design recognition and into teaching semiotic analysis of visual texts.

I also encouraged my students to approach texts with a critical eye and to question both the medium and the message. Similar to the goals of the studies on critical literacy conducted by both Huang (2011) and Locke and Cleary (2011), I believe students need to understand that all texts are constructed and that texts position readers to see a particular reality. I adopted an intertextual teaching approach to critical literacy learning, as recommended by both Locke and Cleary (2011) and Skinner (2007). Intertextuality, a term coined by Kristeva (1966), refers to the interrelationship between author, reader and other texts (as cited in Chandler, 2007). Research by Locke and Cleary (2011) and Skinner (2007) included the use of multiple texts, of varying perspectives, on the same topic to deepen student understanding of textual representation. Stuckey and Kring (2007) and Fortuna (2010) honed students' critical literacy skills through film study. Both teacher-researchers used elements of film to strengthen visual literacy skills and to help students consider the role of semiotics "in the reinforcement of or the resistance to cultural stereotypes" (Stuckey & Kring, 2007, p. 27). In addition to encouraging my students to read with a critical lens, I wanted my students to become aware of both societal and their own personal assumptions about gender and power. Wallowitz's (2004) study greatly influenced my approach to teaching feminist theory and gender construction, as did the research by Moffatt and Norton (2005) that included a post-structuralist analysis of an Archie™ comic with middle-school students.

I not only wanted students to challenge mainstream media and cultural texts, but also I wanted them to become designers and producers of texts as well. Once students become aware of how a text is constructed, they can use these design elements to subvert or challenge mediated messages. In their research, Chung and Kirby (2009) and Bourke (2009) reported how students took a critical stance by subverting original mediated messages through the creation of texts.

Findings from studies conducted by Hull and Nelson (2005) and Gilje (2010) illustrated how students negotiated meaning within and across different modes as they designed their own multimodal texts.

Design of multimodal texts coincides with art education. As a way to practice visual literacy skills in the classroom, my students worked with elements of art. Research by Zoss, Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen (2007) revealed how working with the arts can act as a vehicle for self-reflection and the study by Morawski (2014) demonstrated the emotional and imaginative potential of working with multimodal arts texts.

### **Choice of Formats**

Although the fairytale unit would work with any grade, I chose to work with Grade 11 students because there was more curricular freedom (no provincial exam to prepare for as in Grades 10 and 12). As a class, we studied the evolution of fairytales (focusing on Snow White) and the various sociocultural influences that affect both the tale's longevity and its transformation. This process of reading and interpreting literature can lead to a better understanding of "oneself, one's community, and the world" (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 74). As is described in Chapter 4, throughout the unit students analyzed various versions of fairytales and then recreated their own multimodal version. For their final multimodal project, students had a choice of format to work with: picturebook, graphic narrative, or film script. A picturebook is a book where text and picture work together to tell a story (Matulka, 2008). I chose the picturebook because of its childhood familiarity and potential for creativity in navigating through semiotic resources. McCloud (2007) defines the medium of comics as "juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer" (p. 9). Because the projects

were approximately 10 pages (under the length of an average graphic novel), I adopted Pantaleo's (2015) term "graphic narrative" to describe this particular medium (p. 4). I chose the medium of comics because it is a popular culture medium of which many students were familiar. As we did not have time to work with film, students wrote a film script which provided instructions for various modes (sound effects, lighting, camera direction, gestures from the actors and so on). With all formats, the aim was to evoke an aesthetic response from the reader, using elements of art and design.

### **Project Overview**

In this chapter, I have discussed my rationale and purpose in creating the fairy tale unit, outlined the literacies and theories that support my unit, and explained how the unit supports the English Language Arts 11 British Columbia curriculum document (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007). In Chapter 2 I define, in more detail, the various theories and literacy concepts that informed my pedagogy and framed my fairytale unit. In Chapter 3 I review relevant literature regarding the use, designing and assessment of multimodal texts; the teaching with multiliteracies (i.e., visual and critical media); and the use of visual art in the English classroom. In Chapter 4 I provide a detailed outline of the fairytale unit, and connect the unit to the theories and literacy concepts explained in Chapter 2 and the literature discussed in Chapter 3.



## **Chapter 2**

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Frameworks**

My pedagogy throughout the fairytale unit was informed by Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, Rosenblatt's transactional theory, and feminist theory. The unit's culminating project, the creation of a multimodal fairytale, draws upon multiliteracies, semiotic theory and multimodality. The unit, as a whole, focuses on visual literacy, critical and media literacy. Throughout the unit, students worked with the medium of comics (graphic novel), picturebooks and film; therefore, I have incorporated examples of studies conducted using these types of text throughout the literature review. The review is organized into two chapters: in Chapter 2 I offer definitions of the various theories and literacy concepts that framed my unit and outline their implications to education, and in Chapter 3 I provide an overview of the research which has used the above media in the English classroom.

#### **Sociocultural Theory**

Sociocultural theory originates in the work of Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist who focused on early child development. Vygotsky believed that social interaction, and speech in particular, is key to cognitive development and that "meaning [is] negotiated at the intersection of individuals, culture, and activity" (Englert, Mariage, & Dunsmore, 2006, p. 208). Vygotsky's theories on human development have had and continue to have a large impact on learning and education. Much education research (Englert et al., 2006; Eun, 2010; Lyle, 2008; Rojas-Drummond, Albarran & Littleton, 2008; Skinner, 2007; Smagorinsky, 2007) supports Vygotsky's views on the positive impact of speech and co-operative learning on intellectual and cognitive development. Providing students with a safe learning environment where they can freely articulate their thinking and build upon their ideas, allows for new ways of understanding

and thinking about the world, themselves, and the curriculum. According to Smagorinsky (2007), Vygotsky's view on the developmental role of speech also translates to the process of writing where a student can work through their ideas on paper (p. 65)

Vygotsky's theory supports the classroom pedagogy of dialogic teaching. According to Lyle (2008), dialogic teaching promotes inclusion, encourages a community of learners, and promotes critical literacy skills where students learn how to ask questions and defend their point of view. According to Alexander (2001 as cited in Lyle, 2008), when teachers and students work collaboratively, a deep understanding occurs from "testing evidence, analyzing ideas and exploring values" (p. 230). The goal is for this critical dialogue to become internalized to serve the individual's way of thinking and interacting in the world.

Vygotsky also examined cognitive transformation, when an individual actively and consciously internalizes the signs learned from the mentor and becomes able to self-regulate his or her own learning. The place of this cognitive transformation occurs in what Vygotsky terms, the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) (1978). This zone exists between the student's learned ability and his/her learning potential achieved through collaboration with a mentor. Ideally, learners should function within this zone where they are challenged to learn just above their already acquired abilities (Berk & Winsler, 1995, p. 26). One way to achieve this collaborative learning is by scaffolding the student's learning through various problem-solving activities (Berk & Winsler, 1995).

Smagorinsky (2013) and Eun (2010) note that there is a third voice, the "larger social, cultural, historical, and institutional forces," that affect the goals and learning outcomes of the ZPD participants (p. 415), such as an individual's prior knowledge and experience, the extent of understanding between the participants regarding the use of cultural tools needed, and the

cultural expectations within the framework of the school. Smagorinsky (2013) further argues that educators need to be aware of ingrained cultural biases within the school system (i.e., white, middle-class) and that individual student cultural backgrounds need to be acknowledged and respected for the ZPD process to work effectively (p. 199). For example, if a student struggles in class to process material, the teacher should explore if the student's cultural background may be influencing her/his meaning making within the school rather than assume a lack of intelligence or effort.

Vygotsky strongly believed that an individual's sociocultural background affects his or her perception and interpretation of the world. Smagorinsky (2013) states that "people's thinking shapes their physical and symbolic worlds, and their engagement with those worlds in turn shapes how they (and others) think" (p. 62); thus, individuals construct their reality based on their physical and cultural environment. Eun (2010) described how studies by Moll and his colleagues (Moll, Amanti, Neff, & Gonzalez, 1992; Moll & Greenberg, 1990) concluded that a student's background knowledge (from home, community) enhanced learning in school when educators bridged the learning between home and school.

In the next section I discuss Rosenblatt's theory of how people transact with texts as they read. Similar to Vygotsky, Rosenblatt's theoretical ideas include attention to the social construction of language and knowledge.

### **Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory of Reading**

Louise Rosenblatt was an American educator and researcher interested in the reading and processing of literature. She was heavily influenced by John Dewey's pragmatic philosophy regarding the transactional relationship between subject and object (Connell, 2008). *Transaction* describes the reciprocal relationship where "each element conditions and is conditioned by the

other in a mutually constituted situation” (Rosenblatt, 1999, p. 1058). Rosenblatt was also inspired by the linguistic theory of Peirce and his triadic model. Peirce viewed language as a series of signs that hold meaning only when a reader brings context and interpretation to them, making a symbol (Rosenblatt, 1994). Thus, people make meaning from literature through transacting with text and their social environment. Though the fundamentals of Rosenblatt’s reader-response theory are rooted in Dewey, her work is considered revolutionary in the world of literary theory and education. According to Connell (2008), Rosenblatt’s theory was a critical response to the New Criticism of literary studies in the 1920s. Rosenblatt challenged the conventional understanding that literary experience was both objective and scientific: the reader passively reads a text that holds a specific, pre-defined, and intended meaning of the author. Rather, Rosenblatt viewed the reader as an active participant involved in a reciprocal experience with the text.

As communicated in the Sociocultural Theory section, meaning is socially constructed; writing and reading are social because text meaning is constantly being negotiated between readers and writers. Rosenblatt’s (1994) transactional theory explicates how readers make meaning from text. The theory postulates that an experience occurs when a reader transacts with, and makes meaning from, a text. Reading is a process that continues long after the initial reading of a text has occurred; meaning resonates with the reader and becomes a part of their “personal linguistic-experiential reservoir” which influences further meaning-making (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1061). Readers transact with a text to create new meaning, comprised of the reader’s personal or “private” interpretation of the signs, application of past knowledge (public and private connotations), “public” or sociocultural context of the signs, and the writer’s intention (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1061). Thus, each reader creates their own unique meaning from the text,

dependent upon the predominant “stance” taken (the extent of public and private knowledge they use during their interaction with the text). Rosenblatt (1994) identified two types of predominant stances a reader can take: efferent (reading for particular pieces of information) and aesthetic (reacting to the emotions, ideas, and scenes, evoked from reading). These stances exist on a continuum and readers can fluctuate from one stance to another while engaging with a text. Although readers can adopt both stances while reading, one stance is typically dominant (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1067).

Incorporating Rosenblatt’s theory into classroom pedagogy gives credence to a student’s voice and experience. Students are often asked to provide the right or intended answer from a text rather than be encouraged to explore their aesthetic responses to a text. By valuing both efferent and aesthetic stances in the classroom, students can feel their personal experiences are valued and teachers can gain a better understanding of how students construct meaning from a text. Similarly, when students and teachers share their personal responses to texts, a collaborative environment is created enabling new meanings to develop. The concept of texts not having a fixed meaning is further explored in Kristeva’s idea of intertextuality.

### **Intertextuality**

Julia Kristeva, a literary theorist, introduced the term *intertextuality* to acknowledge the social connection that exists when reading a text, whether between author and reader or between text and another text (Chandler, 2007, p. 197; Pantaleo, 2012b). Kristeva suggested we should look beyond the structure of the text, and consider how the text came into being (Chandler, 2007); thus allowing for a deeper understanding of the text itself. Roland Barthes (1974 as cited in Chandler, 2007) questioned the notion of an original author, claiming that all writing is unoriginal as various texts “blend and clash” with one another to create new texts. Texts, such as

advertisements, draw upon multiple social and textual codes which provide the reader with context; thus manipulating a variety of interpretations (Chandler, 2007). Developing an understanding of intertextuality reinforces, for students, that reality is constructed; thus encouraging them to become active readers of mainstream media.

### **Post-structuralist Feminist Theory**

Another theory that encourages students to become active readers of mediated culture is feminist theory. Under the umbrella of critical media literacy, which is discussed below, feminist theory exposes the patriarchal agendas that dominate our culture and shape gender identity construction. Post-structuralist feminist theory suggests that gender is continuously constructed in our culture and that meaning is derived through language and discourse (written, gestural and spoken communication) (Jones, 2010). Much of the discourse embedded in popular media texts (visual and print-based) frame gender roles, limiting how females and males are represented within popular culture. For instance, in most comic books, male superheroes are drawn disproportionately with exaggerated muscle mass (signifying strength) and female superheroes are hyper-sexualized (Labre & Duke, 2004; Sneddon, 2011). In texts such as many comic books or video games, girls and boys are presented either with an idealized identity that they can never achieve, such as a muscle-bound hero with supernatural abilities or one that they cannot live down, such as the female victim in need of rescue. Male and female readers are positioned by these texts to both objectify and be objectified. It is important to provide youth with effective strategies for engaging in, and questioning, popular culture media to prevent manipulation by these damaging gender stereotypes. Teaching students to read texts through a variety of lenses, such as feminist theory, promotes engaged and purposeful reading; thereby increasing student awareness of the popular media within which they both shape, and are shaped. Approaching texts

(both reading and writing) through a critical lens also reminds students that all communication is constructed and can therefore be deconstructed.

### **Semiotic Theory**

The understanding that communication is constructed is further evident through the study of semiotics. Semiotics is the study of signs or of “anything that stands for something else,” such as words, images, sounds, gestures or objects (Chandler, 2007, p. 2). Semiotic theory is mostly derived from the work of the linguist, Ferdinand de Saussure and philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. A sign has two elements: the signifier (the form or object) and the signified (the meaning or reader’s interpretation of the sign). The reader makes meaning by organizing signs into a cultural context or framework (codes). A sign must function within a code that is understood or recognized by the reader in order to hold any meaning. Kress and van Leeuwen (1996) argue that “signs are never arbitrary” nor do they exist in isolation (p. 7). Signs hold meaning only when interpreted in conjunction with other signs or text. Sign-makers actively choose the forms and media to best express their meaning, and readers make judgments about and interpret the importance of signs based on their personal experience or knowledge of the world.

It is important to note the different view of semiotics within a multimodal context compared to Saussure’s notion of semiotics. “Traditional semiotics sees language and other semiotic systems as codes” that once used cannot be altered (Jewitt, 2009, p. 23), whereas from a social semiotic perspective, signs are considered malleable and are used to make meaning in a particular moment in a particular context. Signs are not fixed: meaning is shaped within a particular social context and “in response to the communicative needs of communities, institutions and societies” (Jewitt, 2009, p. 22).

Many social semioticians (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996; New London Group, 1996) use Michael Halliday's work on language to organize and talk about visual semiotics. His method of organizing grammars of language can be applied to any form or function of design (New London Group, 1996, p. 75). However, Bazalgette and Buckingham (2012) remind us that communication is "socially motivated and situated, not merely the manifestation of an abstract system or grammar" (p. 4); therefore, for meaning to be properly communicated, one has to be aware of the reader's semiotic domain. James Paul Gee (2003) defines semiotic domain as the intimate understanding of the literacy and rules within a particular social practice, such as basketball or playing videogames. In order for a member of a Discourse or semiotic domain to make meaning within a situated practice, he/she has to have an understanding of the signs and symbols understood in that domain and how multiple uses of these convey different meanings (Knobel & Lanksheer, 2008). For example, fans of a TV show or comic book attending a convention will have their own language of inside jokes, quotations, or images that would be understood only amongst people familiar with the text. Literacy is not simply the ability to encode language of text but also the ability to read the social context surrounding the text.

According to Chandler (n.d.), "we learn to read the world in terms of the codes and conventions which are dominant within the specific socio-cultural contexts and roles within which we are socialized" (p. 22). Repeated exposure to these dominant signs over time can lead the viewer to interpret visual language as natural rather than constructed (Chandler, 2007). An example is people passively reading the media without questioning the construction of manipulated signs. In learning these social codes, people adopt certain assumptions or ideologies about the world around them. Explicitly teaching semiotic analysis in the classroom can help to uncover these "hidden assumptions about race, gender, and other cultural differences" (Stuckey



& Kring, 2007, p. 27) that exist in media, literature or within the students. In the next section, I discuss multimodality and the importance of using and designing multimodal texts in the classroom.

### **Multimodality**

Multimodality is the process of using multiple modes to communicate and make meaning. Kress (2009) defines a mode as “a socially shaped and culturally given resource for making meaning” (p. 54) such as gesture, text, language, sound or image. Each mode has inherent qualities or “affordances” that are culturally defined and accepted (Albers & Harste, 2007, p. 12) and each has “its own distinctive features or semiotic resources that can be called upon in any combination to make meaning” (Wyatt-Smith & Kimber, 2009, p. 72). As a result, the type of mode and the interactions between modes create specific meanings both for the writer and for the reader. Hull and Nelson (2005) argue that multimodality is not just a variety of modes that work together in complement, nor is it a method of communicating the same message just in varying modes. Instead, they note how multimodal design offers a unique message to the reader that would not otherwise have been communicated via individual modes (p. 251).

“Drawing on their knowledge of the world and of the medium” readers judge texts which provide cues as to how reliable or plausible they are in their representation of reality (Chandler, 2007, p. 65). Different genres or mediums provide an “aesthetic code” that “comes to be accepted as a reflection of reality” (Chandler, 2007, p. 68). Often a text’s believability is, in part, due to the chosen modes or medium (Graham & Benson, 2010). For example, the validity of photography or film is often questioned less than print text because filming techniques (editing, special effects) become naturalized to the reader and appear to represent truth (i.e., seeing is believing).

The incorporation of multimodality in the English curriculum supports the practice of multiliteracies. Focusing on one mode of literacy, such as print text, in the classroom is no longer appropriate for the complete development of students. Jewitt (2008) warns educators that use of multiple modes in the classroom offers both possibilities and constraints for students' learning, and cautions against a potential for "breakdown" of understanding when students are asked to interpret concepts from a variety of resources (p. 258). Students use their pre-existing knowledge when approaching a new concept, so if students (or teachers) privilege one mode over another, it may affect their ability to make sense of information presented in a different mode or context. As well, modes communicate knowledge in particular ways and make different demands on various types of learners, offering different potentials for learning (Jewitt, 2009). For example, a concept learned through print text will be interpreted differently through a visual medium, such as film. Similarly, some learners may gain more understanding from reading or representing through images, whereas other learners may have an easier time using the mode of sound to obtain knowledge or understanding.

Educators should be cognizant of the learning potential of each mode used within the classroom as multiple modes provide students with multiple opportunities for success, maximizing the likelihood of curriculum learning outcomes. One way for students to develop an understanding of multimodality is through designing their own multimodal texts. When students have to actively negotiate between modes and use of semiotic resources, their learning and understanding becomes both authentic and ingrained.

### **Design.**

The New London Group (1996) addressed the pedagogy of design in their manifesto on multiliteracies. They suggested all texts should be produced and consumed using three elements:

*Available Design, Designing, and the Redesigned.* Available Design is essentially the “grammars” of social semiotic systems or the relationship between modes. Designing is the process of making meaning using various modes, involving “re-presentation and recontextualization” and intertextuality (New London Group, 1996, p. 75). Design is *how* people make use of their available resources to create their intended texts or representation (Albers & Harste, 2007) and how they recognize acceptable content in a particular “semiotic domain” (Gee, 2003, p. 30). Redesigned is the transformation of meaning: a process where the “meaning-makers remake themselves” while transforming available designs (New London Group, 1996, p. 76).

