



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2021 Volume I: The Social Struggles of Contemporary Black Art

Visual Literacy, Creative Response & the Afrofuturist Aesthetic

Curriculum Unit 21.01.08
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Introduction

This unit centers around two pedagogical ideas within the context of the secondary English classroom. The first is that by sharpening skills of critical analysis, students can use those skills across multiple disciplines and in their lives outside of school. The second is that students need more opportunities to respond to texts through the creation of their own texts. Drawing from work that I do in my own classroom, the structure of this YNHTI Seminar led by Dr. Ferguson, and changes happening in college-level composition courses like the First Year Writing course at UCONN, this unit asks students to apply skills of critical analysis to three visual texts by Clotilde Jimenez and then respond to those texts by composing a creative text of their own. Intended to be a unit done with students in the beginning stages of the school year, this unit will provide a foundation for visual literacy skills that can be put to use in other arenas of study both in the English classroom and in other classes throughout the rest of the academic year. For this unit, the three visual texts are all by the artist Clotilde Jimenez, an artist who works primarily in mixed media collage.

Before getting into the specific theories that undergird the critical analysis and creative response elements of this unit, I begin with the aspirational vision of an Afrofuturist classroom aesthetic. Having the chance to learn about Afrofuturism from Dr. Ferguson and the artists he introduced to our seminar group has been nothing short of transformational in terms of how I view possibilities within my own classroom. The section titled “An Afrofuturist Classroom Aesthetics” lays out how this vision may be put to use in the context of this particular unit and in my classroom moving forward.

The section called “The Task” lays out the specifics of my unit in terms of how my students and I would spend our time during different portions of the unit. Having three visual texts as the centerpieces of the crucial analysis portion of the unit is inspired again by the weekly rhythms of our seminar groups’ work with Dr. Ferguson. Instead of examining a wide range of visual texts, we spend five, ten, sometimes even fifteen minutes examining a single image. By constructing this unit around three specifically chosen pieces of art, I hope to instill the same sense of wonder and endless possibility within a single image Dr. Ferguson conjured in our seminar group.

When considering how to support the development of critical analysis skills in secondary students, there are a number of different mnemonics, frameworks, and approaches to choose from. In all honesty, as a classroom

teacher it can be quite overwhelming to sift through! Drawing from Frank Serafini's *Reading the Visual*, Gilda Williams' *How to Write about Contemporary Art* and incredibly durable advice from a mentor teacher I had the chance to work with years ago, in the section called "How We See Text" I propose a simple and widely adaptable set of questions to support students as they approach a visual text for the purposes of critical analysis.

Sentence-stems or sentence-starters have been incredibly useful for me as a teacher striving to help students find their voice as writers or as participants in class discussions. The section called "How We Respond to Text" draws on my experience in the classroom, research on using discussion to drive inquiry-based writing by Thomas M. McCann, and advice from *They Say, I Say* by Graff, Birkenstein and Durst to provide examples of prompts that might encourage critical, creative responses to texts. In keeping with the intention of making this unit a flexible framework adaptable within a variety of classroom contexts, this section will leave students with written responses to texts that can be used for a formal discussion, as prewriting for a piece of academic writing, or as ideas to drive a more creative kind of response.

Ideas about how to assess what students know and are able to do in the secondary classroom continue to move away from standardized tests and towards portfolio-based assessment, project-based learning, and performance-assessment tasks. Across the entire English Department in New Haven Public Schools, we are attempting our own shift away from standardized assessments. My hope is that this unit will serve to further support the development of assessments that engage students in asking meaningful questions and encourage them to use their voices as they search for answers. My vision for how this model might look in practice as well as ways similar models are at work in other places including the University of Connecticut's First Year Writing program are in the penultimate section titled "Composing a Creative Response."

An Afrofuturist Classroom Aesthetic

The kind of thinking I hope to explore with students in this unit is what I am calling an "Afrofuturist Aesthetic." That is to say, it is a unit that is grounded in the ideas of Afrofuturism and the spirit of creation that drives Afrofuturist work. In paraphrasing the words of Mark Dery, Alondra Nelson states "Afrofuturism can be broadly defined as 'African American voices' with 'other stories to tell about culture, technology and things to come.'

