

Dystopian Literature Circles

by

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## **Abstract**

This project features the teacher resource, “Dystopian Literature Circles,” which is designed to integrate technology with literacy in meaningful and authentic ways that foster student engagement. The design of the teacher resource reflects the theoretical and conceptual frameworks of Rosenblatt’s transactional theory, Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, multiliteracies, multimodality, and affinity spaces. The overarching goal of the teaching unit is to deepen and expand students’ responses during dystopian literature circle novels through participation in both face-to-face and online discussions. The review of the literature revealed that students develop both their face-to-face and online communication skills when online discussions are combined with face-to-face peer led discussions – skills that students will be required to use throughout school and into adulthood. Additionally, the culminating activity of the unit where students create their own utopia is designed to foster students’ creativity and to integrate their digital literacy skills with in-school literacy practices. The teacher resource also includes a variety of activities, and assessments that are intended to meaningfully engage students and that are directly connected to the British Columbia’s new English Language Arts curriculum (2013).

## Table of Contents

Abstract.....	i
Table of Contents.....	ii
Acknowledgements.....	vii
Chapter One Introduction.....	1
Dystopian Novels.....	2
Why Dystopian Novels?.....	3
Integrating Technology with Literature Circles.....	4
Creating the Teacher Resource.....	6
Project Overview.....	7
Chapter Two Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations.....	9
Theoretical Frameworks.....	10
Rosenblatt’s Transactional Theory.....	10
Social Constructivism.....	13
Conceptual Frameworks.....	16
Multiliteracies.....	16
Multimodalities.....	22
Affinity Spaces.....	28
Chapter Three Review of Literature.....	37
Peer Led Discussions.....	37
Young Adult Literature.....	42
Appeal of YAL for educators.....	43
Using YAL in classrooms.....	46

Online Literature Circles.....	52
Community in online literature circle discussions.....	52
Audience and authentic writing.....	55
Asynchronous versus synchronous communication.....	56
Time to consider, reflect, and compose.....	56
Equitable opportunities to respond.....	58
Responsive Teaching.....	60
Using transcripts.....	60
Teacher Participation and monitoring.....	62
Integrating technology.....	63
Socially constructed learning.....	66
Challenges to Online Literature Circle Discussions.....	67
Summary.....	69
Chapter Four Dystopian Literature Circles.....	71
Rationale.....	71
Considerations.....	73
Adaptations.....	74
Online Dystopian Literature Circles Overview.....	74
Activity Descriptions for Literature Circles.....	75
Activity 1 Whole class debate, defining dystopia, and setting up online discussions...75	
A. Whole class debate.....	75
B. Defining dystopia.....	75
C. Creating Moodle accounts.....	76

D. Introducing whole class online discussions.....	76
E. Starting the whole class online debate.....	77
F. Role of the teacher.....	78
Activity 2 Teacher book talk and student book selection.....	78
A. Teacher book talk.....	78
B. Student book selections.....	79
C. Distributing books.....	79
Activity 3 Face-to-face discussions.....	79
A. Preparing students for face-to-face discussions.....	79
B. Using post-it notes.....	80
C. Students' first literature circle discussions meeting.....	80
D. Creating time and space for literature circle discussions.....	81
E. Supporting and evaluating students' face-to-face discussions.....	81
F. Providing feedback for students' face-to face discussions .....	81
Activity 4 Online literature discussions.....	82
A. Preparing students for online discussions.....	82
B. Online discussion prompts.....	82
C. Supporting and evaluating online discussions.....	83
Activity 5 "Creating Your Own Utopia or Dystopia" culminating activity.....	84
Curriculum Connections.....	84
Assessment.....	90
Chapter Five Connections and Reflections.....	92
Using Young Adult Literature.....	92

Reader Response and Engaged Reading.....	93
Multiliteracies.....	95
Multimodalities.....	96
Socially Constructed Learning.....	97
Peer Led Discussions.....	99
Affinity Spaces.....	100
Online Literature Circle Discussions.....	102
Modeling and Explicit Instructions.....	103
Overall Reflections.....	103
References.....	107
Appendix A.....	116
Appendix B.....	119
Appendix C.....	120
Appendix D.....	121
Appendix E.....	122
Appendix F.....	123
Appendix G.....	124
Appendix H.....	125
Appendix I.....	126
Appendix J.....	127
Appendix K.....	130
Appendix L.....	132
Appendix M.....	133

Appendix N.....134

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## Chapter One

### Introduction

As I start my 14<sup>th</sup> year in the public education system as a classroom teacher and a teacher librarian, I find nothing as satisfying as watching students enthusiastically discuss, debate, and question a novel in a literature circle format. When I began my teaching career I was using techniques such as whole-class read alouds, chapter review questions, and large group discussions; however, it often seemed that students were not always as engaged as I expected and wanted them to be. Therefore, I was motivated to investigate ways to engage these students with literature. When I started to employ literature circles I noticed that students were both excited and engaged when discussing their novels with peers. However, I wondered if educational technology applications might further engage my students. Recently, I introduced the use of a course management system, Moodle (2002), for students to extend their face-to-face literature discussions and to include students in other classes who were reading the same book. I consider myself a novice educational technologist but by starting to use technology tools with literature circles I am learning as I go, alongside my colleagues and students. I have observed an increase in engagement for many students who are eager to apply their “know how” with technology to their literature circle discussions and activities online.

My decision to use dystopian novels for literature circles started with my students’ excitement for Suzanne Collin’s *Hunger Games* trilogy (2008, 2009, 2010). I, too, had started to read the trilogy and enjoyed it as much as my students. As the volume of published dystopian novels grew I realized that dystopian novels would make engaging selections for literature circles. In fact, according to Jack Martin, President of the Young

Adult Library Services Association, current trends in teen reading indicate that dystopian romances are still very popular among teen readers along with alternative histories, manga and fairy tale retellings (Silvester, 2013). Additionally, McCoy's (2011) survey of popular fiction in the United States also found that dystopias blended with science fiction were very popular with teen readers. Thus, this trend in literature provided me with an opportunity to introduce a variety of newer dystopian novels that students would be excited to read in my English classes.

In this chapter, I define the characteristics and appeal of dystopian novels for adolescent readers. Additionally I discuss my motivation to integrate technology with literature circles. Lastly, I outline the content of the chapters in this project.

### **Dystopian Novels**

Hill (2011) defines dystopia as follows:

a futuristic society in which a system had been constructed to allay the ills that pervade our present, such as poverty and over population. On the surface this system, though advanced in technology and or other means, appears to benefit the populace, but on closer examination citizens are worse off. (p. 101)

These stories exaggerate today's environmental, societal and political problems and portray them as bleak realistic futures (Hill, 2011; Wilkinson, 2010). Often the dystopian society is described as rigidly conformist. Within these societies in a specifically YA dystopian novel, the adolescent heroes dare to ask questions and seek answers about their world (Hintz, 2002), and ultimately emerge as individuals in opposition to a conformist society. Additionally, the adolescent heroes show great determination and grit as they fight the authorities in physically and emotionally challenging environments (Hill, 2011;

Reeve, 2011). Dystopian novels celebrate adolescent characters who expose the truth and bring freedom.

### **Why Dystopian Novels?**

My reasons for using dystopian novels as selections for literature circles are many and varied. Dystopian novels can serve as a mirror of the adolescent world, reflecting the struggles and frustrations that many young people encounter while going through adolescence. These books currently are enjoying pop culture attention and popularity in print, as well as in movies, youth culture, fashion and music. I also wanted to explore if students reading these books would look more critically at their own world with regard to environmental awareness, social and political injustices. As Wilkinson (2012) and Wolk (2009) suggest, using dystopian literature allows students to explore this world's problems through the exaggeration of the novel's world in order to consider alternative possibilities.

Furthermore, dystopian novels portray characters rebelling against the society, which may appeal to adolescents who may feel powerless in their lives, especially those who are attempting to break free of the authority, whether at school, in relating to their parents, or with society in general (Hintz, 2011). Additionally, adolescents are also trying to establish their own identities and place in the world (Hintz, 2011; Reeves, 2011). Thus, it may be appealing to adolescents to read about a futuristic world that depicts an adult world that is destroyed. Students may also feel safe reading about and imagining living in a post apocalyptic world rather than living in one (Hill, 2011; Reeves, 2011). Further, examining the bleak and depressing futuristic worlds depicted within dystopian novels may provide a starting point for teachers to engage their students in discussions about

current environmental, political and societal problems and may urge students to make changes to their own worlds (Hill, 2011; Wilkinson, 2011; Wolk, 2009).

### **Integrating Technology with Literature Circles**

My motivation for integrating technology into literature circles and the unit's culminating project is derived from the belief that educators must incorporate new technologies into their pedagogical practices. Educators have a responsibility to provide instruction about, and opportunities for students to use technology in school to capitalize on most students experience with technology out of school, as well as to prepare students for participating in today's society. New technologies also offer teachers additional tools to help engage, create collaborative learning environments, and personalize learning for their students (Farkas, 2011; Tarasiuk, 2010). I believe, and the review of the literature supports my belief, that students' face-to-face discussions can be enriched with an online discussion forum. The teacher resource I created, "Dystopian Literature Circles" and the culminating project "Create Your Own Utopia" discussed in Chapter Four, capitalize on students' collaborative learning and ways of creatively representing their knowledge. Additionally, in the teacher resource I also recommend teachers use Moodle, iPads and various applications to allow students to explore and create using the technology that best suits their needs. I also believe that the integration of technology with literacy practices within the unit provides students with new communication skills that will be required throughout and after their schooling. Furthermore, it is essential that students be taught the skills to communicate socially and electronically in school and that the delivery of these skills to students should be done using effective, and relevant learning opportunities.

A key consideration in the design of the teacher resource that features online literature discussions is the understanding that students' face-to-face discussions can be expanded with online discussions. As is discussed in Chapter Three, peer led discussions can encourage students to expand their understanding and construct a deeper understanding of the novel as they listen and respond to their peers (Evans, 2002). Furthermore, Gambrell (1996) states that, providing students with opportunities to engage socially with books during literature circle discussions increases student motivation to read and deepens student learning. Additionally, having students self-select a novel for literature circles affords students with the opportunity to select a book that is "just right for them, right now" (Daniel, 2006). Students' self-selection of text fosters student motivation and engagement with reading (Gambrell, 1996). Literature circles also invite students to become responsible for their participation as the "students do everything adult readers do: selecting a book, creating groups, making a reading schedule, responding to the reading, having conversations, and self assessment" (Daniel, 2006, p. 55).

As is also discussed in Chapter Three, extending students' face-to-face peer led discussions to online discussions can result in many benefits (Day & Kroon, 2007; Stewart, 2009; Walker, 2010; Wolsey & Grisham, 2007). Online discussions afford students with more time to think and compose responses, and may also enable students to enrich their understanding of the novel by building on their face- to-face discussions. Students may also experience a deeper sense of community as they discuss the novels online because peers can provide supportive comments and become accountable as they respond to one another. Additionally, students may find writing discussion responses more relevant and engaging online than doing pen and paper journal entries because they

are writing for their peers, who constitute an authentic audience. Furthermore, the integration of technology in literature circles allows students to apply and develop new literacy skills that students may find relevant and engaging.

### **Creating the Teacher Resource**

The overall aim of creating the teacher resource, “Dystopian Literature Circles,” featured in Chapter Four was to develop a teacher friendly resource that engages students with current dystopian novels and integrates technology with traditional literacy activities. I also wanted to create a culminating project “Create Your Own Utopia” that would allow students to apply their creativity with technology skills.

The resource is designed to provide students with opportunities to demonstrate many learning standards for comprehending and connecting, as well as creating and communicating, competencies identified in the British Columbia Ministry of Education, English Language Arts curriculum (2013). In the Goals and Rationale section of the new English Language Arts curriculum, the following four goals are identified as “Students will have the opportunity to”:

1. Develop and construct meaning, think creatively, critically analyze, evaluate and synthesize.
2. Develop literacy in the broadest sense by accessing and understanding process and effectively using oral language, written and digital multimedia forms of communication for a range of purposes and audiences.
3. Sustain a life long love of reading and learning as well as an appreciation of the power and beauty of language and literature.

4. Develop a deep understanding of literacy concepts and how these may be used to accomplish personal social and academic goals. (British Columbia, Ministry of Education, English Language Arts, Goals and Rationale, 2013, para. 7).

Several of the activities included in the project reflect the goals of the British Columbia Ministry of Education Draft English Language Arts curriculum (2013). Students are offered a variety of opportunities to read, respond and creatively express themselves during discussions and while creating their utopia in the culminating activity. The teacher resource is also aligned with British Columbia Ministry of Education draft English Language Arts curriculum (2013) assessment goal, to have an increased emphasis on assessment for learning practices. Throughout the online and face-to-face discussions, as well as in the culminating project, students are asked to reflect on their learning using self-assessments and rubrics.

### **Project Overview**

In Chapter One I have discussed my motivations to select my topic and outlined how the teacher resource aligns with the British Columbia Ministry of Education draft English Language Arts curriculum (2013). In Chapter Two I describe the theoretical and conceptual understandings that applicable to the design of the project: Rosenblatt's transactional theory (1994), Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory (Smagorinsky, 2007), multiliteracies, (New London Group, 1996), multimodalities (Jewitt, 2008) and affinity spaces (Gee, 2004). In Chapter Three I provide a selected review of the relevant literature concerning peer led discussion, young adult literature, and online literature circles. Chapter Four is the teacher resource itself. The document includes suggestions and considerations for implementing the unit and provides information about how the

project activities meet specific learning standards outlined in the 2013 British Columbia Ministry of Education Draft English Language Arts curriculum. An annotated bibliography of the novels, examples of self- assessments and rubrics for activities, and a description of the culminating student project, “Create Your Own Utopia,” are also included in the teacher resource. In Chapter Five I connect the current literature to the teacher resource and reflect on my completion of the Master of Education project.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations**

The use of young adult literature in literature circles has been researched extensively in many classroom-based studies. However, the traditional design and delivery of literature circles is changing as technology is being increasingly integrated into today's classrooms. Thus, it is important to understand the findings from research that have explored how to effectively integrate technology with literature circles.

In this chapter I describe the theoretical and conceptual frameworks that influenced my decisions for this project; integrating technology in literature circles that feature selections of dystopian young-adult literature. Overall the content of Chapter Two explores the theoretical foundations concerning reader transaction with text and reader interaction with peers. The theoretical and conceptual frameworks that are relevant to my project are Rosenblatt's transactional theory, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and social constructivism. The concept of Gee's (2004) affinity spaces is also discussed as it includes how students interact with online spaces. Other conceptual foundations discussed in this chapter include multiliteracies and multimodality. In Chapter Three, a continuation of the literature review for my project, I present a review of young adult literature and peer led discussions, focusing particularly on increasing student engagement, is followed by a review of literature concerning online Literature Circles discussions, including a discussion about the merits and variety of methods that may be used to integrate technology within Literature Circle activities.

## **Theoretical Frameworks**

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks that influenced my approach to designing the Literature Circle project are based on Louise Rosenblatt's transactional theory, and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory and social constructivism. I also examine the foundational understanding of the roles of played by online affinity spaces and the concept of multimodality and multiliteracies.

### **Rosenblatt's transactional theory.**

Louise Rosenblatt was an influential literary theorist whose development of transactional theory, which explains the complexities of the reading process and meaning construction, is both widely supported and written about by scholars and teachers. Rosenblatt questioned the notion that meaning was already "in" the text and developed a theory that explained how the reader and text transact to create meaning. Rosenblatt was influenced by the work of John Dewey's (1934) publication *Art as Experience* and his use of the term "transaction," by Charles Sander Pierce's semiotics theory, and by Lady Welby's triadic concept of language (Karolides, 1999, p.162). Theorizing that meaning construction from reading a text was a complex process, Rosenblatt explained that consideration and understanding of a reader's social and cultural experiences are an integral part of reading and meaning construction. According to Rosenblatt (1994), her transactional theory respects how "every reading act is an event, or transaction involving a particular reader and a particular pattern of signs, a text and occurring at a particular time in a particular context" (p. 1063). Rosenblatt (1994) described the reading process as a "dynamic" event in which the reader and text "act on one another... during the transaction to create meaning" (p. 1063). Meaning, according to Rosenblatt (1994), is

constructed through a process that is a “complex, nonlinear, recursive, self correcting transaction” (p. 1094). Other scholars have also written about and support Rosenblatt’s transactional theory and the meaning construction process of readers. For instance, Franzak (2006) states that meaning is constructed through a “process” instead of a “correct” understanding of text.

While Rosenblatt (2001) emphasized the particularity of the reading event, she also explained how the reading process “evokes past experiences of language... and of the world for the reader” (p. 268). Lantandresse (2004) and Larson (2009) both support Rosenblatt’s transactional theory by noting the important role of students’ background knowledge when they make meaning of texts. As Rosenblatt (1982) explained, the words “stir up” a reader’s memory and “activate areas of consciousness”(p. 268). It is the process of activating one’s previous knowledge that enables the reader to create a “tentative notion of the subject” allowing the ideas of text to have meaning (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 268). Rosenblatt (1994) also highlighted the importance of a reader’s “linguistic-experiential reservoir” as “reading draws on the whole person’s past transactions with the environment” (p. 1065). This aspect of her theory explains why Rosenblatt finds it so important for teachers to have an understanding of a student’s “social and cultural environment” (Rosenblatt, 1982, p.273). Thus, for Rosenblatt the personal and social context for reading make each reading transaction a “unique event in time” (Karolides 1999, p. 162).

Rosenblatt (1982) also explained how the reader embraces a particular “mental set” or “stance” which establishes a purpose early in a reading. By adopting a stance the reader is “bringing certain aspects into the center of attention and pushing others into the fringes

of consciousness” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1066). Rosenblatt described two predominant stances that a reader may embrace while reading: the “efferent” or “aesthetic” stance. The efferent stance is what is carried away from a reading in the form of “ideas, information, directions and or conclusions” (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1067). The aesthetic stance is where the reader devotes attention to what is experienced during a reading event, focusing on feelings, ideas, situations, scenes, personalities and emotions (Rosenblatt, 1994). Rosenblatt explained how selecting a stance demonstrates that “reading is an organizing, and synthesizing activity” where the meaning of a text emerges from the interplay of the “back and forth influence” of the reader to text and text to reader (Karolides, 1999, p. 164). In both stances the reader’s transaction with text and the subsequent “evocation” of “the work” are the result of the “ideas and experiences linked with a text” and are unique to the individual reader during and after a reading event (Rosenblatt, 1994, p.1070). Rosenblatt (1982) further explained that the efferent and aesthetic stance exist on a continuum, and that most reading events will move along the efferent and aesthetic continuum, demonstrating how there are multiples ways of transacting with text (Karolides, 1999). Rosenblatt espoused that it is important for educators to not only acknowledge the interplay between the stances but to also teach students how to “handle the affective as well as the cognitive aspects of meaning when reading” (Karolides, 1999, p. 167).

Rosenblatt’s transactional theory explicates why it is imperative that educators consider the individual student and his or her literary and life experiences because students construct diverse meanings from a single text. Using Rosenblatt’s transactional theory as a foundational theoretical orientation in the design of my project serves to

deepen my understanding of the reader and text transaction explaining the unique and complex processes involved in reading and meaning construction of texts in classrooms.

Lastly, Rosenblatt recognized the personal and social nature of the reading event and how the latter influence meaning construction. These ideas are reflected in the “Dystopian Literature Circles” teacher resource in Chapter Four as students read and discuss their connections, questions and predictions about the novels in small groups. The following section discusses Vygotsky’s theory sociocultural theory and the learning process associated with social constructivism.