A variety of design practices, such as remix, are available to choose from when producing a text, especially with increasing access to technology. Remix is a popular design practice where the designer takes “cultural artifacts and combine[s] and manipulate[s] them into new kinds of creative blends” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008, p. 22). Many students outside of school use various programs and technological tools to manipulate, create and transform cultural images and texts to their own ends; “remix is how they share meaning and motivate others to action” (Jenkins, 2014, p. 36). It is often used to subvert mainstream media, culture or corporate messages. Cultural memes are an example of remix which dominate social media pages such as Facebook or YouTube (i.e., the ‘pepper-spray cop’ meme which exploded in the internet in 2011 when a police officer pepper-sprayed some student activists at the University of California, Davis).

Tension can exist within a traditional classroom setting where teachers ask for original work yet remix blurs the line between original and plagiarism. Education researchers (Gainer & Lapp, 2010; Hagood, Alvermann & Heron-Hruby, 2010; Knobel & Lankshear, 2008) encourage

educators to value remix in the classroom and embrace students' attempt to create something new out of pre-existing ideas.

Teaching design in the classroom requires the explicit teaching of a metalanguage or grammar of design elements. Although, as Bazalgette and Buckingham (2012) indicate, the grammar cannot be uniformly applied to all multimodal texts, it gives teachers and students a way to navigate through multimodal texts. Bazalgette and Buckingham (2012) also argue that when analyzing a text one has to look beyond just the grammar of design, and take context into account (e.g., production, intended audience) (p. 5). As is discussed in Chapter 3, much research has explored the benefits of explicitly teaching a metalanguage of grammar and elements of design. Kress and van Leeuwen's *Grammar of Visual Design* (1996) offers a formal approach to multimodal analysis with multiple suggestions on how to read visual design. A metalanguage of grammar can provide a common understanding between the producer and the reader. "Students' understanding of design will augment their understanding of the social construction and purpose of a multimodal text" (Walsh, 2008, p. 107). A deeper understanding of conventions is exhibited when learners become designers and producers; a comic book cannot be successfully produced or subverted unless the artist understands the social practice and conventions of the medium and knows how to position the various elements in relation to one another and to the viewer (Albers & Haste, 2007; Gee, 2003). Having students design text (choose the medium, the modes, the semiotic resources, and the message that they want to communicate) encourages imagination and problem solving (Albers & Harste, 2007).

In the next section, I explain and discuss the importance of teaching multiple literacies in the English classroom alongside those of reading (decoding text) and writing.

## Multiliteracies

Literacy is “no longer viewed as merely a set of skills one must master, but as a set of practices, beliefs, and values as well as a way of being in the world” (Mulcahy, 2008, p. 15). In 1994, 10 educators and researchers from the Western world, known as the New London Group, met in New London, New Hampshire, USA, to discuss the direction and purpose of education and literacy pedagogy. Aware of how the world was changing, including the fact that society was becoming increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse, they saw the need for education to change accordingly. As a group, they acknowledged that literacy learning should allow for universal access to the language of work, power and community and should teach the critical skills necessary for students to design their “social futures” and to achieve employment (New London Group, 1996, p. 60).

The term ‘multiliteracies’ was coined by the New London Group in 1996 to reflect the multiple literacies or modes of representation that exist beyond language. A multiliteracies pedagogy consists of four related components: *situated practice* (meaning making in real-world contexts by building on student knowledge and experiences), *overt instruction* (encourages students to learn and use a metalanguage of design), *critical framing* (consideration of the social context and purpose or intention of design), and *transformed practice* (transformation of existing meanings to make new meanings) (New London Group, 1996, p. 88). The New London Group (1996) also identified various modes of meaning: linguistic, visual, audio, gestural, spatial, and multimodal, claiming that multimodal is the most important as it incorporates a combination of the others (p. 80). Many theorists (Bazalgette & Buckingham, 2012; New London Group, 1996; Pantaleo, 2012b, 2012c) argue that all texts are multimodal, even print texts, as writers have to make modal design choices when producing print text such as font or page layout.

Unfortunately, print literacy is still privileged in mainstream literacy education. In order for multiliteracies to be implemented in classrooms on a regular basis, educators' thinking needs to change: "new" literacy needs to be viewed as a right instead of a privilege (Mills, 2009) and treated as core literacy instead of just a "hook" (Bailey, 2009). Mills (2009) urges that in order for multiliteracies pedagogy to be taken up successfully, power politics in the classroom need to be addressed. Mills found, through her study of issues of power within a culturally diverse Australian Grade 6 class, that due to power relations and classroom discourse, students did not have equal access to multiliteracies. For example, a group of non-Anglo boys were being disruptive in class and were consequently prohibited from completing their multimodal movie projects; instead they were assigned a monomodal, handwritten assignment. In this case, multimodal texts were seen as a privileged form of literacy rather than an educational right.

Below, I discuss the various types of literacies that informed my learning goals within my fairytale unit described in Chapter 4: visual literacy and critical literacy.

### **Visual Literacy**

Visual literacy was one of the predominant literacies I focused on throughout the fairytale unit. A pedagogy of multiliteracies requires teachers to look beyond print text to the visual or in some cases to a combination of the two. For a person to be visually literate implies that one should be able to create and interpret or decode meaning from visual images. Metros (2008) defines visual literacy as "the ability to be an informed critic of visual information, able to ethically judge accuracy, validity, and worth" (p. 103). Visual comprehension and representation are necessary skills that should be taught in the cross-curricular classroom alongside writing and reading. Visuals are not just accompaniment to written text, but can instead introduce concepts independently (Jewitt, 2008). Visuals are integral to learning in primary and elementary school

classrooms yet, for the most part, the written word is still valued over the visual in secondary level classes (other than art courses).

Fostering visual literacy in the English classroom can provide access to deeper engagement and success for students who have felt marginalized in traditional classrooms, enable a community where students can learn about themselves, and open up new ways for students to explore and question the mediated world in which they live. Indeed, Albers and Harste (2007) promote the role of visual arts or “aesthetic education” in learning because it can change one’s perspective of the world. According to Maxine Greene (1979 as cited in Albers & Harste, 2007) an “aesthetic education” encourages students to “develop an awareness of detail and of composition” and to look at their world in a new way, becoming more appreciative and reflective of both themselves and of their environment (p. 11). Asking students to interpret visual images allows for a wide set of interpretations and multiple readings. Images may prompt readers to question their significance in relation to other images or to question the artist’s intentions behind the image. Albers and Harste (2007) argue that art encourages students to develop an “aesthetic sense” which transcends beyond the artwork itself (p. 11). By exploring a subject/theme through various modes, such as visuals, students can develop a deeper and more complex understanding than relying solely on print text (Albers, 2006; Tan, n.d.).

Many education researchers (Ajayi, 2009; Bustle, 2004; Chung & Kirby, 2009; George, 2002; Metros, 2008) recognize the discrepancy between the literacies needed to navigate students’ mass media and consumer driven worlds and the curricular standards and teaching practices of the educational system. George (2002) outlines the history of visual representation in the teaching of writing. She states that words have always been considered “high culture” and that visuals have been associated with “low culture” (George, 2002, p. 14). With the advancements in

technology and its developed place in the classroom, this high culture/low-culture divide is blurring (Bustle, 2004, p. 416). Our mediated culture is becoming increasingly dependent upon the visual for its instantaneous communicability and universal applicability (Metros, 2008). Daily students are using and composing multimodal texts, making constant connection between the visual and the written word.

Using and producing multimodal texts in the classroom, therefore, provides a more egalitarian playing field for students. With varying degrees of literacy skill sets and varying types of learners, opening up the curriculum to include a variety of texts and literacies will afford students with greater opportunities for expression, representation and understanding. For example, using images and visual texts in the classroom is helpful for students whose first language is not English. Ajayi (2009) writes, “multimodal pedagogy goes beyond language to promote alternative ways of reading, interpreting, and text composing” (p. 587). The use of multiple modes enables students to read text, such as graphic novels, in a multitude of ways (layout, text, visual signs, design) rather than solely relying on written language. Similarly, relieving students of the pressure of grammar and linear composition can free them to explore different sign systems (Choo, 2010). Ultimately, this exploration can lead to a much richer learning experience, unlimited by a sole adherence to written language.

Although incorporating visual representation in the curriculum is clearly beneficial, it does not come without challenges. Because of the historical bias between print text as high culture and visual as low culture, both students and parents sometimes perceive the use of visuals in a non-art classroom as play or escape (Begoray, 2001). Similarly, this cultural bias causes some teachers to shy away from using the visual arts in the classroom because it takes precious time away from the core literacies of reading and writing (Barton, 2014; Seglam & Witte, 2009). This



devaluing of the visual is evident in the research by Dowdy and Campbell (2008) with student teachers. Prior to working with visual literacy, many student teachers rejected the use of visual art in their classroom, claiming that they “thought it was more of a way to keep students busy rather than to educate them” (Dowdy & Campbell, 2008, p. 5). Their opinions were changed by the end of their practicums when they saw how visual literacy helped secondary school students understand and connect with the material rather than just learn content. Viewing traditional literacies (written text) as more important than other literacies denies students access to critical learning tools that help make meaning of their surrounding world. Students need to be taught the skills with which to analyze or read visual images and the non-verbal vocabulary with which to communicate their ideas (Metros, 2008).

### **Critical Literacy**

In addition to visual literacy, students need to learn how to critically read a text. Critical literacy “is a way of viewing and interacting with the world” (Mulcahy, 2008, p. 16). It is an approach which involves examining texts for social constructs and assumptions, hidden agendas, power structures and social injustices. When readers view texts through a critical lens, they look at both the content and the construction of the text. Being critically literate means to question power relationships within texts and to examine how readers are positioned to perpetuate dominant ideologies. The foundation of critical pedagogy is inspired by the work of Paolo Freire, a Brazilian educator who encouraged his students to “read their world” (1970 as cited in Wallowitz, 2008, p. 3). Freire believed the education system must do away with the “banking method” of teaching where teachers tell students the information they want them to know, without expecting any critical thinking from the student (Wallowitz, 2008, p. 3). Instead, Freire

argued students were autonomous beings who should be encouraged to question and to change their constructed world.

According to the New London Group (1996), “students need to develop the capacity to speak up, to negotiate, and to be able to engage critically” within their world (both in and out of school) (p. 67). Educators need to teach students how to be critical thinkers; however, Mulcahy (2008) warns educators not to confuse critical literacy with critical *thinking*. Both should be taught, but where critical *thinking* encourages student metacognition, critical *literacy* is transformative: it encourages students to focus on sociopolitical issues and to take action against the status quo to promote social justice (Mulcahy, 2008). Where critical thinking encourages students to question the self, critical literacy encourages students to look at their environment and the broader issues surrounding them. By critically examining and producing texts that reflect both individual and societal issues, students can become critical readers of their society with the hopes of making a difference in the world. Rosenblatt’s transactional theory of reading explicates the inter-relationship between a commercial text, such as an advertisement, and the reader: “the advertiser brings a set of values, experiences, and knowledge” and the reader’s interpretation of the text is imbued with “another set of values, experiences, and knowledge” (Begoray, Wharf Higgins, Harrison & Collins-Emery, 2013, p. 123).

Kress (2005) suggests that literate individuals need to assume both a rhetorical stance (critical analysis of text, regarding intended audience and purpose) and a semiotic stance (the meaning of the content within the text) when producing and consuming texts. He defines the *rhetor* as “somebody who has a full understanding of the social [or political] situation in which she or he acts,” and the *social semiotic designer* as somebody who “has a full understanding of the resources which are available and which are relevant and could be used in which the designing is

being done” (2005 as cited in Bearne, 2005, p. 296). He argues that designers of text need to consider both positions when creating or navigating through text.

### **Media literacy.**

Under the umbrella of critical literacy, media literacy is the ability to read and interpret the constructs and design of mediated visual and digital texts. The term ‘media’ refers to the mediums of communication such as Internet, film or print and their texts such as web sites, movies and billboards (Stack & Kelly, 2006). With increase in technology, much of this “new” literacy is devoted to knowing how to communicate in digital modes. Today’s youth are involved in a participatory culture: “a culture that supports widespread participation in the production and distribution of media” (Jenkins, Clinton, Purushotma, Robison & Weigel, 2009, p. 6). New media literacies are often seen as replacing traditional literacies such as reading and writing. Jenkins et al. (2009) strongly disagree with this notion (as do I); they believe that digital technology works hand-in-hand with traditional literacies. “Youth must expand their required competencies, not push aside old skills to make room for the new” (Jenkins et al., 2009, p. 19). Digital technological modes often support improvement of reading and writing, such as providing a wider authentic audience for honing literacy skills (e.g., blogs, online journals, fan pages). Conversely, in order to make the most of digital technologies, one needs strong fundamental literacy skills.

Most contemporary students are bombarded daily with media that tells them what to believe; youth need to be shown how to navigate through and critically read such texts. Many educational researchers (e.g., Alvermann & Heron, 2001; Begoray et al., 2013; Stack & Kelly, 2006) emphasize the importance of youth developing critical awareness of media mass marketing strategies. Adolescents, in particular, are targeted to purchase the latest and greatest of media

products such as the most recent iPhone apps or video games. The media creates a reality, convincing youth they are incomplete without these new products, and youth should be given the opportunity to respond in an informed manner to this media manipulation. The MacArthur Foundation Report suggests that, “we are moving away from a world in which some produce and many consume media, toward one in which everyone has a more active stake in the culture that is produced” (Jenkins et al., 2009, p. 10). Adolescents need opportunities in the classroom to learn design construction, practice literacy skills and become active producers. The Center for Media Literacy (n.d) or Canadian MediaSmarts (n.d.) are educational resources devoted to developing critical literacy and media production skills for youth.

These media literacy skills can be easily incorporated in the classroom, using various popular culture texts. According to Jewitt (2008), research on multiple literacy pedagogy encourages teachers to build curriculum around student “knowledge, experiences and interests,” such as “integrating students’ knowledge of narrative characterization and structure developed from visual modes,” such as film, graphic novels and picturebooks (p. 254). In the past, popular culture texts were not deemed suitable classroom learning tools, as they were “thought to be uniform and predictable; text meaning was uncomplicated and self-evident” (Hagood, 2008, p. 534). Fortunately, this opinion is changing, and many educators use popular culture texts, such as film and graphic novels as a way to develop critical media literacy skills in the classroom and to build the bridge between students’ out-of-school literacies and in-school literacies.

Teachers need to be cognizant of how they incorporate popular culture texts in the classroom so they connect rather than disconnect students to the curriculum. Jewitt (2008) warns that classroom material is subject to power and control of the teacher, where they control “what is allowed to count, to whom, and for what purpose” (p. 253). There is also the risk of tainting

students' joy of out-of-school literacy by making it a mandatory part of the curriculum. With mindful pedagogy, educators can help students become conscientious consumers and producers of digital media.

## **Conclusion**

My pedagogy was, and is, informed by Vygotsky's ideas regarding the importance of social interaction and collaborative learning, Rosenblatt's ideas regarding the reciprocally communicative nature of reading, feminist theory and social semiotic theory. The tenets of all of the above theories include recognition of how communication and reality are socially constructed, and of how no text is imbued with fixed meaning but offers multiple meanings dependent on context and reader experience. Because learning and cognitive development are dependent on social interaction, I tried to create a collaborative community in my Grade 11 classroom prior to and throughout the fairytale unit. As is described in Chapter 4, students engaged in scaffolded, collaborative activities where they shared experiences and responses to various texts. One of the goals of the unit was for students and myself to learn from one another as we studied the fairytale genre and grammar of visual art and design.

The framework of the unit followed the New London Group's multiliteracies pedagogy involving situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing, and transformed practice. The cumulative multimodal project of the unit incorporated the New London Group's Design pedagogy (available design, designing and redesign) where students negotiated between and made use of various modes and semiotic resources.

Throughout the unit, as is described in Chapter 4, the students learned how to critically read and think about their world; thereby promoting social justice. To achieve this literacy practice, students engaged in multiple literacies (visual, critical, media) throughout the unit. Students were

also encouraged to adopt various lenses when reading, using such analytical frameworks as feminist theory and semiotic analysis. As a class, we exposed dominant ideologies and societal (and personal) assumptions regarding sex, gender, class and race.

In Chapter 3 I review relevant literature regarding the use of, designing of, and assessment of multimodal texts; the teaching with multiliteracies (i.e., visual and critical media); and the use of visual art in the English classroom.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Review of the Literature**

In Chapter 2 I defined the theories, literacies and theoretical concepts that framed my fairytale unit. In this chapter I review literature on student reading of multimodal texts, engaging with critical literacy, designing of multimodal texts, and the incorporation of art in the English classroom. I then discuss the complexity of and recommendations for the assessment of multimodal texts. It is important to note that, from my experience in reviewing the literature, much of the research discussion on use of multimodal texts in the English classroom has focused on either elementary to middle school age or pre-service education at the university level. I included these studies in my review because the findings pedagogically support my unit, regardless of the age of the participants. Most of the secondary level case studies have focused on technology-based or digital texts, which is not the focus of my unit. Similarly, although I tried to use Canadian studies, much of the literature is based on American studies.

### **Multiple Literacies and Multiple Texts: Reading Multimodal Texts in the Classroom**

Because most young people in the Western world are surrounded with non-linear, multimedia texts, it is often assumed by both teachers and literacy researchers (Groenke & Youngquist, 2011; Skinner, 2007) that they have “built-in” multimodal schema with which to navigate their way through multimedia texts, such as film, websites and graphic novels. Regardless of the type of text, students need to learn how to read each mode and how to choose which piece of information to focus on. As was discussed in Chapter 2, a competent reader must navigate through multiple sign systems and use various strategies to comprehend the material (Serafini, 2011, p. 343). This navigation is even more challenging with digital multimodal texts because

students have more choice in how to approach their reading as there are “different points of entry” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 259).

Although an increase of technology widens the scope of multimodal texts used in the classroom, Albers (2006) reminds new English teachers not to lose sight of the literature through the use of technology. In a pre-service curriculum development course taught by Albers (2006), she noted how many students became so excited about using multimodal texts in the classroom that the link to the literature and curriculum became disjointed or lost. Similarly, Bazalgette and Buckingham (2012) and Bailey (2009) express concern that some teachers’ sole use of multimodality is a tool to spice up their lesson plans rather than holding any intrinsic value of its own. Mills (2010) reminds educators “adolescents’ engagement in multimodal textual practices is not about fitting [curriculum] to the interests of youth” (p. 36). In other words it is not just about making canon texts, such as Shakespeare, appealing or relevant. Although use of multimodal texts is bound to pique student interest, the goal is to teach students how to create, interpret and read multimodal texts within and outside of the classroom and to make students more productive participants of society.

