LOVE THAT BOOK

Multimodal Response to Literature

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Several fourth graders who experience learning difficulties have just finished listening to their teacher read aloud *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach* (Deedy, 2007). A discussion follows as the teacher guides them in thinking through the plot line and the various characters who were vying for Martina's leg in marriage. Following her Cuban grandmother's advice, Martina has tested their intentions by pouring coffee on their shoes, and they have all failed miserably. Of course, there is one last suitor, the small brown mouse Perez, who is successful. He cleverly turns the tables on Martina—testing her by pouring coffee on her shoes—because he, too, has a wise Cuban grandmother!

What happens next for these students is a new experience for them, the creation of a multimodal response to the story. Each child selects a character, and sitting at the computer with a copy of the character's illustration and a microphone, they audio record a retelling from the perspective of their character. Author Grisham uses GarageBand and PowerPoint to create a digital book that is presented in class and published on the school website. The students are fully engaged in these academic activities and are proud of their efforts.

What makes the difference in these students' response to the literature? Most likely, it is a combination of factors: a story worth thinking about and responding to, an audio-recording tool that allows students to express themselves through speech, a mode that is easier for many of them than writing, and publication for a real audience. Each student was able to productively respond to this award-winning piece of children's literature using GarageBand. Their presentation in class celebrated their literacy performance, rather than highlight shortcomings.

In the last column, I illustrated how close reading of text, a key idea in the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center] & Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO], 2010), could be achieved through multimodal hypertext commentary and illustration remix (Dalton, 2013). This piece continues in the same vein, focusing on multimodal response to literary and informational text. With a tip of the hat to Sharon Creech, author of *Love That Dog*, my good friend Dana Grisham and I entitled this article "Love That Book."

We have been exploring multimodal response for several years now and have seen its potential to engage children in personal response and critical analysis of literature, while also developing their appreciation of particular books, authors, genres, and topics. Expanding the literacy palette to include the modes of image, video, audio, and writing offers students more choices for how to develop and express their thinking and feelings. A child who exclaims "Love that book!" is open to new opportunities for learning with and about literature. We've selected five of our favorite multimodal

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response-to-text activities that offer students multiple ways to understand, analyze, critique and respond emotionally to the texts they are reading.

We invite you to share your strategies and experiences connecting literature and technology on *The Reading Teacher* Facebook page (www.facebook.com/pages/The-Reading-Teacher/297544810290021?ref=br_tf).

Why Invest in Multimodal Response?

Today's students have grown up with technology and are generally facile users. Their experiences gaming, creating digital videos, posting photos, and staying in touch with friends and family have obvious implications for their digital literacies development, but may be largely untapped in literacy classrooms.

The Common Core vision of the 21st century learner is one who is able to use text, technology, and media critically and strategically for reading, composing, and learning (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). In the United States, President Obama recently announced the ConnectED initiative (White House, 2013). We were pleased to see that the goal to improve broadband connectivity and access to digital devices was accompanied by a second goal to provide teachers the training and resources they need to effectively integrate technology and improve student learning. For literacy teachers, a high-leverage integration practice is to connect literary and informational texts with students' multimodal expression.

With regard to the Common Core, multimodal response to literature is a "two-fer," addressing both reading and writing standards (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010). First, composing with different modes is now an expectation for the successful student; writing is no longer the sole medium of expression valued in academic learning (Kress,

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2003). Second, there is a growing body of research demonstrating the positive effect of multimedia on learning (Mayer, 2005), including promising evidence that composing with different modes can engage students in content and develop their literary analysis skills (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Jocius, 2013).

On occasion, we're asked about the role of multimodal literacies for struggling readers. The underlying concern is that struggling readers don't have time for this kind of learning, or at least not until after they have developed the necessary reading and writing skills. We agree that time can easily be wasted with technology. However, there is growing evidence that technology and media can support struggling readers' literacy achievement in both print and digital formats (Dalton & Jocius, 2013; MacArthur, Ferretti, Okolo, & Cavalier, 2001). What makes the difference for students, whether avid reader or reluctant reader, is the teacher who knows how to scaffold and personalize learning for individual differences. The following activities offer students flexible options for developing and expressing their understanding and affective response to literary and informational texts.

Multimodal Retellings From a Character's Perspective

We began this article with the example of fourth graders who read *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach: A Cuban Folktale* (Deedy, 2007). Using GarageBand, students recorded their responses

to the story, including retelling from their chosen character's perspective. The recordings were embedded in a PowerPoint presentation illustrating the characters from the book, which was then posted to the school's website. Students chose their own pseudonyms and composed their retellings according to what they found compelling in the story. They also spontaneously used vocabulary from the text in their audio recordings, demonstrating transfer and vocabulary growth (Grisham & Smetana, 2011).