¹ And while only some, not all, of the students or 'voices' in my classes identify as African American, the Afrofuturist mindset of engaging with and composting "other stories" about "culture, technology and things to come" is one that I know from experience to be widely engaging to students who identify in all sorts of ways. Nelson herself positions Afrofuturism not simply an artistic moment with a definitive beginning when she states "Though [Afrofuturism] was first used by Dery in 1993, the currents that comprise it existed long before."² It is the currents, as Nelson calls them, that I am particularly hopeful of tapping into through the process of critical analysis and creative response in this unit.

The choice of Clotilde Jimenez as the artist for all three texts studied by students in this unit is intentional in supporting the Afrofuturist aesthetic. As someone who claims Afro-Latinx heritage, Jimenez is one of millions of Americans whose mixed-race background is representative of the changing conceptions of how we define our countries' racial demographics. In a June 2021 article in *The Atlantic*, Alba, Levy and Myers claim that "by softening and blurring racial and ethnic lines, diversity is bringing Americans together more than it is tearing

the country apart.”³ The concept of seeing a future where racial and ethnic lines are rethought from how we currently conceive them, specifically from an African American perspective, seems to fall into the category of ‘things to come,’ as Nelson defines Afrofuturism. Jimenez’s work is described on the website of gallerist Mariane Ibrahim as doing the work of “exploring rigid definitions placed on Black and queer bodies.”⁴ This kind of exploration also seems to fit soundly into the definition of Afrofuturism laid out by Nelson, in particular when she centers the importance of “other stories to tell about culture.”⁵ In learning a bit about Clotilde Jimenez’s background and seeing how he translates his story and identity into his art, students will be encouraged to assume that Afrofuturist mindset in considering what parts of their own stories they wish to tell and how that might help them see what’s to come for them, and how people like them operate in the world now and into the future.

By designing this unit so the summative task is one that requires the composition of a creative response, I am also hoping to situate the pedagogy of the unit within an Afrofuturist aesthetic. The rejection of a formal essay as the summative task for this unit is particularly intentional, as the essay format or academic writing in general can be seen as standing for an educational system that has, in the United States at least, largely failed to support, develop and uplift the voices of students of color, particularly African American students. One only needs to look at the most recent reports of SAT scores across school districts in our very own state in Connecticut to see that there are long-standing differences between the scores of white students and students of color. By asking students to compose a creative response and centering students as the storytellers in this unit, I am hoping to challenge the very idea that standardized tests, and more standard measures of achievement like the formal academic essay as it is often taught in English classes, is a valid measurement of students’ intellect. Dr. Ibram X. Kendi stated in an article in 2016, “Our faith in standardized tests causes us to believe that the racial gap in test scores means something is wrong with the Black test takers—and not the tests.”⁶ By inviting students to engage in the creative process and not being prescriptive about the format their final response takes, this unit challenges this, as Kendi would call it, racist belief, that something is “wrong with Black-test takers.” While I certainly believe the mental processes that go into composing a formal academic essay still have an important place in the high school classroom, the nature of academic writing is itself changing - and thinking beyond having students respond solely through academic essay writing is part of this unit’s Afrofuturist aesthetic and seeing what, in terms of student response, are the “things to come.”

The Task

At the start and conclusion of this unit, students respond to questions related to the unit’s grounding in the Afrofuturist aesthetic, allowing them to reflect on what they may have learned, pose new questions they might have, and offer their own perspectives on how Afrofuturism might influence their thinking in and out of school moving forward. Coming in the form of what is typically called the pre-and post- assessment portions of a unit, this beginning and concluding activity will be mostly reflective in nature and also support the overall notion that Afrofuturism is a mindset that can be applied in a variety of contexts.

In addition to gaining an understanding of Afrofuturism and the Afrofuturist perspective, this unit is also about students honing their skills of critical analysis. Following the opening reflection of the unit and an overview of the scope of the unit, students will spend time learning about the visual artist Clotilde Jimenez. Students will view a short film of approximately four minutes published on the website of gallerist Mariane Ibrahim, which

showcases pieces in one of Jimenez's recent shows called "The Contest." The film gives an overview of Jimenez's work in collage and sculpture and tells a little of his backstory and how that influences his art. In addition to watching the short film, students will be given a section of transcribed dialogue from the short film to engage in an even closer analysis of Jimenez talking about his work and process.