The following two case studies show the need for fostering a skill set for reading multimodal texts: Groenke and Youngquist (2011) demonstrated that adolescent students need to be taught how to navigate through these various sign systems within non-linear texts, and Graham and Benson (2010) argued that students also need to examine *why* the use of sign systems even matters. Groenke and Youngquist (teacher and researcher) conducted a collaborative classroom-based inquiry of a Grade 9 class of 25 students during their reading of the postmodern novel, *Monster* (1999), by Walter Dean Myers. This novel includes multimodalities, such as journal entries, a screenplay and photographs, and relies on non-linear narrative devices, such as



flashback. Steve, the novel's protagonist, struggles to define his identity, which, by the end of the novel, is left fragmented and his future, ambiguous. With a postmodern novel, the reader is asked to become a co-author by filling in gaps and pulling together narrative strands that appear to be randomly placed. Data gathered by the researchers included transcripts of informal student discussions or "chats" about the novel (Groenke & Youngquist, 2011, p. 510). Although no explicit information was provided about the data analysis, it seemed that the data were analyzed qualitatively resulting in the identification of themes. For example, transcripts revealed that students found the ambiguous ending and disjointed narrative style difficult to accept and navigate, despite the researcher's initial assumptions that students would need little help working through the various texts. The feedback informed the teachers that they needed to provide more scaffolding to support student learning before reading the novel. Although students made intertextual connections between *Monster* and previously read texts, they found the postmodern layout and structure (use of flashback, use of multiple modes, ambiguous ending) of the text to be confusing and frustrating. According to Groenke and Youngquist (2011), students' difficulty in processing flashback could be the result of adolescent underdeveloped processing skills (p. 509). Although my teaching experiences have revealed that adolescents most competently understand and interpret flashback, this study reminds educators that students need literacy tools and explicit, framed instruction when working through multimodal, non-linear texts, including when transferring out-of-school literacies to in-school practices.

Graham and Benson (2010), teacher-researchers, worked with pre-service teachers in an underfunded rural Appalachian state university that encourages the incorporation of multimodality and "21<sup>st</sup> century" skills into the curriculum. Each research-educator piloted a multimodal project in a literacy methods course (one for elementary and one for secondary

English). The purpose of both projects was to get pre-service teachers acquainted with and comfortable using multimodal texts in their classrooms. The elementary teachers were required to analyze a television show focusing on the impact of different modes on the episode, while the secondary teachers were to create a Media Instruction Plan for their future classes. With the latter project, many pre-service teachers used nonprint texts such as websites and infomercials as a supplement to print text in their unit plans. Feedback responses showed that “few students reflected on the possibility that the type of thinking fostered in print-based modes might differ from the thinking fostered in nonprint-based modes” (Graham & Benson, 2010, p. 97). Graham and Benson emphasized the value of multiliteracies-based instruction as it provides students with access to a multitude of meanings and ways of thinking, dependent on the modes used. Their findings revealed that although students were capable of identifying and working within various modes, they were not able to analyze the importance of each mode within the text; thus, emphasizing the need for more explicit teaching of multimodal theory and analysis in undergraduate education classes. Ideally once pre-service educators learn the value of and the tools or resources for working with multimodal texts, they will carry this literacy learning forward into the school system.

In addition to explicit teaching, students need ample time and space to navigate through and aesthetically respond to multimodal texts. As mentioned in Chapter 2, Rosenblatt (1994) viewed the reader as an active participant involved in a reciprocal experience with the text. A reader can adopt two potential stances, efferent or aesthetic, and because the stances exist on a continuum, a reader can adopt both stances while reading, although one stance is typically dominant (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1067). Pantaleo’s (2012a, 2012b, 2013) extensive research on youth and their work with picturebooks and graphic novels demonstrated how readers adopted these two

stances while co-authoring with authors of texts. For example, one case study reported on Grade 7 students engaging in “deep reading and deep thinking” of the metaphorical images and literary elements embedded in Shaun Tan’s picturebook, *The Red Tree* (Tan, 2001) (Pantaleo, 2012a, p. 52). Although picturebooks are typically considered children’s literature, Tan (n.d.) believes they are for anyone “who likes asking questions and using their imagination, and is prepared to devote time and attention accordingly” (Tan, n.d., Picturebooks: Who are they for?, para. 20). Pantaleo (2012a) believes that picturebooks are ideal for teaching students about visual literacy and how to critically “analyze, construct and deconstruct” any text: skills that translate beyond the picturebook (p. 54) to students’ outside world.

Similarly, Connors (2013) conducted a case study on how six American Midwest high school students read graphic novels in an after-school reading group. According to Connors (2012) his study addressed a gap in the literature of empirical studies on how students interact with graphic novels to make meaning (p. 28). Students (ages 15-17) identified as proficient readers were recruited from English classes to participate in a graphic novel reading group. By inviting proficient readers as participants, Connors hoped to dispel the assumption that graphic novels might be used for only struggling readers. He also acknowledged how the limitations of his sample population (white, middle-class, proficient readers) significantly limited the findings.

Students met bi-weekly over a 17-week period to read, discuss and write journals about previously chosen (by the teacher) graphic novels. Connors collected data about students’ reading of graphic novels through informal think-aloud exercises, interviews and journal responses. All students used perspective, facial expression, colour and layout as resources to make meaning of the characters and mood of the text. Through the reader responses to the novel, Rosenblatt’s ideas regarding “personal meanings that written language evokes” became clear,

especially through reader analysis of literary devices such as irony or symbolism (as cited in Connors, 2013, p. 43). The findings also support Hull and Nelson's (2005) position regarding the unique message multimodal texts offer through the use of various semiotic resources. For example, one student, Hal, made new meaning from the text by "shift[ing] between the text's visual and linguistic design" (Connors, 2013, p. 47). As Pantaleo's (2012a) students did in the above study, Hal filled in the gaps to make sense of the text. Overall, students had considerable knowledge of elements of design and semiotic resources coming into the study but they were unfamiliar with the process of critically analyzing such resources; thus implying the need for educators to provide the opportunity for interrogation and discussion of design elements (Connors, 2013). The need for critical reading of texts is further explored in the following section.

### **Reading the Word, Reading the World: Reading with a Critical Eye**

Just as Rosenblatt's transactional theory (1994) suggests people read from efferent and aesthetic stances, people can also approach the reading of text through a variety of lenses, such as critical or feminist. These various lens impact how a reader makes meaning. As explained in Chapter 2, critical literacy refers to how readers view and question both the content and construction of text. Huang (2011) argues that critical reading needs to be regarded by educators as an ideological practice. Her research showed that students automatically view reading as either a factual, intellectual activity for the classroom, or, as an emotional pastime for enjoyment, and that critical reading is something students seem to practice independent of their reading practices. Huang conducted a qualitative study of her English advanced high school course in Taiwan. The study was part of a teacher inquiry on critical literacy and reading practice. Throughout the course, students examined and discussed the construction of and ideas

represented in whole publications (course textbook and 10 magazines). They also questioned the focus of the texts, the intended audiences, and evident power relations. During the study, students were also asked to reflect on their understanding of their reading practices.

By the end of the course, the students were able to deconstruct texts and see texts as both “positioned” and “positioning” (Huang, 2011, p. 159). Unfortunately, Huang (2011) found out through student feedback that once the assignments were completed, students stopped reading critically in their everyday reading practices, arguing that it “complicated the previously simple act of reading” (p. 158). Her students seemed to feel that critical literacy had a time and a place, unlike reading for pleasure or for information. Huang (2011) recommended that educators strive for a balance between “reading with texts” and “reading against texts” when teaching reading so that both practices are seen as compatible (p. 160). Her concluding argument is indeed something for educators to consider: to be careful not to emphasize one form of literacy at the risk of marginalizing another.

Some researchers (e.g., Locke & Cleary, 2011; Pantaleo, 2012b) recommend an intertextual approach to critical literacy learning. According to Locke and Cleary (2011), “critical literacy concepts are best taught in a situation where students are exposed to a range of texts dealing with a similar subject or topic” (p. 136). Cleary conducted a case study of a year 13 English class in New Zealand which was part of a larger two-year multi-locale project framed in action research, ethnographic research and critical discourse analysis. The class was situated in a semi-rural school and consisted of a multicultural student body. Critical literacy, accessing students’ prior knowledge, and discussion were the pedagogical foci of the English course taught by Cleary. Baseline and intervention-related data included student and teacher reflections, questionnaires, interviews, student work and test results. These data were collaboratively analyzed by teacher-

researchers and university-based researchers. Throughout the course, Cleary used many types of texts, as she believed “individual texts lose their discreteness and become meaningful only in an infinitely complex network of intertextual relationships” (Locke & Cleary, 2011, p. 121).

Not unlike Huang’s (2011) study, Cleary’s goal was to show students that texts (and language) are constructed and that texts position readers to see a particular truth or reality. Using a critical lens, the class conducted an in-depth study on technology’s impact on prolonging life, reading both fictional and non-fictional texts. The students also studied the story of Rubin Carter (an African American/Canadian boxer who was accused of murder, and then released after 20 years in prison). The class assessed whether or not Carter was justly accused by examining the various texts. After listening to Bob Dylan’s (1976) song, *The Hurricane*, and watching the movie of the same title, the class unanimously believed in Rubin’s innocence, as both the language and the images led them to believe Carter was wrongly accused. Then, Cleary introduced her students to two websites that took a very different stance towards Carter’s supposed innocence. The class discussed “gaps, silences or elisions in the initial texts they encountered” (Locke & Cleary, 2011, p. 126). Students became somewhat disillusioned with their originally unquestioned belief in Dylan and his lyrics. In surprise, one student wrote: “Bob Dylan, he’s a...like...a legend...if he said [Carter] didn’t do it. I’d believe him” (Locke & Cleary, 2011, p. 126), after reading texts contesting Dylan’s version of the story.

Overall, Locke and Cleary (2011) found that examining multiple texts with various perspectives on the same topic proved most effective for deepening student understanding of textual representation. Students were better able to adopt a critical stance when they compared and contrasted texts in intertextual contexts. Cleary reported that her students especially enjoyed the texts with which they found a social or cultural connection, and observed how student

cultural background impacted their reading of the texts and level of engagement (students preferred non-fiction texts) (Locke & Cleary, 2011, p. 135). By accessing student prior knowledge and providing them with a range of texts, students felt they had valuable knowledge and opinions worth sharing. Data analysis revealed that by the end of the study, students had gained a stronger understanding of critical literacy but a post-study questionnaire revealed that not all fully understood a critical literary approach. They understood the analysis, but some had difficulty resisting the ingrained authority of texts.

Another case study highlighting the intertextual approach to critical literacy is Skinner's (2007) research on a Grade 7 after-school writing/popular culture club called *Teenage Addiction*. The club consisted of multicultural, American female adolescents from poor or working-class backgrounds. They met 2-3 times a week over a 10-week period. During the meetings students analyzed advertisements and held intertextual discussions on popular texts, such as fashion magazines, TV shows and movies. Ultimately, these media texts became mentor texts for the girls' fiction writing. For the advertisement analysis, Skinner posed a series of critical media literacy questions (adapted from Alvermann, Moon & Hagood, 1999) to help focus the students' thinking around media messages and their beliefs around these messages. Data were collected and analyzed using dialogic inquiry of student discussions, and media literacy activities such as ad analysis and group writing conferences. Skinner found the students were not initially able to analyze advertisements of unfamiliar products and that she needed to adopt Vygotsky's ideas of scaffolding students' learning and incorporating prior knowledge such as first analyzing familiar products in preparation for future analysis.

After students critiqued and made personal connections to the popular cultural texts, they wrote original work, thematically centering on these social issues. Skinner (2007) reported that

many of these student compositions challenged the status quo rather than reinforcing the stereotypical fairytale images of the Hollywood texts. For instance, Raquel, a 13-year-old girl, adopted the theme of high-school popularity hierarchy found in two popular films (*She's all that* (1999) and *Love don't cost a thing* (2003)): the unpopular, lower class protagonist broke the barriers of social class and became popular by the end of the film. Raquel questioned the reality of the happy ending, based on her own experiences with popularity, and in response “critically constructed the text of her short story to reflect the relationship between social class and popularity” as she knew it (Skinner, 2007, p. 36). Raquel demonstrated critical literacy learning through purposeful engagement with popular mediated texts and through reflecting upon her own personal experience.

As is evident by the above case studies, assessing students' prior knowledge is imperative when reading texts because readers come to a text with their own interpretation of signs and transact with both the sociocultural context of the signs and the writer's intentional meaning of the text (Rosenblatt, 1994). Student application of prior knowledge to an assignment can facilitate more purposeful engagement with the material. Ajayi (2009, 2012) has conducted several studies exploring how ESL learners use their sociocultural experiences to interpret or “read” popular culture film and books such as Disney films. Ajayi (2011) conducted a study with a Grade 3 California ESL/literacy class, focusing on how Hispanic pupils used their cultural backgrounds to interpret Disney's *Cinderella* (1950). Evidence from this study suggested that students' sociocultural backgrounds affected how they interpreted and critically responded to the Disney video. For example, one of the students, Rebecca, criticized Disney's portrayal of women as subservient, such as Cinderella needing a prince to rescue her from her low station in life. Rebecca's mother was the sole provider in her household, and because of her strong, independent



role model, Rebecca rejected the idea that the princess needed a man to rescue her.

“Sociocultural theory seeks to understand how culturally and historically situated meanings are constructed, reconstructed, and transformed through social mediation” (Englert, Mariage & Dunsmore, 2006, p. 208). Although the above study was conducted with Grade 3 students, I believe the evident message that students’ sociocultural backgrounds affect how they question and deconstruct the ideologies presented in films holds true for all students.

As shown in the above study, film is an excellent medium with which to question and deconstruct dominant ideologies and to help students become more literate within their social world. Stuckey (2007) created a graduate popular culture course designed to explore how social relations are portrayed in popular film. Stuckey and Kring, one of her students, wrote a chapter on their reflections of the course. She was interested in how “semiotics plays a role in the reinforcement of or the resistance to cultural stereotypes” (Stuckey & Kring, 2007, p. 27). Throughout the course, students analyzed the cinematic tools (lighting, camera angles), the acting, and narrative structures (setting, narrative, symbolism) to see how each of these elements reinforced the dominant culture in the film. The class discussed the film *Brokeback Mountain* (Schamus, Ossana, & Lee, 2005) and its portrayal of homosexuality. Once students began to notice the intentional symbolism behind the camera shots and setting, it opened the film to a wider variety of meaning. In looking beyond the film’s entertainment value the film acted as a starting point for student discussion on the privileges heterosexuals have in society (in students’ lives and in films). It is interesting to note that students did not comment as much on the heterosexual messages of sexuality in the movie (marriages of Ennis and Jack), perhaps because these were messages already ingrained in their dominant culture. Reflections of student discussions and written responses revealed that the course encouraged students to look beyond

the superficial plot narrative and to question the hidden agendas and the challenging or reinforcement of cultural binaries in the film.

### **Feminist Theory and Gender Construction**

Another critical lens to adopt when engaging with texts is feminist theory. As described in Chapter 2, feminist theory exposes the patriarchal agendas that dominate our culture and shape gender identity construction. Because media and text agendas are not always transparent, it is important that educators make room for discussion in their classrooms about gender identity and discourse embedded in various texts. Hartman (2006) observed one Grade 10 American Honours English class, and interviewed four female students about their ideas and interpretations of gender. She collected and qualitatively analyzed data from interviews and participant group discussions. The English class read novels by predominantly male authors with predominantly male protagonists, with the exception of Lee's (1960) *To Kill a Mockingbird*. Analysis of data revealed that despite this gender imbalance, the girls ultimately found the female characters to be the most interesting or the most important. Hartman (2006) also found that the girls held conflicting and "contradictory notions of gender" (p. 3). For example, the girls admired Scout from *To Kill a Mockingbird* because she was outspoken and assertive but they all thought it appropriate she change as she grew older because women "should do what they were told, keep their opinions to themselves" and make sacrifices for their families (Hartman, 2006, p. 5). The girls had different expectations of males and females but also of girls and women; these varied expectations became apparent in a discussion about Shakespeare's Portia from *A Merchant of Venice* (1992). The tomboy assertiveness that they so admired in Scout was interpreted as "arrogant" and "bossy" from Portia (Hartman, 2006, p. 7). Similarly, as Scout was admired for rejecting feminine attire and wearing overalls, the girls were disturbed by Portia's performance

in drag. Although the girls admired strong, independent characters, they appeared more comfortable with women as passive and agreeable to men (Hartman, 2006, p. 9). Hartman's research revealed that it is important to provide a space where students can critically discuss gender ideology in both texts and in students' lives, and where potential contradictions in beliefs can be analyzed and questioned.

Wallowitz (2004) designed such a space through a Women's Studies course for high school students to teach how "texts construct notions of gender and how to resist those messages" (p. 26). Throughout the unit, Wallowitz relied heavily on Martino and Mellor's (2000) book *Gendered Fictions* for questions and learning activities for the course. Students were asked to consider such questions as: How do literature and media influence ideas of masculinity and femininity? Does media perpetuate gender stereotypes or create them? Keeping with Freire's beliefs (as mentioned in Chapter 2) that students need to read their world, Wallowitz (2004) stressed the importance of analyzing a variety of texts, beyond the traditional, such as advertisements, television, music and film because it better equips students to avoid gender assumptions in their world and in themselves (p. 27). Throughout the unit students analyzed advertisements, literature and Disney's *Cinderella* (1950) to unearth their personal assumptions and bias about gender, race, power and class. Wallowitz gained insight into student understanding through observing classroom activities, reading personal narratives and text analysis. Findings revealed that toward the end of the course, students were able to successfully juxtapose their readings of canon literature against media representation of women and men. For their final project, the students had to show what they had learned by analyzing texts that were part of their world outside of school through a feminist lens. Students were excited to apply their critical literacy skills learned in class to their world outside of school. It became very clear that

students were learning how to “read their world” after taking this course: students shared anecdotes of gendered moments in their lives with the teacher (Wallowitz, 2004, p. 31).

Moffatt and Norton (2005) acknowledge that using a feminist framework to critique texts with students can be met with resistance because adolescents feel they can no longer just enjoy their popular culture for pleasure when forced to critically read it (not unlike some of Huang’s students). Moffatt and Norton suggest using a feminist post-structuralist approach as an alternative to traditional feminist perspective to explore gender construction of texts as it provides a more balanced or equitable reading. As outlined in Chapter 2, feminist post-structuralist theory suggests that gender is continuously constructed in our society. Adopting the feminist post-structuralist approach to literature requires students to determine how texts both support *and* unravel dominant heterosexual ideologies, unlike the traditional feminist approach where students analyze how a text reinforces the dominant patriarchal ideas of gender and sexuality.

Moffatt and Norton (2005) conducted a case study on issues of gender, popular culture and reading with students in Grades 5 to 7 from a Canadian elementary school in Greater Vancouver, BC. Archie™ comics were chosen for the study because they are commonly considered a useful tool for reluctant readers while being criticized for their “sexist ideas about gender” (Moffatt & Norton, 2005, p. 3). Fifty-five students read an Archie comic entitled *Fairytale Land Revisited*, and then answered survey questions that focused on student construction of gender relations. Ten girls and 10 boys were selected for an additional interview to elaborate on their survey answers. The researchers transcribed the interviews for coding and analysis. Two girls were uncomfortable with the Wolf’s sexually aggressive treatment towards Betty: they believed that Betty might feel “weird” about the encounter and that “Betty should be careful wherever she

goes” (Moffatt & Norton, 2005, p. 5). Initially the researchers thought the student responses indicated a misreading of text. However, these students’ responses prompted the researchers to reread the Archie comic from both a feminist theoretical perspective: how dominant ideals of gender are supported (sexually aggressive male predator and a cautious, innocent female), and from a post-structuralist perspective: how the repeated stereotypical masculine and feminine ideals might challenge cultural ideas of gender. The post-structural reading showed that the text both constructs patriarchal gender relations (heterosexual relationships) and undermines them: the text shows women seeking protection and security from men, suggesting that heterosexual relations are based on need for safety rather than sexual desire (Moffatt & Norton, 2005, p. 10). Ideally, adopting a feminist post-structural approach to reading texts encourages students to think about relationships and gender constructs beyond just the text; examining culturally embedded ideologies and questioning what is missing from texts, allows for more complex interpretations.