### **Social constructivism**

Informed by Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, social constructivism suggests that learners are “social beings who are being inducted into cultural practices and ways of seeing the world that are enacted by the groups to which they belong” (Barnes, 2008). Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, posited that learning is a “social and collaborative activity” that allows people to construct meaning through exchanges with others (Schreiber & Valle, 2013, p. 396). The central themes of Vygotsky’s work emphasize the influential roles of social and cultural backgrounds on individual learners and describe how social interactions can serve to create new perspectives for all learners. Thus, a social constructivist view of the classroom values students meaningfully interacting with one another while constructing their knowledge (Schreiber & Valle, 2013).

Smagorinsky (2013) and Barnes (2008) identify several key tenets of Vygotsky’s work that are applicable to teaching English in today’s classrooms. According to Smagorinsky, Vygotsky described speech as an essential tool for learning, and explained how speech is helpful in forming and representing ideas. Barnes (2008) also notes how

Vygotsky was one of the first psychologists to highlight the importance of speech for “organizing and understanding the world” (p. 9). Barnes (2008) explains that Vygotsky viewed speech as “central to learning” (p. 9) because the words and sentences hold meanings and purposes that represent the social relationships in which they are embedded. The role of speech to create meaning supports the idea that talk should be encouraged in classrooms as it enables students to experiment with their own ideas and to consider other students’ perspectives and ideas (Smagorinsky, 2013).

The connection between cognition and emotion is another focus of Vygotsky’s work (Smagorinsky, 2013). Vygotsky believed that all things in life are interrelated including how people think and feel. Smagorinsky (2013) states that Vygotsky also viewed learning as social and that people learn best by engaging with others. Smagorinsky (2013) also explains Vygotsky’s understanding that the cultural aspect of learning varies among people who may have different “culturally learned ways of knowing” (p. 197). Vygotsky argued that students’ diverse backgrounds and experiences impact how they learn and understand concepts (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). Vygotsky emphasized that it is essential for teachers to create a social climate of learning, especially for students whose home cultural practices are different from that of the school. This understanding supports the creation of inclusive classrooms where students’ diverse cultural backgrounds are valued and represented in the teacher’s instruction and assignments (Smagorinsky, 2007).

Smagorinsky (2013) also describes Vygotsky’s belief that learning occurs best when it is made relevant to the learner, termed as “spontaneous or everyday concepts” (p. 198). Vygotsky believed it was important to have students’ out-of-school knowledge be reflected in the classroom to develop relevance and meaning for students as well as

enrich students' knowledge (Smagorinsky, 2007). Thus, Vygotsky advocated that teachers create learning environments that use "authentic tasks" considered meaningful to students because the task reflected students' real worlds (Schreiber & Valle, 2013, p. 397). According to Smagorinsky (2013), Vygotsky asserted that without the connection between out of school knowledge and in school practices learning for students would become "hollow and difficult" (p. 199).

Vygotsky emphasized that teachers need to value the processes involved in learning, particularly where the written and spoken word is generated, and not solely the "product of learning" (Smagorinsky, 2013, p. 202). Similarly, Au (1998) suggested that Vygotsky believed that a holistic approach to learning would benefit student learning more than "methods based on the analysis of separate elements" (p. 300). Smagorinsky (2013) explains that teachers, according to Vygotsky, should view a student's learning as "tentative steps on the way to ideas and expressions of greater sophistication and clarity" rather than judge a student's initial learning (p. 202).

Applying Vygotsky's social constructivist perspective to literacy practices enables educators to understand and appreciate the importance of students' diverse social and cultural backgrounds in shaping learning experiences (Schreiber & Valle, 2013). Social constructivist theory underlines the discussion activities which aim to enrich students' understanding of the novels, as students share and consider their personal connections, predictions, and questions regarding the novel with one another. In the next section I discuss the conceptual frameworks of multiliteracies, multimodality and affinity spaces. These conceptual frameworks reflect the importance of integrating new communication technologies into classrooms.

## **Conceptual Frameworks**

The concepts of multiliteracies and multimodality are key understandings that were applied to the design of activities for the project described in Chapter Four.

### **Multiliteracies**

Multiliteracies was a term coined by the members of the New London Group (1996) to describe a new literacy pedagogy that broadens understanding of literacy to include a “multiplicity of discourses” (p. 61). Broadening the definition of literacy to include multiple literacies, the New London Group (1996) described its foundational understanding of the latter by stating that, “educators must ensure that all students benefit from learning in ways that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life” (p. 60). Thus, a multiliteracies approach reflects the need to create classroom-learning environments that are reflective of the diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds of students.

The New London Group (1996) identified the following six complex and integrated modes of multiliteracies that facilitate meaning making: linguistic, audio, spatial, gestural, visual, and multimodal (i.e., how the other modes integrate with one another). They further explained how new communications media are changing the ways people use language and stated that no longer can “single skill set or standards” meet the arising new understandings emerging from these new communications (New London Group, 1996, p. 64). Thus, “using multiple languages, multiple Englishes and communications patterns are necessary for effective interaction in all aspects of life” (New London Group, 1996, p. 64). The New London Group further explained that global connectedness and cultural and linguistic diversity are current factors impacting student learning. In fact,

Kalantzis and Cope (2008), two members of the original New London Group, noted that migration, multiculturalism, global economy and new communication technologies have created a shift away from the notion that English should be taught to students in a monomodal fashion; that is considered learning as “ordered and controllable” (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008, p. 199). Instead, a multiliteracies approach requires educators to consider the adoption of an “open ended and flexible grammar” to allow learners to explain linguistic, and cultural differences as well as to teach students about the multimodality and its influence on communication (Kalantzis & Cope, 2008, p. 197). Additionally, Kalantzis and Cope describe how many people in our contemporary world are immersed in and communicate with a variety of new technologies. Thus, educators today have a responsibility to understand and to incorporate new technologies that enable students to express themselves and build communities in new ways.

A study conducted by Cumming-Potvin (2007) explored “how the convergence of multiliteracies, scaffolding and reading circles in a Grade 7 class offered new possibilities for literacy development in a supportive environment” (p. 485). More specifically, the teacher integrated all elements of the New London Group’s multiliteracies pedagogy (1996), including situated practice, which involves connecting students’ out-of-school knowledge with in-school tasks; overt instruction, which refers to providing explicit instruction for new tasks; critical framing, whereby students further their understanding of what they are learning by examining its relation to sociocultural and political worlds; and transformative practice, which involves students demonstrating their new understanding.

The Grade 7 class in Cumming-Potvin's (2007) study consisted of 12 males and 9 females. The research occurred in an elementary school in the south metropolitan region of Perth, Western Australia. Prior to the implementation of reading circles, the teacher modeled various reading strategies using picture books, short stories and extracts from novels. To further students' reading strategies the teacher modeled effective reading strategies as she audio-taped herself reading chapters from a whole class novel study, and posted these recordings on a reading webpage for students and parents to access at home or at school. Next, the teacher implemented the reading circles, with whole class and individual tasks that integrated traditional and multimodal texts. Cumming-Potvin (2007) selected four boys to observe. These boys were noted by the teacher as low achieving due to learning difficulties associated with dyslexia, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder. To track the literacy events the researcher used a spiraling cycle of four steps of planning, acting, observing and reflecting. Data collection included student work samples, interviews and direct observations. Lastly, Cumming-Potvin conducted data analysis by coding and analyzing the transcripts of recorded discussions.

The article focused on Nicholas, one of the four boys in the study. Cumming-Potvin (2007) observed and conducted interviews both in Nicholas's home and at school. Analysis of Nicholas's home observations and interviews showed that although he struggled with reading, he was quite adept at playing and downloading computer games, particularly car racing games. His mother noted that he struggled with reading at home and that he often gave up, even if the reading was intentional, such as reading a TV guide. However, it was also observed that at home Nicholas read magazines about cars and that he used the pictures, brief texts and family around him to help understand words.

Additionally, in an online task at home Nicholas was observed skillfully guiding his parent through the multimodal features of the class website. School observations made by Cumming-Potvin revealed that when Nicholas was scaffolded during small reading groups tasks that he successfully contributed and debated with his peers. The teacher used overt and situated practice for a discussion, which allowed Nicholas to express, validate, and disagree with the diverse views of his peers because the discussion prompts were framed with real life examples. Cumming-Potvin suggested that Nicholas benefited from having supportive people such as his teacher and family who assisted him with reading and comprehending. Additionally, as evidenced by Nicholas's ability to explain and successfully navigate the class website for his parent, Nicholas's home computer skills were complemented with school literacy skills. Findings from the study suggested that due to Nicholas's teacher adopting a multiliteracies approach that integrated New London Group's (1996) situated practice, overt instruction, critical framing and transformative practice, Nicholas was able to develop his identity at school as a literacy learner by adopting the role as expert with technology in the classroom when he taught his parent how to use the school website. Cumming-Potvin (2007) recommended that multiliteracy experiences and instruction be drawn from students' "cultural and intellectual resources" (p. 502) and that they be linked with school activities in meaningful ways to promote positive relationships between home and school communities.

The role an educator plays in creating learning spaces that facilitate the process of students' self-expression and community building requires an understanding that the "old rules of literacy need to be supplemented with today's new communication environment"

(Kalantiz & Cope, 2008, p. 202). The literacy practices of today's educators need to account for the multitude of different uses and contexts in which students can represent and apply their understanding and communication. Indeed, Kalantiz and Cope (2008) state that "literacy involves not only knowledge of grammatical conventions but also effective communication in diverse setting[s] and using tools of text design which may include word processing, desktop publishing and image manipulation" (p. 202).

Applying these new basics to literacy instruction means that educators are providing students with opportunities and experiences that can help them become adaptable and creative learners who can communicate and represent their understanding using both traditional and digital literacies.

Another example of teachers using a multiliteracies pedagogy was demonstrated in multiple-case study conducted by Cooper, Lockyer and Brown (2013). The researchers examined the "multiliteracies learning experiences and outcomes for students engaged in a media analysis and digital video construction program" called *Making News Today* (Cooper et al., p. 93). The study took place in a year 10 English class, consisting of 21 girls and 9 boys of mixed abilities. The class composition had little cultural or sociocultural diversity. The high school, located in New South Wales, Australia, was in a region consisting of middle-income families. The research team, in collaboration, developed the 10-week program, *Making News Today*, with industry representatives and 12 primary and secondary teachers. Student activities were focused on media and were intended to scaffold students to analyze, create and critically analyze media. Overall, the aim of the project tasks was to have students better understand the news making process. The activities also were designed to help students understand meaning-making as

described in the New London Group's multiliteracies pedagogy. The first tasks scaffolded the students in understanding media analysis. The students were involved in examining various television, print and online news presentations. The students then created their own news stories by writing scripts and shooting footage about topics within their own school community. Throughout the project students had access to the project based website where they could upload and share their final news broadcasts as well as having access to a professional television journalist and teachers who provided feedback to them. Data collection included observations, student-learning reflections, work samples, and interviews. The raw data were organized, coded and analyzed. Results from the study indicated that student engagement and motivation increased as students made their news stories. Students indicated that having the opportunity to work with computers and filming equipment in an English class was motivating and engaging. Thus, integrating digital video activities may greatly enhance student motivation and engagement (Cooper et al., 2013). Research observations also revealed that students understood and could analyze media messages more effectively after having made their own news stories because they better understood the processes involved in making a news story. Cooper et al. (2013) recommended that scaffolding student knowledge about media analysis was a factor that assisted students develop their information literacy skills.

Applying a multiliteracies approach to teaching can foster student engagement increase student motivation, and create relevant learning situations for students (Bailey, 2009; Cooper et al., 2013). As indicated earlier, learning environments should provide students with opportunities to access, apply and blend their out-of-school knowledge with school-based literacy practices. Adopting a multiliteracies approach that values students'

diverse experiences and integrates new communication technologies can create engaging learning environments that promote creativity and problem-solving skills.

Understanding the role and importance of multiliteracies in the world along with my belief that students should be taught in classrooms that include these skills required for today's new literacies informed my decision to integrate the online feature into literature circles for my project. The next section discusses the concept of multimodality and explores how multimodality can be integrated into classrooms to enrich students' understanding of the world.

### **Multimodality.**

Multimodality is considered "eclectic" as it draws from traditional psychology and linguistic foundations of print literacies as well as anthropological, sociological and discourse theories (Jewitt, 2008, p. 246). Although a multimodal approach assumes that meanings are created, shared, and explained in a variety of ways that integrate non-linguistic elements such as gesture, movement, image, music, sound and colour (Jewitt, 2008), traditional linguistic elements of the written and spoken word are also included in multimodality. As described above, the New London Group (1996) identified "multimodal patterns" (p. 65) of meaning as the visual, audio, gestural, spatial, meanings of modes relating to each other. Additionally, the New London Group (1996) described the interrelationships of modes as "dynamic" (p. 65).

A key understanding of multimodality is that each mode has various semiotic resources that represent and communicate meaning (Albers & Harste, 2007).

Researchers of multimodality highlight the importance of understanding the modal

elements present within digital works, but as Bearne (2009) explains, a multimodal approach to texts applies to both digital and traditional print literacies.

A major factor that determines modal meaning is the communication need of the community using the mode. In fact, the more a community uses a particular mode the more “articulated” that mode is, thus identifying and expanding modal “regularities and patterns” (Jewitt, 2008, p. 247). For example the font used in a writing that may contain an affordance or “meaning potential” which means a font can be assigned meaning through the affordance of that font (Bezemer & Kress, 2008, p.172). However, modes are not necessarily better understood when only viewed as repeated meanings, rather modes are also to be understood as a changing resource that influences modal meaning (Jewitt, 2008). Thus, a multimodality approach understands that modes are dynamic and ever changing as people and society transform and reassign modal meanings (Mills, 2009).

Modal affordance, which means “potentials and constraints for making meaning” (Bezemer & Kress, 2008, p. 171), is another element of multimodality that should be considered when examining the semiotic resources of modes. Modal affordance refers to how the mode is used, what the modal meaning is repeatedly used to communicate, and how the social conventions explain the mode’s use (Jewitt, 2008). Thus, modal affordance is a complex concept interconnected to the material, cultural, and historical use of a mode (Jewitt, 2008). Teaching students about modal affordances, both the potentials and the constraints, is an important consideration of multimodality as this concept can encourage students to examine the historical and social context of modes, which can provide students with an opportunity to think critically about the modes

(Siegel, 2012). For instance, when students critically examine the social contexts of modes as well as the social worlds of the people designing the modes they can enrich their understanding of that mode by discovering the designer's motivation (Siegel, 2012). This understanding may then motivate students to create pieces that challenge conventional understanding of a particular mode (Siegel, 2012).

Understanding the modes within a multimodal text also requires an understanding of how the affordances and constraints of various semiotic resources of a mode influence the whole. When students consider what modes to use in their meaning-making, they also need to consider how they will use the semiotic resources of the mode (e.g., image – line, point of view, colour), thus requiring students to use imagination, vision and problem solving skills (Albers & Harste, 2007). Furthermore, thinking critically about the design of a multimodal project, whether digital or online, may also encourage students to consider the potential audience response (Albers & Harste, 2007). Indeed, Doering, Beach and O'Brien, (2007) explain that designers of multimodal digital texts have to think about how best to represent their ideas in ways that will invite others to view and potentially engage with their work.

A study conducted by Vasudevan, Schultz and Bateman (2010) examined “how learning new composing practices for a multimodal storytelling project led some fifth grade students to author new literate identities in their classroom community” (p. 443). During the year-long research project, Vasudevan et al. (2010) examined how students selected various digital resources to compose their digital stories and analyzed “how students enacted their identities through these varied and multimodal composing practices” (p. 448). The students were asked to photograph buildings, write stories about

the buildings they selected, and then record various sounds from the community associated with the building to create “Sound Portraits” using audio and video recorders. Then drawing on a variety of semiotic resources of both the visual and auditory mode, students composed and edited their digital stories using iMovie. The final portion of the project required students to select a primary mode through which to tell the story. The researchers wanted to give students a choice about which mode they used to tell their story. Vasudevan et al. (2010) noted that overall the students used and combined various modes ranging from written text, a series of pictures, and soundtracks to create their digital stories.

The article featured one particular student’s experience composing his digital story and the authors suggested an interconnection between how the student created his digital story and how he assumed a new literacy identity. Vasudevan et al. (2010) described Michael as an outgoing and energetic Grade 5 student who participated in school activities and assignments only sporadically. Michael was also noted as needing a high amount of personal attention in order for him to be attentive and engaged in the classroom. However, as Michael composed his digital story he became much more engaged in the classroom. The researchers attributed his increased engagement to having the opportunity to compose his digital story outside of the classroom in his community as well as using visual and auditory modes to create his story. According to Vasudevan et al. (2010), observations of Michael suggested he had created a new literacy identity for himself because the project deepened his literacy skills through narration, photographing, writing and editing skills and presented him with new modes for telling his story. The researchers recommend that educators use both multi-digital and non-digital modalities in

classrooms to facilitate students' use of their knowledge and experiences from their communities, and that by doing so students may gain new understandings about themselves as learners as they compose multimodal works.

Multimodal design of texts using technology is not only transforming how students make meaning but also results in students reconstructing and renegotiating their identities as they create and analyze multimodal texts (Doering, Beach & O'Brien, 2007). Today's digital technologies enable image, sound and movement to be used in classroom settings in new and significant ways (Jewitt, 2008). However, Rowsell and Walsh (2011) also explain that while students may have the technological skills to touch, scroll and click, they still require instruction about the various modes of image, sound and movement that influence meaning construction.

Bailey's (2009) study examined one teacher's implementation of a new literacies curriculum in a Grade 9 English class. Bailey examined how a teacher changed her teaching practice when adopting a new literacy stance. Bailey also analyzed the kinds of literacy learning that resulted for students when new literacies were integrated into a traditional English 9 curriculum. The study took place over a five-month period at a middle class, suburban high school in a northeastern state in the US. The 14 male and 14 female students in the classroom were considered average in academic ability and four students had Individual Education Plans. Explicitly teaching students about modes and multimodality was one of the approaches the teacher in the study adopted while incorporating a new literacy stance into her practice. The teacher provided students with metalanguage, and examples of semiotic resources while teaching about modes and multimodality. To provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge

of multimodality the teacher created a multimodal poetry project where students were to represent their favourite poem or write their own while using PowerPoint. Students were also given instruction about the various tools available in PowerPoint to use as they created their poetry presentations. Data included field notes collected three to four times week during the fall semester, transcripts from interviews, emails from the teacher and some students, teacher lesson plans, reflections and student work. Bailey (2009) described her analysis as “ongoing and recursive” explaining that the data were coded and categorized throughout the data collection process (p. 214).

Bailey’s findings revealed how the students used the metalanguage to better understand, represent and communicate meanings as they created their poetry projects. Additionally, Bailey noted how the teacher created a classroom environment where students felt empowered to use multimodal tools to create their projects and that this ethos was largely facilitated by her explicit teaching about multimodality and multimodal tools available in PowerPoint. Furthermore, Bailey (2009) recommended that teachers should implement a new literacies curriculum with an emphasis on multimodality but pointed out that the teaching of multimodality should be done in a “systemic and informed” way (p. 230). According to year-end final exam marks, students in the research classroom had a stronger understanding of literary elements, poetic devices and rhetorical elements than other Grade 9 students in the school. She attributed this increased depth of understanding to the students being taught to analyze and create multimodal works. More importantly Bailey (2009) noted that students saw themselves as having a new and better understanding of literacy by understanding multimodality and

that this knowledge afforded them more opportunities for “self-discovery and self-expression” (p. 215).

In addition to new literacy identities being formed while students create multimodal works, students may further benefit from their increased understanding of and participation in their diverse and rapidly changing world by applying their creative and analytical skills regarding multimodality (Mills, 2009). Indeed, in order to meet the learning needs of contemporary students, educators need to include multimodal communication and representation into their literacy practices (Mills, 2009).

Understanding the concepts of multimodality and their application to classroom practices provides me with knowledge about interpreting online materials that were applied to activities for this project. The next section discusses the concept of affinity spaces and the evolving ways youth are interacting within these spaces.

