

PROJECT

NEW

MEDIA LITERACIES

CREATE CIRCULATE CONNECT COLLABORATE

Teachers' Strategy Guide

Featuring:

Moby-Dick by Herman Melville

Mixed Magic Theatre's *Moby-Dick: Then and Now*



*Reading in a
Participatory Culture*

Introduction to the Teachers' Strategy Guide: Reading in a Participatory Culture An overview, a rationale, and some acknowledgements

“And what are you, reader, but a Loose-Fish and a Fast-Fish, too?”
--Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick*

Overview

It's not news that today's 15-year-old is less likely to read a classic novel than was the 15-year-old of a generation ago. We know that teens and pre-teens spend more time on MySpace and other social networking sites than they do reading books, for school or for fun. This fact has led to a fierce debate over the effect of “screen time” on students' ability to read—and by extension, their ability to think critically and thrive intellectually.

This guide changes the terms of the debate. Instead of asking what effects, positive or negative, the emergence of digital technologies has had on kids' reading skills, we ask: How can we draw on the skills and mindsets young people are developing in their use of digital technologies in order to enhance their engagement with traditional texts?

To answer this question, we must first consider how young people are spending their time online. A recent study by the Pew Center for the Internet & American Life found that the work young people do with technology is inherently creative, collaborative, and social: Online, it's possible—and common—to remix video and text, to pull and cull information from a variety of sources, and to connect to networks and communities in which members are encouraged to develop and share personal interests, passions, and knowledge.

Rationale

These new participatory practices, far from being an anomaly, are in high demand in a culture that values creativity, resourcefulness, and collaborative problem-solving. Indeed, the creative and social practices in which young people engage are increasingly being taken up within a variety of disciplines, and the disciplines themselves are shifting to accommodate these practices.

In line with this shift, we came to wonder how a traditional model of teaching classic texts might be enhanced through an interdisciplinary approach to literary analysis. Specifically, we draw on the mindsets, tools, and approach of Comparative Media Studies in order to enact a conceptual shift toward a participatory model of reading.

The key premise of this shift is that “reading” is an umbrella term for a variety of critical and creative practices. In a traditional model of reading, the emphasis is on reading to understand authorial intent, and on writing to demonstrate mastery. The participatory model emphasizes that understanding ‘authorial intent’ requires a broader lens. From this perspective, literary works are seen as artifacts that both shape and are shaped by historical and contemporary media practices—and writers, in the words of literary critic John Bryant (2005), “dance along with and in resistance to a culture.”

The theory of learning informing our participatory model of reading pivots on the notion that in any classroom interaction, there are always two experts and two novices (Yowell & Smylie, 1999). As expressed by Hickey and Schafer (2005):

Youngsters are the experts in their social environment. They understand the contingencies of their behavior in ways that are not shared (or sharable) with the adult “novices.” On the other hand, adults are experts in the long-term consequences of actions and strategies that promote learning, motivation, and identity.

We might expand upon this to suggest that teachers and students possess expertise in different kinds of digital practices, and that, ideally, classroom practices would draw on the expertise of both.

Description of the guide

The *Teachers’ Strategy Guide: Reading in a Participatory Culture* is our response to this new social and cultural landscape. The guide recruits new media literacy practices for teaching classic literature. In the guide, we use Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* as our model text, and Ricardo Pitts-Wiley’s *Moby-Dick: Then and Now* as an example of a contemporary theater adaptation. The guide has been customized to teach these texts, but the thematic units are intended to be applicable to other classic texts, such as *Frankenstein*, *Beowulf*, and *Their Eyes Were Watching God*.

We chose *Moby-Dick* because it’s a heavy book. This novel enjoys a weighty status not only as an iconic text—one whose themes and motifs have been taken up by a variety of media sources, just as Melville drew on a variety of sources in crafting the work—but also as the Great (Unread) American Novel. We figured if we could do it with a book that has for so long been considered the Sacred American Text, we could do it with anything.

How to use the guide

Though this guide embraces traditional literacy practices, it also encourages engagement with a classic text in ways that differ from traditional reading methods. Put very simply, this guide does not require a linear, deep, thorough, or complete reading of a text—and, indeed, suggests that there may be benefits to applying discontinuous reading strategies.