### **Students as Designers: Negotiating Semiotic Resources**

In addition to being able to read and challenge mainstream media, it is important for students to learn how to design and produce “alternative stories” (Stack & Kelly, 2006, p. 20). Once students become aware of the construction (message, design, layout) of media texts, they can use these design elements to create their own text to resist or subvert mediated messages of corporations and government. This media activism is known as culture jamming (Lasn, 1999), where people disrupt corporate cultural domination through various forms, including parody, adbusting and remixing. Teachers can empower students by encouraging them to use their voices to question their worlds. Chung and Kirby (2009) led a media activism unit with a Grade 8 art class where students had to create their own thought provoking subvertisements (advertisement which subverts the original message of a company to point out the social or environmental

irresponsibility of that company). After explaining the ideas behind their work, students put their subvertisement onto a t-shirt and wore it for one week to educate the public. Unfortunately, no data were provided by the researchers regarding public response to the students' subvertisements. With this exercise, students moved away from the role of passive consumer to an active producer, soliciting reactions from the public world. By the end of the unit, it became clear to the teacher-researchers that by taking a critical stance with advertising and other visual images in students' consumer driven worlds, students were empowered, educated and excited. By expanding the "classroom" beyond the school walls to an authentic public audience, students became engaged in their learning and began to see school as useful and relevant to their daily lives. As one student commented, "without this class, I would still be clueless" about media and corporate advertising (Chung & Kirby, 2009, p. 38).

Another example of student empowerment through taking a critical stance and rewriting texts is Bourke's (2009) study of Grade 1 students and fairytales. Bourke, the teacher and researcher, used fairytales to teach his students about critical literacy: how texts are socially or culturally shaped. His goal was to teach his students to argue with texts and to question "assumed normalities" of fairytales (Bourke, 2009, p. 308). Bourke observed that his students had become culturally conditioned to equate use of colour with morality in texts (dark as evil and light skin as good or beautiful). This good/evil binary was disconcerting for Bourke because his Grade 1 children were all of non-European descent; if students interpreted white as good and dark skinned as bad within the texts then how did they see themselves as defined by society? To challenge the dominant ideologies of fairytales, the class read and discussed several versions of fairytales and Bourke (2009) asked such critical questions as, "Could things have happened differently?" in the tale (p. 309). Bourke found that his students were unable to see alternatives,

perhaps due to their belief in absolutism and unwavering belief in authority. Bourke surmised that the children's resistance to challenging authority figures (i.e., teacher, parent) was equated with their resistance to challenging the text's authoritativeness. To challenge this blind respect of authority, Bourke (2009) taught his students to think critically and to change the "factions of power" through the rewriting of an existing fairytale (p. 311). An example of challenging who has the power in the story is when one student altered the story of *Three Billy Goats Gruff*; he significantly changed the ending of the tale by having the goats and the troll become friends. As authors, the students took ownership of who was represented and how they were represented in their tales. According to Bourke (2009), by the end of the unit the students began to question their own lack of representation within the fairytale genre. They also started to question and challenge the beautiful-ugly binaries presented through various semiotic modes, beyond classroom texts, and into mainstream society. Although this unit was conducted with Grade 1 students, the rewriting and challenging of traditional texts is an activity that can be conducted with all ages. I especially liked Bourke's message about how students gain "power-as-a-writer" by creating their own versions of a fairytale (p. 310). The students' rewriting of fairytales was very relevant to my unit.

Bailey's (2009) study of a Grade 9 English class showed that the above New literacies approach (analyzing and designing multimodal texts) in English class needs to be consistently integrated within the curriculum for students to truly become literate. Bailey, a participant-researcher, observed Carol, the English teacher, as she made a pedagogical shift in her teaching practice. Carol's goal was to move away from traditional teacher-centered learning and print texts in her classroom by building her lessons around semiotic analysis and constructivist learning, and having her students engage with multimodal textual formats. Over a five month

observation period, Bailey observed a change in Carol's attitude towards her own teaching. Initially Carol equated technology with multimodality and saw it as separate from literacy learning. She also regarded multimodal use in the classroom as primarily motivational, to keep her students hooked on the course material. Carol's students would typically engage in multimodal activities to introduce a literature unit, for example. However, as the semester continued, Carol began to realize that "merely dropping multimodal activities ... into classes is not new literacies instruction" (Bailey, 2009, p. 217). Instead, Carol encouraged her students to make intertextual connections between their popular culture texts (music) and their school text (print novel). Carol's teaching of semiotic tools used to create multimodal texts became the real motivation for learning rather than just a "fancy hook" (Bailey, 2009, p. 229). Students watched a music video and discussed how the various modes, such as visual images and gestures helped to create both mood and message. Bailey observed how the students learned to apply the design metalanguage to the semiotic elements of the video which they later applied to their own video and then again towards the class novel. Overall, Bailey discovered, through student interviews, that Carol's students seemed to view her new literacies teaching methods as meaningful and important; their eyes were opened to different ways of reading text and that English class could be more enjoyable than they originally perceived (Bailey, 2009, p. 224).

The above study reinforces the notion that for students to become multimodal designers of texts, they need to be explicitly taught a semiotic metalanguage and a grammar of design (Callow, 2006; Fortuna, 2010; Mills, 2009; Pantaleo, 2012b, 2012c, 2015; Unsworth 2006). Within the multiliteracies element of design outlined by New London Group (1996), a negotiation of semiotic resources takes place to create a unique message that would not otherwise have been communicated through independent modes. The following case studies by



Hull and Nelson (2005), Gilje (2010) and Fortuna (2010) explore students' negotiation of semiotic resources to achieve their own multimodal design.

Hull and Nelson (2005) analyzed the semiotic composition and design of an adolescent's digital narrative, which was a part of DUSTY (Digital Underground Storytelling for Youth), a community center after-school program in West Oakland, California. The program was created to teach digital storytelling to underprivileged youth, thereby positioning young storytellers as expert authors and designers within their communities. The researchers chose Randy's "Lyfe-N-rhyme" narrative to analyze for their project because it was technologically simple, easy to decode, and a great example of a "transcendent synthesis of form and meaning across a variety of semiotic modes" (Hull & Nelson, 2005, p. 238). The narrative consisted of a series of still photographs, poetry, rap, jazz music and spoken word, combined with an autobiography and social commentary.

Hull and Nelson (2005) found that Randy used visual images to replace the linguistic role of written text; for example, he used titles as a sort of punctuation throughout his project. The title-like images acted as breaks, allowing the reader to pause between thematic images. Randy also relied on cultural archetypes to act as thematic symbols for his story. As described in Chapter 2, a reader's interpretation of signs is dependent upon repeated exposure to dominant cultural codes, such as archetypes. Randy relied on readers' knowledge of iconic African American males who struggled for what they believed in and achieved greatness (e.g., Malcolm X, Tupac, Garvey) to make his point. There was no direct connection between the spoken word and the images; instead, viewers were to independently make these thematic connections. Separately, the images would not communicate the same message as they did when considered in conjunction

with the music and spoken word. According to Hull and Nelson (2005) together all of the modes communicated Randy's life struggle and personal story.

When students become designers, they gain the ability to interpret and communicate information across various modes. Gilje (2010) illustrated how students negotiated meaning within (transformation) and across (transduction) different modes in a case study on a secondary school media education class in Oslo, Norway. As a participant observer, Gilje observed three 17-year-old student filmmakers over a seven-week period as they collaborated on a film. Gilje used both a multimodal analysis lens and a sociocultural lens to interpret how the students made and changed meaning through use of semiotic resources such as writing (a synopsis), discussing and drawing storyboards. He focused his analysis on one specific scene that the three students worked on to examine how they made decisions about their filmmaking. By focusing on one scene, he followed how one specific meaning was "transformed" and "transduced" across the whole process of filmmaking. Gilje collected interactive data through videotaped observation (13 hours), student reflections, and copies of final film projects. To increase the trustworthiness of the data analysis, Gilje had fellow researchers review and qualitatively analyze the video data.

For their film project, the students had to adapt an existing short story into a film. They wrote a half-page-long synopsis and a script, composed a storyboard and created a short film. Throughout the project, Gilje (2010) focused on instances where students were feeling challenged and had to work collaboratively to problem solve (p. 504). As discussed in Chapter 2, meaning making is social, which was shown through students collaboratively negotiating which semiotic tools (script, storyboarding, synopsis writing) to use and how to best use them to relay the intended meaning. Gilje (2010) observed how the students were challenged with having to explicitly show a concept in their film that was implicitly communicated in the original written

story. Analysis of student data (i.e., storyboard, student responses, film projects) and teacher videotaped observation revealed that storyboarding best exhibited the students' use of and negotiation around transduction as they struggled to transfer their ideas from written mode to the visual (Gilje, 2010). Findings also revealed that throughout the entire filmmaking process, there was a constant tension at play between the students and their semiotic tools as they tried to problem solve through their scenes. In some cases the problems just moved from one mode to another. Although the students used the filmmaking resources (storyboard, script) expected by their teacher, they were not all useful tools for resolving their problems in producing meaning (Gilje, 2010, p. 516). This case study is a reminder to educators that not all semiotic tools will work in the same way for all students. Room for experimenting and negotiation needs to be provided. Gilje's case study also demonstrated the importance of collaboration and peer feedback. Without peer feedback, the three foci students would not have known there was a communication break down between what they wanted to say through their film and the audience.

Fortuna's (2010) study on teaching the grammar of film explicates the benefits of explicitly teaching design metalanguage. According to Fortuna (2010), the grammar of film is a vehicle "through which youth [can] connect academic to public literacies and the texts they [encounter] in wider social and cultural contexts" (p. 22). Fortuna, a teacher-researcher, implemented a film and photography study with her Grade 11 English class at a secondary school in the northeastern U.S. The participants of the study were mostly upper-class, white-European-Americans and deemed "college preparatory" students (Fortuna, 2010). Fortuna adopted Vygotsky's (1978) ideas around teacher modeling and scaffolding of learning through think-alouds throughout the course. Fortuna first assessed her students' prior knowledge of visual literacy; it became evident

that they understood elements such as sound, budget, lighting, but some confused grammar of design with narrative structures such as protagonist, setting, and climax (terms commonly associated with English curriculum). Fortuna (2010) stated that “the synthesis, reflection, and evaluation necessary during film production...challenge[s] students to new levels of” literacy (p. 15); therefore, her goal for the unit was to teach her students how to apply their analytical tools learned in the classroom to their visual world outside. To achieve this goal, students honed their visual literacy skills by analyzing movie posters, black and white photographs and then film analysis. Students learned how to read and analyze the photographs, using a metalanguage of black and white photography. When students came to the film analysis, Fortuna found that those who were typically reserved around group literary discussions became confident and outspoken when discussing the elements of film. Fortuna attributed this confidence to her careful scaffolding of metalanguage through the various types of texts (photography, print and film). Perhaps students also felt confident working with this medium due to their familiarity with film outside of school.

Students then deconstructed both the play and film version of *Inherit the Wind* (Lawrence & Lee, 1955). As a final assessment project, students designed a film trailer to demonstrate their understanding of the grammar of film. Fortuna collected and qualitatively analyzed students’ written responses, observed discussions and final projects (film trailers). Overall, Fortuna found that students became successful producers of texts. They “demonstrated clear communicative meanings across modalities in their projects” (Fortuna, 2010, p. 22). Fortuna’s (2010) findings showed that through explicit instruction on the grammar of film and through careful scaffolding of skills, students can become both critical consumers of and competent producers of visual text.

Becoming competent in these visual literacy skills will ideally transfer to students' world outside of school where they are required to deconstruct and interpret mediated texts on a daily basis.

### **Art Education in English Classroom**

In addition to becoming critically and visually literate, working with multimodal texts encourages “thinking that creates new connections and meanings” (Morawski, Hayden, Nutt, Pasic, Rogers & Zawada 2014, p. 27), and as discussed in Chapter 2, an “aesthetic education” can be transformative for the student, by providing varying perspectives (Albers & Harste, 2007; Barton, 2014). Incorporating art, via multimodal design, into the English curriculum encourages new pathways of meaning. Vygotsky (1978) believed that interaction with works of art were integral to an individual's development (Smagorinsky, 2013, p. 195). In his opinion, a person's emotional response to art (literature or otherwise) encourages self-reflection, which in turn leads to a greater understanding or appreciation of the human experience (Smagorinsky, 2013, p. 195). Similarly, through art or aesthetic representation, one can communicate and develop a deeper understanding of oneself and the world (Barton, 2014).

A case study conducted by Zoss, Smagorinsky and O'Donnell-Allen (2007) shows how working with the arts can act as a vehicle for self-reflection. As a part of an identity unit, Cindy, the English teacher-co-researcher, led a mask-making activity with her senior English class in a Southwestern American high-school. The arts played an integral part of the identity unit. Zoss et al. observed students as they explored their individual identity through a diversity of activities: reading autobiographies, creating self-portraits and masks, and writing journals, metaphors, and poetry. Data collection included recorded field notes, verified by Cindy; Cindy's journal responses; and transcribed interviews with the focal students. Although data were not subjected to formal analysis, codes (goal, tool and setting) were identified by Cindy and all researchers to

provide context for the mask activity. Three 18 year-old students volunteered to be focal students for the study: Alan, Jay and Peta (all names were pseudonyms). In all cases, students used semiotic resources, such as colour, shape and symbols, to represent their identities and their emotions through their masks. Vygotsky's belief, that an individual's sociocultural background influences one's perceptions of themselves and the world, was evident in the students' mask projects. For example, Jay depicted a ying-yang symbol in black and white to depict both his interest in Chinese culture and his dual-faceted personality: Jay described the symbol as the "nice side that is fun to be with" and the "kind of angry" side who wants "to be alone" (Zoss et al., 2007, p. 30). Similarly, Peta, a student of mixed Native American and Anglo descent, proudly represented his mixed heritage through the creation of his mask. Peta chose to tell a story with his mask; he explained, "stories are always told with drawings. At least to me they are. That is how the entire Indian history was" (Zoss et al., 2007, p. 16). Peta also represented his emotions and connection to nature through images of leaves and rain, which were seen by the researchers as reflecting his Native American background.

The findings of the study also revealed the meaningfulness that the project had for each of the male students. Peta did not view school as relevant to his life, and he made this evident through his lack of attendance and previous lack of participation, including incomplete assignments; yet, for this project he completed both his mask and final poem. Peta found this identity project to be authentic and worthwhile because it directly related to him and how he viewed himself. Although Peta did not attend every class throughout the project, he was invested in the assignment (he took it home, completed it, and brought it back to class). Unfortunately, after the project, Peta dropped out of school to help financially support his family. Similarly Jay, stating a preference for sciences, was initially resistant to Cindy's teaching method of learning

“centered in play, exploration, and the arts” (Zoss et al., 2007, p. 21). Both he and his parents perceived the use of art in an English classroom as play and “wasn’t real writing” where students have to sit down and write an essay (Zoss et al., 2007, p. 15) (a not uncommon opinion as discussed in Chapter 2). Throughout the unit, however, Jay spent a lot of time and effort on his mask, as he deemed it important and cared about what it looked like. Although it was not writing, Jay found the activity to be educational, more than just “fun” (Zoss et al., 2007, p. 21).

Another case study which exhibited the emotional and imaginative power of working with multimodal arts text was conducted by Morawski, a professor at the University of Ottawa, and five participant-co-authors. While working with five students in a graduate course on Learning Differences in Education, Morawski examined the effects of multimodal learning on her students’ “pedagogical perspectives and practices” (Morawski et al, 2014, p. 3). Students constructed a multimodal composition that reflected their positions on learning differences in education. The data collected and analyzed by Morawski included the student projects and the student responses to and thinking behind their projects (gathered through conversations and written responses). Morawski thematically plotted data using a two-part process (course-grain phase and fine-grain phase). Findings indicated that in all cases, students felt working with multimodalities allowed them to access emotions and imagination that would not otherwise have been accessed via monomodal assignments. Aileen, for example, used sculpture for her project because she believed she would not “have been able to transmit the same message through writing a paper” (Morawski et al., 2014, p. 13). In her opinion, working with tangible material allowed her to connect with the text at a much deeper level. Another student, Nik, found that working within multiple modes (print text, a Barbie doll and Christmas paper) “trigger[ed] a human emotional response” and allowed him “to continue to discover new layers of meaning and

personal understanding” (Morawski et al., 2014, p. 19). As discussed above, when students have to actively negotiate between modes, their learning and understanding becomes ingrained; most of the participants found that using various modes actually deepened their thinking and allowed them to make new connections and meaning through their work. Although this study involved graduate level students, I included it in this review because it was a Canadian study and because, regardless of the age level, it exemplifies the potential depth of insight that working with art texts can provide to students of any age.

### **Assessment of Multimodal Projects**

Many educators use multimodal texts and encourage visual literacy (reading and producing visual texts) in their classrooms, but assessment of such texts can be challenging. Further, Kress and van Leeuwen (2002) remind us that the grammar of visual design is not definitive, and is not taken up by everyone in the same way (p. 344), thus making assessment even more difficult. As discussed in Chapter 2, sign makers use modes differently in various contexts to create meaning for specific purposes. Similarly, because the use of multimodality crosses curricular subject areas (fine arts, language arts, graphic design), the language of its grammar can be varied and, therefore, additionally confusing for both educators and students; therefore Bearne (2009) suggests teachers collaborate cross-curricularly to create a proper assessment tool for multimodal texts (p. 21).

The explicit teaching and use of a design metalanguage (by teacher and students) in classrooms can aid the assessment of multimodal projects. As previously mentioned in this chapter, literacy researchers (Callow, 2006; Cloonan, 2011; Locke, 2011; Mills, 2009; New London Group 1996) have emphasized the necessity for a working multimodal metalanguage that can be used for both instruction and assessment of student work. The New London Group



(1996) recommended the language of design be viewed as flexible and open-ended rather than as a strict grammar. It should act as a “tool kit” to empower students and allow them to explore their ideas through semiotic resources (New London Group, 1996, p. 77).

In addition to a functional metalanguage, considering the type of assessment is also helpful when assessing multimodal design. There is much debate amongst educators in regards to use of a rubric for assessment, yet regardless of the assessment tool used, it is important to keep in mind that students value their learning when situated practice is “constructive rather than punitive” (Knobel & Lankshear, 2008, p. 30). Much of the literature on multimodal texts focuses on summative assessment practices over formative (Wyatt-Smith & Kimber, 2009).

Some researchers believe that rubrics are too inflexible, and that by focusing on identification of specific elements within specific categories, the dynamic aesthetic response of the project will become lost (Wyatt-Smith & Kimber, 2009). On the other hand, rubrics can create awareness around using design elements and of the multimodal creative process. Hung, Chiu and Yeh (2013) conducted a study showing the usefulness of a design rubric for both a formative and summative assessment tool to support new literacy practices. The study was conducted within a skill-based course with 18 junior English major volunteers from a Taiwanese public university who were organized into a focus group and a control group. The course objective was to develop and improve student communication strategies for delivering English presentations. Students gave an initial presentation, which acted as a baseline assessment for the study. Students were given feedback via a design rubric informed by New London Group’s (1996) pedagogy of multiliteracies, described in Chapter 2. Over an 18-week period data collection included teacher feedback, student interviews and student performance evaluations. Analysis of the data suggested that the rubric enhanced “the students’ understanding and awareness of the multimodal

nature of presentation slides” and led to improvements in their design practices (Hung et al., 2013, p. 407). The researchers also found the rubric useful in determining student performance around the modes of multimodal text design. Hung et al. (2013) recommended, as highlighted earlier in this section, that rubrics be used in conjunction with feedback sessions and dialogue between student and teacher (p. 408) to insure a more complete understanding of assessment. Although this study was conducted with university level students, the researchers’ use of rubric is easily transferable to a secondary English classroom.