Once students have had a chance to learn a little about Jimenez and his art, the closer critical analysis will begin. Both in large and small group settings, students will take several class periods to examine three of Jimenez's works in particular. Supported by the principles of visual literacy described later, students will examine the works from several perspectives, guided by prompts or questions they devise as a class with the guidance of the teacher. The pieces by Jimenez students will analyze are all collages from his exhibition titled "The Contest." Each piece shows a figure in a different position and in each piece, Jimenez has used different media to compose the figure and the scene. All three of the images for this unit display single figures in boxing stances and boxing attire. *Peekaboo (Puerto Rico)* shows a figure with both hands in fists curled up near the face, appearing to be a boxer ready to spar. Behind the boxer are the flags of several nations, including Puerto Rico, Ghana and Canada - similar to the small flags that might ring a boxing gym to represent the various backgrounds of the many fighters. *Toy Puncher* depicts a heavy-set figure on a small stool in a boxing ring, like a fighter taking a break between rounds, or perhaps preparing for or recovering from a sparring session. This fighter is wearing protective headgear and has one boxing glove off and one boxing glove on. Most interesting in this piece is that the shirt of the figure appears to be made of actual fabric from an undershirt - a technique that Jimenez describes in the short film students will view at the start of the unit of using some of his actual clothing in some of his pieces. *Always on Guard* is the final piece students will examine. Similar to the previous piece, in *Always on Guard* Jimenez appears to use pieces from his own Adidas brand track pants to cover the legs of a fighter in a seated position but this time in a chair. The fighter and chair are in a nondescript location. Similar to *Toy Puncher* in this piece the fighter also has one boxing glove removed.

Students will use a tool described below to support a critical visual analysis of all three pieces by Jimenez and will then use a second tool to collect their thoughts, make comparisons and contrasts between the works, and make plans for their own creative response. For the creative response itself, students will be asked to, like Jimenez, create a collage that uses a variety of mediums to compose a figure that represents the most important or significant qualities they see in themselves, their family members or other groups that they identify with. Just as Jimenez uses the love for boxing he and his father have as a basis for many of the pieces in "The Contest" series, I am asking students to consider what interests, skills, and attributes they share with others that are influential in their lives, and use the medium of collage to present that in a human figure or figures. Wherever possible, students will also be encouraged to use material that is from or similar to an object that they have used in their everyday lives, like Jimenez uses cuttings from old t-shirts and track-pants in two of the pieces studied in this unit. Students will be encouraged to use their analysis of Jimenez and the document on which they collect their thoughts about their analyses of Jimenez as a kind of planning document for their own work. If possible, students will be given several days to plan and create their collage.

Before completing the post-unit reflection, students will complete a 1-2 paragraph narrative explaining how they approached the work in their collage, what influence Jimenez's work had on their own process, and what they are most proud of or see as most significant in their work. This "Artist's Note" will help both the student and the teacher in the assessment process gauging growth according to the standards identified for this unit in the Appendix.

How We See Text

One of the primary questions that nags at me whenever I am using a visual text, or any text for that matter, in my classroom is how do I create an environment where all of my students are being supported in approaching the text in the same way? While the experiences and perspectives students bring with them to the classroom are out of my control, I have always felt strongly about creating a common language or approach to how we as a class examine texts. This requires a delicate balance between encouraging students to name what they see and describe their own interpretations and prompting students to go a bit further than they would on their own.

Simply being in a classroom amongst peers is an excellent starting point for nudging students a bit further into the interpretive process. Serafini asserts that “being visually literate is a social *and* cognitive process.”⁷ Like any kind of classroom norm or procedure, there needs to be flexibility and structure in any framework given to students when approaching a text. The social element, being aware of what other students are noticing or attending to in a text makes any set of questions, pointers or suggestions a starting point for interpretation rather than a checklist to complete before moving ahead.