### **Affinity spaces.**

James Paul Gee (2004) coined the term affinity space to describe places where newcomers and experts interact with one another on a “common endeavor” (p. 85). These spaces mostly occur in online settings though they can also take place as face-to-face interactions (Gee, 2004). It is important to note that Gee (2004) did not use the term community to describe these spaces because he wanted the definition to reflect the shared interest that brings people to the spaces not peoples’ “race, age, gender, disability or social class” (p. 85). Affinity spaces have three components: “content,” what the affinity space is about; “generator,” what gives the affinity space content within spaces; and “portals,” which provide “access to the content and to ways of interacting with that

content, by oneself or with other people” (Gee, 2004, p. 81). The 11 features of affinity spaces as suggested by Gee (2004) are as follows:

1. Common endeavor is primary
2. Newbies and masters and everyone else share common space
3. Some portals are strong generators
4. Content organization is transformed by interactional organization
5. Encourages intensive and extensive knowledge
6. Encourages individual and distributed knowledge
7. Encourages and disperses knowledge
8. Uses and honors tacit knowledge
9. Many different forms and routes to participation
10. Lots of different routes to status
11. Leadership is porous and leaders are resources. (pp. 85-87)

The features exhibited within portals contribute to the definition of affinity spaces because they provide multiple opportunities for individuals to both generate and interact with content within affinity spaces (Gee, 2004). Additionally, Gee states the above 11 features do not all have to be present for a space to be considered an affinity space; however the more features a space has, the more closely the space resembles that of an affinity space. Gee (2004) recommends that classrooms should look to the features present within affinity spaces and apply them to their classrooms as today’s students are frequently interacting with affinity spaces and may desire a classroom learning environment that resembles those of an affinity space.

Expanding on Gee's (2004) theorization of affinity space is the view that affinity spaces are also "dynamic, cross-generational and multimodal spaces" that enable people to share, and create their thoughts and expressions about a particular pop culture game or literature" (Lammers, Curwood & Magnifico, 2012, p. 55). Both Gee (2004) and Lammers et al. (2012) recognize that affinity spaces include a variety of semiotic resources, texts, modes and discourses. However, Lammers et al. (2012) provide a theorization of affinity spaces that represents the changes to affinity spaces over time. Lammers et al. (2012) list nine features present in affinity spaces:

1. A common endeavor is primary
2. Participation is self-directed, multifaceted and dynamic
3. Portals are multimodal
4. Affinity spaces provide a passionate, public audience for content
5. Socializing plays an important role in affinity space participation
6. Leadership roles vary within and among portals
7. Knowledge is distributed across the entire affinity space
8. Many portals place a high value on cataloguing and documenting practices
9. Affinity spaces encompass a variety of media specific and social networking portals. (pp. 48-50)

Lammers et al. (2012) posit that the above affinity space features reflect today's online technologies and social working sites that make these spaces both highly networked and constantly evolving. They also point out that social media is now a fundamental part of affinity spaces and state that portals within new affinity spaces are changing the "size, scope and practices" of affinity spaces (Lammers et al., 2012, p. 55).

Educators today need to understand how affinity spaces are increasingly becoming places where many contemporary students interact socially with one another and that these spaces can foster an effective learning space (Gee, 2004; Lammers et al., 2012). According to Lammers et al. (2012) affinity spaces provide young people multiple pathways for participation, encourage critical discussions, and afford access to authentic audiences when expressing creative works. Therefore, as many adolescents are increasingly being “transformed through their participation with online global, multimodal literacies,” it becomes essential for educators to consider the creative opportunities affinity spaces can provide for students (Lammers et al., 2012, p. 55). Gee (2004) explains that many classrooms today do not exhibit the features of affinity spaces and that young people who are experiencing the features of digital affinity spaces may then experience school as a place that is uninspiring and of little relevance to their out-of-school knowledge and lives.

Research by Lammers et al. (2012) revealed how affinity spaces can give insight into adolescent literacy practices. Their research, which explored adolescent literacies connected to *The Sims*, a life simulation video game, the *Hunger Games* dystopian novels and *Neopets*, an online virtual pet game, showed that adolescents interacting in these spaces were engaged in “value project based” learning that was “self directed” in order to share their work with authentic audiences (Lammers et al., 2012, p. 55). That is adolescents engaged within these spaces demonstrate decoding, making meaning, and critically examining and transforming texts (Lammers, et al., 2012).

An ethnographic study conducted by Curwood (2013) also examined online affinity spaces and young adult literature. Curwood’s data included online observations of and

interviews with 20 participants, ages 11-17 years, from Canada, United States, United Kingdom and Australia. Study participants shared their “motivation for participating in online spaces including *Hunger Games* fan sites and social media” (Curwood, 2013, p. 419). The study focused on Jack, a 13 year old boy’s, literacy practice across various modes related to *The Hunger Games* trilogy (Collins, 2008, 2009, 2010). Curwood described the websites that Jack interacted with as well as the interactions that Jack had on the websites. Observations showed that Jack created multiple podcasts, blogs, and tutorials, and revealed how he recruited others to assist him with the website. Curwood (2013) noted users of the Hunger Games affinity spaces demonstrated literacy practices that included decoding language specific to *The Hunger Games*, as well as understanding of the dystopian genre. Online affinity spaces can also be viewed as a tool to aid “meaning making with literature” as observed by Curwood (2013) when Jack directly requested that another contributor, who added to a character index, was asked to include specific quotations and page numbers to his entries (p. 422). Jack’s interactions with those sharing the affinity space enriched his understanding of *The Hunger Games* trilogy (Curwood, 2013). Additionally, Curwood (2013) observed that participants’ literacy skills were developed as participants sought fan-created stories, podcasts, videos and songs in online portals of affinity spaces to “enrich their reading experience and to make intertextual connections” (p. 421).

Curwood (2013) also observed that students were eager to have opportunities where they could “analyze and transform literature” and that sharing creative responses with an authentic audience served to motivate and engage students (p. 423). Her observations of other fans showed they produced a variety of works such as videos, art, stories, role

plays, and news updates, while others just “lurked” (Curwood, 2013, p. 425). However, despite the variability of participation within affinity spaces, Curwood (2013) noted that it is important not to underestimate the value these spaces provide for youth to “read, critique and reinvent young adult literature” (p. 424). Curwood recommended that educators learn more about and integrate digital literacies into their curriculum to further engage and motivate adolescent students because digital literacies can provide students with different entry points into the curriculum and may motivate student reading and writing. Lastly, Curwood (2013) suggested that educators re-examine the current curriculum and instructional practices to ensure that they reflect “student driven, literacy rich practices that incorporate diverse modes, semiotic resources, and learning environments” (p. 426).

In another article were three ethnographic studies conducted by Curwood, Magnifico, and Lammers (2013) discussed, with respect to online affinity spaces connected to *The Hunger Games* novels, Neopets online game, and the Sims online video game. To better understand young peoples’ motivations for writing and sharing in fan based affinity spaces, as well as the role of affinity spaces played in supporting their writing and creation of transformative works within fan sites. The studies had 8-20 participants ranging in ages 11-23 from the United States, United Kingdom, Canada and Australia. All three studies collected data through interviews using e-mail, Skype and or private messaging. Curwood et al. (2013) also collected artifacts including fan based transformative works, rules for discussion boards and online profiles.

In the article by Curwood et al. (2013) Curwood, presented another study she had conducted *The Hunger Games* that analyzed the creation of stories, videos, music and

role-playing games within fan fiction portals over two years. In this article, she focuses on Cassie, a young adult who participated within an online fan site for *The Hunger Games* trilogy. Observations made by Curwood showed that the affinity space provided Cassie with a variety of opportunities. Firstly, the affinity space introduced Cassie to others' perspectives through online discussions. Secondly, writing within the affinity space allowed Cassie to improve her writing through feedback from others and writing for an authentic audience. Lastly, Cassie's motivation to continue posting art, recent news, intertextual connections and other information was fostered by the use of social networking sites as well as a desire to continue sharing with others who were also passionate about the series. Curwood (2013) suggested it was the "self directed and dynamic nature of online affinity spaces" and their tools that promoted Cassie's authentic reading and writing practice (p. 681).

Magnifico's (2012) one-year study discussed in the Curwood et al. (2013) article examined Neopets, an online site where people create virtual pets. Magnifico specifically studied the writers who wrote for Neopian Times, a weekly site newspaper. The study focused on Neopian members' motivation for contributing art and writing and how they selected publication venues for their work as well as how they created and edited their work. Magnifico's (2012) work followed Sheena, a young adult whose participation included entering contests and writing a variety of different genres for the site by posting poems, stories, and news publications. Magnifico observed two kinds of writing present within the site. The first was the use of multimodal features present in participants' posted compositions and activities. Magnifico suggested the multimodal works reflected how the players' designs and interactions changed over time as the skills

of the participants grew. Feedback and collaboration were also considered by Magnifico as another feature of writing that Magnifico observed on the Neopian sites. Both the feedback and collaboration occurred instantly, which encouraged and motivated participants to continue to share their writing and in some cases collaborate with others. Writing for an audience was also considered a key feature for those participating within Neopian sites.

Lastly, the article by Curwood et al. (2013) focused on Lammer's (2011) study. The study took place over two years and examined a portal for Sims fan fiction writers. The study followed 13 year-old Eve, an adolescent participant, and her multimodal practice within a Sims affinity space. As Eve discovered her talent with creating digital images and editing in an online affinity space, she shared her work with various social networking sites. Within the Curwood et al. (2013) article, Lammer stated that the multimodality present within online affinity spaces supported Eve's creativity, and developed her confidence for writing by enabling her to express her creativity in animated stories with music and video. In addition to enjoying the creative aspect of making videos, Lammers (2011) noted that she also enjoyed the support and encouragement of others and found that it motivated her to continue creating for the site. Lammers (2011) suggested that the multimodality present in the Sims affinity space motivated Eve to develop both her writing and multimodal literacy skills because it gave her confidence in ways that were unavailable to her in her traditional school setting.

Curwood et al's., (2013) ethnographic research about fan sites demonstrates how young adults can benefit when given the opportunity to use multiple genres and diverse modes in their writing. Curwood, Magnifico and Lammers (2013) strongly urge

educators to include online literacies into their literacy practices. However, they recommended that online literacies be delivered in ways that allow students the opportunity to create transformative works by remixing the work of others and suggested that student work be kept in portfolios to track students' writing development. Another recommendation made by the researchers was to provide students with the opportunity to share their work with an authentic audience. Lastly, Curwood et al. (2013) suggested that online affinity spaces and digital tools are key to motivating students in “new and complex” ways that result in engagement with reading, writing and designing, and strongly recommend that in school literacy practices match the opportunities present in online affinity spaces (p. 683).

Understanding the concept and features of affinity spaces enriched my knowledge about adolescents' online activities and facilitated the design of assignments for the project. Affinity spaces can provide students with authentic and meaningful opportunities to create and share their ideas. For educators understanding the value of affinity space interactions is especially important as they try to emulate these similar experiences within their literacy practices. Affinity spaces also reflect social constructivism as people exchange knowledge and insights with one another within these spaces.

In the next chapter I review the literature about students engaging in social interactions during peer led face-to-face and online discussions. I also present information on the multiple values of including young adult literature in the curriculum.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Review of Relevant Literature**

In this chapter I review literature regarding the use of young adult literature, peer led discussions, and online literature circles. The review of the literature on peer led discussions and young adult literature focuses on how integrating these practices and materials can increase student engagement and enrich students' literacy skills. The review of the literature focusing on online literature discussions explores a variety of features of these discussions as well as their value to student learning.

#### **Peer Led Literature Discussions**

Peer led literature discussions can afford students with the opportunity to enter into collaborative discussions with one another. These discussions can benefit students through engagement, consideration of new perspectives, extension of thinking, and clarification of ideas about the novels (Evans, 2002). Furthermore, discussions that involve respectful debate, where peers' comments are thoughtfully considered, can encourage higher-level thinking about the text (Grambrell, 2004). Studies regarding peer led literature discussion groups have identified features of effective literature discussions, benefits to students, and recommendations for educators with respect to integrating discussions into their classrooms.

The features of effective literature discussion were examined in a study conducted by Evans (2002). Over a school year in a fifth grade classroom of 22 students, Evans examined students' perceptions of their experiences during peer led discussions. The teacher prepared students for the discussions by providing explicit instructions about and modeling of literature discussions. The students began the activity by browsing the

suggested books for literature circles and ranking them. The students were then placed into groups according to their preferred novel and engaged in two sessions of literature discussions.

Data collection consisted of transcribed literature discussions, video recordings and field notes. The findings from the study reflected ways literature circles can be improved as well as the benefits of effective discussion groups. Students' reflections about the literature circle discussions suggested that all group members should come prepared having completed the reading, including the writing of discussion prompts, as many of the groups experienced frustration when a group member arrived unprepared for discussions. Additionally, students reported that in order for discussions to be effective, they needed to have respectful interactions such as not interrupting, cooperating and treating others fairly. The students also conveyed that it was how members communicated with one another that determined if their group was having fair discussions. Students indicated that if the ideas of others were not considered, or if the discussion was controlled by someone that it resulted in people feeling silenced in discussions. However, the students also stated that having a leader facilitate discussions was helpful as long as they did not control the discussions. An additional recommendation made by students was the importance of engaging books to read. The students acknowledged that without engaging texts their motivation to read and discuss would diminish. Evans (2002) also suggested that teachers might need to step in to guide and support discussions if they were deteriorating. Further findings from the study revealed that many students greatly appreciated how discussions with their peers expanded and clarified their thinking. The students explained that they learned and

understood more by listening to others' perspectives about the books. Finally, the students also found it easier to understand confusing parts when they worked in groups rather than individually.

Sanacore (2013) also discussed the benefits of students engaging in reflective thinking when participating in literature circle discussions. He posited that literature circle discussions may become more effective when “the process of reflection is nurtured in the context of literature discussions” (Sanacore, 2013, p. 118). Sanacore suggested that reflection about the text can afford students the opportunity to connect personally to the text, which can then enable students to construct personal and critical responses to the text; and that this process develops higher-level thinking. According to Sanacore, classroom teachers need to provide modeling and scaffolding of reflective stances on literature to support students' literature discussions. He explained that literature circle discussions that feature students sharing, considering and discussing personal and critical responses can create multiple view points from which to analyze texts. Like the students in the study of Evans (2002), Sanacore (2013) recommended that teachers ensure they provide texts that are engaging to “entice students to read and discuss” the texts (p. 117). Lastly, he emphasized how effective literature discussions “require hard work, patience, and careful planning” by teachers and students, and noted that as the reflective stances are developed in literature circles so too will the higher level thinking, which may also be applied to new texts and literature circle discussions (Sanacore, 2013, p. 119).

Effective literature circle discussions also require educators to provide students with the opportunity to reflect upon the effectiveness of their own discussions. Mills and Jennings (2011) examined two elementary teachers' classroom implementation of

reflective and reflexive thinking to improve the quality of literature circles discussions. Mills and Jennings acknowledged that while literature circles are a powerful tool for educators to use in reading curricula, discussions can easily break down if students are not engaged in thoughtful conversations about the books. They suggested that providing students with opportunities to be reflective and reflexive about their literature circles can guide students to develop better discussions. The students in the Grades 5 and 3 classes were initially asked to be reflective of their learning by studying themselves and classmates as learners through reflections about their talk, thinking and behaviour. Students then were asked to be reflexive about their learning by considering what changes they could personally make to improve their talk, thinking and behaviour. To support the students in a reflexive process the educators showed videos of exemplary literature discussions and provided students with audiotapes of their own literature discussions. As a result of the reflexive experience where students practiced, reviewed and reflected on their discussions, students and teachers observed how the discussion had become purposeful, and that students were more engaged, asked deeper questions and made deeper intertextual and personal connections to the texts.

As was evident in the research by Mills and Jennings, peer led literature discussions can also benefit students by developing their comprehension skills. A study by Berne and Clark (2006), which took place in the US Midwest, examined 29 Grade 9 students' comprehension strategies employed during peer led discussions. The researchers discussed the importance of modeled and scaffolded teaching of discussions. Students were placed in discussion groups to discuss Shirley Jackson's (1942) short story "The Lottery." The researchers chose to examine peer led discussions about this story because

it requires students to access background knowledge, and use various comprehension strategies to construct an understanding of the story. Prior to the study the students had experience with peer led discussions as their teacher had used literature circles with them. However, the students also received additional support from the researchers who further modeled for the teacher and students effective small group peer led discussions. The lessons for peer led discussions focused on developing questions, as well as role-playing to identify the qualities of productive talk.

Data consisted of field notes and audio taped discussions. The study's findings revealed that discussions about comprehension occurred in 72%-94% of students' peer led discussions and that a variety of comprehension strategies were used during students' discussions. The comprehension strategies included interpreting, questioning, stating confusion about the story, making textual inferences, summarizing, and engaging in retrospection. Additionally, the students also noted the author's craft, and inserted themselves into the text to better understand the story's meaning and characters' reactions. Berne and Clark (2006) noted that peer led discussions need to have students participating, exchanging and considering the ideas of others. The researchers emphasized that it is crucial for educators to provide students with explicit instruction regarding how to listen to others, to ask questions, and to thoughtfully respond before moving onto other topics. Lastly, Berne and Clark (2006) suggested that students' understanding of texts through thoughtful literature circle discussions developed comprehension strategies that can be transferred to new texts for students.

Understanding the benefits of peer led discussions deepened by my appreciation for the role discourse plays in creating rich literature circle discussions as well as the

important role of the teacher to model, and guide and provide reflection for students of the features of effective discussions. Peer led discussions also apply a social constructivism approach as students engaged in discussions are building upon and creating new understandings about the novels during their exchanges. Additionally, Rosenblatt's transactional theory is also reflected in peer led discussions as students share their individual connections, predictions and questions regarding the novels with one another. The online dystopian literature circle teacher resource discussed in Chapter Four includes face-to-face discussions and includes many of the recommendations reviewed in the literature. The next section discusses young adult literature and its value in classrooms.

### **Young Adult Literature**

As described in Chapter One, Young Adult Literature (hereafter referred to as YAL), has increased in popularity with the release of books and subsequent movies for Meyer's *Twilight* series (2005, 2006, 2007, 2008), Collin's *Hunger Games* Trilogy (2008, 2009, 2010) and Roth's *Divergent* trilogy (2011, 2012, 2013). YAL novels are primarily written for young adults between 12-18 years of age (Nilsen & Donelson, 2001 as cited by Johnson, 2011), and provide adolescents with stories that explore the life of being a teen including issues such as identity, sexuality, violence, drugs and depression (Glenn, King, Heintz, Klapatch & Berg, 2009). Stallworth (2006) describes YAL as an "electrifying genre" (p. 59) that invites teens to explore who they are and what they stand for. The stories themselves provide hope that change is possible, that characters can cope when their world seems bleak, and that characters must deal with consequences of their actions (Bushman, 1997). Thus, YAL can also provide students with the sense that they

can change themselves and the world around them (Elliot-Johns, 2012). With the plethora of high quality YAL for educators to select from, educators can easily integrate YAL into their literacy curriculum. The stories can be examined for literary elements, while comprehension strategies can be expanded through text-to-self, text-to-text and text-to-world connections (Roberts, 2013). Most importantly, YAL has the ability to engage youth who are disengaged from reading with stories that are easily read, understood and enjoyed.

### **Appeal of YAL for educators.**

YAL affords teachers with the opportunity to bring difficult issues into the classroom, and by doing so allows students to engage in discussions and reflect upon the complexities of contemporary issues. Educators understand that adolescents are confronted daily with making decisions based on their beliefs and that these decisions can be difficult for teens to make (Groneke, Maples, & Henderson, 2010). As Bull (2012) states YAL should appeal to today's educator because the stories are relevant to teens' "intellectual and emotional growth" (p. 67). The powerful stories conveyed in many YAL selections, can develop empathy and morality, and provide opportunities for educators to connect the stories to real world events (Stallworth, 2006).