Rubrics can be useful tools for assessment, as indicated above, if students are a part of the assessment process, whether collaborating on the building of a rubric or creating a list of criteria for a project (Curwood, 2012). Similarly, in order for rubrics to be purposeful tools for assessment, “instruction and assessment need to be tightly integrated” (Ostenson, 2012, p. 168); thus the criteria should be reflected within the rubric. Curwood, a researcher and co-facilitator of the unit delivered during the research, conducted an ethnographic case study of Kate, an English teacher of a Midwestern, suburban, American high-school, and her use of a rubric to evaluate students’ digital multimodal poster project. Curwood’s (2012) goal was to determine if “tensions between theoretic and virtual cultures” were evident in Kate’s assessment practices and if her assessment approach effectively captured student learning (p. 237). The poster project was the culminating assignment for a multimodal unit on the Harlem Renaissance. Because the cultural movement is intrinsically multimodal with its plethora of mediums (jazz, paintings, poetry, dance), Kate believed the only way to capture the essence of the Harlem Renaissance for her Grades 11 and 12 students was through multimodal texts.

Both the teacher and researcher were members of a learning community, consisting of six English teachers and two library media specialists. The learning community provided Kate with

feedback throughout the Harlem Renaissance unit. Curwood's data collection included video recordings and written observations of professional learning community meetings, teacher reflections and interviews with the teacher. No explicit information was provided about how the data were analyzed. Curwood (2012) found Kate's project rubric to be problematic because it "reveal[ed] tensions between culture and literacy practices" (p. 239). The rubric privileged written text over visual/audio modes, despite her attempt to create a multimodal unit. For example, when students were required to create a performance piece for the poster, they were also required to explain their images in writing on the poster to reinforce its relevancy. Similarly, Curwood found that not all of Kate's initial criteria for the project appeared in the rubric. For example, she initially specified the number of songs, videos and images students were to include in their posters yet nothing was mentioned of these mediums in the rubric. Curwood (2012) recommended that teachers encourage their students to focus more on the design process, analyzing the "affordances and constraints of modes, mediums, and tools for given purposes" (p. 242) rather than simply focus on the number of specific tools or modes to use. Curwood also recommended, as suggested above, that teachers and students co-construct assessment tools which outline the design process for more authentic learning.

At the crux of assessment (rubric or otherwise; formative or summative) are students showing their understanding – whether through written responses, interviews or a final project. Many researchers (Ajayi, 2011; Bustle, 2004; Dowdy & Campbell, 2008; Graham & Benson, 2010; Ostenson, 2012; Pantaleo, 2012b) recognize the significant role that conversation plays in student reflection and assessment of their learning. When students talk about their thinking behind their visual representation then teachers are able to assess the learning process. To develop a solid awareness of student understanding and meaning making, educators must be

mindful of “the complex and synergistic relationship among text, reader and context” (Pantaleo, 2012b, p. 48). Pantaleo conducted a case study analysis on an original multimodal project, the graphic narrative text, of a Grade 7 boy named Santino. She conducted an 11-week classroom-based research project on student understanding and interpretation of picturebooks and graphic novels. Pantaleo’s analysis of Santino’s artifact was framed in a sociocultural perspective.

Santino used intertextuality throughout his multimodal graphic novel entitled, *Graphichool*. An interview with the student about his project allowed Pantaleo to identify intertextualities in his project that she would not have otherwise recognized. For example, throughout his project, Santino “appropriated” fictitious characters from his favourite texts (*The Simpsons*, *Calvin & Hobbes*, *Spiderman*) by rewriting them in different contexts from their original stories (Pantaleo, 2012b, p. 42). Santino’s use of parody and appropriation may have been missed and thus, not assessed, if the interview had not been conducted. This case study revealed the value, for both the teacher and student, of interviewing students about their thinking and intentions behind their design.

## **Conclusion**

Despite the various challenges of assessment for multimodal projects, their value in literacy education is clear, as shown through the above studies. Most students already have a vast knowledge of or experience with a variety of modes and semiotic resources, but as seen in the above case studies, they need practice and assistance learning how to navigate through sign systems of multimodal texts. The literature review also revealed that students need the time and the opportunity to learn how to critically read and deconstruct dominant ideologies within texts. It takes practice to learn how to challenge the ingrained authority of texts; thus, a curricular immersion of critical literacy is needed. The review of the literature supports Vygotsky’s and

Rosenblatt's beliefs that the practices of reading and communicating are intrinsically social; therefore accessing prior student knowledge when reading or producing multimodal texts allows for a more profound and purposeful engagement with literacy. Similarly, designing multimodal texts increases student engagement, and shows students that language is constructed and that all texts position the reader to see a particular reality. Ideally, with these multimodal and critical literacy practices, students will become more active and literate participants of their society. In the next chapter I describe the fairytale unit, and connect it to the English 11 curriculum, and to the theories, concepts and literature reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3.

## **Chapter 4**

### **Fairytale Unit and Connections to the Literature**

In this chapter I outline the various activities included in the fairytale unit and then I connect the unit to the theories and literacies outlined in Chapter 2 and to the literature discussed in Chapter 3. For each activity of the unit I list the learning objectives, the materials to be assessed (formative and summative), the student and teacher resources required for each activity, and the activity sequence. I have included a chart outlining the appropriate Language Arts 11 prescribed learning outcomes (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2007) supported by each activity in Appendix A. The various assignments and rubrics mentioned in the description of the unit are included in Appendices B-L.

#### **Components of the Fairytale Unit**

The unit was organized with the focus on visual literacy skills, taught through the elements of art and design. First, I taught students the metalanguage of design through the formats of picturebook, graphic novel and film. Students learned the structure of these formats by reading and analyzing the use of design elements within these texts, and then they practiced critical literacy skills by questioning and critiquing the message and purpose of design. Students then became the designers by reimagining existing fairytales and redesigning them to subvert the tale's original message.

The two major assignments of the unit are the fairytale analysis (Appendix B) and the multimodal composition (Appendix C). I recommend that the fairytale analysis be assigned at the beginning of the unit so students have time to choose a fairytale and apply the types of analysis learned during class to their assignment. Due dates are determined by the teacher, but I recommend the storyboard for the project be submitted at least 1-2 weeks prior to the due date of

the final multimodal project so students can receive appropriate feedback on their stories. In the unit outline below I have not included the work periods where students brainstormed, created, peer-edited, and revised their projects. I found that students needed at least two weeks of class time to work on their projects. I provided these periods throughout the unit and then provided approximately a week towards the end of the unit. I have also not included, within the activities below, the collaborative building of criteria for the multimodal composition. As a class we generated a checklist of criteria for the project as well as a list of interview questions to be asked of each student about their project. These criteria and interview documents ensured that students knew what was expected of them and allowed students to be a part of their own learning.

### **Response Journals**

Written responses play a significant role in my English classroom. Whether students respond to texts, ideas or write original narratives, students are required to write in their journals approximately three times a week. Each day, a new topic, idea or text is presented for students to respond to. Student responses are free form in that they are not assessed or critiqued on content or structure (grammar, writing competence) but rather on completion. The written responses also provide an opportunity for me to provide feedback and check for student understanding. If students run out of time during class, they have time to complete their journals at home. The purposes of the response journals are to encourage students to deepen their thinking about ideas and perspectives, learn how to support these ideas, and gain writing practice. Throughout the fairytale unit I provided opportunities for varied forms of responses.

## Unit Outline

### Activity #1

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**Topic:** Introducing the Fairytale

Number of Lessons: 1

**Objectives:**

- Students will participate in small group and whole-class discussions
- Students will become acquainted with the fairytale genre
- Students will practice communicating their ideas through an alternative medium to written text

**Assessment:**

- Discussion
- Play-Doh™ activity

**Resources, Materials and Equipment:**

- Class set of Play-Doh™

**Activity Sequence:**

Teacher introduces the history of the fairytale: Oral folk tales to written tales (i.e., Perrault, Grimm brothers, Hans Christian Andersen) to visual representation (i.e., Disney).

Discussion in partners and then open up to group discussion

Brainstorm a definition of and criteria for a fairytale. Suggested questions:

- What is a fairytale?
- What are the common elements and archetypes of a fairytale?
- What fairytales did you grow up with? What are the similarities between them?
- Why do you think fairytales are still popular today (why does Hollywood keep reimagining them)?
- In small groups, discuss the importance of setting in a fairytale (i.e., what do the following types of settings symbolize or represent in fairytales: woods, castle, hut in the forest, and tower).
- Each group is assigned one of the above settings (each group picks a setting out of a hat). Using Play-Doh™, students visually represent the symbolic importance of the setting in a traditional fairytale. Each group shows and explains their sculptures to the class.

Closing/Exit Slip:

- What was it like to represent your ideas using Play-Doh™? What were the pros and challenges of using this medium?
-



## Activity #2

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**Topic:** Semiotics and Advertising

Number of Lessons: 2-3

### Objectives:

- Students will participate in small group and whole-class discussions
- Students will respond to a prompt by writing or representing in their journal
- Students will develop a basic understanding of semiotics and see how mediated messages are constructed

### Assessment:

- Discussion
- Advertisement analysis assignment

### Resources, Materials and Equipment:

- PowerPoint™ of pictures (Stetson hat, cowboy, Marlboro ad, Reagan and Bush in hat)
- Advertisements (i.e. Hermes Cinderella ad  
(<https://superqueen.files.wordpress.com/2010/04/hermes-spring-summer-2010-ad-campaign-1.jpg>) OR Arden UNTOLD perfume ad  
([http://static.becomegorgeous.com/img/arts/2013/7/elizabeth-arden-untold-new-fragrance-2013/embedded\\_Elizabeth-Arden-Untold-campaign.jpg](http://static.becomegorgeous.com/img/arts/2013/7/elizabeth-arden-untold-new-fragrance-2013/embedded_Elizabeth-Arden-Untold-campaign.jpg))
- Class set of magazines to cut-up
- Semiotic Analysis worksheet (see Appendix D)

### Activity Sequence:

#### Response Journal

- Starting with “Once upon a time...” write a short narrative incorporating one of the settings and two elements or fairytale archetypes that were discussed yesterday.

Teacher gives a lesson on semiotics, including such concepts as signs, codes, connotation, denotation, intended meaning.

#### Discussion in partners and then open up to group discussion

- Teacher presents slides of Stetson hat, a cowboy, Marlboro advertisement, etc. For each PowerPoint slide students will determine the signs and discuss the codes or connotations associated with each sign. For example for many people in Western society a cowboy hat represents strength, American hero, etc. Then as a class, discuss the cowboy myth and its role in advertising, film and politics.
- Access student prior knowledge on purpose of advertising and artists’ strategies to manipulate the reader/consumer.
- As a class, analyze the Hermes or Arden advertisement.

Discussion of semiotic analysis and composition of the advertisement: what are the cultural codes or meanings attached to the signs? What is the preferred meaning and intended audience of the advertisement? What is the intended message?

### Culminating Activity

- In partners, choose an ad from a magazine and work through the questions on the Semiotic analysis sheet.
- Close with a discussion on an artist's strategic use of visual signs to manipulate the reader, regardless of the format (film, graphic novels, picturebooks or advertising).

## **Activity # 3**

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**Topic:** Elements of Design and Picturebooks

**Number of Lessons:** 3

### **Objectives:**

- Students will develop a definition for visual literacy
- Students will develop an understanding of the elements of visual art and design
- Students will develop an appreciation for and understanding of picturebooks

### **Assessment:**

- Discussion participation
- Journal entry
- Subversive drawing of picture book

### **Resources, Materials and Equipment:**

- Martin Scorcese's interview on visual literacy (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I90ZluYvHic>)
- A class set of picturebooks (one per two students)
- Picturebook worksheet/ handout on elements of visual art and design (see Appendix E)

### **Activity Sequence:**

- Ask students to define visual literacy in their journals: what does the term *visual literacy* make you think of? What do you think it means?

### Response Journal

- Watch Martin Scorcese's interview on visual literacy.
- Students discuss the following questions: how does Scorcese's definition of visual literacy compare to yours? According to Scorcese, why is visual literacy so important? What does 'framing the image' mean? What role does visual literacy play in your life?

### Partner Discussion

- In partners, students read a picturebook, focusing on only the pictures. Together, (orally) they create a narrative.

- Students then reread the story with text.
- Do the illustrations do a good job at telling the story? What information was missing without the words?
- What information is added by the text? What role does each one (text, image) play in the telling of the story

### Lesson on Visual Elements of Design

Teacher gives a lesson on elements of visual art and design. In conjunction with the picturebook worksheet, the teacher should provide exemplars from picturebooks on the use of various elements.

- In partners, students will work through questions outlined on the picturebook worksheet regarding elements of visual art and design.

### Culminating Activity

- Students choose one page from the picturebook to subvert.
- Using various elements of visual art (colour, perspective, framing), students redraw the image, subverting its intended meaning (students can do this in partners or independently).
- In a circle, students show their drawing to the class and explain how they changed the meaning of the picture.

### Closing/Exit Slips

- KWL: What did you already Know? What do you still Wonder about? What did you Learn today?

## **Activity #4**

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**Topic:** Snow White and archetypal analysis

Number of Lessons: 2

### **Objectives:**

- Students will become familiar with Jungian Archetypes and analysis
- Students will respond to a poem and prose

### **Assessment:**

- Discussion

### **Resources, Materials and Equipment:**

- Sylvia Plath's poem, *Mirror* (see Appendix F)
- A copy of Grimm's story *Snowdrop* (available online)
- Handout of Jungian archetypes (available online)
- Fairytale analysis assignment (see Appendix B)

**Activity Sequence:**Response Journal

- Students independently read Plath's poem, *Mirror*. Then write a response to the poem in their journals, keeping the following questions in mind: What does the poem mean to you? What images or phrases capture your attention? What does the poem make you think of? Can you relate to the poem? What images evoke emotion? Then discuss poem as a class.
- During a class discussion, access student prior knowledge: what do you know about the story of Snow White? How does the poem relate to the tale? What do you know about the culture of 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe? What films, books have you read set in this time period?
- Students independently read Grimm's *Snowdrop*. Students should record anything that stands out to them (content or language) and take notice of recognizable symbols or archetypes as they read.

Group Discussion

- Using a handout on Jungian Archetypes, groups will discuss the archetypes found in Grimm's *Snowdrop*. In addition to archetypes, students will discuss the significance of the story's setting (relating back to Activity #1), the story's moral and how the story is reflective of the time in which it was written.
- Groups will report out to prompt a whole class discussion of the tale.

**Activity #5**

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**Topic:** Deconstruction of Disney's Snow White**Number of Lessons:** 3-4**Objectives:**

- Students will develop an understanding of feminist theory and gender construction
- Students will develop their analytic skills regarding semiotics
- Students will practice using grammar or metalanguage of visual art and design

**Assessment:**

- Journal Response
- Class discussion
- Snow White Worksheet

**Resources, Materials and Equipment:**

- Disney's *Snow White* (1937)
- Deconstruction of Snow White Worksheet (see Appendix G)
- LCD projector or DVD player

**Activity Sequence:**Response Journal

- Students write a journal response on gender, discussing such questions as what does it mean to be female or male in your living/school environment? How have gender assumptions

shaped your identity? Were the toys you played with as a child gendered in nature? Write about a time when you challenged gender stereotypes.

- Class discussion of gender response.
- In preparation for viewing the Disney film, students will make a quadrant on a piece of paper with the following headings: symbols or signs (visual, audio, colour), gender stereotypes, lessons or morals, and changes made from Grimm's version.
- As a class, brainstorm prior knowledge of the 1930s (The Depression era) to establish cultural context for the film.
- Students will view the film and fill out the chart as they watch. The film should be stopped periodically to allow time to fill out the charts.

### Discussion

- In small groups, students will discuss their charts and then answer questions from the *Deconstruction of Snow White* worksheet.
- Groups will report out then discuss as a class.

### Checking in/Exit Slips

- What fairytale have you chosen to research for your project (Appendix B)? What versions of the tale are you going to analyze? How are you going to prepare for these questions: what is your plan of attack?

## **Activity #6**

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**Topic:** Graphic Novel and Subversion

**Number of Lessons:** 2

### **Objectives:**

- Students will participate in small group and whole-class discussions
- Students will gain an appreciation for and understanding of the comic medium
- Students will apply visual literacy skills within the context of graphic novel

### **Assessment:**

- Graphic novel worksheet
- Response journal

### **Resources, Materials and Equipment:**

- Scott McCloud's *Making Comics* (2006) and *Understanding Comics* (1993) (suggested teacher resource)
- Graphic novel worksheet (see Appendix H)
- Class set of AFI Screen education storyboard glossary of common film shots (pdf available online)
- Class set of graphic novels (one per two students)

**Activity Sequence:**

Looking at various examples of graphic novels, teacher provides a lesson on camera angles and other elements of visual art and design used in graphic novels (i.e., types of lines, paneling, framing). Hand out AFI glossary of film shots.

Group Discussion

- In partners students choose a graphic novel from the library or teacher collection. Then students will work through the graphic novel worksheet, including the subversion of a scene.

Response Journal/Checking-in

- What have you learned so far in this class with respect to visual literacy? Is it getting easier to identify and evaluate images? Explain.
- What are the similarities in how picturebooks, animated film and graphic novels use elements of visual art and design? How are they used differently?
- How could you apply what you have learned to your life outside of this classroom? How do these skills translate to the “real world”?

**Activity #7**

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**Topic:** Film Analysis, Script Reading and Storyboarding

Number of Lessons: 3

**Objectives:**

- Students will gain an appreciation for how scripts are formatted
- Students will apply visual literacy skills within the context of film
- Students will learn how to storyboard a scene for film

**Assessment:**

- Response journals
- Storyboard scene

**Resources, Materials and Equipment:**

- Short film (choice of the teacher). Academy award winning short films work well.
- Class set (students can share) of the script for *Snow White and the Huntsman* ([http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~ina22/splaylib/Screenplay-Snow\\_White\\_and\\_the\\_Hunstman.pdf](http://www.pages.drexel.edu/~ina22/splaylib/Screenplay-Snow_White_and_the_Hunstman.pdf))
- AFI introduction to the Storyboard (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWPjjoOFIu8>)
- Storyboard Template (available online or students can make their own)

**Activity Sequence:**Response Journal

- As a class, watch a short film chosen by the teacher (approximately 10 minutes). Students do an analysis of the film in their journals. What elements of visual art and design are used

throughout the film? Are they used effectively? Explain. What is the main message of the film? What is the target audience? Does the film remind you of anything? Explain.

### Group Activity

- Review elements of visual art and design, including camera shots/angles.
- As a class, read through the script for *Snow White and the Huntsman*. Assign students different character reading roles. Depending on time availability, teachers may want to read only a portion of the script. Teacher and students should discuss the visual imagery and camera directions while reading.