Serafini provides such a framework, and a highly researched and technical one at that, for guiding students through the process of analyzing a visual text. Serafini calls this his “tripartite framework”⁸ and breaks the process of visual analysis down into the following areas: perceptual, structural, and ideological. This framework by Serafini is broken down by having each element of the framework guided by specific moves to encourage deep analysis of certain elements in a visual text. The order of Serafini’s framework is of particular importance moving from the Perceptual, which Serafini calls “Noticing, Navigating, and Naming Elements”⁹ to the Structural where analysis of the visual grammar of the image encourages looking for any possible symbols or structures meant to convey a deeper meaning, and finishing with the Ideological, where Serafini encourages “Analysis of the Social Practices and Sociocultural Context”¹⁰ of the visual text.

Moving from analysis of the surface elements of a visual text to considering the wider sociocultural context is mirrored in Gilda Williams’ “three jobs of communicative art-writing.”¹¹ Williams presents her framework in a series of three questions: “Q1 What is it?... Q2 What might this mean... Q3 Why does this matter to the world at large?”¹² After each of these questions Williams gives a short paragraph of instructions for where an aspiring art-writer might find the answers. After the first question, “What is it?” Williams offers ideas such as “Look closely for meaningful details...perhaps regarding materials; size; selection of materials; placement.”¹³ As a classroom teacher searching for the ‘right way’ to look at art, it is striking to see the similarities in the brevity of Williams’ and Serafini’s frameworks, both being just three points, as well as the ways in which the frameworks suggest starting with the surface details of the work itself, then attempting to build meaning from the combination of those surface elements, and then finishing with considering the wider contexts in which the work might be understood as a cultural artifact.

Knowingly or unknowingly, a brilliant teacher named Mark Peters, with whom I was fortunate to work with some years ago when I was a long-term substitute teacher in the Humanities Department at Shepaug Valley High School in Washington Depot, CT, shared a strikingly similar framework he had used for many years with students when looking at visual as well as print texts. To this day, when Peters gives students a new text to examine, he poses two questions to the class: “What do you see? What does it mean?” Asking students to begin by taking note of surface structures and then pushing them to consider the meanings of those

structures is similar to the first two elements of both Serafini's and Williams' aforementioned frameworks but put into straightforward language well-suited for the high school classroom. In using Peters' framework with my own students, I sometimes add a third question: "How does it connect?" as I ask students to consider how a text might connect to other texts in a unit, other texts we have looked at in class, or even connections to their own lives or the world outside the classroom. Mark Peters' two questions (plus my third add-on) along with Serafini's and Williams' models makes a clear case for a visual analysis framework that is concise, broadly applicable, and flexible.

In keeping with the spirit of this unit's Afrofuturist approach analysis and composition, the framework that I employ in this unit is outlined in the sub-section below. It borrows from the three-part models described previously and adds a fourth element that encourages students to think ahead, beyond and outside the text itself. Afrofuturism considers the world that might be, and the framework employed in this model asks students to do the same in the context of what they see, understand or are able to connect to the text being analyzed. The framework also borrows from the structure of the aforementioned models, but maintains space for students to generate questions, prompts and reminders on their own. Ideally, the framework for each class would look a little differently to reflect the differences in approaches amongst the various sections I or any other teacher might have though the classes may be working on the same texts. I can also envision the framework being a tool that is revisited throughout the year and revised for clarity, brevity, and to suit the particular needs of a class or unit as the students and teacher see fit.

Framework for Student Analysis Guide

Before analyzing any visual text in this unit or future units, students will be asked to generate responses to the following questions in small groups and then collect those responses as an entire class. The teacher will take the responses for all groups, revise for clarity when necessary, and then use these student responses to create a protocol for analyzing visual texts. This protocol can be a dynamic one in that it can be revisited and revised as the class deems necessary after using it with different kinds of visual texts.

- First Look: What questions, phrases, or stems would help you look closely at the surface elements of a visual text?
- Making Meaning: What questions, phrases, or stems would help you think about what this visual text is trying to communicate?
- Connections: What questions, phrases, or stems would help you think about what other texts this visual text might be inspired by, remind you of, or connect with?
- Going Beyond: What are questions, phrases or stems would help you capture new questions or ideas inspired by this visual text?