Another appealing aspect of using YAL in classrooms is that the texts can motivate students to read (Bull, 2012). Crowe (1999) discussed how YAL helps reluctant readers become readers by drawing them into reading with relatable characters and controversial issues, which in turn fosters further reading for students. Furthermore, by encouraging students to read books that engage them, educators increase the likelihood that students will become lifelong readers (Santoli & Wagner, 2004). In fact, according to National

Center for Education Statistics 2011, students who are motivated to read, read more and develop better reading skills (as cited by Bull, 2012).

Educators may experience how using YAL in their classroom furthers students' literature appreciation and expands literacy knowledge. Stallworth (2006) explained that YAL can "address multiple instructional goals related to students' interests" by increasing motivation and developing literacy skills (p.55). Santoli and Wagner (2004) also suggest that students should have the opportunity to share their ideas safely and that discussions of YAL can afford students with opportunities to enter into conversations that otherwise may be risky to have without the context of a YAL novel. Teachers can create and foster students' joy of reading, and critical thinking skills by providing good quality YAL, alongside with activities such as literature circles, book clubs and book sharing presentations for students. These learning activities give students the opportunity to collaborate in discussions as well as provide students with choice with respect to book selection (Bull, 2012; Santoli & Wagner, 2004).

As stated previously, many selections of YAL reflect the new realities of today's youth. A study conducted by Koss and Teale (2009) examined the genres, trends, types of characters and issues represented in YAL. The researchers selected books that were considered by educators to be high quality, award winning, favoured by teens, and best sellers. They analyzed 59 YAL books looking for themes. The overall findings revealed that 85% of the books were fiction and that most were contemporary realistic fiction. Characters in the books were generally European Americans, with only 20% from other cultures. However, many of the books had international settings. LGBTQ topics were represented in 10% of the books, while many more titles dealt with physical and mental

health issues; more specifically, one-half of these books dealt with mental illness. The content analysis indicated that 85% of the books dealt with stories about teens trying to find themselves, a shift away from traditional coming-of-age stories focused on the main character dealing with a significant event. Koss and Teale (2009) suggested the reason for the latter shift may be reflective of a teen's world that is confronted with the increase of advertising targeted at teens, stating that "as the lives of teens become more complicated so too does the literature written for them" (p. 569). The study also indicated that bullying and abuse were portrayed more than stories that dealt with romance, sex, and substance abuse and that this trend reflected the increased awareness of bullying in schools. Hopeful endings were evident in the majority of books while one-third of the books used humour to discuss difficult topics. Trends in writing included the use of flashbacks, flash forwards, poetry, notes and journal entries. Many books also included content references to technology such as text messages and blogs. Koss and Teale (2009) suggested that understanding the trends in YAL can assist educators in selecting books that present varied points of view. They also encouraged educators to explore and use a variety of YAL texts that represent the realities of youth in their classrooms.

A study conducted by Gibbons, Dali and Stallworth (2006) surveyed teachers to find out what YAL titles they used in their classrooms and the ways the English teachers integrate these books into their classes. The researchers surveyed 142 English language arts teachers working in 72 different schools. The survey responses revealed that English teachers used YAL because the books provide teachers with "full length works of literature that contain sophisticated literary devices" (Gibbons et al., 2006, p. 53). The

findings of the survey distributed by Gibbons et al. (2006) revealed how teachers believe that YAL reflects students' interests and facilitates the development of literacy skills of students who struggle and who are reluctant readers. One survey respondent stated that YAL engaged reluctant readers because students enjoyed reading "fast paced texts" and in turn further developed their reading skills (p. 56). Teachers in the study also read aloud, or created book groups to study YAL. The book groups appealed to students because they had the opportunity to choose YAL books to read. Gibbons et al. suggested that YAL allows teachers to engage their students in reading good literature as well as meet the standard and assessment objectives in English classrooms because the texts can easily be understood and analyzed by students.

#### **Using YAL in classrooms.**

Integrating YAL into the classroom affords students with an opportunity to not only engage with a story of interest but it can also broaden their perspective about the world and their place in it (Stallworth, 2006). However, it is important that educators consider providing students with a variety of books, allow students to enter in discussions with their peers about the books, and create meaningful assignments for students. Educators may choose to use YAL in a variety of ways in the classrooms. Glenn, King, Heintz, Klapatch and Berg (2009) examined four first year teachers' integration of YAL into their teaching practice. One teacher, who taught in a suburban town in New England, used YAL titles with her students in Reader's Workshops, where students focused on the use of literary devices in their books. Students analyzed the author's craft and as a result, according to the researchers, were able to understand both literary elements and the story

more deeply. The teacher also had students write their own short stories using similar techniques that they had discovered in the YAL books.

A second teacher taught at a school located on the shoreline of New England and used YAL in an independent reading program. She provided students with a large variety of YAL to browse and select from. The teacher also collaborated with her librarian to ensure the collection of books were varied enough for the students; she wanted to ensure that individual students would be able to select those titles that appealed to them. Students read daily and logged the place, time and number of pages they read, then reflected on who they were as readers. Students then entered into post reading activities where they created projects that communicated their personal connections and understanding of the themes and elements in the book. According to Glenn et al. (2009) the successful use of YAL in the independent reading activity demonstrated that youth wanted to read when “reading is valued and the content is real” (p. 9). They also suggested that students were motivated to read more books because their peers were “ranting and raving how awesome their books were” (Glenn et al., 2009, p. 9). Glenn et al. emphasized how implementation of an independent reading program requires direct instruction and the preparation of a classroom where there is a wide variety of YAL. Additionally, successful implementation of independent reading also required educators to be able to promote the books, thus the teacher’s enthusiasm regarding the reading of YA books needs to be strong.

The third teacher who integrated YA Literature into her Grades 6 and 8 language arts classes at a fundamental school in St. Petersburg, Florida, stated that she read the YAL books before introducing them to her class so that she could identify the issues discussed

in the book. Books with content that some parents may find questionable, such as those that may be considered inappropriate for an age group, were signed out only if the parent had signed off permission for their child to read the texts. The researchers suggested the time to read all the books is well worth the effort as it is important to know the content of the books when helping students decide what to read (Glenn et al., 2009). Additionally, the researchers also suggested that many teens also appreciated how some YAL books have an online component that afforded them the opportunity to ask the author questions, or share and discuss with other people reading the book through blogs and forums (Glenn et al., 2009).

The fourth teacher, who also taught in New England, used YAL novels in her high school English class to explore how themes in literature changed over time. The teacher blended the use of classics and contemporary YAL to encourage discussions focused on an issue encountered in adolescents' lives. For instance, Glenn et al. (2009) suggested integrating several similarly themed YA books such as Stephanie Meyer's *Twilight* while teaching *Romeo and Juliet*. According to the researchers, the bridging of the classics with contemporary literature afforded students with the opportunity to engage in richer discussions as well as develop deeper understandings of the literature.

A study conducted by Ivey and Johnston (2013) examined students' perceptions regarding the process of engaged reading with YAL. Prior to the study, Grade 8 teachers in a middle school located in a mid-Atlantic US town changed their practice of assigning whole class classic texts for students to student led, self-paced reading of contemporary young adult fiction. Students could read at their own pace and were no longer assigned projects or quizzes for the books as the pattern previously had been. Instead students

could choose from 150-200 different YAL novels that were rotated between the classes every nine weeks. All the English teachers devoted substantial amounts of time to in-class reading and read-alouds of YAL novels to students. Data collected consisted of year-end interviews, state test scores from the current and previous year, observational data from bi-weekly classroom visits, on-the-fly conversations and audio/video recordings of student initiated small group discussions.

Findings from the research revealed that student engagement with YAL encouraged engaged reading both in and out of school. Student reflections showed that students discussed the books they were reading with peers, teachers, and family members because the books were engaging and students wanted to talk about them. Students also reported that they experienced new and deepened friendships with peers from reading the same books. Study findings also revealed that teacher and student relationships also “evolved” as students discussed YAL novels with their teachers (Ivey & Johnston, 2013, p. 262). The researchers also observed a shift in students’ identities of themselves as they changed their self-perceptions of themselves as readers, moving from thinking of themselves as non-readers to viewing themselves as avid readers. Ivey and Johnson (2013) stated that it was students’ engagement with the books and with one another that provided students with agency. Students often remarked that they could have an effect on their own reading and the social behaviours of others, make a moral difference in the world by making decisions to live differently to be a better person, and regulate their own emotional, social, and academic behaviour (Ivey & Johnston, 2013). The findings also showed how some students believed they had broadened their perspectives, indicating that they became more open-minded about ideas as they listened and discussed the books with

others. The students reported that because they were engaged readers of YAL, they could relate to the situations of characters easily and that the latter enabled them to look at their own lives with a different perspective. Other students stated that the bleak situations of some of the characters made them more thankful for the good things in their own lives. In addition, the findings revealed how the students communicated an expanded knowledge of the world stating that they learned things about the world, history, and life by reading the YAL books. Furthermore the students developed knowledge about genres, point of view, and how to read unique texts. Many students expanded their reading preferences by reading a variety of books, or by reading book recommendations of peers. Students also reflected that as they read more, their writing also improved. Further, several students stated that they improved their reading speed, vocabulary, grammar, and comprehension. According to the researchers, test scores of students showed that 85% of students passed the Grade 8 reading test versus 79% passing the Grade 7 test of the previous year. Finally, many students who were previously tested as being in the lowest passing category moved up to the higher passing categories during the study.

Similar to the findings of other studies, Lapp and Fisher (2009) reported on the motivating factor of YAL in classrooms. They integrated YAL into literature circles into a Grade 11 English class comprised of 24 low achieving students and found that YAL books motivated reluctant readers to enjoy reading. Tasks were assigned that were designed to engage and support students and lessons often included teacher modeling through think-alouds. Classroom activities included whole class jig-saws, reciprocal teaching, book clubs, online chats, independent reading, poetry raps and plays. The English teacher focused on themes such as racial profiling, and coming of age and she

offered students a variety of YAL books to read that supported these themes. The researchers observed that students connected to the novels personally through discussions where students described how they would feel or what they would do if they were a particular character. The researchers also observed that students were not only engaged in the reading of the books in class but that they also read sequels to the books. Some even decided to read classic novels such as Mark Twain's *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1885) because of a reference in one of the YAL books. Similar to Ivey and Johnson (2013), Lapp and Fisher found that as students read their books, they expanded their views of themselves as readers. Additionally, like other researchers, Lapp and Fisher highlighted the importance of providing students with choice of books and opportunities to interact with their peers and the teacher about the books they are reading.

In summary, YAL affords educators with multiple opportunities to integrate well written novels that will engage students in reading and potentially motivate them to have a positive attitude about reading to keep reading for lifetime (Elliot-Johns, 2012). To successfully integrate YAL into classrooms educators need to be both knowledgeable and enthusiastic about YAL titles and genres, and ensure that the activities for students are supported through a gradual release of responsibility model (Pearson, 1985). It is also of equal importance that educators provide opportunities for student to share their ideas about the books with their peers, either in face-to-face conversations or through the use of technology. Rosenblatt's transactional theory (1994) is also relevant to the understanding of YAL and its ability to promote engaged reading through its use of relatable characters and fast paced stories that many young people enjoy reading. The next section provides insight into the implementation and benefits of online literature circles.

### **Online Literature Circles**

Described as small groups of students meeting collaboratively to talk in peer led discussions about a novel, literature circles have been implemented successfully in classrooms for years (Daniels, 2002). As described previously, the use of literature circles in classrooms can promote reading engagement by providing students with choices with respect to text selection, and enhancing a sense of community. However, today's literature circles now have the option to include an online component to the discussions. Using various web 2.0 technologies, online literature circles can provide students with a variety of different options to extend the face-to-face discussions. The authors of several of the studies discussed below view the use of technology for online literature circles as a means to enhance the face-to-face discussions, not as a means to replace face-to-face discussions (Carico & Logan, 2004; Edmonson, 2012; Kitsis, 2010). The following themes are explored in this literature review of online literature circles: development of community, response to an authentic audience, asynchronous and synchronous online discussions, the role of the teacher, integration of technology, and socially constructed learning.

#### **Community in online literature circle discussions.**

Findings from research have indicated that online literature circles develop and enhance a sense of community among the participants when students posted supportive and encouraging comments to their peers that fostered students' sense of connection and accountability to one another (Day & Kroon, 2007; Edmonson, 2012; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006).

A study conducted by Grisham and Wolsey (2006) focused on three Grade 8 classes for three years in a southern California middle school. The aim of the research was to better understand if electronic threaded discussion groups created group coherence among students. Grisham and Wolsey also wanted to share information about the readings with the students as well as have the students share with one another. The researchers stated that they “envisioned tutoring online, refining students’ communication skills and providing feedback” (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006, p. 652). Students in the study were assigned or chose their own groups for reading and discussing a text. Over the course of a year students read and responded to seven novels, four of which included an online discussion forum. Wolsey had been using literature circle discussion with students prior to the study. Data collection for the study consisted of student interviews, documents such as journals, and threaded discussions. Grisham and Wolsey’s (2006) findings revealed that students “felt a sense of responsibility to their peers to keep reading and that the electronic community created a sense of ‘home’ where authentic student voices were encouraged” (p. 658). The sense of accountability was found to improve students’ reading and responding of texts.

Day and Kroon (2010) also suggested that a sense of community was enhanced by online discussions in their study that explored the implementation of literature circles in a sixth grade language arts classroom. The study took place in the Pacific Northwest at a middle school and studied 56 Grade 6 students during the school the 2007/2008 school years. Students in the study, who were scaffolded with teacher modeling of how to engage in face-to-face discussions as well as how to use tools for online discussions, participated in three rounds of literature circles and three rounds of face-to-face

discussions. For both the face-to-face and online discussions, students needed to come prepared with post-it notes that contained references and connections to passages that they had read. The students were also provided with previous online discussion transcripts to reflect and improve upon for future online discussions. This activity was followed up with a mini lesson that developed prompts to help online discussions progress. A variety of data were collected during the study including observations, interviews, surveys and transcripts from online discussions. Day and Kroon's (2010) research revealed that students' posts to one another demonstrated that they cared and supported each other, and that the encouraging comments enhanced students' sense of belonging and connection to peers. As a result of the sense of community, students were motivated to read and engage in the online discussions.

Edmonson (2012) used wiki literature circles that made use of wikis, a website that allows users to contribute and edit entries, in her Grade 10 English class to enhance students' face-to-face literature circle discussions on the subject of coming of age novels. During the study students met daily with their literature circle groups for discussions, created a reading schedule and assigned each other duties such as discussion leader, vocabulary builder, symbol motif tracker, theme tracker, character tracker and extender. Students were reported as feeling as though they were on a team when the groups assigned members specific colors to post in, or created profile themes such as Sesame Street characters for group members on the wiki. Edmonson also suggested that it was the sense of community that motivated students to claim areas of the classroom for group meetings. The sense of community that developed in the online discussions was also considered to improve face-to-face discussions (Edmonson, 2012).

**Audience and authentic writing.**

As is evident above, findings from studies about online literature discussions have also revealed that student motivation to write and the quality of writing improved when participants wrote authentically to their peers (Day & Kroon, 2007; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Wolsey & Grisham 2007).

A second study by Wolsey and Grisham (2007) specifically examined how threaded discussion groups affected students' writing skills and motivated students to write. This case study focused on three Grade 8 classes for three years in a southern California school. Throughout the school year students received scaffolded instruction to develop various writing skills. Students in the study participated in face-to-face literature circles and online literature circle discussions. The teacher in the study focused on providing students with instruction regarding literary elements such as plot, theme, setting and characterization. Students were given instruction about how to use the software for online discussions. Each member of a discussion group was then assigned a role such as discussion director, vocabulary master, and connector. Students also wrote summaries in print journals post discussion. Data collected consisted of observations, interviews, questionnaires, surveys, artifacts, transcripts of online discussions, and student work. The findings from this study suggested that online discussions motivated the students to think more deeply about the literature and their peers' responses than did paper journals and face-to-face discussions (Wolsey & Grisham, 2007). The study's findings also revealed that students' writing improved because their attitude toward writing was positively influenced by writing for an audience of peers. Similarly, Day and Kroon's (2007) findings revealed that students who had previously been reluctant to write

developed confidence in their writing and became motivated to write and engage in future posts.

As described above, Grisham and Wolsey's (2006) study also compared students' paper journals with students' threaded discussion. The researchers observed that the students' paper journals reflected the students' writing in isolation with only the teacher for an audience. These journals often contained summaries of their readings, and that the writing was "lifeless" compared to the threaded discussion (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006, p. 654). However, the threaded discussions reflected the "social environment" of electronic threaded discussions as students' threaded discussions displayed the following features: "student voice, developed perspectives, and meaningful predictions that were connected to the literature to other media" (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006, p. 654). Day and Kroon (2007) also found that student writing that had once been flat in student journals became lively and authentic when students responded to one another through blogs.

#### **Asynchronous versus synchronous communication.**

The online literature circles discussed in several of the studies featured asynchronous communication or threaded discussions. Asynchronous discussions are described as discussions that occur outside of real time and appear as a series of messages that are posted as replies to one another. Only one study reviewed for this review featured synchronous online literature circle discussion where students responded immediately to one another, much like instant messaging. Many of the researchers discussed similar benefits of asynchronous communication for students. These benefits included opportunities to develop thoughtful and reflective responses to peers, flexibility in posting responses, and equitable opportunities for students to engage with the discussions

(Carico & Logan, 2004; Day & Kroon 2010; English, 2007; Larson, 2009; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006).

***Time to consider, reflect, and compose.***

Asynchronous literature circles discussions can afford students the opportunity to compose thoughtful responses to peers outside of school because the discussions are easily extended past the classroom walls. The benefit for students is that they can sustain their focus on an idea without interruption while composing thoughtful and reflective posts to their peers (English, 2007; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Kitsis, 2010; Larson, 2009). Kitsis (2010) implemented online literature discussions with her Grades 11 and 12 English classes in a one-year experiment to see if technology tools could improve student literature discussions. The use of technology was to reinforce face-to-face literature discussions. Kitsis had groups meet one a week for face-to-face literature discussions and asked the groups to post comments on a blog between their weekly face-to-face meetings. The students had received instruction (i.e., modeling) about appropriate ways to interact during online and face-to-face discussions. Initially, Kitsis (2010) asked that posts be well constructed, requiring students to post at least one 200 word post between weekly face-to-face literature discussions. Students were also provided with a rubric that described how they were to use support from text, adhere to proper mechanics, and contribute to the online learning community. Students reported that the asynchronous format of the blog allowed them the opportunity to think about what they wanted to write and that it was “nice to slow down the conversations” as they found it frustrating when face-to-face discussions moved away from a topic before they had a chance to think about it (Kitsis, 2010, p. 53). The students further explained that

asynchronous discussions allowed them “think through their writing” (Kitsis, 2010, p. 52).

Research findings on asynchronous literature discussions have also indicated that students benefited by having flexibility when to engage with discussions (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006). Kitsis (2010) also reported another benefit of the online discussions was that students had more opportunities to interact and that these interactions supported the weekly face-to-face discussions. In fact, Kitsis observed that on a few occasions the online discussions carried on well beyond the assignments.

***Equitable opportunities to respond.***

Another benefit revealed by the research on asynchronous literature discussions was the equal opportunity for participants to respond and engage with discussions (Carico & Logan, 2004; English, 2007; Kitsis, 2010; Larson, 2009). Larson (2009) examined how 10 Grade 5 students in a school located in the Midwestern United States socially constructed their learning while interacting with and responding to literature using an online message board during a semester. Students in the study read e-books on laptops and posted their reading responses electronically. The teacher provided the students with instructions on how to login as well as how to post, create prompts and view threads. Data collection involved field notes, voice recordings, interviews, documents, artifacts, e-journals, and online message board transcripts. Data analysis revealed that asynchronous discussions encouraged students who were shy and struggled to voice their opinions in face-to-face discussion or were learning English as second language to participate as they had extra time to think about and compose their responses.