We want to underscore the above point: You do not need to read all of *Moby-Dick* with your students in order to implement this guide. The guide contains a central unit entitled “Motives for Reading,” which introduces the key concepts and strategies adopted throughout; we recommend you begin with this unit. The other three themed units of the guide contain lesson plans that introduce a main theme and then branch into two tracks, each exploring aspects of the theme. Though the guide in its entirety represents our participatory model, each unit is designed to stand on its own. The lesson plans align to New Media Literacies (NML) competencies, as well as to Massachusetts ELA Framework Standards.

The guide makes use of a variety of multimedia sources, most prevalent of which is video material from Ricardo Pitts-Wiley’s theater adaptation and documentary video including interviews of the cast and crew of Mixed Magic Theatre. These materials are available through the guide’s home page at www.projectnmltsg.ning.com. Registration is free.

This site is also intended as a social networking space for teachers who are piloting the guide. Our goal for this space is to develop a knowledge-building community—a place to share ideas and concerns, and to communicate developing understandings around the text.

The guide also works to integrate a variety of secondary sources, including web tools, resources, and applications. One key resource is Project NML’s Learning Library, which is in development. This online library houses documentary and interactive video materials, as well as learning activities that introduce new media literacy practices and practitioners, and opportunities for exploring and practicing the NML skills.

Expert Voices

This guide is informed by four expert voices. Henry Jenkins, Chair of the Comparative Media Studies Program at MIT and Principal Investigator of Project New Media Literacies, is a media scholar whose work has focused on fan practices and media analysis. Wyn Kelley, Melville Scholar and Senior Lecturer in Literature at MIT, is a literary scholar whose work embraces multimedia approaches to textual analysis. Ricardo Pitts-Wiley, Artistic Director of Mixed Magic Theatre in Pawtucket, RI, has written and produced several adaptations of canonical texts, including *Moby-Dick: Then and Now*, which inspired our model for creative engagement with texts. These three expert perspectives provide the bulk of the supplemental material included in the “Expert Voices” section of the guide.

In working with Ricardo, we were introduced to Rudy Cabrera, a cast member of Mixed Magic Theatre. Rudy stood out for us as a talented and articulate performer whose empowered relationship to classic texts—“I have a responsibility as an actor to understand things word for word,” Rudy said in an interview—became invaluable to our process of envisioning the kind of student engagement that we seek to foster through this guide. Rudy is our fourth expert voice. As a self-motivated and socially adept performer, both onstage and off, his ability to negotiate identity in a variety of contexts makes him a role model for successfully navigating digital culture.

One final note: Our design-based model of research requires teachers and students to participate as co-researchers. We are grateful for this opportunity to collaborate on this project with you, as we together revise and refine the general principles of the participatory model of reading and the specifics of its implementation. The true test of the guide’s success will be the extent to which it is usable in actual classrooms—and the extent to which it is usable will largely depend on creative implementation and honest critique.

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The core development team consisted of Henry Jenkins, Wyn Kelley, Curriculum Specialist Jenna McWilliams, Researcher Debora Lui, and Content Analyst Katie Clinton, with additional conceptual development from Anna van Someren, Creative Manager for Project New Media Literacies. These materials were developed under the leadership and supervision of Research Director Erin Brockett Reilly.

Curriculum in this guide was developed primarily by Jenna McWilliams, Debora Lui, and Katie Clinton. Final formatting and design was completed by Debora Lui. Guidance on development was also provided by Daniel T. Hickey, Associate Professor in the School of Education, Counseling and Educational Psychology Department, at Indiana University.

Video was shot and edited by Anna van Someren, Debora Lui, Research Assistant Talieh Rohani, and cinematographers Stephanie Stender and Susan Bryant. Web development was completed by Debora Lui and Anna van Someren. Visualizations were developed by Anna van Someren.

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The "ethics" track of this guide's "Appropriation and Remixing" unit came through a collaboration with Harvard University's GoodPlay Project; the curriculum in this unit came through the work of NML Research Assistants Lana Swartz and Steve Schultze and GoodPlay Research Associates Andrea Flores and John Francis. Our thanks go to Howard Gardner, Co-Director of Project Zero and Principal Investigator of GoodPlay; Carrie James, GoodPlay Research Director; and the entire GoodPlay team. A special thanks to Margaret Weigel, Project Manager and Researcher for Project Zero's Developing Minds and Digital Media Project, whose work with Project New Media Literacies and with the strategy guide provided a strong foundation for the final product.

Finally, our thanks go out to the MacArthur Foundation and its Digital Media and Learning Initiative, whose funding and support for this project have been essential every step of the way.