How We Respond to Text

The summative task for this unit asks students to compose a creative response - which may end up taking any number of forms depending on the interests, gifts and talents of any particular student. As a result, this next section on how to aid students in building the bridge from their analysis of a visual text and print text maintains the same spirit of flexibility from the previous section. In this section is a discussion of best-

practices of how to use prompts and sentence-stems or sentence-starters to help students capture their thoughts in writing. This writing can be thought of as pre-writing for a creative response that will be prose or poetry based, or as notes to guide the creation of a visually based response such as a drawing, painting or collage. Regardless of the form that a students' creative composition eventually takes, this critical step in the analysis process is designed to supports students' continued processing of the visual and print texts, help guide their thoughts about composing their creative response, and may also be useful in the final reflection as students are asked to take stock of what they learned over the course of the unit.

The structure of how students will respond is supported by the work of Thomas M. McCann's *Transforming Talk into Text* and *They Say, I Say* by Birkenstein, Graff & Durst. Both texts are written in a way that guides one towards a final product that is essay-like in form. And while this unit's final product encourages students to compose a creative response, starting with the foundation of what might become a strong essay seems to be an appropriate way to construct or compose any number of creative kinds of responses. In *Sin and Syntax*, Constance Hale's five "new principles of prose" include one that captures the pedagogical mindset supporting what follows in this section: "Aim deep, but be simple."¹⁴ The goal of this portion of the unit is to encourage students to think deeply about their analysis of the visual and print texts, but in a manner that is as simple as possible to invite student to authentically engage in the creative and critical processes that follow.

Just as the initial analysis of the print and visual texts will be social as students look at the pieces and talk in a large group or with one another about them, how we encourage students to capture this kind of thinking incorporates a social element. Thomas M. McCann plainly states "students benefit greatly from their interactions with others."¹⁵ Supporting this idea further, McCann references Nussbaum and Meier when he states that frequent discussion or conversation among peers around a particular text or topic of inquiry "fosters an environment of tolerance, critical thinking and democratic spirit."¹⁶ This kind of environment supports the overarching Afrofuturist mentality for this unit, and as such, the first way students are asked to respond to the texts they analyze is done in a group of 2-4 around a discussion of statements. Students are encouraged to discuss the statements with each other but to make their assessments of the statements based on their own opinions. Following this discussion-based response to statements that support analysis of the pieces, students will move into a more writing-intensive portion of the analysis using the model of sentence stems.

The final stage for students to capture their responses to both the visual and print texts they will analyze in this unit continue the social aspect from earlier stages of the unit but ask students to engage in written conversation with ideas they have heard from others during the earlier stages of analysis, ideas they are identifying within the texts themselves, or ideas they may be wrestling with in their own heads. Inspired by the work of Birkenstein, Graff & Durst in *They Say, I Say*, the stems that support student responses in this final section of analysis are designed to support students' continued thinking about the ideas within both the visual and print texts, regardless of the format that their creative response might take. Using sentence stems that mirror some of the "moves"¹⁷ of academic writing - encouraging students to think about their ideas as they would if preparing to compose an academic-style piece of argument writing. As a result, whatever kind of creative response a student chooses to compose, having the stems will serve as an ideological foundation for their work, which will support students in talking about how their creative response is continuing the conversation they see as happening between the visual and print texts.

Composing a Creative Response

In Lynda Barry's mixed-media text *What it Is*, one of the many questions she poses (and answers) is "What is an Image?"¹⁸ Barry's response to her own question helped the rigid-English teacher in me let go of the notion that all student responses in the English classroom must be in essay format. Barry states: "At the center of everything we call 'the arts' and children call 'play,' is something which somehow seems alive"¹⁹ In searching for most appropriate way to structure student response to images that are "alive," this unit encourages students to create responses that can also be "alive" in the same way Clotilde Jimenez's visual compositions are. In my time as a classroom teacher, I often find that when students are empowered to create work that feels exciting and authentic, it naturally pulls out the best of their innate gifts and talents. While I do ask for students to craft a short piece of narrative or "Artist's Note" to explain their work, process and any revelations that occurred during the process of making the work, the bulk of the response is meant to be one that allows students to step away from the essay into work that is much closer to the kind of mixed media collage Jimenez creates and they have studied over the course of the unit.