Kitsis (2010) also indicated that asynchronous literature discussions were reported by students to be more equitable than face-to-face discussions because one person dominated some face-to-face discussions whereas the asynchronous format required students to consider the responses of others when posting. Similarly, when English (2007) implemented online literature discussion for her Grade 11 English class she found that threaded discussions gave students more time to think about questions that were posed during class and that student participation in the discussions was more balanced. English also suggested that asynchronous discussions benefited shy students by giving them an alternative opportunity to enter discussions. English described the growth of two quiet students who rarely spoke in class but provided deeply insightful posts during online discussions. One student demonstrated a deep understanding of the text in a response, while the other student showed risk taking in a response. According to English, it was the time to think and compose as well as the lack of fear and pressure to voice opinions in face-to-face conversations that enabled these reticent students' responses to be heard in online discussion forum.

Carico and Logan (2004) also made observations about equitable opportunities to participate in asynchronous discussions. They examined online discussions from over six years to investigate if communication technology enhanced the teaching and learning of language arts. Participants included Grade 8 classes and pre-service teachers in a project called WebPal. Students and participants were given explicit instruction about how to navigate the MOO (an acronym for Multi-user, Object-Oriented) environment as well as expectations for responses. After examining over 400 online responses on the MOO, Carico and Logan suggested that online discussions encouraged students, who were

considered shy and reluctant to engage during in class discussion, to participate in and be more engaged during the online discussions. Student survey and interview data indicated that shy students felt it was difficult to voice their thoughts while others were looking at them and that the pressure made them silent during in class discussions. However, the researchers also reported that some students missed the face-to-face discussions and enjoyed seeing the facial expressions of people while in discussions.

Conversely, Day and Kroon (2010) found that students participating in synchronous discussions for virtual literature circles were initially confused trying to figure out who they needed to respond to. Once the researchers and teacher had a system in place for reading posts the students stated that they enjoyed having so many conversations taking place at one time. Students said the real time online discussions kept them on track more than face-to-face discussions. Students also enjoyed the instant message feature of the technology as many students were already well versed in how to communicate this way from their out-of-school technology use.

### **Responsive teaching.**

Research findings have revealed how online literature circles often require scaffolded instruction for synchronous and asynchronous discussions. Educators and students can use printed transcripts to improve student writing, participation, engagement, and responses (Carico & Logan, 2004; Day & Kroon, 2007; English, 2007; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Kitsis, 2010; Larson, 2009).

### ***Using transcripts.***

Online literature circle discussions easily allow the transcripts of discussions to be used by students and teachers to analyze and reflect upon discussions. Carico and

Logan's (2004) investigation using synchronized online discussions identified the benefits of using transcripts from online discussions. The transcripts were as important as the discussions themselves because they provided students with the opportunity to deepen their understanding and reveal new perspectives that students would otherwise have not considered on their own. Students discovered how the transcripts showed how they worked as a group, developed new perspectives, gained better understanding of the literature, and revealed ways to improve future discussions. Carico and Logan (2004) suggested that revisiting discussion transcripts afforded students with the opportunity to develop "deeper and more varied reflections than is possible in a traditional classroom setting" (p. 299).

Grisham and Wolsey (2006) also photocopied students' online discussion transcripts after they realized that the initial discussions lacked new thinking. The researchers then taught students how to code and analyze their discussion transcripts for examples of initiating discussion, active listening, questioning, clarifying, connecting, retelling and discussing literary elements. Grisham and Wolsey noticed immediate and continued improvement in the quality and quantity of students' responses during online discussions after students analyzed the transcripts. Additionally, Grisham and Wolsey used students' transcripts to inform their instruction about how to further support students' interactions and responses. For example, the researchers developed a mini lesson for students about how to give constructive feedback and create prompts to enrich the discussions.

Kitsis (2010) also discussed the use of transcripts from online discussion as a benefit to students and teachers. She explained that the transcripts allowed teachers to evaluate the prompts to identify which ones led to rich discussions, which books or readings were

unpopular, and which areas in the readings led to confusion for students. Identifying these aspects enabled teachers to reflect on how to support students through those texts in the future.

***Teacher participation and monitoring.***

In several of the studies discussed above, educators monitored the discussions and explicitly taught and modeled for students how to conduct online literature discussions (Day & Kroon, 2007; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Kitsis, 2010; Larson, 2009; Wolsey & Grisham, 2007). Both Grisham and Wolsey (2006) responded to threaded student discussions throughout to “increase the level of complexity of student responses” (p. 658). In fact, Grisham and Wolsey’s findings suggested that the discussions of students who missed teacher scaffolding were less effective than those that were scaffolded. English (2007) also communicated the importance of initially modeling discussions in online discussion for students. However, once peer-to-peer responses began to develop, English preferred to let the discussions happen without her to allow students ownership of the discussions. As well, Larson (2009) discussed the flexible stance of the teacher when students wanted to take on a leadership role in the discussions by creating their own prompts for the class. As a result of this request the teacher relinquished her role as prompt provider allowing students to post discussion prompts. Finally, Kitsis (2010) also observed how some student groups were able to move away from the structure provided by teacher prompts for discussions, while other groups still needed the support of teacher prompts to develop the discussions.

Another explicitly taught feature of online literature circles was “netiquette” where teachers identified appropriate online behaviour for discussions (Day & Kroon, 2007;

Grisham & Wolsey, 2006). Wolsey and Grisham (2007) also described the need for teachers to monitor posts to ensure that students are interacting with one another appropriately, noting that they had to limit access privileges for some students. Additionally, English (2007) discussed the importance of monitoring the amount of responses students received. She found that responding to students periodically as a teacher was valuable as was ensuring that all students received responses to their posts from other classmates. Kitsis (2010) also spent time modeling online behaviour expectations for students, and they had opportunities to practice these behaviours, including how to challenge one another without damaging the collaborative environment of the online discussions.

### **Integrating technology.**

The research has also revealed how online literature circle discussions afforded students with opportunities to apply and develop new literacy skills (Day & Kroon, 2007; Edmonson 2012; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Larson, 2009). For most students, using the computer was not a new experience: Grisham and Wolsey's (2006) student surveys revealed 92% of the Grade 8 students had computers at home and used them an average of 5.14 hours a week. The survey also found that 73% of the students preferred to type rather than write because writing made their hand hurt. Findings from the study by Wolsey and Grisham (2007) also revealed that students were very familiar with using computers, as student surveys showed that students used computers daily at home to play games online, surf the internet, use chat rooms and e-mail.

In the study by Day and Kroon (2010), Grade 6 students cheered when they were informed that they would get to go online to share in virtual literature circles, thus

showing their enthusiasm in having the opportunity to work with a technology that was the same technology that most students used daily out of school. In fact, the researchers thought that the novelty of online literature circle discussions would diminish as the year progressed, but they found that students' enthusiasm for online discussion continued throughout the year. Students' self-reflections from this study contained comments such as; "I can't believe we get to do this in school" and "I love working on computers. Technology is much more fun" (Day & Kroon, 2010, p. 22). Day and Kroon (2010) also noted that the online discussion created a "ripple effect" because as students shared their novels with one another, other students would want to read the books, motivating them to read as many books from the literature circles as possible (p.23). Additionally, findings from the research indicated that students who would normally balk at pen to paper work were much more engaged and completed their electronic extension projects using PowerPoint and Tux paint.

Another emerging trend in online literature discussion is the integration of social networks. As educators include social networks into students' literacy practices they strengthen the bridge between students out-of-school technology use with meaningful in-school literacy practices. A paper presented at the International Association of School Librarianship Annual Conference by Walker (2010) discussed how social networks such as *Facebook* and *Goodreads* along with laptops, iPods and other information and communication technologies can enhance literature circles. The paper featured a study involving Year 7 and 8 students at Hong Kong at Renaissance College, an International Baccalaureate school where many of the students are EAL (English as an Alternative Language). The school decided to expand their traditional literature circles to include

online literature circles for the following four reasons: to increase students' language capacity of EAL learners; to afford students the opportunity to discuss books outside of class time; to blend students' experience with social network within school learning activities; and to make the books and the library more visible to students (Walker, 2010, pp. 2-3). Educators at the school believed the inclusion of information and communication technologies and social networking sites would improve students' learning and enrich students' global intelligence.

The researcher and librarian established a collection of both print and audio YAL books that appealed to students. *Goodreads*, an online social network, was used for students to post reviews, keep track of books of books they read, list future books they want to read, and join discussions. Once students had selected their books they formed small groups that met face-to-face once a week to discuss the books; students also decided how much they would need to read daily to finish two books during the three week time period during the face-to-face meeting. Students were provided with post-it notes to identify pages or passages for discussion and given bookmarks with discussion prompts. During the last week of literature discussions students also went online to *Goodreads* to post comments and discuss the book.

Student responses indicated that they thought they read more books because of the literature circle discussions. Students also indicated that *Goodreads* afforded them with an opportunity to deepen their understanding of the text as the students discussed problems, mysteries, characters and events in the books (Walker, 2010). Additionally, the use of *Goodreads* allowed literature discussions to extend beyond the classroom. Findings from the study also revealed that students who participated in the literature

circles were taking more books out from the library, often reading the sequels or trilogy of books and that many students continued to use *Goodreads* after the study. The use of social networking structure, with its “simple and flexible structure” and choice of novels resulted in extended face-to-face group discussions and promoted reading (Walker, 2010, p. 6).

Stewart (2009) also used social networking to support online literature circles. The six high school students featured in this article who were involved in the online literature circle were library helpers who enjoyed reading and were eager to discuss books with others using Facebook. Students were given instructions about how to use various applications such as the discussion board, posting to the wall, and the chat feature within Facebook. Students were also assigned roles of leader, literary luminary, vocabulary enricher, connector, recorder and clarifier for the online literature discussions. The librarian taught and practiced with students the social skills needed to facilitate thoughtful online discussions. This online literature circle discussion activity afforded students who did not have classes together the opportunity to engage in discussions. Stewart (2009) suggested that the students in the virtual literature circles “gain[ed] social value by developing mutual respect and as a result felt comfortable sharing ideas with each other” (p. 33). Using social networks with online literature discussions allowed students to blend the social experience of Facebook with their academic learning (Stewart, 2009).

### **Socially constructed learning.**

Several researchers described how students constructed meanings about the literature through their interactions with one another during online literature discussions

(Carico & Logan, 2004; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Kitsis, 2010; Larson, 2010). For example, findings from Larson's (2009) research indicated that students were socially constructing their learning by building on their face-to-face discussions and informal social interactions online, and that this collaboration was reflected in the deep conversations that drew on information from "real and virtual environments" because students had considered the diverse perspectives of others (p. 647). Additionally, Larson found that both the teacher-created and student-created prompts for discussions facilitated the group to socially construct meaning with one another.

Observations by Carico and Logan (2004) also revealed socially constructed meanings when several comments on the MOO revealed that students were clarifying details in their books by making connections to other books in their online discussions with one another. Similarly, findings from the study by Grisham and Wolsey (2006) indicated students were considering each other's points of view and building upon them in their responses. In the other study by Wolsey and Grisham (2007) analysis of the data revealed that it was the online written interaction with peers that contributed to students' effective understanding of and connecting with a text. Finally, Kitsis (2010) also observed how students' online discussions revealed engaged reading where students' questions to clarify meaning required analysis, synthesis and evaluation. The students' online discussions showed how they had learned to support their views and communicate effectively, and socially construct meaning together during the discussions.

### **Challenges to Online Literature Circle Discussions**

Although researchers have identified many strengths associated with online literature discussions, they have also identified issues that require consideration. For example,

Larson (2009) reported that some students had difficulty discerning the intended tone of electronic exchanges. A few students experienced difficulty with typing and believed that this skill limited their responses (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006). The reliability of technology and limitations associated with access were also mentioned in some studies (Carico & Logan, 2004).

English (2007), Kitsis (2010) and Stewart (2009) identified several other concerns and considerations when implementing and managing online literature discussions. English (2007) suggested that some parents may not be comfortable with their adolescents engaging in an online forum and recommended that teachers use a site that is provided through their district so that it is not public. Similarly, Kitsis (2010) mentioned the importance of securing blog sites to ensure that only her students would view the blogs, and asking students not to use their real names in the blogs. Kitsis (2010) required students to use separate accounts for their private and school blogs. Stewart (2009) also asked students not to attach their personal Facebook account identities to the Facebook literature discussions. As well, Kitsis recommended that teachers share their written expectations about privacy and acceptable use with students, parents and administrators.

Additionally, English (2007) acknowledged that setting up an online forum for students requires registering the students, which may be both time consuming and daunting for some educators. Ensuring that students use the space as intended by the teacher also requires that the teacher provide scaffolding, modeling and monitoring for students concerning online literature discussions. Lastly, English noted that some students may not get a response to their post while others may get several; to counter this situation, English asked certain students to respond to other students' posts.

## Summary

As revealed by the review of the literature in this section, meaningful integration of literacy technology, such as online literature discussions, has the potential to not only engage students but also to provide students the opportunity to develop new literacy and critical thinking skills (Carico & Logan, 2004; Day & Kroon, 2007; Edmonson, 2012; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Stewart, 2009; Wolsey & Grisham, 2007). Online literature circle transcripts can afford many students and teachers with the opportunity to analyze discussions (Carico & Logan, 2004; Day & Kroon, 2007; English, 2007; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Kitsis, 2010; Kroon, 2007; Larson, 2009; Wolsey & Grisham, 2007). Student engagement was also a prevailing theme evident throughout the studies and was largely attributed to the incorporation of new technologies into the traditional classroom (Carico & Logan, 2004; Day & Kroon, 2007; Edmonson, 2012; English, 2007; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Kitsis, 2010; Stewart, 2009; Walker, 2010). Teachers observed how students produced connected, thoughtful and authentic responses throughout the studies and how students demonstrated enriched understandings from their socially constructed learning by engaging in online literature discussions (Carico & Logan, 2004; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Kitsis, 2010). Although a few researchers reported cautions about using some of the technology, many still indicated that the benefits outweighed the drawbacks and suggested strategies to minimize or work around potential shortcomings (Day & Kroon, 2007; English, 2007; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Kitsis, 2010). Online literature circle discussions relate to Rosenblatt's transactional theory (1994) and social constructivism (Smagorinsky, 2013) as students involved in these discussions shared

their personal insights and connections to the novels and created new and deeper understandings during the discussions.

In Chapter Four I describe the design and implementation of face-to-face and online dystopian literature circle discussions as well as the implementation of the culminating activity “Create Your Own Utopia” for the teacher resource “Dystopian Literature Circles.”

## Chapter Four

### Dystopian Literature Circles

The teacher resource, “Dystopian Literature Circles,” featured in this chapter describes how to implement online and face-to-face dystopian literature circles and the culminating activity “Create Your Own Utopia.” The activities in the resource can easily be substituted to fit other themed literature circles for a variety of grade levels. The resource consists of a rationale, descriptions of resources, and activities, which are connected to the new British Columbia English 9 curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013). Additionally, the resource includes samples of teacher and student self-assessment rubrics. Considerations for implementing online and face-to-face literature circles and suggested adaptations for students are also included in the resource. I implemented the unit during the Spring of 2014 and my reflections on the unit’s implementation are included in Chapter Five. It is my hope that teachers will find the ideas and activities within the resource useful and applicable to their practice.

#### **Rationale**

The design of this teacher resource is based on scholarly literature and research that supports the enrichment of face-to-face discussions with online discussions and the inclusion of the culminating student project’s activities for students. The theoretical foundations and conceptual foundations of the resource are Rosenblatt’s transactional theory (1994), Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory, New London Group’s (1996) multiliteracies, multimodality, and Gee’s (2004) affinity spaces. Rosenblatt’s transactional theory serves as the foundation for the face-to-face and online discussion as students’ construction of meaning and responses to the novels are based on their personal

thoughts and sociocultural experiences. Vygotsky's sociocultural theory is also central to the design of the resource as it explains that knowledge is co-constructed during social interactions. Therefore, students' interactions during the discussion activities reflect Vygotsky's beliefs that learning is a social process.

A multiliteracies approach is reflected by the student activities that require students to use new communication tools (Moodle) as well as the application iMovie to create their culminating projects. Applying a multiliteracies approach to student activities affords students with the opportunity to express and combine their creativity and new technology skills with school learning. As stated in Chapter Two integrating new literacies into classrooms may foster students' engagement and make learning more relevant for students. The resource is also designed to meet the multimodal needs of students as they learn and apply multimodal elements to their online discussions and culminating projects. The teacher resource draws on the findings of the articles and primary studies discussed in Chapter Three, the review of the literature regarding peer led discussions, young adult literature and online literature discussions. Lastly, the teacher resource considers and reflects on the "Big Ideas" outlined in the new British Columbia Ministry of Education, English Language Arts curriculum. These "Big Ideas" are:

1. That language and literature help students find meaning and joy in reading.
2. That exploring rich and diverse texts will deepen student understanding and develop students' ability to make connections, express ideas and think critically.
3. That inquiry, curiosity and thoughtful reflection in story and text deepen student understanding of self, identity and humanity.

4. That using artistry and precise language are powerful tools when communicating for specific audiences and purposes (British Columbia Ministry of Education, English Language Arts Draft Curriculum, 2013, p. 5).

### **Considerations**

A few considerations should be noted before embarking on the implementation of online dystopian literature circles. Teachers should think about which online format to use for the discussion forum and how to protect the security of students' identities. Secondly, teachers should understand that students have variety of different experience levels with online and face-to-face discussions. Therefore, it is important that teachers provide instructions for online discussions and model for the students their clear expectations regarding behaviour and conduct during discussions.

Teacher participation within the online and face-to-face discussions is another point of consideration. Some teachers may decide to post discussion prompts and enter into discussions and others may decide to step back from the discussions preferring students manage the forum themselves. Other teachers may choose to provide the initial discussion prompts for students' literature discussions and then gradually release the responsibility to the students to run their own discussions.

Teachers will also need to decide how frequently to observe and monitor students' discussions. Some teachers may choose to review posts and observe students' discussions daily while others may want to read students' posts and evaluate students' face-to-face discussions only a few times during the week. Another consideration for teachers is providing students with reflection and self-assessment opportunities for their online discussions. Teachers may find it useful to print transcripts of posts for both

themselves and students to use for teacher evaluation and student self-assessment.

Additionally, teachers may want to ensure that all students are receiving responses to their posts, which may mean asking students to respond to specific students' posts.

Lastly, teachers should decide what to do when students finish a novel before their peers. For students who finish their book early teachers may decide to encourage these students to read another book from the literature circles or teachers may want to include copies of the sequels for the books as several of the novels are the first book in a trilogy.

### **Adaptations**

For students who require adaptations, teachers may want to provide audio books of the novels. Teachers may also need to allow students who would prefer to use their own e-books or audio books copies of the novels. The novel annotations (see Appendix A) indicate if an audiobook and or e-book version for the books is available at the time of this unit.

### **Online Dystopian Literature Circles Overview**

The teacher resource has five sections that address the following topics: an introduction to the unit, student book selection, facilitating students' face-to-face and online discussions, and culminating activity. The time period considered reasonable for the Online Dystopian Literature Circles unit is four to five weeks, and is based on a schedule of 80-minute classes five times a week. The first activity (2 classes) involves a whole class debate about the rights of teenagers as well an introduction to the online discussion forum. The purpose of the online discussion forum introduction is to introduce to students the tools and applications within Moodle. The second activity (1 class) is the book browse where the teacher enthusiastically tells students about the books

and the students browse each book for 10 minutes and rank their preferred books. The third and fourth activities focus on the combination of face-to-face and online discussions and are ongoing throughout the unit (approximately 12 classes). As stated previously, prior to the face-to-face and online discussions teachers need to model and explicitly instruct students about the features of effective face-to-face and online discussions. The fifth activity (5-6 classes) is the culminating activity where students create their own utopia.