### Culminating Activity

- As a class, watch AFI introduction to the storyboard video. Then in partners students choose a scene from *Snow White and the Huntsman* script and create a storyboard, using the various shots learned from the AFI glossary.
- Assign storyboard of the project (homework): the storyboard is a rough visual outline for the students' project. Regardless of the chosen format, students must first submit a storyboard of their project, keeping camera angles/shots in mind. It should be submitted 1-2 weeks prior to the project and returned with teacher feedback that students can apply to their final project.

## **Activity #8**

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**Topic:** Film

Number of Lessons: 2

### **Objectives:**

- Students will learn the arc of film (Acts I-III)
- Students will learn the Hero's journey and how it applies to film

### **Assessment:**

- Film analysis worksheet
- Group and class discussion

### **Resources, Materials and Equipment:**

- Copy of *Snow White and the Huntsman*
- Hero's journey outline (available online)
- Video explanation of hero's journey: recommended (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Hhk4N9A0oCA>)
- Film analysis worksheet (see Appendix I)
- Computer and projector

### **Activity Sequence:**

- Teacher provides a lesson on the hero's journey and the three-act structure of film.

- As a class, watch *Snow White and the Huntsman*, keeping notes in the Film analysis worksheet.

#### Group Discussion

- In groups, discuss the worksheet. Option: assign different students a different letter from the worksheet into a Jigsaw.
- Groups report-out into whole class discussion of the film.

#### Closing/Exit Slips

- What is the arc of your fairytale? Which stages of the hero's journey have you included into your story? What is missing? What elements from the hero's journey could you add into your fairytale?

### **Activity #9**

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**Topic:** Unit Wrap-up

Number of Lessons: 1

#### **Objectives:**

- Students will be able to articulate what they have learned within the unit
- Students will be able to see the connection between what they learned and their lives outside of school

#### **Assessment:**

- Teacher developed questionnaire
- Response journals
- Class discussion

#### **Resources, Materials and Equipment:**

- Teacher constructed questionnaire

#### **Activity Sequence:**

##### Response Journal

- How has your definition of visual literacy changed from the beginning of the unit? What elements of visual art and design are used in all formats we have studied (advertisements, picturebook, graphic novel, film)? How are they used similarly and differently in each medium? What visual literacy skills have you learned throughout this unit? How could you apply these new literacy skills to your world outside of school?

##### Group Discussion

- In partners, discuss response topic and share experiences.
- Individually, students fill out questionnaires (anonymously) and submit them.

**Note:** Appendix J features a rubric for assessment of the fairytale analysis assignment and Appendix K features a rubric for the multimodal fairytale project.



## **Connections to the Literature**

### **Socially constructed learning.**

Influenced by Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory and Rosenblatt's (1994) transactional theory of reading, I worked to develop a community of learners in my classroom where students were encouraged to collaborate and discuss one another's ideas. Students worked in partners and small groups while engaging in various forms of analysis of text and while learning about elements of visual art and design. Smagorinsky (2013) states that students have little opportunity in school to use speech as an exploratory tool to develop their thinking and that too often they are expected to submit their thoughts (written or oral) for assessment rather than given the opportunity to brainstorm and build on their thinking with other students (p. 194). Work periods were provided where students could collaborate or gain feedback from one another, free from formal assessment. This lack of formality worked really well for some students who sat around a table and discussed their stories, although some students preferred to work independently as they found it challenging to discuss their stories with others.

The Gradual Release of Responsibility model (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983) and Vygotsky's (1978) concept of the zone of proximal development influenced my classroom pedagogy as I scaffolded student learning and modelled my thinking during text analysis and teaching of visual art and design elements. Tenets of both sociocultural theory and Rosenblatt's (1994) transactional theory of reading convey how language is socially constructed; thus, reading or writing of a text is a social act. According to Rosenblatt (1994), when a reader transacts with a text, a unique meaning is created by application of prior knowledge, the sociocultural context of modes or signs and the reading event, and the writer's intention. In many cases, the influence of a student's sociocultural background was evident in both the construction of the fairytale project

and in student interpretation of text. For example, a student who is gay changed the gender roles of the main characters in her version of *The Little Mermaid*, thus changing the romantic relationship between two men. It seemed her sexual orientation influenced how she wanted to subvert the dominant ideology evident in the classic fairytale. This example supports Ajayi's (2011, 2012) research on how students' sociocultural experiences influence how they interpret popular cultural texts.

Similarly, Rosenblatt's (1994) ideas about a reader's stance when transacting with a text influenced the student response journaling in my classroom. As previously mentioned in this chapter, students periodically responded to a variety of texts in their response journals. Students made meaning from texts, dependent upon their reading stance (efferent stance or aesthetic stance, or both). Because these stances exist on a continuum, readers fluctuate from one stance to another while engaging with texts (Rosenblatt, 1994). Encouraging students to respond to a variety of texts reinforced the idea that all texts are constructed and that meaning is fluid, dependent upon what the reader brings to the reading of a text.

### **Semiotic theory.**

One of my goals throughout the unit was to teach students about semiotic theory and to get them thinking about how all texts, media included, are constructed. I first introduced the concepts of signs and cultural codes through advertising. Students were asked to deconstruct advertisements, looking at how the meaning of signs change dependent upon the particular context and their relationship to other signs (Chandler, 2007). Many of the students had previous experiences deconstructing media in other classes, though the metalanguage may have been different. This prior knowledge provided a great baseline from which the unit could develop.

As a class, we looked at the positioning of models and objects within advertisements and how these in turn positioned the reader/viewer, as well as analyzing the connotations of signs in certain contexts. As a class, we collectively analyzed several ads and then the students worked in partners; working collaboratively opened them up to more interpretations and deeper analysis. Similar to Skinner's (2007) findings in her study of an after-school writing club, I found that students had a much easier time analyzing products with which they were familiar, which shows the significance of engaging prior knowledge in learning. We continued with this semiotic analysis through picturebooks, graphic novels and film. By deconstructing a variety of different types of texts, students learned to look beyond the superficial.

### **Multiliteracies.**

As discussed in Chapter 2 'multiliteracies' is a term coined by the New London Group (1996) to reflect the multiple literacies that exist beyond language. I developed the fairytale unit following the New London Group's (1996) multiliteracies pedagogic model as outlined in Chapter 2. Through the analysis and discussion of various texts, students were placed in *situated practice* as they discussed and wrote about their personal responses to and shared their background knowledge of various concepts or issues. I delivered *overt instruction* of visual art and design elements to my students so that once they understood the design process, they could make strategic decisions around use of modes and design structure. Students used *critical framing* both in their analysis of and in the construction of the fairytale to increase awareness of social context and design purposes, and finally, students exhibited *transformed practice* through their construction of multimodal text (New London Group, 1996, p. 88).

### **Reading with a critical eye.**

Locke (2011) stated that “each [reader] brings to the act of reading a set of discursive lens, each of which will interact with the discursive designs of a text in a particular way, ranging from submission to resistance” (p. 121). As a class we read texts through a variety of lenses such as feminist theory, archetypal analysis, semiotic analysis and critical literacy. A review of related literature clearly revealed how students need time and space to critically discuss or challenge dominant ideologies in texts and in society in order to unearth bias and assumptions in their world and in themselves (Hartman, 2006; Moffatt & Norton, 2005; Stuckey & Kring, 2007; Wallowitz, 2004). Throughout the unit, we spent significant time deconstructing advertisements, film and media to explore the societal contradictions about gender (i.e., sexism in the film and toy industry). Media text analysis led to student discussions regarding their own gendered experiences. I found Wallowitz’s (2004) accounts of her Women’s Studies course to be very helpful in constructing my lessons on gender throughout the unit.

By the end of the unit it was clear students understood how to deconstruct texts and question ideologies, but I am unsure how and if these skills will translate outside of the classroom. Huang’s (2011) study of students’ critical reading practices revealed that students “did not consider critical literacy as having implications for their everyday reading practices” (p. 158); however, studies conducted by Wallowitz (2004) and Chung and Kirby (2009) found that students were enthusiastic to use their critical literacy skills to read their world. The hope is with proper scaffolding and reinforcement of skills and concepts students will leave the classroom feeling informed and empowered.

As the literature indicates, critical literacy instruction is especially effective when taught in an intertextual context where students read various versions of a topic through a range of texts

(Locke & Cleary, 2011; Skinner, 2007). According to Locke and Cleary (2011), a “deepening understanding of the ways in which the partiality of textual representation” occurs when students are able to compare and contrast the same story through various mediums and modes (p. 133). Through thematically linked texts, Cleary’s (2011) year 13 English students in New Zealand analyzed how language can position the reader to view a particular reality. I adopted this intertextual framework and had students examine various versions of Snow White; we explored how images (or imagery) positioned the reader and assessed how the story’s message altered or stayed the same over time. I observed how the students developed a deeper understanding of the fairytale through the analysis of multiple versions.

### **Reading multimodal texts.**

Another key concept revealed by my review of the literature is the need for students to be explicitly taught how to read multimodal texts despite assumed familiarity with them (Groenke & Youngquist, 2011; Jewitt, 2008; Mills, 2010; Pantaleo, 2012a; Skinner, 2007). Regardless of the type of text, a competent reader must navigate through multiple sign systems and use various strategies to comprehend the material (Serafini, 2011, p. 343). In order to develop this skill set, I led students through a variety of activities, reading and deconstructing various multimodal texts (picturebook, graphic novel, film, poetry). Through these readings, students actively “shift[ed] between the text’s visual and linguistic design” (Connor, 2012, p. 47) to make meaning.

The literature also revealed the importance of teaching a metalanguage or grammar of visual design to students (Callow, 2006; Fortuna, 2010; Mills, 2009; Pantaleo, 2015). I believe the students developed and strengthened their visual literacy skills throughout the unit by analyzing the use of elements of visual art and design and then through the designing of multimodal texts.

### **Students as designers: negotiating semiotic resources.**

According to Hull and Nelson (2005) “multimodality can afford, not just a new way to make meaning, but a different kind of meaning” (p. 225). Once my students became familiar with the construction of multimodal texts, they used their new knowledge of design elements to create an original, subverted version of a fairytale in the format of a picturebook, graphic narrative or film script. According to Bourke (2009) and Chung and Kirby (2009), the most effective way to shift positions of power for students is to give them an authorial voice. English classes often provide students with the tools to analyze and discuss literature, but students are not always provided with the opportunity to deconstruct and then re-construct literary texts. Having students produce texts shifts them from the role of consumer to meaning-maker and enables them to see the different ways they can construct meaning or messages for an audience.

In order to design these texts, my students had to learn how to make use of available semiotic resources to make meaning (Albers & Harste, 2007). Much of the research I reviewed communicated the power of students negotiating semiotic resources and modes when designing texts (Bailey, 2009; Fortuna, 2010; Gilje, 2010; Hull & Nelson, 2005). When students were constructing their projects, they had to decide which modes would work best in a particular context, such as how to effectively portray the character’s thoughts and emotions through dialogue, sound effect, and/or gesture. They also had to use written language in a very different way than they were traditionally used to. For example, with the graphic novel format, they had to use minimal text that worked in conjunction with image and gesture.

As revealed in some of the case studies, such as Gilje’s (2010) research, design negotiations can be challenging for students. Some of my students felt challenged during the process of storyboarding their story (all students had to submit a storyboard outline of their projects).

Storyboarding is a common tool, typically found in the film industry, used to discuss and visualize ideas before shooting the final product (Gilje 2010). It is a collaborative stage where the filmmakers negotiate what semiotic resources they will use to bring the script to life on screen. Storyboarding proved to be a challenging, yet an important part of the learning process. Many students found it difficult to articulate their ideas through drawing instead of through text, but most felt storyboarding strengthened their final product. This process of transmediation encouraged students to become more cognizant of design choices and decision-making (Pantaleo, 2013), and to see the story from a different perspective, resulting in a more complex finished product. It is important to note that the teacher needs to allow some flexibility in how students use the storyboard. Because students are working in varied formats for their projects, the storyboard will subsequently serve a varied purpose. For example, a storyboard for a scene to be filmed will focus on different visual elements than a storyboard for a page from a picturebook. For the storyboard to be used effectively, students need to be given the freedom to use it as needed rather than have strict formatting expectations. Kress and van Leeuwen (2002) state that the grammar of visual design is not definitive and neither are the way to use design tools. Students are most successful when given room for experimenting and negotiating through semiotic resources (Gilje, 2010; Hull & Nelson, 2005; Fortuna, 2010; Zoss et al., 2007).

### **Assessment of multimodal texts.**

As indicated by the literature, assessment of multimodal texts is challenging (Bearne, 2009; Curwood, 2012; Wyatt-Smith & Kimber, 2009). Assessment of multimodal texts requires a shift from traditional text-based English testing practices. There is much debate regarding the use of the rubric to assess multimodal texts; many researchers deem the rubric too inflexible and that the aesthetic response of the project can be lost as it focuses on identification of specific

elements within specific categories (Wyatt & Kimber, 2009). I experienced some difficulty with the rigidity of the rubric I created for the multimodal project and found myself continuously adjusting or adding to it to reflect student learning. Despite the rubric's constraints, however, the consensus from the literature seems to be that rubrics are useful for formative assessment in that they increase student awareness of the key learning concepts, such as design practices (Hung et al., 2013). Much of the literature praises formative assessment over summative and places value on the process over the product for student learning (Bearne, 2009; Graham & Benson, 2010). Although I agree that formative assessment is pertinent to student learning, more discussion is needed on how to produce a mark when summative assessment is required. I found the rubric helpful in determining a baseline for assessment such as whether or not the project fully met expectations or not; however, the grade or rubric category did not always take into account the thought processes that were, or were not, invested into some of the student projects.

My review of the literature revealed the importance of students being able to express their thinking behind their work for both assessment purpose and to make sense of student learning (Pantaleo, 2012b). Because I wanted to factor in student thought processes, I adopted Pantaleo's (2012b) interview approach to assessment in her case study of Grade 7 students and their graphic narratives. Pantaleo found that she would have missed students' intertextual work such as appropriation, parody and pastiche had the students not been permitted to explain their thinking behind their projects. At the end of the unit, I had students conduct filmed interviews of one another about their projects. The class collaborated on a list of questions ahead of time. I found these interviews very revealing as in most cases, students showed deeper levels of understanding than that revealed by only viewing and reading their projects. The interview process also gave students a sense of pride in showing their work to another.



## **Reflections and Suggestions for Future Pedagogy**

Although students developed a checklist of criteria for their projects, the actual rubric, as indicated above, was used only for formative assessment. In the future, I would include students in the building of the rubric and I would use the rubric as a tool for self-assessment, giving students the opportunity to reflect and improve upon their projects before handing it in for final assessment. Through consistent feedback and reflection, students and teachers can develop a common language with which they can judge the quality of their work (Bearne, 2009; Ostenson, 2012). Although I did provide feedback on other assignments throughout the unit, I could have put more emphasis on student self-assessment.

Overall, student thinking about visual literacy changed considerably throughout the unit. When asked, towards the end of the unit, what they learned, many students indicated that they became more aware of intentional camera angles and strategic use of modes in film and advertising. One student enjoyed taking photographs and said that she was able to apply what she learned to her hobby (most specifically regarding mood and positioning).

Because the unit includes a lot of content, time and scheduling of the various activities proved challenging. I had the opportunity to teach this unit twice. During the second delivery of the unit, we ran out of time so I reduced the film analysis activity (Activity #9). Unfortunately, omitting this activity meant loss of explicit film analysis and literacy connections, and resulted in students not connecting as explicitly between literacy skills learned in class to their outside world. For example, when asked how they would use what they learned outside of the classroom on the end of unit questionnaire, most students did not answer or they stated that if they ever had to make a picturebook they would know how to do so. Unfortunately, the connecting piece between elements of film and the reading of mediated texts in their lives was missed. The unit, ideally,

takes approximately five weeks to complete (in a semester system with a class length of 80 minutes per day four days a week and one 60 minute class per week). If a teacher has time restrictions, I recommend minimizing the choice of formats by omitting the graphic novel lesson. Elements of design for film and graphic novel are very similar in regards to framing, camera angles, perspective and point of view, and film seemed to be more applicable and of stronger interest to the students. The majority of students chose to work in either picturebook format or film script for their projects.

In regards to the student interviews, although I found them useful, they did not accurately represent all that the students had learned. Upon informal discussions with my students, I realized that they had learned far more than indicated in their filmed interviews because the interview structure did not always encourage students to elaborate as much as they could have. I recommend the teacher and the class have a discussion about how to conduct an interview, and how to draw information from the interviewee. Also, if possible, I recommend the teacher have a one-on-one discussion with the student after the peer interviews, perhaps for purpose of clarification of points. If time allows, a carousel or class show-and-tell for students to display their projects to one another would be a positive extension of student learning. Providing students with an audience, beyond the teacher, adds some authenticity to their learning and enables students to learn from one another, as a true community.

### **Final Reflections**

Developing this unit has been a rewarding experience. It was important to me to do my Master's project on something that I could use in my classroom. I have always enjoyed incorporating visual literacy in my classroom pedagogy, but doing this project made me realize that I need to be vigilant in my use of multimodal texts and practice of new literacies, and to not

just use it as an occasional “hook” (Bailey, 2009). I have also learned how integral the incorporation of art into the English curriculum is for my students as it encourages new perspectives and self-reflection, leading to a greater understanding of the human experience (Smagorinsky, 2013). Visual literacy is especially pertinent to education with our increasingly technology-dependent society (Metros, 2008). I found students became much more engaged with their learning through the designing of their multimodal projects as well as through the deep analysis of fairytales. Most of the students found it enjoyable and interesting to explore the history and meaning behind classic fairytales; throughout the unit, the tales became much more than the Disney children’s movies with which they were previously familiar.

However, I experienced some challenges during the development of this project. I found it difficult to find studies on multimodality and visual literacy conducted with secondary students. As stated previously, the majority of the research was conducted with either middle school aged students and younger, or with pre-service teachers at the graduate level. It would have been helpful to compare my experiences with adolescents with those experiences of other secondary school teachers. Similarly, I found it challenging to find Canadian studies; the majority of the research I reviewed was American. Also, although many researchers have explored student reading of multimodal texts, very few make the learning connection between visual literacy skills and writing skills. As an English teacher, I recommend more research be conducted on the possible beneficial connection between visual literacy and reading comprehension.

I really enjoyed being a graduate student. It was invigorating to simultaneously be a student and a teacher, and I feel the learning process has made me a stronger teacher. I was excited to share what I had learned with my students, both directly and indirectly. Initially, I found some of the theoretical and foundational literacy concepts difficult and challenging to comprehend, but

through the coursework and help of my instructors, I began to make sense of the grounding theories, scholars and their ideas. I found Jewitt (2008, 2009), Smagorinsky (2007, 2013) and Chandler (2007) particularly helpful in explaining some of the key concepts.

I also enjoyed the opportunity to learn alongside my peers in graduate courses. Teaching can be very isolating and there is not a lot of time for collaboration with peers, so being able to brainstorm and process ideas with others was very rewarding. I value the learning experience with my colleagues and mentor professors afforded by the Master's program.