Keys to success for this multimodal response strategy are varied. Children read and discussed the story with the teacher and each other before the retelling. Children were allowed to choose their character for the retelling/response. Students knew they didn't have to retell the entire story, but could tell what they remembered and responded to personally. An adult recorded the students with GarageBand and created the PowerPoint book—scanning the images from the book and embedding the sound files into the slide. Finally, the work was posted on the school's webpage, expanding the children's audience from the classroom to the larger community. This kind of scaffolded retelling offered students multiple entry points into developing and expressing their understanding of the characters, plot, and themes of the story and developed their vocabulary.

VoiceThread Collaborative Response

Students' understanding of text develops through quality conversation (Wilkinson,

Soter, & Murphy, 2010). Sometimes it's a challenge to find time for in-depth exploration of text and ideas that includes each child as an active participant. At Voicethread.com, you will find a free tool for collaborative responses to the texts that students are reading. The site is free, although you can pay for an educators' professional package with additional features. With the basic account, you may create voicethreads for multiple texts and room for many student responses. Using your school's email accounts, you will need to post an image, text, or video and invite students to respond.

Just as reading teachers must be readers, and writing teachers must be writers, we advocate trying out multimodal activities on your own or with colleagues before launching them in the classroom. Smetana and Grisham used VoiceThread with teacher candidates to respond to the picture book, *Martina the Beautiful Cockroach: A Cuban Folktale* (Deedy, 2007). Grisham posted illustrations of the characters and students chose their illustration and response mode—typing, audio recording, or making a video.

One student wrote about Martina, wondering about the author's choice of a cockroach for the main character and the use of color:

> Of all the characters in this story, the cockroach would be the least appealing in nature.… I think this is handled by the choice of color of Martina and her grandmother. While all of the other characters closely resemble their real life counterparts, I do not believe that cockroaches come in green.

Other students focused on the folktale genre, the emotional presentation of the characters, and the humorous style. Students read or listened to each other's comments and elaborated on them in the class discussion.

In another VoiceThread example, Utah teacher Erin Berg helped a second grader post his painting and audio record his story. Later, a ninth grader from Colorado created and recited a poem in response, and middle school music composition students from Texas created music. In this instance, VoiceThread supported collaborative storytelling among students living in different parts of the country.

Keys to success for these two VoiceThread activities included allowing students to choose their preferred mode for contributing to the conversation, either through analysis or response to the work, the opportunity to read or listen to others' responses, and the targeted nature of the stimulus text or image.

Video Book Trailers

What is better than a movie trailer? A video book trailer, of course. Authors and publishers are experimenting with video book trailers as a new form of advertising, and students are persuading peers to read their books in ways that reflect their understanding of fiction and informational text. Composing an effective text-supported argument is one of the CCSS (NGA Center & CCSSO, 2010) anchor writing standards, and book trailers are certainly a form of

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persuasion. To see a hilarious example created by a librarian and teacher, check out the award-winning video book trailer of Kevin Henkes's *Lilly's Purple Plastic Purse* at www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZM3WsOW86r4.

Be sure also to take a look at the Veterans Park Academy Media Blog, where middle school students have posted book trailers to their school blog (vpaamedia.edublogs.org/2009/01/20/students-create-digital-book-trailers-like-movie-previews-for-books/). After viewing the book trailer about Cynthia Lord's novel, *Rules,* you will be impressed with how this student communicated important themes and character relationships in a way that is sure to entice others to read the book.

Young children are also creating book trailers, with varying levels of help from adults at home and in school. Storytubes, sponsored by the American Library Association and selected book publishers, holds an annual online contest for short book trailers created by children from ages 5–7, 8–10, 11–13, and 14–18 (storytubes.info/drupal). In addition to the Judges' Choices, online viewers select a winner for each category. The 2013 voting has just ended, and the winning videos for several years are viewable online. You will find that they can be used to introduce students to new books and serve as models for how to create an award-winning book trailer.

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Making a digital book trailer requires a storyboard or script, actors, and time for practice. Some videos have multiple scene locations and props, whereas others present a child holding a book and talking directly to their camera audience. The biggest technology issue is not the actual videotaping, which can be accomplished with a smart phone or other inexpensive video camera. The complexity of this activity lies in the need for planning the video before shooting and then editing with a video editor to produce the final cut. Music, sound effects, and visual effects can be added during production. Free editors such as iMovie and MovieMaker are available and can be used in simple to complex ways, depending on skill level. Digital Book Talk (digitalbooktalk.com/) offers excellent resources for teaching, along with a gallery of digital book talks created by students of all ages.

Keys to success for creating digital book trailers are capitalizing on students' love of a particular book, viewing and critiquing the online videos so that children develop an understanding of the characteristics of the genre (it combines some features of book talks, book reports, movie trailers, and advertising), and choosing a form of digital book trailer that is developmentally appropriate for the age group and that can be technically supported with the resources you have at hand (view Storytubes videos created by 5–7-year-olds versus middle school students to get a good sense of the range of book trailer strategies and techniques).