### **Activity Descriptions for Literature Circles**

Teacher preparation for this activity requires the creation of an online forum for the class(es). The forum should allow students to enter into discussions easily by clicking on links for specific discussions related to specific books.

#### **Activity 1 Whole class debate, defining dystopia, and setting up the online discussion (2 classes)**

##### ***A. Whole class debate***

Introduce students to the dystopian literature circle by conducting an “agree and disagree” debate. Discuss with students the importance of speaking to one another respectfully, and to consider the ideas of others before responding during the debate. To organize this debate have one side of the room designated as the agree side and the other side designated as the disagree side. The following questions are suggested debate prompts:

- Do you agree or disagree that a perfect society may also be a horrible society?
- Do you agree or disagree that a perfect society has no crime?

- Do you agree or disagree that in order for a perfect society to exist there needs to be someone or something that controls all aspects of it?

During the debate record students' responses to the prompts from the discussion and leave them on the board for students to consider during the "Defining Dystopia" discussion.

### ***B. Defining dystopia.***

Ask students first to contribute to a class definition of dystopia while you record students' ideas about dystopias on the white board. Ask students to list features such as government, environment, people, accommodation or shelter of a dystopia. Students may want to volunteer information from books and movies they have read. Explain to students that the class will be reading dystopian novels for their literature circles.

### ***C. Creating Moodle accounts.***

Students will need to create and log on to their new Moodle or other online discussion forum accounts; some students may choose to use the Moodle on their mobile device. Instruct students to bookmark or save the district operated Moodle or other site to their browser or to add it to the home screen on their mobile device. Students should also be introduced and given instruction about the various tools within Moodle or other site such as how to post, start a discussion, use the editing tools, add video and attach links. To provide students with easy navigation to the specific book discussions consider using cover images of the books that are linked to the specific online book discussion forums.

### ***D. Introducing whole class online discussion.***

To effectively prepare students for the online discussion students should be given very explicit and detailed expectations for online literature discussion forums. Teachers can

review the sheet “Expectations for Online Discussions” with the class (see Appendix B). The expectations sheet should also be a link on the Moodle site. The teacher should also explain to students that the online discussion forum is intended to expand face-to-face discussions, and that it is necessary for students to read and respond to each other’s prompts. To further support and prepare students for online discussions the teacher should review the online discussion rubric (see Appendix C) outlining key expectations with students before they begin their online discussions. Additionally, to help students understand how to begin a discussion or respond to someone’s prompt tips, for facilitating discussions teachers should also present students with the discussion starter prompts and tips sheet in Appendix D.

***E. Starting the whole class online debate.***

After addressing the expectations and explicit instructions for online discussions students will follow the instructions and respond to the discussion prompts below. Students are directed to follow the expectations for online posting, respond to at least one of the discussion posts, create a post that is at least 100 words, or approximately 5-6 complete sentences, and reply to at least two other people’s posts.

Prompts for whole class online debate:

- How do you feel about government and or major corporations tracking your movement or activity on the internet? Explain your reasoning.
- Should the choices you make as a teenager affect the rest of your life? Explain why or why not.

### ***F. Role of the teacher.***

As the moderator of the discussion, teachers should monitor students' discussions carefully, ensuring that students are behaving appropriately and engaging in meaningful discussions within the forum. Additionally, the teacher should provide students with modeling, feedback and clarification by responding to students' posts.

After the online discussion is complete, teachers should print the transcripts of the discussion for students and have students assess the discussions and make goals for the next discussions using the self-assessment sheet (see Appendix E) for online discussions.

### **Activity 2 Teacher book talk and student book selection (1 class)**

#### ***A. Teacher book talk.***

Prior to beginning any literature circle, teachers should read all of the books that are offered as selections for students. Many students will have questions about the stories and want to discuss the books with the teacher.

Engage in enthusiastic book talks for the following books. As previously stated book annotations can be found in Appendix A. Suggested books for dystopian literature circles include the following:

- *Unwind* by Neil Shusterman (2007)
- *Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008)
- *Matched* by Ally Condie (2010)
- *Blood Red Road* by Moira Young (2011)
- *Divergent* by Veronica Roth (2011)
- *Legend* by Marie Lu (2011)
- *What Happened to Serenity?* By Sarah Collins (2011)

***B. Student book selection.***

Provide students with approximately 10 minutes with each book to read a few of the first few pages. Students will then rate the books on the student book rating sheet located in Appendix F. Teachers should use these ratings to help organize students into their first pick book literature circles. Teachers should also explain to students that they may be placed into the second or third book choice depending on the numbers of students who select particular titles.

***C. Distributing books.***

I recommend that the literature circle discussion groups have four to six students and that teachers provide students with their first choice pick as much as possible. However, teachers should also think about the individual students in each group and determine which students should be placed into which groups. Once the literature circles are formed the teacher should post the groups in a central place in the classroom and on Moodle or other online discussion forum for students (see Appendix G).

**Activity 3 Face-to-face discussions (approximately 12 classes).**

Activity three includes a variety of activities to prepare, support and evaluate students' face-to-face literature circle discussions. The face-to-face discussions are also intended to occur during the same weeks as the online discussions.

***A. Preparing students for face-to-face discussions.***

As noted above, to prepare students for their face-to-face discussions teachers should provide explicit instruction of and model face-to-face discussion expectations as well as review with students the rubric that will be used to evaluate face-to-face discussions (see Appendix H).

***B. Using post-it notes.***

Teachers should also provide students with post-it notes to use during their reading to write down their connections, questions and predictions. It should also be explained to students that they must not read through the chapters without placing a minimum of two post-it notes to mark passages for discussion by emphasizing to students the importance of arriving at their face-to-face discussions with something to share and that the post-it notes are a tool to help them hold their thinking while reading. Additionally, teachers should model for students how to find the passages to apply post-it notes to by explaining that it is about finding passages that they can connect (text-to-text, text-to-self, text-to-world) deeply to, or that they have questions about. A suggestion for modeling how to find the passages may be done with a teacher “think aloud” where the teacher reads a passage from a book and shares their thinking with the class to demonstrate the kinds of connections they are forming as they read.

***C. Students’ first literature circle discussion meeting.***

On the first day of face-to-face discussions teachers should explain to students that they will be meeting their group members and that they will need to decide as a group their reading goals for each day. Suggest to students that they consider looking at the number of chapters and dividing them evenly among the number of days designated for the literature discussions (12 class days). As previously stated, this unit is based on 80-minute classes. Additionally students should also be reminded that they will be evaluated using the face-to-face literature discussion rubric (see Appendix H) twice during the week, and that they will be expected to engage in daily discussion circles and complete daily self-assessments (see Appendix I) of their discussions.

***D. Creating classroom space and time for literature discussions.***

Teachers may want students to create circles with their desks or gather around a table when forming discussion circles by designating areas in the classroom for specific literature discussion groups to meet. Daily face-to-face literature circle discussions should take 20-25 minutes. Teachers should also encourage students to use the previously mentioned sentence starter prompts and tips for facilitating discussions sheet located in Appendix D.

***E. Supporting and evaluating students' face-to-face literature discussions.***

To support students' first literature circle discussions the teacher should initially observe the exchanges among students. If students are sharing their thoughts about the novel chapters using their post-it notes and asking questions or expanding on one another's ideas, the teacher should quietly observe and make notes about how well individuals are engaging in the discussions. However, if the discussion appears to stalled or monopolized by a student the teacher should enter into the discussion to model for effective discussion techniques. Once the first literature discussion is complete the students should reflect on the discussion by completing the literature circle self-assessment (see Appendix I). Teachers may also find it beneficial to have a whole discussion about face-to-face discussions by asking students to share their experiences about what did work and what did not during their discussions.

***F. Providing feedback for students' face-to-face discussions.***

To successfully guide students toward having meaningful discussions the teacher should provide timely feedback using the face-to-face discussion rubric as well as allow students the opportunity to reflect and set goals for discussions using the face-to-face

self-assessments (see Appendix H and I). It is important to understand that the role of the teacher is to guide and encourage students to develop engaging discussions with their peers. Therefore, it is recommended that teachers find positive aspects of students' discussion to share first and then address areas of concern and recommendations.

**Activity 4 Online literature discussions (approximately 12 classes).**

Activity four describes a variety of ways to help prepare, support, and evaluate students' online discussions. As previously mentioned in activity three the online discussion should occur during the same weeks as the in class face-to-face literature circles discussions.

***A. Preparing students for online discussions.***

During the first literature discussion meeting the teacher should also discuss with students the posting of discussion prompts for the week and expectations for online discussions. The teacher should explain the criteria for online discussions by reviewing the online behaviour expectations and the online discussion rubric (see Appendix B). To further support students' online discussions, the teacher should also remind students of their whole class online debate and their goals for future online discussions that occurred during the whole class online debate.

***B. Online discussion prompts.***

This resource includes suggested prompts for each novel (see Appendix J), however these are only suggestions and teachers may choose to have students from each group create the weekly discussion prompt and facilitate the online discussion. Teachers who choose to have students create the weekly discussion prompts and facilitate the weekly discussion should also provide students with the previously mentioned discussion

sentence prompts and tips for facilitating discussions located in Appendix D.

Additionally, as for many students it may be their first time running a forum, teachers may want students to work with a partner to create the weekly discussion prompt and facilitate the online discussion and to share the responding that accompanies the facilitation of a discussion forum.

### ***C. Supporting and evaluating online discussions.***

To support students' online discussions teachers should monitor closely the discussions and participate if the discussions appears stalled or off topic. Teacher contributions may also provide students additional modeling for facilitating online literature discussions by demonstrating to students how to ask open-ended questions and encourage other students' responses. Students' online discussions will also require quick feedback from their peers and teachers. Therefore, it is important that the teacher ask students to check the Moodle once a day during the week. Additionally, as stated previously, students must post a response to the teacher or student created prompt as well as to at least two other students' responses during the weekly discussions. Students should also be provided with weekly printed transcripts of their discussions to review with the online discussion rubric. The teacher should indicate on the rubric appropriate descriptors that indicate students' performance during their online discussions and suggest ways students can improve their future discussions. The weekly printed transcripts will enable students to reflect on the discussion and to set goals for the next discussion using the online discussions self-assessment sheets (see Appendix E). Lastly, students should also be encouraged to post links to videos, and news stories that relate directly to the online discussions. The links and videos may allow students the flexibility

to discuss their connections to other texts and the world more easily and may further deepen students' understanding of the novels.

**Activity 5 “*Creating Your Utopia or Dystopia*” culminating activity (5 classes).**

The purpose of “Creating Your Own Utopia” activity (see Appendix K) is to provide students with the opportunity to create their own utopia. However, some students may want to create their own dystopia. If so, teachers should require the students to complete same activity but also explain how the utopia became a dystopia. Students will be drawing on ideas from their novels they read to complete this activity. The culminating activity requires students to complete a variety of activities including descriptive and imaginative writing as well as integrating technology. The culminating activity will be assessed using the rubric in Appendix L. Students are also required to complete the criteria proof sheet located in Appendix M for the project before submitting it to the teacher. The criteria proof sheet also allows students the opportunity to self-assess the project and helps ensure that students have not missed key parts of the project. Prior to implementing the project teachers should have students complete the activity “Thinking About a Utopia” (see Appendix N). The purpose of the latter is to encourage students to consider how a utopian society works. Once the projects are completed students will be asked to share their projects during a gallery walk.

**Curriculum Connections**

The resource “Dystopian Literature Circles” and the culminating activity address many of British Columbia’s Draft English Language Arts learning standards (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013). The online and face-to-face dystopian literature circle format may be adapted to fit other grade levels. However, this resource package

identifies the Band 8-9 English Language Arts learning standards, for comprehending and connecting as well as creating and communicating competencies (British Columbia Ministry of Education, English Language Arts Draft Curriculum, 2013). A complete list of the learning standards for Band 8-9 English Language Arts learning standards can be found at [www.curriculum.gov.bc.ca](http://www.curriculum.gov.bc.ca).

The following table outlines the curricular competencies for comprehending and connecting and describes how students will meet the curricular these competencies with the online and face-to-face literature circle discussion activities and the culminating activities for “Creating Your Own Utopia.” Additionally, the new British Columbia draft for English 8/9 states that curricular competencies for comprehending and connecting are expected to develop as students use “oral, written, visual, and digital texts” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 5). The resource “Dystopian Literature Circles” provides students with opportunities to write and orally discuss their novels, as well as share and create visual and audio images digitally.

<b>Curricular Competencies Comprehending and Connecting</b>	<b>Student Activities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and use reading strategies to increase comprehension</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Preparing and asking questions about the novel.</li> <li>• Reading and re-reading the text to clarify understanding</li> <li>• Discussing the text with peers and teacher during face-to-face and online discussions.</li> <li>• Recording connections to the text to share during discussions.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make meaningful person connections with ideas presented in a variety of texts to increase understanding of self and others</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discussing text-to-text, text-to-self and text-to-world connections during online and face-to-face literature circle discussions as well as creating their culminating project.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Engage actively as readers and listeners to construct meaning, deepen thinking and comprehension, and promote inquiry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During online and face-to-face discussions as well as when creating their utopia project students will be sharing, building and gaining new knowledge and perspectives by listening and reading to peers' thoughts, and questions about the novels.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Critically engage with text to appreciate the power and beauty of language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During online and face-to-face discussions students will be discussing their reactions and feelings for the text.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Examine text in relation to social, historical and cultural contexts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During online and face-to-face discussions as well as when creating their utopia project students will be examining their own social worlds, and asking questions about history such as relating events in the story to the kinds of control and power of leaders.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze the ways language can be manipulated for specific purposes, including ways to evoke emotional responses</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>During online and face-to-face discussions as well as when creating their utopia project students will be sharing their reactions and feelings to parts of the novels.</li> <li>Students are to explain the motivation of the author to create particular reactions for readers.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Recognize literary elements, devices, and language features to interpret, analyze and evaluate text</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will be discussing sections of the novels that they liked, examining the author's craft (descriptive writing) along with symbolism, and imagery.</li> </ul>

The following table further describes how students will demonstrate the concepts and content related to the learning standards for comprehending and connecting (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013).

<b>Concepts and Content for Comprehending and Connecting</b>	<b>Student Activities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reading and metacognitive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As students read their novels they</li> </ul>

strategies before, during and after reading to improve understanding and thinking	will be instructed to record their connections and questions about the text.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The writing process to enhance communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As students compose posts for online discussions and complete their own utopia project they will be required to write descriptively, and persuasively.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The purpose and impact of a variety of communication forms</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Many novels for the literature circle have a variety of texts embedded within the novels that students can be asked to evaluate.</li> <li>Students will be creating a variety of texts for creating their own utopia project.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The structure, features, forms, conventions, and origins of language</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>As students compose their posts they will need to ensure that they are communicating clearly.</li> <li>Students will receive feedback from peers and the teacher to assist them in composing clearly written posts.</li> <li>Posting to each other will provide students with an authentic opportunity to edit and apply language conventions meaningfully to their writing.</li> <li>Students will write descriptively, and persuasively as they create the final project.</li> </ul>

The following table identifies the curricular competencies for creating and communicating and describes how the student activities for online and face-to-face discussions and the activities for the culminating activity meet the creating and communicating competencies.

<b>Curricular Competencies Creating and Communicating</b>	<b>Student Activities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Use oral language to explore and express ideas, communicate clearly, and evoke emotions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will post responses to the novels that will require them to clearly state their reactions to text.</li> <li>Students will post responses that describe what they might do if they</li> </ul>

	<p>were a character in the novel.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students need to explain their reactions and respond to other students' perceptions of their writing.</li> <li>• The culminating activity requires students to write in character for two journal entries. Thus students will be writing about characters' emotions and their reactions to life in the utopia.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use stages of writing process to improve clarity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students need to read and re-read their posts before replying.</li> <li>• Students are writing for an audience and will be given feedback on their writing from peers. Thus, students have an authentic opportunity to compose and edit their writing.</li> <li>• The culminating activity includes a variety of writing activities where students need to plan, write, edit and revise their writing.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present ideas and information and adjust point of view and tone for a variety of purposes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Students need to consider how to discuss differing points of view with peers during online discussion.</li> <li>• Students need to consider the tone of their writing and their word choice to respectfully disagree or ask for clarification with peers.</li> <li>• Students will write descriptively and persuasively during the online discussion.</li> <li>• The culminating activity requires students to write persuasively (e.g., the advertisement for their utopia).</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apply the conventions of language to clarify meaning in written and oral communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The online discussion portion requires students to read and re-read their posts before replying.</li> <li>• Students are writing for an audience and will receive feedback on their writing from their peers.</li> <li>• The face-to-face discussion portion requires students to consider how they will state their ideas clearly. Similar to the online discussions students will be receiving authentic</li> </ul>

	feedback from peers to help them improve their communication.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Refine form and structure according to purpose, audience and context</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The culminating activity requires students to write in role as a person living in the utopia.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Assess and adjust communication to improve its clarity, effectiveness and impact</li> <li>• Manipulate language to refine meaning, create voice, develop style, and create artistry</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The online discussion portion involves students reading and re-reading their posts before replying.</li> <li>• Students are also writing for an audience and will be given feedback on their writing from peers.</li> <li>• The culminating activity includes students writing in role, and creating an advertisement. Thus students must consider the clarity of their writing to fulfill the aforementioned purposes.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop and defend a position with supporting evidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• During the online discussions students will be developing and supporting their ideas with text references from their novels.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Create a variety of texts to communicate ideas, create impact and evoke emotions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The online discussions and culminating activity require students to write in role, create an advertisement, and to post links that connect and demonstrate students' understanding to the novels.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employ stylistic and rhetorical devices to create meaning and achieve purpose</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Both the online discussions and the final project require students to represent the work creatively.</li> <li>• Students will be working with applications on the iPads that will give them various tools to create audio and visual representations for their activities.</li> </ul>

The new curriculum draft does not include an information and technology section but it does state that students will be able to develop curricular competencies using digital texts.

I have used British Columbia Ministry of Education's (1996) prescribed learning

outcomes for information and technology in the following table to show how students will be integrating technology into their culminating activities:

<b>Information and Technology Prescribed Learning Outcomes Grade 9</b>	<b>Student Activities</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Select, use and evaluate a variety of information technology tools for making presentations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are given the option to design their utopia using Keynote slide show, and iMovie.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Apply the principles of effective communication and good design when using information technology tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students are given the option to create the advertisement for their project using a brochure maker, iMovie or Keynote slide show.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Analyze the impact of multimedia documents on the intended audiences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Students will need to consider how best to use colours, fonts, images, and audio for their projects within the applications on the iPads.</li> </ul>

### **Assessment**

Throughout the resource it is suggested that teachers use specific rubrics, and self-assessments with students and that these assessment tools be presented to students before, during and after the activities. The purpose of identifying the criteria within the rubrics is to continually guide students as they complete the activities. Additionally, self-assessments are included for most of the activities and are intended to engage students in self-reflection and the setting of goals for their activities. The use of rubrics and self-assessments within the teacher resource “Online Dystopian Literature Circles” reflects the new “Transforming Assessment” document from the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2013). According to the “Transforming Assessment” document from the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2013), teachers must use a variety of effective

assessment tools. The Draft English Language Arts curriculum states that “assessment is ongoing and inseparable from the instructional assessment and learning cycle” (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013, para. 5).

The “Dystopian Literature Circle” resource integrates a variety of skills described in the British Columbia’s Draft English Language Arts learning standards (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2013). It is my hope that teachers using the teacher resource “Dystopian Literature Circles” will find that students are engaged in their reading, responding, creating and representing.

## **Chapter Five**

### **Connections and Reflections**

The design of the “Dystopian Literature Circle” unit was motivated by my desire to integrate technology with effective literary practices in my English classes. In this chapter I reflect upon the various activities and aspects of the unit as they connect to the research discussed in Chapters Two and Three. As stated previously, I implemented the teacher resource during the Spring of 2014. After reflecting upon my experiences, I knew that I wanted to make changes to the unit to further support students’ discussions and creativity. The version of the teacher resource presented in Chapter Four is the revised “Dystopian Literature Circle” unit.