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## Appendix A

### Prescribed Learning Outcomes for Grade 11 English Language Arts Curriculum Addressed During the Fairytale Unit

Oral Language (Speaking and Listening)	Activity #
A1 interact and collaborate in pairs and groups to	
– support and extend the learning of self and others	1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8
– explore experiences, ideas, and information	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
– incorporate new perspectives into own thinking	1, 2, 4, 5, 6
– respond to and <b>critique</b> a variety of <b>texts</b>	2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8
– create a variety of <b>texts</b>	2, 3, 6, 7
A2 express ideas and information in a variety of situations and <b>forms</b> to	
– explore and respond	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8
– recall and describe	1, 4, 5, 7
– narrate and explain	1, 3, 5, 7
– argue, persuade, and <b>critique</b>	3, 5, 6, 8
– support and extend	2, 4, 5, 6, 8
– engage and entertain	1, 2
A3 listen to comprehend, interpret, and <b>evaluate</b> ideas and information from a variety of <b>texts</b> , considering	
– purpose	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8
– messages	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8
– <b>tone</b>	3, 5, 6, 7, 8
– <b>structure</b>	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8
– effects and impact	2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8
– bias	2, 3, 5, 8
– <b>context</b> , including historical, social, and political influences	2, 5, 7, 8
Strategies (Oral Language)	
A4 select, adapt, and apply a range of strategies to interact and collaborate with others in pairs and groups, including	
– initiating and sharing responsibilities	2, 3, 6, 7
– listening actively	1, 2, 3, 4, 6
– contributing ideas and supporting the ideas of others	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
– seeking out diverse perspectives	4, 5, 8
– reaching consensus or agreeing to differ	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7
A5 select, adapt, and apply a range of strategies to prepare oral communications, including	
– interpreting a task and setting a purpose	1, 3, 4, 5, 8
– generating ideas	1, 3, 4, 5, 8
– considering multiple perspectives	4, 5, 8
– synthesizing relevant knowledge and experiences	1, 3, 4, 5, 8
– planning and rehearsing presentations	1, 4, 5, 8
A6 select, adapt, and apply a range of strategies to express ideas and information in oral communications, including	
– vocal techniques	1, 7
– style and tone	7
– visual aids	1, 3
A7 use listening strategies to understand, recall, and analyse a	

variety of texts, including	
– extending understanding by accessing prior knowledge	2, 5
– making plausible predictions	5, 6
– synthesizing main points	4, 5
– generating critical questions	5
– clarifying and confirming meaning	2, 4, 5, 6
A8 speak and listen to make personal responses to <b>texts</b> , by	
– relating reactions and emotions to understanding of the <b>text</b>	3, 6
– generating thoughtful questions	4, 8
– making inferences	2, 3, 8
– explaining opinions using reasons and evidence	2, 3, 4, 6, 8
– suggesting <b>contextual</b> influences and relationships	2, 3, 4, 6, 8
A9 speak and listen to interpret, <b>analyse</b> , and <b>evaluate</b> ideas and information from <b>texts</b> , by	
– examining and comparing ideas and concepts among <b>texts</b>	2, 3, 5, 8
– <b>critiquing</b> the <b>author’s</b> logic and quality of evidence	3
– identifying and challenging bias, contradictions, and distortions	2, 5, 6, 8
– identifying the importance and impact of historical, social, and political <b>contexts</b>	3, 5, 6, 8
A10 speak and listen to <b>synthesize</b> and extend thinking, by	
– personalizing ideas and information	2, 5, 8
– explaining relationships among ideas and information	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8
– applying new ideas and information	1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 8
– <b>transforming</b> existing ideas and information	1, 3, 6, 8
– <b>contextualizing</b> ideas and information	2, 3, 4, 5, 8
<b>Reading and Viewing</b>	
B1 read, both collaboratively and independently, to comprehend a wide variety of literary <b>texts</b> , including	
– literature reflecting a variety of times, places, and perspectives	4, 5
– literature reflecting a variety of prose <b>forms</b>	4, 7
– poetry in a variety of <b>forms</b>	4
B2 read, both collaboratively and independently, to comprehend a wide variety of <b>information</b> and persuasive <b>texts</b> with increasing complexity and subtlety of ideas and <b>form</b> , such as	
– print and electronic reference material	<b>Appendix A</b>
– advertising and promotional material	2
B3 view, both collaboratively and independently, to comprehend a variety of visual <b>texts</b> , with increasing complexity of ideas and <b>form</b> , such as	
– <b>graphic novels</b>	6
– film and video	3, 5, 7, 8
– art	3
– visual components of print media	3
– student-generated material	3
<b>Strategies (Reading and Viewing)</b>	
B5 before reading and viewing, select, adapt, and apply a range of <b>strategies</b> to anticipate content and construct meaning, including	
– interpreting a task	6, 8
– setting a purpose or multiple purposes	5, 6, 8
– accessing prior knowledge, including knowledge of <b>genre</b> , <b>form</b> , and <b>context</b>	2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8



<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– making logical, detailed predictions</li> <li>– generating guiding or speculative questions</li> </ul>	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 4, 5, 7, 8
<p>B6 during reading and viewing, select, adapt, and apply a range of <b>strategies</b> to construct, monitor, and confirm meaning, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– comparing and refining predictions, questions, images, and connections</li> </ul>	2, 3, 7, 8
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– making inferences and drawing conclusions</li> <li>– summarizing and paraphrasing</li> <li>– using <b>text features</b></li> <li>– determining the meaning of unknown words and phrases</li> <li>– clarifying meaning</li> </ul>	2, 4, 5, 7, 8 3, 5, 7, 8 2, 7 3, 7 2, 7
<p>B7 after reading and viewing, select, adapt, and apply a range of <b>strategies</b> to extend and confirm meaning, and to consider <b>author's</b> craft, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– reflecting on predictions, questions, images, and connections made during reading</li> <li>– reviewing <b>text</b> and purpose for reading</li> <li>– making inferences and drawing conclusions</li> <li>– summarizing, <b>synthesizing</b>, and applying ideas</li> <li>– identifying stylistic techniques</li> </ul>	3, 4, 5, 7, 8  2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8
<p><b>Thinking (Reading and Viewing)</b></p> <p>B8 explain and support personal responses to <b>texts</b>, by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– making comparisons to other ideas and concepts</li> <li>– relating reactions and emotions to understanding of the <b>text</b></li> <li>– developing opinions using reasons and evidence</li> <li>– suggesting <b>contextual</b> influences and relationships</li> </ul>	 1, 2, 4, 7, 8 1, 2, 3, 6, 7, 8 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8
<p>B9 interpret, <b>analyse</b>, and <b>evaluate</b> ideas and information from <b>texts</b>, by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– identifying and describing <b>diverse voices</b></li> <li>– <b>critiquing</b> perspectives</li> <li>– identifying and challenging bias, contradictions, and distortions</li> <li>– identifying the importance and impact of social, political, and historical <b>contexts</b></li> </ul>	5, 6, 8 3, 7, 8 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 2, 4, 5, 7, 8
<p>B10 <b>synthesize</b> and extend thinking about <b>texts</b>, by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– personalizing ideas and information</li> <li>– explaining relationships among ideas and information</li> <li>– applying new ideas and information</li> <li>– <b>transforming</b> existing ideas and information</li> <li>– <b>contextualizing</b> ideas and information</li> </ul>	3, 7, 8 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 1, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8 4, 7, 8
<p>B11 use <b>metacognitive strategies</b> to reflect on and assess their reading and viewing, by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– referring to criteria</li> <li>– setting goals for improvement</li> <li>– creating a plan for achieving goals</li> <li>– <b>evaluating</b> progress and setting new goals</li> </ul>	6, 8 8 8 6, 8
<p><b>Features (Reading and Viewing)</b></p> <p>B12 recognize and explain how <b>structures</b> and <b>features</b> of <b>text</b> shape readers' and viewers' construction of meaning and appreciation of <b>author's</b> craft, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>form</b> and <b>genre</b></li> <li>– functions of <b>text</b></li> </ul>	   1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 2, 3, 6, 7, 8

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>literary elements</b></li> <li>– <b>literary devices</b></li> <li>– use of language</li> <li>– <b>visual/artistic devices</b></li> </ul>	<p><b>1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8</b>  <b>3, 5, 6, 7, 8</b>  <b>2, 3, 4, 6, 7</b>  <b>1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8</b></p>
<p>B13 demonstrate increasing word skills and vocabulary knowledge, by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– determining meanings and uses of words based on context</li> <li>– identifying, selecting, and using appropriate academic and technical language</li> <li>– using vocabulary appropriate to audience and purpose</li> <li>– discerning nuances in meaning of words considering social, political, historical, and literary contexts</li> </ul>	<p><b>3</b>  <b>2, 3, 6</b>    <b>3, 5</b>  <b>2, 4, 5</b></p>
<p><b>Writing and Representing</b>  Purposes (Writing and Representing)  C1 write meaningful personal texts that elaborate on ideas and information to</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– express self</li> <li>– make connections</li> <li>– reflect and respond</li> <li>– remember and recall</li> </ul>	<p><b>5</b>  <b>3, 4, 5, 6, 7</b>  <b>3, 4, 5, 6, 7</b>  <b>5, 6</b></p>
<p>C2 write purposeful information texts that express ideas and information to</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– explore and respond</li> <li>– record and describe</li> <li>– speculate and consider</li> <li>– argue and persuade</li> <li>– analyse and critique</li> <li>– engage</li> </ul>	<p><b>Appendix B</b>  <b>2, Appendix B</b>  <b>3, Appendix B</b>  <b>Appendix B</b>  <b>2, 3, Appendix B</b>  <b>Appendix B, C</b></p>
<p>C3 write effective imaginative texts to develop ideas and information to</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– strengthen connections and insights</li> <li>– explore and adapt literary forms and techniques</li> <li>– experiment with increasingly sophisticated language and style</li> <li>– engage and entertain</li> </ul>	<p><b>1, 2, 3, 6, Appendix C</b>  <b>1, 2, 3, 6, 7, Appendix C</b>  <b>2, 3, 6, Appendix C</b>  <b>1, 2, 3, 7, Appendix C</b></p>
<p>C4 create thoughtful representations that communicate ideas and information to</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– explore and respond</li> <li>– explain and persuade</li> <li>– engage</li> </ul>	<p><b>7, Appendix C</b>  <b>1, 6, Appendix C</b>  <b>1, 6, Appendix C</b></p>
<p>Strategies (Writing and Representing)  C5 select, adapt, and apply a range of strategies to generate, develop, and organize ideas for writing and representing, including</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– making connections</li> <li>– setting a purpose and considering audience</li> <li>– gathering and summarizing ideas from personal interest, knowledge, and inquiry</li> <li>– analysing writing samples or models</li> <li>– setting class-generated criteria</li> </ul>	<p><b>2, 7, Appendix B</b>  <b>7, Appendix C</b>  <b>Appendix B, C</b></p>
<p>C6 select, adapt, and apply a range of drafting and composing strategies while writing and representing, including</p>	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– using a variety of sources to collect ideas and information</li> </ul>	<p><b>3, Appendix B, C</b>  <b>Appendix C</b></p>
	<p><b>Appendix B</b></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– generating text</li> <li>– organizing and synthesizing ideas and information</li> <li>– analysing writing samples or models</li> <li>– creating and consulting criteria</li> </ul> <p>C7 select, adapt, and apply a range of strategies to revise, edit, and publish writing and representing, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– checking work against established criteria</li> <li>– enhancing supporting details and examples</li> <li>– refining specific aspects and features of text</li> <li>– proofreading</li> </ul> <p>Thinking (Writing and Representing)</p> <p>C8 Write and represent to explain and support personal responses to texts, by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– making comparisons to other ideas and concepts</li> <li>– relating reactions and emotions to understanding of the text</li> <li>– developing opinions using reasons and evidence</li> <li>– suggesting contextual influences and relationships</li> </ul> <p>C9 write &amp; represent to interpret, analyse, and evaluate ideas and information from texts, by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– critiquing logic and quality of evidence</li> <li>– relating and critiquing perspectives</li> <li>– identifying and challenging bias, contradictions, and distortions</li> <li>– identifying the importance and impact of social, political, and historical contexts</li> </ul> <p>C10 write and represent to synthesize and extend thinking, by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– personalizing ideas and information</li> <li>– explaining relationships among ideas and information</li> <li>– applying new ideas and information</li> <li>– transforming existing ideas and information</li> <li>– contextualizing ideas and information</li> </ul> <p>C11 use metacognitive strategies to reflect on and assess their writing and representing, by</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– relating their work to criteria</li> <li>– setting goals for improvement</li> <li>– creating a plan for achieving goals</li> <li>– evaluating progress and setting new goals</li> </ul> <p>Features (Writing and Representing)</p> <p>C12 use and experiment with elements of style in writing and representing, appropriate to purpose and audience, to enhance meaning and artistry, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– point of view</li> <li>– literary devices</li> <li>– visual/artistic devices</li> </ul> <p>C13 use and experiment with elements of form in writing and representing, appropriate to purpose and audience, to enhance meaning and artistry, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– organization of ideas and information</li> <li>– text features and visual/artistic devices</li> </ul> <p>C14 use conventions in writing and representing, appropriate to purpose and audience, to enhance meaning and artistry, including</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– grammar and usage</li> </ul>	<p><b>2, Appendix C</b>  <b>Appendix B, C</b>  <b>Appendix C</b>  <b>Appendix B, C</b></p> <p><b>Appendix B, C</b>  <b>Appendix B, C</b>  <b>Appendix B, C</b>  <b>Appendix B, C</b></p> <p><b>4, 5, 7, Appendix B</b>  <b>4, 5, 7, Appendix B</b>  <b>2, 4, 5, 7, Appendix B</b>  <b>3, 5, 7, Appendix B</b></p> <p><b>2, Appendix B</b>  <b>2, 5, 7, 8, Appendix B</b>  <b>2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8 Appendix B</b>  <b>2, 5, 6, 7, 8, Appendix B</b></p> <p><b>3</b>  <b>5, 6, 8</b>  <b>2, 5, 6, 7, 8</b>  <b>3, 5, 6, 7, 8</b>  <b>3, 5, 7, 8</b></p> <p><b>5, Appendix B, C</b>  <b>Appendix B, C</b>  <b>5, 8, Appendix B, C</b>  <b>8, Appendix B, C</b></p> <p><b>2, 7, Appendix C</b>  <b>2, 7, Appendix C</b>  <b>3, 6, 7, Appendix C</b></p> <p><b>1, 7, Appendix B, C</b>  <b>1, 3, 6, 7, Appendix B, C</b></p> <p><b>3, Appendix B, C</b></p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>– punctuation, capitalization, Canadian spelling</li><li>– copyright and citation of references</li><li>– presentation/layout</li></ul>	<b>Appendix B, C</b> <b>Appendix C</b> <b>3, Appendix B, C</b>
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## Appendix B

# Rewriting a Fairytale

Once you have completed your research analysis, you are to create your own version of the classic fairytale you studied. This can be done individually or in partners. Your version must subvert the original message or supported dominant ideology of an existing version of the tale. One way to achieve this is through *appropriation* (where an image or character is taken from one context and placed in another). For example, the *Three Little Pigs* told from the wolf's perspective or placing the archetype of a fairytale princess in a modern world to deal with modern problems.



As you write your tale, consider your previous analysis of the fairytale. This will help you to frame your story. You can set your tale in any time period or culture you wish, as long as you maintain the key elements or motifs of the original fairy tale (it should be recognizable). **This project is due [date].**

Each option is multimodal in its combination of modes (text and image). Consider how you want your audience to interpret your design: how will you construct or position the images? What message are you trying to get across?

Choose **one** of the following mediums with which to represent your reimagining of the fairytale. Regardless of which one you choose, your project must include the following criteria:

1. Fundamental fairytale motifs and archetypes must be evident;
2. Calculated use of all elements of design and composition (which we have studied throughout the unit): *Balance, contrast, salience, perspective, colour, harmony, movement, rhythm, unity, point of view (camera shots/angles), framing, line, typography, sound;*
3. Consideration of your intended audience and intended message. Subversion of the message or fairytale should be evident; and
4. Your fairytale should be original (Paper bag princess has been done).

In preparation for your project, you are to submit a storyboard of your tale. This is due [date] so it can be returned to you with feedback for your project. Think of it as a visual blueprint for your design.

**Upon completion of your project, you** will be interviewed by a classmate about your project. The interview will give you the opportunity to reflect upon and explain your intentions/thinking

behind your design. This will aid me in the assessment of your project. It will also give you the opportunity to share all your hard work with others. Interviews will be recorded and submitted to me, along with your project, no later than [date].

### **Option A: Graphic Novel**

Represent your fairytale in a graphic novel format. It should be approx. 8-10 pages in length. Create a cover for your story, visually reflecting the main motifs. It does not have to be hand drawn. There are programs that can help with your design (<http://chogger.com/comics>, <http://comiclfe.com/>, <http://www.picmonkey.com/collage>). On the back page, you should provide a brief synopsis of your story that will intrigue your reader.

### **Option B: Picturebook**

Design a picturebook of your fairytale. It should be between 8-10 pages in length. Your book should strike a balance between images and words. Create a cover for your story, visually reflecting the main motifs. The artwork must be either original or altered by you (in other words, you can't simply copy complete images from the internet). On the back page, you should provide a brief synopsis of your story that will intrigue your reader.

### **Option C: Film Script**

Write a short film script of the fairytale. Each page is worth one minute of film time, and your short film should be written for approximately a 20 - 25 minute slot (20-25 pages in length). Your script should be written in traditional format (as discussed in class). Because this assignment is focused on visual literacy, you are to write your script for the director with as much camera direction (grammar of film) as possible.

## Appendix C

### Fairytale Research and Analysis

**/40 Marks**

For this assignment you are required to do an in depth study on a traditional fairy tale that has been retold several times. You are to analyze at least two versions of the tale (one print text and one visual) and research the tale's history, cultural context, and meaning. You may consult secondary sources for ideas but you must cite where you get your ideas and information (refer to APA citation and formatting style).

1. Please indicate the chosen versions of the Fairytale. Include date of publication, author, producer and director. /1
2. Briefly describe the history and origin of your tale. /2
3. What motifs or elements remain consistent throughout the various versions of the tale? /2
4. What is the main message or moral of the tale (both versions)? Explain. /2
5. Choose **one** of the following options and write a multi-paragraph analysis. Be sure to provide lots of examples to support your thinking. Although this is marked mostly for content, your ideas should be organized. /15

A: Visual Analysis: Conduct a semiotic analysis (signs, codes) of one of the films. Apply your knowledge of art and design elements to help support your arguments. Consider the cultural context and societal values of the time period in which the film was made to help make sense of the signs.

B: Text Analysis: Conduct an archetypal literary analysis of the text. Find the archetypes in the story and explain their significance or what they represent. How do these archetypes add to the overall theme or message of the tale?

6. Choose **one** of the following options and write a multi-paragraph analysis, comparing at least two texts. Be sure to provide lots of examples to support your thinking. Although the analysis is marked mostly for content, your ideas should be organized. /15

a. Discuss the key changes made in the retelling of the tale (from the original to the film)? Why were these changes made? How is each version representative of the time and culture of when it was made? Think back to our discussion of Disney's Snow white and the Depression.

b. How do the various versions of the fairy tale both support and challenge dominant ideological assumptions? Examine such elements as gender, race, or sexuality. Provide examples from both texts to support your points.

7. Reference list and APA citation of sources. /3

## Appendix D

### A Semiotic Analysis of an Advertisement

Please answer the questions below in complete sentences, on a separate piece of paper. Then attach your answers to the advertisement and hand it in.