Illustrated Letters in Response to Informational Text

The Internet hosts a wealth of media resources that can be used to enrich learning from informational text. For example, Grisham worked with a group of teachers interested in going beyond the somewhat dry description of the Civil War Battle of Gettysburg found in their students' social studies textbook. They sought images of the Civil War from Google Images and inserted them into a PowerPoint to tell a pictorial study of the battle. Then, they wrote a poignant letter from an imaginary soldier, adding text to each illustrated slide. Their letter reflects their understanding of the soldier, his life back home, and the significance of this historical battle. Figure 1 shows the opening and closing of their four-slide illustrated letter.

Figure   Opening and Closing of a Letter From a Civil War Soldier Using Historical Images in the Public Domain

Teachers make the Battle of Gettysburg come to life as they compose a 4-slide PowerPoint letter from a Civil War soldier using historical images that are in the public domain. These slides represent the opening and closing of the letter.

"[An illustrated letter] puts students in the role of generating text…and provides them with an emotional link to events in history."

This multimodal activity involves reading and researching text and images to create an illustrated fictional letter that is embedded in a particular historical event and context. Although this version relied on text and image, the letter could be enhanced with music, sound effects, and a young man's voice speaking the letter to his mother. Importantly, adding this multimodal letter to the classroom library or online class website expands the "texts" available to students. It puts students in the role of generating text that may be visited again and again by students and provides them with an emotional link to the events in history.

Keys to success for this activity are the initial readings of the social studies text so that students had information to work with, the open-ended search for historical images on the Internet that required students to draw on text-based information and prior knowledge, the use of images as an important conveyor of meaning, and the freedom to create a letter from an imaginary character of their own choosing.

Multimedia Posters

Imagine creating a multimedia poster with a palette of tools provided for you to point and click. Instead of scissors, paper, glue, markers, and tacks to secure posters on the bulletin board, teachers can set up a literature-based digital poster activity (a "glog") with glogster. com's free tool and website (edu.glogster.com). Students design the look and feel of their poster; write text; audio record narration; import sounds, music, and videos; and make hyperlinks to Internet-related resources. Of course, what they create will be in response to the demands of the task, genre, and availability of resources.

Examples of student posters and students' reflections about their composing process are available on the Glogster website, which has been reviewed by teachers' and parents' organizations and found to be a safe electronic classroom community. One of our favorite projects is sixth-grade teacher Kevin Hodgson's glog project in response to the Greg Mortenson book, *3 Cups of Tea* (norris3cups.yolasite.com/). He provided students with several issues to address, such as three things they learned from the book, three challenges that Mortenson faced as he tried to build schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan, three of Mortenson's character traits, and so forth. Some students hyperlinked to a video interview with the author, some inserted images of the mountain villages, and all students wrote and composed the visual background and layout of their poster.

Keys to success for the use of Glogster, like other digital authoring and publishing tools, are found in the use of the tool in service of a meaningful literacy activity and not the tools themselves. Think back on the posters you've seen students create in the past. A poster is a visual medium, and thus design matters. However, the most memorable posters are those in which the design and content work together in creative and thoughtful ways.

In the preceding example, Hodgson asked his students to read and analyze *3 Cups of Tea* in relation to personal learning (what's important to you?), as well as insights about Mortenson as an individual (challenges and character traits). The use of image, text, video, and Internet hyperlinked resources provided students multiple ways of communicating their knowledge, whereas the visual design added another layer of expression, especially when the design reflected aspects of the book's content. Finally, Hodgson provided a rubric to guide students in creating their project.

Parting Shots

We know that many students are enthusiastic multimedia composers (Grisham & Wolsey, 2006; Smith, 2014). As literacy teachers, we are quite enthusiastic about the wonderful world of literary and informational text. In this article, we have offered five strategies that bring together children's interest in multimodal expression with teachers' interest in text to create multimodal character retellings, collaborative

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VoiceThreads, digital book trailers, illustrated letters, and book/author multimedia posters.

To begin integrating multimodal response into your curriculum, we recommend that you start with a favorite book and then select a multimodal response activity that makes sense for that text. How you choose to vary the type and amount of scaffolding will depend on your children's experience with the literacy task. (Is retelling a new or familiar task? Have they developed language to analyze illustrations?) It will also depend on their experience with the specific technology tools needed for the assignment. (Do some students use photo or video cameras at home? Have all students used the color background feature of PowerPoint or other slide show programs to convey tone?)

One strategy for distributing expertise and help is to offer students opportunities to compose on their own, with a partner, or with a small group (assuming the project has enough roles to keep everyone engaged). Students' expertise with specific tools or digital practices will emerge. We recommend that time be set aside for student experts to showcase a skill to their peers. Designating an area on the wall for students to post "things

they know how to do" is another way to encourage children to help one another. Parent volunteers, reading specialists, special education teachers, computer teachers, library media specialists, and students from upper grades can also provide valuable just-in-time support for children during multimodal composing sessions.

In closing, we invite you to try multimodal response to literature, first as a reader and composer yourself, and then with your students. And, to paraphrase a Beatles song, remember that we all get by with a little help from our friends!

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