### **Using Young Adult Literature**

The novels selected for the literature circles are all dystopian young adult novels based on the theme of dystopias. As described in Chapter One, the dystopian-themed novels exaggerate contemporary issues of today and invite students to consider alternative realities for a better future (Reeves, 2009). These young adult novels were also selected as a means to teach students about literary elements, as all the novels provide examples of suspense building, conflict, descriptive writing and characterization. As noted by Stallworth (2006), using young adult novels to teach literary elements can be very effective. The teacher resource includes suggested prompts for online discussions questions that ask students to look for passages that reflect these literary elements.

The literature reviewed in Chapter Three indicated how young adult literature can engage and motivate students to read because the stories often contain characters and issues that adolescents can easily relate to and understand (Stallworth, 2006). The novels

selected for the literature circles for the teacher resource contain a variety of teen characters dealing with a range of issues that students should find enjoyable and that should motivate them to read and discuss the novels. Additionally, in the teacher resource I suggested that teachers allow the students who have finished their literature circle novel early an opportunity to read another literature circle novel or read the next book in the series.

The role of the teacher in introducing the novels was also discussed in Chapter Three. Teachers should read and be knowledgeable about the novels that they are recommending and enthusiastically introduce the novels to students (Elliot-Johns, 2012). In the teacher resource I strongly recommended that teachers read all the books included for literature circles as teachers need to be able to answer questions and enter into discussion with students about the books. Teachers can model their aesthetic responses to the literature (Rosenblatt, 1994) and communicate to students that they expect them to adopt an aesthetic stance to the novels they read.

### **Reader Response and Engaged Reading**

A primary goal of the teacher resource is to have students actively engaged while reading and discussing literature. The reader response and discussion portion of the unit reflects Rosenblatt's (1994) transactional theory, which describes the reading experience for readers as a "dynamic event" involving a "particular reader and a particular pattern of signs, and occurs at a particular time within a particular context" (p. 1063). Additionally, Rosenblatt explains how the reader's social and cultural experiences play an important role in how a reader constructs meaning when reading a text. Thus, the literature circle discussions will ideally reveal individual reader's unique responses to the same text and

provide students with enriched understandings of the text as they share their responses and gain new insights and understanding by listening to their peers.

Another goal of the teacher resource is to develop and sustain students' love of reading as students "transact with the text" creating meanings and enjoyment while reading (Rosenblatt, 1994, p. 1061). To foster students' reading engagement I selected a variety of exciting, contemporary young adult dystopian novels for students to read during their literature circles. Understanding that YAL can capture the interest of reluctant readers through stories that include relatable characters and are easily read by adolescents motivated me to design a unit that uses popular dystopian themed books (Bull, 2012). As discussed in Chapter Three, many selections of YAL address contemporary issues facing youth today and the stories often have the effect of helping students develop empathy and consider moral issues (Stallworth, 2006). My experience delivering the unit was that the students were initially drawn in by the novels' dystopian worlds, with their relatable characters and contemporary issues. Students easily connected with the story and its messages to their real world.

As described in Chapter Two YAL can also be used to effectively teach literary elements. I suggested prompts for discussion that encourage students to consider literary elements of symbolism and imagery along with descriptive and suspense writing during their literature circle discussions. My initial implementation of the teacher resource did not include questions about literary elements present within the novels. However, as I reflected on the unit I believe that discussing the literary elements within the novels would provide students with authentic opportunities to see how various literary elements can be used in writing to enrich the language and engage the reader.

Another key feature of the literature circles resource is student book choice. As discussed in Chapter Three providing students with book choice gives students the opportunity to select a book they most want to read, and promotes positive reading engagement. Originally when I implemented the teacher resource I strove to ensure that students received the book they most wanted to read. I believe that book choice is key to developing a positive experience in reading. I have observed first hand students' excitement when they realize they are in their preferred novel groups.

### **Multiliteracies**

As is discussed in Chapter Two, the New London Group (1996) coined the term multiliteracies to explain that literacy pedagogy needed to include multiple literacies that recognized multimodalities, diverse cultures and new communication technologies. Applying a multiliteracies approach to the design of this project recognizes that students need to be engaged in learning that not only values students' diverse backgrounds but also values new methods of communications. The unit "Dystopian Literature Circles" requires students to share their responses and connections to the novels during discussions. When students participate in these discussions their responses may include content that reflects their diverse backgrounds and experiences. Additionally, the online discussion portion of the literature circles and the culminating activity encourage students to represent and apply new communication technologies as they post discussion responses, links, and design their utopia advertisements and found artifacts. In Chapter Three I also discussed how online literature discussions invite students to apply and develop new literacy skills such as how to communicate using a discussion forum (Day &

Kroon, 2007; Edmonson, 2012, Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Kitsis, 2010; Larson, 2009; Stewart, 2009; Walker, 2010).

Lastly, applying a multiliteracies approach to the design of the teacher resource can foster student engagement, as revealed by the research discussed in Chapter Three. Students view the opportunity to use new technologies to represent their understanding and express their creativity as relevant to their learning (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Day & Kroon, 2007; Edmonson, 2012; English, 2007; Kitsis, 2010). Using Moodle with last year's students was a very enlightening experience. A variety of experience levels was present among my students ranging from those who were able to expertly navigate various features within Moodle, to students who struggled with how to do the very basics such as replying to a post rather than creating a discussion prompt. However, within a few classes students were sharing tips about personalizing their profiles and learning with one another how to use Moodle. My experiences using Moodle with my students taught me the importance of explicit instruction, as well as the value of providing opportunities for students to use new communication tools in the classroom.

### **Multimodalities**

Multimodality is another key understanding applied to the design of the teacher resource "Dystopian Literature Circles." As stated in Chapter Two, a multimodal approach assumes meanings are created, shared and explained using linguistic and non-linguistic modes that include gesture, movement, image, music, sound and colour (Jewitt, 2008). The teacher resource in Chapter Four reflects a multimodal approach because, for example, as students post their online responses, they can also create links to other websites, or download and share images and music to demonstrate their understanding of

and connections to the text. Additionally, students have the opportunity to design and create the utopia advertisements for their culminating assignment using images, videos, and music. Educating students regarding the effectiveness of multimodal representation is also key, as students will receive instruction about how to integrate the modal resources into their utopia advertisements. My experience with students creating multimodal presentations for the “Create Your Own Utopia” assignment revealed two insights about student creating multimodal representations using technology. The first insight was that some students were already very adept at using various applications on the iPads to create presentations and enjoyed creating and representing their learning using the devices. The other insight was that some students were very uncomfortable using the iPads for the assignment and much preferred a more traditional approach to completing the project using a paper and pencil approach. Reflecting on the experiences of my students from last year I have decided to guide students more with tutorials about how to use the iPads and their applications to create their projects. My hope is that if students better understand the ways they can use the iPads for creating and representing that they will become more willing to learn how to use the devices.

### **Socially Constructed Learning**

Another goal of the teacher resource is to have students enter into meaningful face-to-face and online discussions of the novels. As discussed in Chapter Two Vygotsky viewed learning as a “social and collaborative” process and meaning construction through social exchanges is a key aspect of this process (Schreiber & Valle, 2013, p. 396). Another important aspect related to Vygotsky’s work is the recognition that students’ “diverse backgrounds and experiences” impact how they “learn and understand

concepts” (Schreiber & Valle, 2013, p. 197). Both the face-to-face and online discussions included in the resource provide students with opportunities to learn about and better understand the diverse backgrounds of their peers. Additionally, the findings from the literature regarding online literature circles described in Chapter Three support the fact that face-to-face and online discussions create opportunities for socially constructed meaning. Engaging in discussions can expand students’ perspectives, as well as extend and clarify their thinking (Evans, 2002). Furthermore, student exchanges during online and face-to-face discussions may include students engaging in respectful debates that encourage higher-level thinking (Carico & Logan, 2004; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Kitsis, 2010). The literature reviewed in Chapter Three also revealed how peer led discussions improved students’ comprehension as students engaged in questioning, inferencing, summarization, and retrospection and these skills increased their depth of understanding (Bearne & Clarke, 2006). Developing students’ comprehension skills is reflected in the unit’s suggested online discussion prompts as students are asked to use the previously listed comprehension strategies to further enrich and extend the literature discussions. However, these prompts are intended to only help start a discussion, and ideally students will participate in discussions that extend beyond the prompts.

Reflecting on the use of teacher-generated prompts during my initial implementation of the unit led me to decide to not supply prompts throughout the online discussions. Instead, as described in Chapter Four, I plan to have students create the discussion prompt and facilitate the weekly discussion forum with a partner after I have modeled how to facilitate a discussion. My experience with the teacher-generated prompts demonstrated that students were very good at responding to the prompts but did not

respond well to one another. I believe that if students are in charge of the forum themselves they will be more likely to engage authentically with one another.

### **Peer Led Discussions**

As discussed in Chapter Three participation in peer led discussions can facilitate engagement as students consider new perspectives and develop higher-level thinking (Evans, 2002; Gambrell, 2004). Additionally, several researchers whose work was reviewed in Chapter Three suggested enriching discussions by providing students with explicit instructions and modeling effective discussions for students (Berne & Clarke, 2006; Mills & Jennings, 2011; Sanacore, 2013). The teacher resource also suggests that teachers review expectations and use whole class discussions, rubrics and self-assessments to reflect on and develop students' group literature discussions. The role of the teacher was also discussed in Chapter Three and several scholars recommended that the teacher initially be involved in the discussions to model ways to keep discussions moving, and then gradually release responsibility of the discussion to students as they become better at managing discussions (Pearson, 1985). The teacher resource also applies a gradual release of responsibility for student discussions as I recommended that teachers provide students with the opportunity to create their own discussion prompts and facilitate discussions after they have had instruction and modeling for effective prompts and facilitating discussions. The face-to-face literature discussions described in the teacher resource require students to come prepared with their connections, predictions and questions on post-it notes. This activity is intended to provide students with an opportunity to reflect on their reading and to facilitate the sharing of their thinking with

other students. Students should then be able to expand their understanding of the novel by listening and building on the ideas shared by others.

The face-to-face discussions I observed during my initial implementation demonstrated that students needed more guidance about how to share their thinking. Firstly, I noticed that students came unprepared for discussions. Some students were avid readers who loved and read the books in a couple of days but did not place post-it notes to record their thinking at various points in the chapters for discussions. Other students did not complete the readings and did not contribute during discussions. I reflected on this experience as I redesigned the resource and suggested that students need to come to the discussions prepared with at least two post-it notes per chapter. Secondly, I also included self-reflections and goal setting as a part of the discussions to help encourage students to keep up with the readings. My hope is that students will reflect on their role in discussions and become motivated to improve using their self-reflections.

### **Affinity Spaces**

Another goal of the teaching resource was to provide students with a digital space in which they can create and interact with their peers. As discussed in Chapter Two, affinity spaces are settings that usually occur digitally and include a variety of features that promote opportunities for individuals to generate and interact with content within particular settings. Affinity spaces are represented in today's online technologies and social networking sites and are constantly evolving (Gee, 2004; Lammers, Curwood & Magnifico, 2012). The teacher resource suggests using Moodle, an online discussion forum, because Moodle has many of the features present in affinity spaces such as, students are interacting with one another on a "shared endeavor", by responding to one

another about their novels (Gee, 2004, p.85). The Moodle platform also encourages “intensive and extensive knowledge” as students who become familiar with how to use Moodle to best suit their needs share and teach other students (Gee, 2004, p.85).

Understanding both the features of and possible uses for affinity spaces influenced the design of activities for students in the resource because it was one of my goals to have students share their knowledge, ask questions, post links, and upload content during their online discussions.

My experience with Moodle for online discussions revealed that students were either already familiar with how to use and share in this online discussion format, or if they were not, they quickly learned how to use the features. I am excited to use Moodle again with my students as I observed students’ uploading video and links to further their discussions as well as sharing with other how to use the features Moodle. Providing students with the opportunities to use new communications technology skills also helped my students see the relevance of extending the face-to-face discussion with online discussion activities. Additionally, it is necessary for students to use technology that develops communication skills and facilitates creative representation. Not only are many students already familiar with the technologies suggested in the teacher resource but many students will also find new relevance in applying the technology skills they already possess. Educators have a responsibility to prepare students for the future by providing students with practice and experience using a variety of technologies that they will be required to be proficient with throughout their schooling and into adulthood.

### **Online Literature Circle Discussions**

As stated previously the purpose of using Moodle is to enrich the face-to-face discussions. The effectiveness of online discussions for extending face-to-face discussions was discussed in Chapter Three (Edmundson, 2011; English, 2007;; Kitsis, 2011). The use of online literature circles is also intended to provide students with an enhanced sense of community as students respond supportively to one another and extend discussions (Day & Kroon, 2007; Edmonson, 2012; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006). The online literature circles also afford students with authentic opportunities to write, as they are writing and responding to their peers. As noted in Chapter Three, authentic writing opportunities have been found to motivate and improve students' writing (Day & Kroon, 2007; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006). Online literature circle discussions also provide students with the time to deeply reflect and respond to their own as well as their peers' thoughts, connections, predictions and questions about the novel (English, 2007; Larson, 2009; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Kitsis, 2010). Online literature circles were also included in the teacher resource to provide students with equitable opportunities to respond. As revealed by the review of the literature in Chapter Three, students who feel too shy to engage in face-to-face discussions, or students who feel a discussion was dominated by one person have an opportunity to share their thoughts about the novel in an online discussion without the pressure to respond immediately and without the interruption of others (Carico & Logan, 2004; English, 2007; Kitsis, 2010; Larson, 2009).

I also observed several of the research findings discussed in the Chapter Three as I implemented the online literature discussions. I noted that students who were reticent to share their thinking during face-to-face discussions posted very thoughtful and well

composed posts on the forum. I also observed how students spent time writing and re-writing their posts, and checked for clarity before posting because they wanted their peers to see their best thinking. Additionally I also observed students using links and videos to extend and share their ideas with others.

### **Modeling and Explicit Instructions**

Throughout the teacher resource I recommended that teachers provide explicit instruction and modeling for students for the following activities: face-to-face and online discussions, navigation and use of Moodle, and application of various multimodal elements for the design of students' culminating activity. As stated in Chapter Three, teaching students to effectively apply multimodal elements to the final activity, to engage in face-to-face and online literature circles discussions and to apply multimodal elements to their utopia projects all require the teacher modeling and student scaffolding (Bailey, 2009; Bearne & Clarke, 2006; Day & Kroon, 2007; Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Kitsis, 2010; Larson, 2009).

After implementing the unit I realized that the activities needed more teacher support. Thus, for the activities included in the teacher resource in Chapter Four I state clearly the need for teachers to provide modeling and explicit instruction. I am also fortunate to have examples of last year's students' work and I will use these samples as exemplars with my students to further support student learning.

### **Overall Reflections**

Reviewing the literature and creating the teacher resource were both an enriching and challenging experience. One challenge encountered during the research for the literature review was locating Canadian primary studies; many of the primary studies cited in this

document were conducted in the United States. Additionally, recent primary research studies 2010 onward that examined online literature circle discussions of adolescent students were difficult to find. Therefore additional primary research, conducted in Canadian classrooms concerning adolescent students' engagement with online and face-to-face literature circles is needed.

Initially I found the theoretical and foundational concepts that provide the framework for this project somewhat confusing and challenging to understand. Fortunately, my supportive supervisor suggested I read the work by scholars such as Karolides (1999), Smagorinsky (2007, 2013), and Jewitt (2008) to help clarify the grounding theories and concepts of the project.

Designing the teacher resource and its activities was a very enriching experience. The activities are designed to promote student engagement with reading and develop students' literacy skills using discussions, technology and creativity. The teacher resource also includes various rubrics and self-assessments to assist both the students and teacher. The aims of the rubrics and self-assessments are to provide students with clear expectations, and opportunities to reflect on their learning process. Although I used rubrics for my assessment during last year's implementation of the "Dystopian Literature Circles," I realized that the students needed to have opportunities to self-reflect, and self-assess their discussions and activities. Thus, the teacher resource includes self-assessment and goal setting opportunities. Another goal of the resource is to support and develop or nurture students' love of reading beyond the classroom. To promote reading enjoyment students are provided a choice of engaging dystopian novels for literature circles.

The culminating activity is designed to afford students with an opportunity to creatively design their own utopias. The goals of this student assignment are to encourage students to apply their knowledge of technology and learn to use a variety of applications while creatively constructing their perfect world. Many of last year's students created utopian worlds that were original and imaginative while using various applications on the iPads.

Another goal of the project is to provide students with various writing opportunities. During my initial implementation of the unit I observed students writing authentically to their peers during online discussions. Some students wrote very persuasively as they stated their views about a certain discussion topic. Additionally, I also have previous students' culminating projects that demonstrate both descriptive and imaginative writing. Lastly, the project is intended to be teacher user-friendly with its inclusion of book annotations, assessments, descriptions of activities, and considerations for implementing "Dystopian Literature Circles" unit. I am eager to use the teacher resource again and support my colleagues who will use it in the future. The process of creating the teacher resource and researching the supporting literature has been a very rewarding experience and it is my hope that my future students and colleagues will enjoy the activities and novels included in the resource.

My journey through my Master's program has been a very worthwhile and gratifying experience, it has invigorated my practice, and it has developed within me the desire to continue learning and sharing. I am currently joining educational book clubs with my colleagues to continue my learning and to enrich my teaching practice. Reflecting on the creation of the teacher resource I also realize that the courses, my professors and most of

all, my supervisor have all contributed to development of the project and my growth as an educator. Throughout the last three years of my Master's program I know I have become more confident and passionate about sharing and working with my colleagues to develop and use new learning opportunities.

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## Appendix A

### Book Annotations

Collins, P. J. (2011). *What happened to Serenity?* Toronto, ON: Red Deer Press.

Fifteen-year-old Katherine has grown up in a world where knowledge is carefully filtered and curiosity is forbidden. Katherine, a naturally curious girl, is forced to stifle her questions until one day when her best friend's younger sister, Serenity, goes missing. Katherine now must make a choice between respecting the wishes of her community leaders and finding out the truth about Serenity.

Collins, S. (2008). *Hunger Games*. New York, NY: Scholastic. \*\*

A story about beating the odds, 16-year-old Katniss Everdeen takes her sister's Prim's place to compete in the "Hunger Games," a gruesome competition that requires each of the 12 districts to send one male and female, 12 to 18 years of age to battle each other in a kill or be killed competition. Using her survival skills from growing up in District 12 and playing at love to win over the fans, Katniss must figure out how to stay alive in the Hunger Games.

Condie, A. (2010). *Matched*. New York, NY: Speak. \*\*

Cassia belongs to a highly controlled society where every aspect of life is planned out for each individual. Readers first meet Cassia as she prepares for the matching ceremony and is matched with best friend Xander. That is until she discovers a mistake – she was originally matched with Ky, an outcast. Curious who Ky is and why she is no longer matched with him, Cassia begins to question the controlling motives of her society.

Lu, M. (2011). *Legend*. New York, NY: Speak. \*\*

Set in a North America at war with itself and ravaged by the effects of extreme weather brought on by global warming, readers meet Day and June. Day, who was raised in the poorest region, is an outlaw on the run stealing medicine to save his family from the plague. June, a child prodigy, is being groomed by the republic government for military command. The two characters' lives become entwined as Day helps June discover the truth behind her brother's death. Together they begin an adventure that reveals the sinister reality of the republic.

Roth, V. (2011). *Divergent*. New York, NY. HarperCollins \*\*

As 16-year-old Triss undergoes her simulation test and prepares for her choosing ceremony, she is deeply conflicted. What faction will she choose? The simulation does not help her choose and her sense of loyalty to her parent's faction feels wrong. Triss chooses a faction but comes to realize she is not like everyone else. Keeping her secret to herself, Triss begins to discover that the world she knew is not what it seems.