Biographies of the Four Expert Voices

Rudy Cabrera, Actor



Rudy Cabrera first discovered his "hunger for acting" in the ninth grade at Central High School, when he starred in plays such as *Runaways* and *Svetlana's New Blame*. He first became "mixed in" with Mixed Magic Theatre in 2006, after starring in their production of *Taming of the Shrew*. He continues to perform with Mixed Magic in plays including *Moby-Dick: Then and Now* (performances in Pawtucket, New Kingstown, and the Providence Performing Arts Center – PPAC), *The Tempest*, and *Spirit Warrior's Dream*. Rudy has also performed with the Providence Black Repertory Company in *Etymology of Bird*, and for two years at the Langston Hughes Poetry Celebration at RISD Museum. Rudy is currently enrolled at the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI), where he is forwarding his education by studying drama and getting his "stomach ready for the next hot plate of theater."

Henry Jenkins, Media Scholar

Henry Jenkins is the Co-Director of the MIT Comparative Media Studies Program and the Peter de Florez Professor of Humanities. He is the author and/or editor of twelve books on various aspects of media and popular culture, including *Convergence Culture: Where Old and New Media Collide*; *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*; *The Wow Climax: Tracing the Emotional Impact of Popular Culture*; *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*; *Hop on Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*; and *From Barbie to Mortal Kombat: Gender and Computer Games*. Henry writes regularly about media and cultural change at his blog, henryjenkins.org.



Wyn Kelley, Literary Scholar



Wyn Kelley, Melville Scholar and Senior Lecturer in Literature at MIT, is author of *Melville's City: Literary and Urban Form in Nineteenth-Century New York* (1996). Associate Editor of the Melville Society journal *Leviathan*, she has published in a number of journals and collections, including *Melville and Hawthorne: Writing Relationship*, *Ungraspable Phantom: Essays on Moby-Dick, Melville and Women*, "Whole Oceans Away": *Melville in the Pacific*, and *The Cambridge Companion to Herman Melville*. She is the editor of Blackwell Publishing's *A Companion to Herman Melville* (2006) and author of *Herman Melville: An Introduction* (Blackwell 2008). A founding member of the Melville Society Cultural Project, based in New Bedford, MA, she works with the New Bedford Whaling Museum on projects, lecture series, exhibitions, and conferences related to Melville and the museum's concerns.

Ricardo Pitts-Wiley, Creator / Producer

Ricardo Pitts-Wiley is an accomplished actor, director, playwright and composer. In January of 2003, he and his wife Bernadette formed Mixed Magic Theatre & Cultural Events, a non-profit arts organization dedicated to presenting a diversity of cultural and ethnic images and ideas on the stage. Ricardo currently serves as the company's Artistic Director. He has also founded two other theater companies, The Human Eye Ensemble in San Diego and the Art Ship Project in Providence, and has been Artist in Residence at the University of Rhode Island and Long Island University at Southampton, where he directed and taught acting. Ricardo was recently honored with the Individual Achievement Award by the Arts and Business Council of Rhode Island.



The Participatory Model of Reading Visualization of the Conceptual Shift

Traditional model of reading

- Reading and writing are separate activities
- Reading is to understand authorial intent
- Readers write to demonstrate mastery of established interpretations
- Literary works are represented as single, fixed texts
- Reading to understand authorial intent
- Reading is an individual cognitive act
- Teacher is expert; student is novice

Forms of Participatory Culture

- Affiliations**— memberships, formal and informal, in online and offline communities centered around various forms of media
- Expressions**—production of new creative forms
- Collaborative Problem-solving**— working together in teams to complete tasks and develop new knowledge
- Circulations**—dissemination through multiple media forms and platforms

NML Skills

Appropriation
Networking
Collective Intelligence
Transmedia Navigation
Performance
Negotiation
Visualization

Participatory Practices

- *Motives for Reading*: Reading as an act of identity development and collective knowledge-building
- *Appropriation and Remixing*: Acknowledging, identifying, and enacting remix practices
- *Negotiating Cultural Spaces*: Identifying social norms and successfully navigating complex cultural contexts
- *Continuities and Silences*: Developing strategies for examining structural components of a text

Participatory model of reading

- Readers are also writers
- 'Authorial intent' is more broadly defined to consider the author in conversation with a wider collaborative culture
- 'Reading' is an umbrella term for a wide set of critical and creative practices
- Literary works are considered fluid texts existing in multiple versions, reflecting historical and contemporary conversations
- Reading is a social meaning-making activity
- Teachers and students are both experts and novices