1. What caught your attention about this particular ad?
2. What are the visual *signs* that make up the ad? What images or colours are used?
3. What is the focus of the ad? How are the images or objects positioned on the page? How is the reader positioned to read the ad?
4. Is there text? If so, what is the relationship between the images and the text? What function does each serve?
5. What codes (connotations) are created by the various signs or images?
- 6 a) Is there a narrative? What story is the advertisement trying to get across to the reader?  
b) What dominant ideologies are supported in this advertisement?
7. What is the preferred (or intended) message?
8. What personal or cultural experiences have helped shaped your reading or interpretation of the signs?
9. Who is the target reader or audience? What makes you think this?
10. What is the ad's relation to reality? Does it operate in a realistic code?
11. Would you consider this a successful advertisement? Please explain.



## Appendix E

### The Picturebook: Elements of Visual Design

Below are the elements of art and design that you will be using in the design of your project. Please keep this as a reference.

**Elements of Design:** Design is the arrangement of the elements of art in a composition.

*Balance:* The overall visual weight or stability of a composition: Symmetrical, asymmetrical and radial.

*Contrast:* an abrupt, unexpected change in a visual element. It brings objects into focus and encourages eye movement.

*Salience:* when an artist stresses certain elements over others to create a focal point such as placement in the frame, relative size, contrast in colour etc.

*Harmony & Variety:* helps to guide the eye through the composition. Both convey meaning through repetition, proximity and simplicity. It provides unity to a composition. Harmony accentuates similarities of elements and variety accentuates differences.

*Movement:* This guides a viewer's eye through the work. Motion or action is achieved using lines, shapes and textures.

*Rhythm:* The regular repetition or pattern of elements. It creates a feeling of organized movement. Sudden change in position or size creates a lively rhythm.

*Unity:* Quality of completeness by balancing all elements on a page.

### Elements of Art

*Colour:* Intensity of colour conveys mood and emotion. For example a dark background implies fear or danger. Look at hues, saturations and tones of colours; there are warm and cool colours.

- Dull or pastel colours seem soft and sensitive.
- Bright colours seem harsh or lively.

*Lines:* Thick or thin, whole or broken, straight, curved or jagged (conveys enthusiasm, anger and energy).

- Horizontal lines move the eye from left to right.
- Vertical lines suggest stability and strength.
- Diagonal lines provide action and movement on a page (staircase, hills).

*Perspective:* the position or angle from which a picture is viewed. Gives an illusion of depth. Left and Right positioning – In Western culture, information presented on the left is given or culturally understood whereas information on the right is new information. This process provides a sense of continuous movement for the reader. It is often used in advertising where they provide the reader with information that is culturally understood to sell you what your life would be like with the product presented

*Framing:* The technique of drawing attention to the subject by blocking other parts of the image with something or leading the eye towards your main focal point. It disconnects or connects the elements of an image.

*Texture:* This adds a tangible feel to the images (smooth, bumpy, soft, hard, furry etc).

*Shape:* Basic outlines that define space. Shapes can change mood or emotions of the text.

- Organic shapes are irregular and curvy and they symbolize natural objects.
- Geometric shapes are used for non-natural things (building, houses).

*Space:* Positive and negative space. Positive space is where shapes and forms exist. Negative space is the area of a picture that contains “nothing.” Space provides balance in an image.

\*Definitions are adapted from Matulka, D. I. (2008). *A picture book primer: Understanding and using picture books*. Westport, CT: Libraries Unlimited.

For examples using the above elements see [www.picturingbooks.com](http://www.picturingbooks.com)

## Picturebook Analysis

### 1. Text and image relationship.

a) Analyze the text breaks. Do the line breaks slow you down or move you to turn the page? Are there some pages with no text or pages with more text than others?

Why do you think they chose the particular typeface? Is it consistent or does it vary (if so, what is the pattern)?

b) Is there rhythm, repetition, or rhyme used? How does the language enhance or detract from the aesthetic whole?

c) Do the illustrations take place before, during or after the events of the text? Describe the layout of the images and text.

d) Does the story rely more on illustrations or more on text? Why do you think the author made this choice?

### 2. Dominance and subservience in illustrations: Who has the power?

Power is often indicated by the positioning of images in relation to one another and to the reader. For instance, does the reader have to look up to the image or is there one character looking down on another?

Find three different examples of power positioning in your story and describe them.

3. How do the author and illustrator use elements of design to tell the story? Find examples of and explain **four** elements of design (as outlined above) use in the picturebook. What visual tools or elements are used to create the intended meaning? How is it accomplished?

4. Is there anything unusual or creative about your picturebook? Explain. Is it effective?

5. Is there a noticeable pattern (image or text) happening in your picturebook? Explain.

6. Cultural Signs: Think back to the activity we did with the advertisement. What cultural signs can you recognize within the picture book? In other words, in what ways does the author rely on the reader's prior knowledge to understand certain signs or context?

**Now it's your turn!**

Choose a page from the picturebook and subvert its meaning by redrawing the page, using various elements of visual design that you have learned. For example, you can change the message of the picture by changing the mood, or positions of power.

## Appendix F

### Poem Response

#### Mirror

By Sylvia Plath

I am silver and exact. I have no preconceptions.  
What ever you see I swallow immediately  
Just as it is, unmisted by love or dislike.  
I am not cruel, only truthful---  
The eye of a little god, four-cornered.  
Most of the time I meditate on the opposite wall.  
It is pink, with speckles. I have looked at it so long  
I think it is a part of my heart. But it flickers.  
Faces and darkness separate us over and over.  
Now I am a lake. A woman bends over me,  
Searching my reaches for what she really is.  
Then she turns to those liars, the candles or the moon.  
I see her back, and reflect it faithfully.  
She rewards me with tears and an agitation of hands.  
I am important to her. She comes and goes.  
Each morning it is her face that replaces the darkness.  
In me she has drowned a young girl, and in me an old woman  
Rises toward her day after day, like a terrible fish.

- What does the poem mean to you?
- What images or phrases capture your attention?
- What does the poem make you think of?
- Can you relate to the poem?
- What images evoke emotion?

## Appendix G

### The Deconstruction of Disney's *Snow White*

1. Who is the intended audience? Why do you think so?
2. What changes did Disney make to the story of *Snow White*? Why do you think he made these changes? Provide at least three examples.
3. Indicate below which characters from the film most reflect masculine qualities and which ones reflect feminine qualities.

#### GENDER BIAS & CONSTRUCTION

Masculine Qualities	Characters	Feminine Qualities	Characters
Who is active?		Who is passive?	
Who is outside?		Who is indoors?	
Who is mobile?		Who is static?	
Who is demanding?		Who is nurturing?	
Who desires?		Who is desired?	

4. Are there any characters that do not fit society's constructions of femininity and masculinity (see the above chart)? How do you think we are supposed to "read" these characters? Do we dislike them? Do we admire them?
5. What do you think the fairytale *Snow White* teaches young girls and boys about what it means to be *feminine* and *masculine*? How does the film support gender bias? How does the film challenge gender bias?
6. How is the film a product of its time? How does it reflect the values, culture and society of the 1930s? [film was produced in 1937]
7. Do you think literature or film perpetuates gender stereotypes or creates them? Explain.

#### Design & Art Elements

8. What art or compositional elements (colour, framing, perspective, music) does Disney use to create mood throughout the movie? Provide examples.
9. What visual signs (images which connote cultural meaning) did you notice while watching the film? What codes do these symbols represent? For example peacock feathers around the Queen's throne represents her vanity.

## Appendix H

### The Nuts and Bolts of a Graphic Novel

In partners, look through a graphic novel. Find and record an example of the various elements of design outlined in the questions below:

1a) What colours do the artist predominantly use? Examine use of tone, shading and gradation (a gradual passing from one tint or shade to another)

b) What kind of lines are predominantly used in the novel? Do the type of lines match the mood?

2. What kind of font or typography is used? Why do you think it is chosen?

3. What does the cover tell you about the story? Is it informative? Explain.

4. Whose perspective or point of view is the story told from? How can you tell?

5. Find three of the six panel to panel transitions that Scott McCloud outlines in your notes. Which type does the artist mostly rely on to tell his or her story?

6. Find an establishing shot. What is its purpose within the context of the novel?

7. Find an example of an up-shot and a low-shot. What is its purpose within the context of the novel?

8. What type of shots are used most often throughout the novel (long shot, close-up or middle shot)? Why do you think the artist made this decision?

9. Find an example of a *double-height panel* (where the focus of the panel is vertically longer than a regular framed panel) from the novel. What is its purpose?

10. Does the author rely mostly on text or pictures to tell their story? Find three types of word/picture combinations that McCloud outlines in your notes. Which one is most effective? What purpose does each one serve within the context of the whole?

11. How does the illustrator use contrast or juxtaposition in the novel? How does this add to the story?

**Activity:** Now it's your turn

Choose a 2-3 panel sequence (preferably one depicting emotion). Write the dialogue on a separate piece of paper. Now look at how the artist has used facial expression and gesture to show what is going on in the scene.

Subvert the scene, using the same dialogue with different facial expressions and body language. How does the overall message change by altering the pictures?

## Appendix I

### *Snow White and the Huntsman: Film Analysis*

As we watch the film,

1. Keep track of the different stages of the hero's journey. It can be argued that both Snow White and the Huntsman partake in a heroic journey. You may choose to follow either Snow White or the Huntsman (or both) as we watch the film.
2. Depending on which letter you are responsible for, answer the appropriate questions at the bottom of the worksheet.

#### **Act I: Setting, protagonist and initial conflict is established.**

Ordinary world:

Call to adventure:

Refusal of the call:

Mentor:

Crossing of the First threshold (where the hero physically enters the special world):

#### **Act II: Trials and tribulations/ The adventure**

Tests:

Allies:

Enemies:

Approach to the inner most cave (where the hero enters a dangerous place or about to face his greatest enemy):

Ordeal (where the hero confronts his greatest fear and faces the possibility of death; sometimes the hero dies and is born again (rite of passage):

Reward (where the hero survives the battle or death and obtains his reward i.e. sword, knowledge):

### **Act III: Return home and approaching the climax**

The road back:

Resurrection (another life and death moment):

Return with the Elixir (hero returns to the ordinary world, changed):

### **Individual questions:**

1. Does the story follow the Hero's journey? Explain.
2. How do the characters change by the end of the film?
3. How did your scene that you storyboarded differ in the movie? What was similar? Was this scene successful in its visual portrayal?

### **Group discussion questions for *Snow White and the Huntsman***

#### **A: Symbolism:**

1. What *character archetypes* and *symbols* do you recognize from our previous analysis of Grimm's and Disney's versions of Snow White?
2. Do you recognize any of these archetypes and symbols in everyday society and in popular media (film, music)?
3. What purpose do these symbols serve?

**A: Foreshadowing:** Find two examples of foreshadowing in the film.

**B: Heroes** have both an outer goal and an inner goal. They must overcome the inner goal in order to achieve the outer goal. What are the hero's goals in this movie?

**B:** There are many kinds of heroes in film. The anti-hero is an unintentional hero (e.g., Robin Hood) where he does not set out to do anything heroic but ends up being a hero anyway. A Rogue hero is often selfish and self-serving but comes around in the end and saves the day (e.g., Hans Solo or Jack Sparrow). Which category do you think the Huntsman fits?

**C: Conflict** is what builds the character and what drives the plot. Without conflict, there is no story. There are many types of conflict (person vs person, person vs environment and person vs self). The latter is often the most interesting. Sometimes conflict is presented by a dilemma for



the character. It is often harder to do the right thing. What types of conflicts are in the film and what purpose do they serve?

**C:** How has this version of the story been changed from Grimm's version of the tale? For what purpose were these changes made?

**D: The Villain:** The most effective antagonists are ones that are realistic (or have human characteristics) and that the viewer can relate to on some level. We need to understand the antagonist's motivation in order to buy into their character. What do you think of the Queen's character in this film? Is she realistic? Build a character sketch of the Queen.

**E: Elements of Design:** In your opinion what design elements (dialogue, colour, camera angles, sound, costumes, gesture) were most effective, and why? Provide some examples.

## Appendix J

### Glossary of Key Terms Pertinent to the Fairytale Unit

**Active** – to be engaged in or causing activity/ change; capable of exerting influence

**Allusion** – a brief reference in literature, explicit or indirect, to a person, place, event or to another literary work or passage

**Appropriation** - where an image or character is taken from one context and placed in another).

**Archetype** – a recurrent symbol or motif in literature, art, or mythology

**Binary** – the system or use of stable oppositions (as good and evil) to analyze a subject

**Breaking the fourth wall** – the character comes out of the frame/story

**Codes** – associations or connotations that are informed by our culture. Systems of meaning that organize and inform texts and signs

**Connotation** – the feeling or idea that a word invokes in addition to its literal or primary meaning

**Denotation** – the literal or dictionary definition of a word

**Dominant ideology** – the beliefs, values and morals shared by the majority of the people in a society

**Framing** – framing devices that either disconnect or connect elements of the picture to tell the reader what to read as joined or separate. It tells the reader where to focus

**Gender** – the state of being male or female, socially and culturally.

**Gutters** – the space between frames

**Intertextuality** – connections in form and content between two or more texts

**Metafiction** – where the story draws attention to the fact that it is fiction such as a character interacting with the narrator

**Moral** – the implied or stated lesson of a story

**Parody** – a literary work that imitates the characteristic style of an author or work for comic effect or ridicule; a humorous, satirical or off-beat imitation of a person, event or serious work of literature.

**Passive** – to be influenced by or acted upon; not engaged in active participation.

**Pastiche** – a musical, literary, or artistic composition made up of selections from different works

**Positioning** – where an image is placed within an advertisement or picture in relation to the reader (left and right or centered, off-centered etc.) which provides a sense of movement within the image as well as attaching value to the various elements.

**Preferred meaning** - the intended meaning of the creator

**Salience** – the degree to which an element draws attention to itself, creating a hierarchy amongst the images (due to its size, its place in the foreground, its contrast in tonal value or colour).

**Semiotics** – science of signs. A form of analysis where texts and signs work together to create a code of predictable, repeated, stereotypes.

**Setting** – the time, place and mood of the story

**Subvert** – to challenge or undermine the meaning of something

**Symbolism** – characters, objects, events or settings that represent something else beyond themselves

## Appendix K

### Fairytale Analysis Assessment

1. /1

2. /3

3. /3

4. /2

#### 5a) Visual Analysis

/15

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fully Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Does not answer the question. Plot summary. Simplistic observations. Ideas may be listed. May be only one paragraph.	Ideas tend to be superficial and underdeveloped. Some plot summary. Exhibits limited understanding of signs. Minimal discussion about context of tale.	Strong observations. Ideas are fully developed. Shows some understanding of semiotics (signs). Some analysis of context and societal values.	Insightful observations. Deep analysis of context and societal values that contribute to overall meaning. Shows a solid understanding of semiotic design.

#### b) Text Analysis

/15

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fully Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Does not answer the question. Mostly plot summary. Simplistic observations. Ideas may be listed. No understanding of archetypes.	Ideas tend to be superficial and underdeveloped. Some plot summary. Archetypes are recognized but no analysis of purpose. Limited use of archetypal terminology.	Strong observations. Ideas are fully developed. Shows solid understanding of archetypes. Solid understanding of message or purpose exhibited.	Insightful observations. Deep analysis of overall meaning or purpose. Shows a solid understanding of archetypal analysis.

## 6a) Changes to the fairytale

/15

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fully Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Simplistic observations. Ideas may be listed or not in multi-paragraphs. Does not address the question.	Ideas tend to be superficial and underdeveloped. Only one version may be discussed. Limited discussion as to why changes were made.	Strong observations made and well supported with examples. Shows a solid understanding of fairytale and context in which it was made.	Insightful observations made of both versions of tale. Points are well supported. Strong understanding of why changes were made (context, history).

## b) Dominant ideologies

/15

Does Not Meet Expectations	Meets Expectations	Fully Meets Expectations	Exceeds Expectations
Simplistic observations. Ideas may be listed or only one paragraph. Misunderstanding of the question.	Ideas tend to be superficial and underdeveloped. Limited understanding of ideologies evident. Examples may only be from only one text.	Strong observations made from multiple versions. Well supported points. Shows a solid understanding of dominant ideologies. May have only discussed how tales either support or challenge.	Insightful examples from both texts provided to support points. Thoroughly examined at least two ideologies. Deep analysis of how tales support and challenge ideology.

7. /3

Total = /40

## Appendix L

### Multimodal Project Assessment

	<b>1- Ineffective</b>	<b>2-Effective</b>	<b>3-Advanced</b>	<b>4- Exceeds Expectations</b>
<b>Transitions &amp; Layout of Text/ Images</b>	Imbalance between images and text. Scene order may be confusing. Space not used effectively. Lacks effective transitions and pacing.	Image/text placement is expected. Lacks originality. One or two effective transitions but may be unintentional.	Some transitions are well planned. Text and images work appropriately together to provide meaning and context but may be predictable.	Creative placement of text and images; text and image each play a clear role in providing meaning and context. Scenes move seamlessly from one to the next. Panel transitions and pacing are effective and add to the mood.
<b>Grammar and Font Style</b>	Many grammatical errors which impede meaning or no use of print text.	One or two grammatical/ spelling errors but does not impede meaning.	No grammatical errors evident. Chosen font style adds to the aesthetic whole of the text.	Strong relationship between form and content. No spelling or grammatical errors.
<b>Elements of Art</b> <i>lines, colour, perspective, (p.o.v) framing, lighting shape, space, texture, gesture</i>	Elements may elicit emotions counter to the message. Little understanding demonstrated in how elements support meaning. POV may be inconsistent or unclear.	Some awareness and understanding demonstrated in how various elements can create mood and meaning.	Clear understanding demonstrated in the use of <i>some</i> elements to achieve a specific effect or meaning. May have missed or not included a few elements.	Strategic use of elements to emotionally or psychologically position the reader. Creative use of elements matches the message and creates mood. Image framing and camera shots bring depth and new meaning to characters and story. Evidence of solid understanding of visual literacy.
<b>Narrative and Literary Devices and Archetypes</b>	Narrative structure is unclear or confusing in parts. Theme or moral is unclear. Little to no understanding of literary devices.	Superficial use of cultural archetypes without purpose. Theme may not be evident. Some understanding of literary devices.	Intentional use of or challenging of traditional archetypes for intended meaning. Literary devices add to the story and the message.	Effective use of or challenge of traditional archetypes. Creative use of plot devices (irony, foreshadowing, suspense) which creates an emotional reader response. Strong theme resonates throughout.
<b>Elements of Design</b> <i>balance, contrast, salience, variety, movement, unity, repetition</i>	Unclear use of elements of design. Little to no evidence of understanding how design makes meaning.	Very little variety of elements used. Basic understanding of design elements evident.	Character, story and meaning are carefully constructed through elements of design. Some elements may not be used.	Superior use of most design elements. Scenes are beautifully balanced and aesthetically pleasing. Sophisticated understanding of visual literacy demonstrated.

<b>Intentions and Meaning</b>	Purpose of certain images is unclear. No evidence of subversion. Very little has been altered from original fairytale. Possible misunderstanding of Ideology.	Intended audience may not be clear. Fairytale has been altered but its purpose is unclear. Little understanding of subversion or ideology.	Original fairytale has been subverted; ideology clearly challenged but may not be very original. Theme or message is clear. Project is suited to intended audience.	Dominant ideology is clearly subverted through its retelling. Strong message. The retelling is original and creative. Project is appropriate for intended audience.
<b>Cover</b>	Title relates to the story. There may be no illustrations. No synopsis evident.	Title and illustrations relate to the story. No synopsis on the back cover.	Title and illustrations clearly relate to the story.	Title and illustrations relate to the story and entice readers to open the text. Synopsis is concise and piques reader interest.