Shusterman, N. (2007). *Unwind*. New York, NY: Simon & Schuster.

America emerges from a second civil war that eliminates abortions but allows parents of difficult or unwanted 13-18 years old to be unwound. While living, the adolescent body is systematically harvested for donation. Connor an out of control teen, Risa a ward of the state, and Lev raised to be tithed find their lives brought together as they journey together to escape being unwound.

Young, M. (2011). *Blood red road*. Toronto, ON. Double Day.\*\*

Saba lives with her twin brother Lugh, her younger sister, and her father in the barren and bleak wasteland known as Silverlake. They survive in this post apocalyptic world living off the remains of old landfills, until one day when cloaked horsemen come

charging in and abduct her brother. Saba's decision to search for her brother throws her into a world of dangerous people, where she must become a fierce fighter. Joining forces with a good-looking adventurer and group of female revolutionaries, the Free Hawks, Saba embarks on an exciting journey to rescue her brother.

\*\* These books are available as e-books and audio books.

## Appendix B

### Expectations for Online Discussions

1. Post so that there is enough time in the week for others to respond. For instance if the online discussion is for Monday afternoon to Friday morning, do not post your first post at 11:30 pm Thursday night.
2. When replying to another person's post begin with, "Hi \_\_\_\_\_" or if you are posting a question your group you may say, "Hi Everybody, I was wondering \_\_\_\_\_."
3. Reference other's ideas in your post. For example, "Just as \_\_\_\_\_ said in their post..."
4. Please be kind and positive in your post. Absolutely no profanity, or racist, sexist or sarcastic remarks.
5. Please stay on topic. The forum is not the venue to make Friday night plans.
6. Make sure you read the other posts before replying in order to gain new insights and be engaged in the discussions. To help keep the discussion going ask a question at the end of your post.
7. Use full sentences and write clearly. No texting language.
8. No YELLING. Please ensure the *caps lock* is off.
9. Read and re-read your post before clicking reply. Moodle does let you go back and correct but only for 20 minutes after you post.
10. Please let me know if you are having problems with Moodle. I am happy to help.

## Appendix C

### Online Literature Discussion Responses Rubric

	Not Yet Meeting Expectations	Minimally Meeting Expectations	Fully Meeting Expectations	Exceeding Expectations
<b>Participation</b>	No post or post is less than 25 words. No response to posts.	Contribution of one post less than 75 words. One response to another post.	Contributions of one 120-word post along with two responses to other students' posts.	Contributions of one 120 word or more post along with three or more responses to other students' posts.
<b>Support</b>	Post is off topic. Ideas, connections, and or opinions are not supported by the text. No text reference.	Post is on topic but is limited in support from text. The ideas, connections and or opinions may not be logical.	Post is on topic and referenced to page number(s) in the text. The connections, ideas and or opinions are logical.	Post is on topic and referenced to page number(s) in the text. The connections, ideas and or opinions are logical and well explained.
<b>Insight</b>	Post does not offer any new understanding or analysis related to the topic. May retell the story.	Post offers new understanding or analysis but is vague or poorly explained.	Post offers new understanding or analysis and is well explained and supported.	Post offers new understanding or analysis and is thoughtfully explained and well supported.
<b>Discussion Extension</b>	Little or no attempt to engage in discussions. Often off topic.	Attempts to engage but does not contribute to the discussions. Does not include or reference others in the post.	Engages in the discussions by addressing and referencing others' posts. Keeps post on topic.	Engages in discussions by addressing and referencing others' posts. Keeps posts on topic and extends the discussion by posing new questions or comments.

## **Appendix D**

### **Online and Face-to-Face Discussion Sentence Starter Prompts and How to Facilitate Face-to-Face and Online Discussions**

#### **Sentence Starter Prompts**

- What do you think....
- Have you seen something like ... in your own life, in a book or movie or on the news?
- What are you wondering about and why?
- What are you predicting and why?
- Tell me more about....
- What do you think now that.....

#### **Tips for Facilitating Online and Face-to-Face Discussions**

- For online discussions post the discussion topic early in the discussion week.
- Check the forum at least twice a day and respond to posts.
- Ask questions and ask others to expand or clarify their ideas if they seem unclear.
- Be positive, try to compliment the ideas within the posts.
- Encourage others to use page references when they quote passages from the novels.
- Try to make your post interesting so that it makes people want to respond.
- Make sure your post of discussions are clearly written so that others can easily understand what you are saying.

## Appendix E

### Online Discussions Self-Assessment

Criteria	Always	Usually	Needs Improving
I posted my 150 word responses in a timely manner so that others had the opportunity to respond.			
I proofread my posts before replying to make sure that I had no spelling mistakes and to ensure that others could easily understand what I was saying.			
I respected the different opinions, ideas and questions of my group members by responding positively to the ideas of others.			
I read all of the posts before responding and responded to at least two classmates' posts during the week.			
I asked meaningful questions to extend the discussions.			
I shared my connections, thoughts, ideas and questions.			

My goal for my next online discussion is \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

### Student Book Ranking Sheet

Book	Rank out 4****	Why
<i>What Happened to Serenity</i> by Sarah Collins (2011)		
<i>Hunger Games</i> by Suzanne Collins (2008)		
<i>Matched</i> by Ally Condie (2010)		
<i>Legend</i> by Marie Lu (2011)		
<i>Divergent</i> by Veronica Roth (2011)		
<i>Unwind</i> by Neil Shusterman (2007)		
<i>Blood Red Road</i> by Moira Young (2011)		

## Appendix G

### Literature Circle Discussion Groups

Book	Student Discussion Groups
<i>What Happened to Serenity</i> by Sarah Collins (2011)	
<i>Hunger Games</i> by Suzanne Collins (2008)	
<i>Matched</i> by Ally Condie (2010)	
<i>Legend</i> by Marie Lu (2011)	
<i>Divergent</i> by Veronica Roth (2011)	
<i>Unwind</i> by Neil Shusterman (2007)	
<i>Blood Red Road</i> by Moira Young (2011)	

## Appendix H

### Face-to-Face Discussion Rubric

	Not Yet Meeting Expectations	Minimally Meeting Expectations	Fully Meeting Expectations	Exceeding Expectations
Preparedness	Arrives without having done the reading. No post-it note to mark passage for discussion.	Arrives having completed only part of the reading. No post-it note to mark passage for discussion.	Arrives having completed all of the reading and has marked a minimum of 2 passages for discussion with a post-it notes.	Arrives having completed all of the reading and has used multiple post-it notes to mark more than 2 passages for discussion.
Discussion	Does not participate.	Participates reluctantly. Only some connections, ideas and opinions are shared. Does not extend the discussion to others.	Participates regularly. Shares ideas, connections and opinions. Extends and responds to the discussion of others.	High level of participation. Shares multiple ideas, connections and opinions. Extends and responds to the discussion of others.
Support from Text	No examples from the reading are shared.	Only one connection, ideas and or opinion not supported from the reading. Very superficial.	Most connections, ideas and opinions are supported by multiple examples from the reading.	All connections ideas and opinions are supported by examples from the reading.
Insight	Ideas, connections and opinions about the reading are very limited. For example: "It was a good story".	Ideas, connections and opinions about the reading are still limited. Attempts to extend thinking. For example: "It was a good story, I liked the part when..."	Ideas, connections and opinions about the reading reveal thoughts about characters and events in the story. For example: "I like the part when the character did _____, but if it was me, I would...."	Ideas, connections and opinions about the reading reveal analysis (motives) about the characters and events in the story. For example: "I like the part when the character said _____, it showed he was..."

## Appendix I

### Face-to-Face Discussions Self-Assessment

Criteria	Always	Usually	Needs Improving
I arrived having completed the reading for each day.			
I arrived with my post-it note(s) ready to discuss the novel every day.			
I respected the different opinions, ideas and questions of group members.			
I listened to the ideas shared by other group members.			
I asked questions to extend the discussions.			

My goal for my discussion is to \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix J

### Suggested Online Discussion Prompts for Novels

#### ***What Happened to Serenity?* By P. J. Sarah Collins (2011)**

1. What are your thoughts about the community with respect to the way people live and the rules they have? Put yourself in the community, could you live here? Explain why or why not.
2. What are your thoughts about “Father” and his tools?
3. What are your thoughts about Katherine writing in her book and having to keep it hidden?
4. What are your thoughts about Katherine’s punishment and how the community treats her for reading the letter?
5. Would you go the lengths that Katherine went to discover the truth about “Father”? Why or why not?
6. What do you think about “Father” and the “Aunts and Uncles” choosing your life roles and life partners?
7. What are the clues that Katherine puts together to figure out that their community is not the only one on earth?
8. Could you leave your life to discover the truth as Katherine does when she sneaks into the helicopter?
9. What do you think about the ending? Would you listen to “Father”? How would you feel if you were Serenity’s parents?
10. What was your favourite section of the book to read? What did the author do to create the suspense, or show you something? Support your answer with examples from the novel.

#### ***Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins (2008)**

1. What are your thoughts about the reaping and its rules?
2. What are your thoughts about the main characters you have met so far in the book? Describe what you like and dislike about them.
3. What are your thoughts about the Capitol and the other 12 districts? Discuss how people are treated in the district compared to the Capitol.
4. If you were in Katniss’s place how would you handle your feelings about Gale and Peeta?
5. What do you think about the symbols of fire and the mocking jay? What do you think they symbolize?
6. What are your thoughts about the arena and the role of the game master?
7. What are your thoughts concerning Katniss and Rue’s friendship? Why do you think Katniss befriended and mourned Rue the way she did?
8. What are your thoughts about the mutations?
9. What do you think about the rule changes, especially the last one?
10. What was your favourite section of the book to read? What did the author do to create the suspense, or show you something? Support your answer with examples from the novel.

***Matched* by Ally Condie (2010)**

1. What are your thoughts about the matching ceremony?
2. What are your thoughts about Ky and Xander? Why do you think the society originally matched Cassia with Ky and then with Xander?
3. What is Cassia's relationship with her grandfather like? How would you feel if you knew loved ones had to die on their 80<sup>th</sup> birthday?
4. How do you think the poem by Dylan Thomas connects to Cassia?
5. Explain what you think the pills do and why? Would you take the pills?
6. Why do you think the society in Oria chooses not to teach people to write?
7. How would you rebel if you lived in this society?
8. What are your thoughts about the control the society has over people? Why is the government like this?
9. How are the trees and their replacement symbolic of the society's treatment of people?
10. What was your favourite section of the book to read? What did the author do to create the suspense, or show you something? Support your answer with examples from the novel.

***Legend* by Marie Lu (2011)**

1. What are your thoughts about how the government tests children?
2. Why do you think that June cannot figure out what happened to her brother Metias?
3. How are both Day and June alike? How do you think they can help each other?
4. What are your thoughts about the plague and limited vaccines?
5. What does Day's recollection of the Trial test reveal about the society?
6. What are your thoughts about the Republic and its treatment of people?
7. Why do you think the plague exists?
8. Why is the pendent necklace significant? How do you think it contributes to the story about Day's father's death?
9. How would you rebel in this society?
10. What was your favourite section of the book to read? What did the author do to create the suspense, or show you something? Support your answer with examples from the novel.

***Divergent* by Veronica Roth (2011)**

1. Why do you think the six symbols for the factions and the one for divergent are appropriate?
2. What faction would you want to be in and why?
3. What character do you like the most and why? What character do you dislike and why?
4. Do you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Community is the most important thing?" Why or why not?
5. What are your thoughts about how the city is run? What do you think "the great peace" is?
6. What do you think is meant by the quote "Human reason can excuse evil"?

7. What do the hallucinations reveal about people? What might your hallucinations reveal?
8. What do you think is the reason for the rebellion is?
9. What are your thoughts about the following quote, “Human beings as a whole cannot be good for long before the bad creeps back in and poisons us again”?
10. What was your favourite section of the book to read? What did the author do to create the suspense, or show you something? Support your answer with examples from the novel.

***Unwind* by Neil Shusterman (2007)**

1. What are your thoughts about unwinding? Do you think it is a good way to deal with troublesome teens? Why or why not?
2. What are your thoughts about tithing children to be unwound?
3. What are your thoughts about storking?
4. If you were to get a transplanted body part from an “unwound” how would you feel about it?
5. What do you think is the Admiral’s motivation for helping the teenagers?
6. Which character do you like and dislike the most?
7. How did it feel reading about the unwinding of a character? What was your reaction?
8. What are your thoughts about clappers?
9. What was your reaction to the scene where the Admiral meets with the people who have parts of his son?
10. What was your favourite section of the book to read? What did the author do to create suspense, or show you something? Support your answer with examples from the novel.

***Blood Red Road* by Moira Young (2011)**

1. What kind of relationship does Saba have with father and brother? What kind of person do you think Saba is?
2. What do you think of the place where Saba lives and how she survives? Could you live somewhere like this? Why or why not?
3. What are your thoughts about the character Mercy and how she lives?
4. How does Hopetown change Saba? What do you think she discovers about herself?
5. What are your thoughts about Jack and Free Hawks? How do you think they help each other?
6. What are your thoughts about the plan to rescue Lugh? What would you do?
7. What are your thoughts about Nero? How is he connected to the story?
8. Do you think superstition in the story helps the characters or hinders them?
9. What do you think Blood Red Road symbolizes?
10. What was your favourite section of the book to read? What did the author do to create the suspense, or show you something? Support your answer with examples from the novel.

## Appendix K

### Creating Your Utopia

You now have the opportunity to create your own utopia. You may complete this project as a combined slide show, iMovie, brochure, or poster. Please follow the instructions and hand in the completed criteria proof sheet when you finish. The marking rubric is also attached for you to reference.

1. **Naming Your Society**
  - Give your society a creative name that represents it.
  - Explain why you decided to use the name. This section should be 3 or more sentences.
  
2. **What are the values of your society?**
  - Provide a list of 5 or more values followed by your society.
  - Each value must be explained in 2 or more sentences.
  
3. **Utopia Motto and Symbol**
  - Create a motto (saying) and symbol that reflect the values of your society.
  - Explain how the motto and symbol reflect the values of your society in 3-5 sentences.
  
4. **Type of Government and Laws**
  - Decide the type of government of your society. Is it a democracy, anarchy, monarchy, or dictatorship? How will decisions about the laws, and rules be made?
  - Include a 4-6 sentence explanation about how the government works in your society.
  - Create a list of 10 or more laws or rules that all people in the society must follow.
  - Each law or rule must have a 2-4 sentence explanation.
  
5. **Advertising your Utopia**
  - Create an advertisement for your society.
  - You should include at least 4 pictures that reflect daily life in your utopia. You may choose to create this advertisement as TV commercial using iMovie, a slide show, a newspaper ad or a sales brochure.
  - Write 7 or points that try to persuade your audience about why they should come and live in your utopia.
  - Think about what makes your utopia the perfect place to live.
  
6. **Journal Entries (You are expected to write descriptively.)**
  - Write 2 journal entries, 200 words minimum as someone living in your utopia.
  - The first journal entry should be about a hypothetical day when your person goes to school or works. Consider including the daily itinerary of that person.

What do they wear? How do they travel? What do they eat? Are there any daily ceremonies or rules that everyone follows?

- Include the person's thoughts and reactions.
- The second journal entry should follow the same person through a special holiday. Make sure to describe how people celebrate (dress, food, special ways of worshipping etc.) and be sure to provide the reason for the celebration/special holiday.

7. **Found Artifact**

- Imagine that your utopia is no more and it is now considered an ancient utopia. Someone discovers an artifact from your utopian society.
- Write a descriptive paragraph detailing the appearance of the artifact. (Remember to use adjectives and think about the 5 senses as you describe the artifact.)
- Write another paragraph explaining how the artifact symbolizes or was used in your society.
- Please include a picture of the artifact.

## Appendix L

### Creating Your Utopia Rubric

<b>Tasks</b>	<b>Not Yet Meeting Expectations</b>	<b>Minimally Meeting Expectations</b>	<b>Fully Meeting Expectations</b>	<b>Exceeding Expectations</b>
<b>1. Naming the Society</b>	Name is given but it is not explained.	Name is given, but explanation is very brief.	Name is given and reasons for the name are well explained.	Creative name is given and reasons for the name are very thorough.
<b>2. Values of the Society</b>	Less than five values are stated and there are no explanations.	Five values are given but no explanations are given for the reasons for the values.	Five values are well explained with two sentences for each value.	Five or more values are given and every value is explained with at least two sentences that contain rationales for the value.
<b>3. Motto and Symbol</b>	Only the motto or the symbol is represented. No explanation is provided.	Motto and symbol are both represented, but no explanations included.	Motto and symbol are represented and explained in 3-5 sentences.	Creative motto and symbol are given and explained in 3-5 sentences.
<b>4. Type of Government and Laws</b>	Type of government described but no explanation of laws given. Includes less than 10 laws.	Type of government explanation of 10 laws is very brief.	Type of government is well explained. Ten laws are well explained.	Type of government is creative and well explained. Ten or more laws are creative and well explained.
<b>5. Advertisement</b>	Less than four pictures advertising the sights, way of life, food and homes are provided and no explanation for visiting the utopia.	Four pictures advertising the sights, way of life, food and home. The explanation for coming to the utopia is too brief.	Four pictures advertising the sights, way of life, food and home . Well explained reasons for coming to the utopia.	Four or more pictures advertising the sights, way of life, food and homewith creative reasons for coming to the utopia.
<b>6. Journal Entries</b>	Only one journal entry completed and it lacks details of daily life.	Both journal entries completed, but both lack detail about daily life and celebrations. Lacks descriptive language.	Both journal entries reveal aspects of daily life and celebrations from a person's point of view. Descriptive language is well used.	Both journal entries are creative and show many aspects of daily life and celebrations from a person's point of view. Very good use of descriptive language.
<b>7. Found Artifact</b>	Poor picture of artifact included. No description the artifact. No explanation of the artifact's symbolism.	Poor picture of the artifact included. Very brief description the artifact. The artifact's symbolism poorly explained.	Good picture of artifact. The artifact is well described and its symbolism is explained.	Excellent pictures of artifact. The artifact is thoroughly described and the artifact's symbolism is well explained.

## Appendix M

### Creating Your Utopia Criteria Proof

<b>Criteria</b>	<b>Proof</b> (Describe/explain how you did it)
1. Naming Your Society <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explained in 3 or more sentences why you created the name</li> </ul>	
2. Values for your Society <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• List of 5 values with 2 sentences for each explains why your society has these values</li> </ul>	
3. Utopia Motto and Symbol <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3-5 sentences explaining why you chose and created the motto and symbol</li> <li>• What do they represent?</li> </ul>	
4. Types of Government and Laws <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4-6 sentences explaining type of government you chose and why</li> <li>• 10 laws with 2-4 sentences describing why you have each law</li> </ul>	
5. Advertising your Utopia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 4 pictures depicting your utopia</li> <li>• format either imovie, slide show, newspaper ad, or poster</li> <li>• 7 points selling your utopia to people</li> </ul>	
6. Journal Entries <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 journal entries</li> <li>• Each journal entry at least 200 words</li> <li>• Descriptively written</li> <li>• Includes daily life, food, clothes, celebrations, travel, personal thoughts</li> </ul>	
7. Found Artifact <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Descriptive paragraph about its appearance and where it was found</li> <li>• Paragraph about what it symbolizes or how it was used</li> </ul>	

## Appendix N

### Thinking about a Utopia

Do you think a utopia (perfect world) can really exist? Consider the following statements below and list the pros and cons for each. Then decide if you would include it your utopia and explain why or why not.

Statements	Pros	Cons	Will you include feature in your utopia? Why or why not?
Equal distribution of wealth. No wealthy people, no poor people.			
No wars.			
Environment is protected.			
No crime.			
Equality among all races, and sexes.			
Government administered by the utopia creators. They decide the laws and rights of citizens.			