I take seriously the inherent tension in being a white, cisgender, male teacher attempting to engage my class of teenage, mostly black and brown students in examining the work of an artist like Clotilde Jimenez and then creating and maintaining a safe space where students can engage in their own authentically creative response. I lean heavily on Paulo Freire's insistence of shifting away from the banking model of education to one that more closely resembles dialogue, or at least the closest thing to dialogue I can create within the structures of schooling that exist in my own building and community. I also continue to look to other teachers for advice and feedback for how I can create and maintain a space that is anti-racist at its core.

The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom by Felicia Rose Chavez is a text that I am fortunate to have recently encountered. Chavez shares truths and principles based on her own experience as a student of creative writing and as a seasoned veteran instructor of creative writing. Chavez references Lynda Barry's idea of creating work that is alive in the first chapter of the book when she says "That 'something alive' is the crux of craft."²⁰ Similar to how Barry's own words push me to consider the kind of work I ask students to do and whether it invites authentic risk taking, Chavez's work helps me understand that work that is "alive" can actually be the quickest and most direct route to engaging in the most important kind of "craft" or work that we as educators seeks to help students experience and understand; both when they see it in others' work and how they might go about engaging in it themselves. Chavez's work applies broadly to so much of what I want my classroom to become in the future, but for the purposes of this particular unit, there are two principles that fit particularly nicely into creating the Afrofuturist I hope students will be able to use in approaching this work.

Chavez insists that the anti-racist writing work shop must be a "safe space for conversation."²¹ She goes on to state that a teacher wanting to create this kind of space "affirms that participants arrive at the classroom as writers, whether or not they know it yet."²² Although in this unit students will be encouraged to compose a visual text with a shorter, more explanatory prose section to explain their process and discoveries, the premise of affirming students who are able to tell their own stories "whether or not they know it yet" is critical to the success of this unit. While the technical process of creative a visual text may not be familiar to all of my students, insisting that they all have stories worth telling and that they can in fact tell them through clippings of photographs, various kinds of paper, their own brush/pencil/pen strokes, or using artifacts from their own lives as Jimenez does, is just the kind of atmosphere I hope to create in the later stages of this unit.

A second principle or assertion from Chavez that goes hand-in-hand with affirming students' identities as writers is to "empower participants to do it "wrong" before they do it "right."²³ And while the goals of Chavez's semester-long courses within a larger structure of a creative writing degree or concentration are certainly different from my goals within a unit as part of a year of 9th grade English, the message of allowing or even celebrating mistake making in the creative process is equally important. Based on past experiences of giving students an option to craft a creative response, some students run headlong into the work before I can even finish describing the parameters of the task and others struggle to articulate any ideas of what they might want to create. Though this will likely happen with more than a few students in the implementation of this unit, Chavez reminds me that the teacher's job is to empower students to not just create but be able to create something "wrong" so that they can continue to work until some part or all of the piece is right.

Considering how and where I can shift away from essay-only response in my own classroom has invigorated how I plan units and assessments. Admittedly, as I embrace this move away from essay I don't totally know what it is I am moving towards. Thankfully, I only have to look to the First Year Writing (FYW) program at the University Connecticut (UConn) to find a model that offers both affirmation and a path forward. Beginning in 2016, UConn's FYW program staff began a years-long reconsideration of the kind of writing they were asking students to do and whether or not that matched the kind of writing students were being asked to compose in other courses across different departments at UConn or in their lives after UConn. This work has resulted in the development of their "Writing Across Technology" or WAT model which "is designed to teach rhetorical composition practices with a diverse range of technologies and communicative modes."²⁴ Though the style of collage students study in this unit and are then encouraged to use as a motivation for their own creative response may fall a bit outside of the techno-centric vision for the WAT model, as a high school English teacher I am encouraged to continue looking beyond the essay in my own classroom when my state's flagship public university so clearly embraces multimodal composition. Perhaps this unit will be part of a larger shift in my own classes that influences greater shifts in my department at the school and district level where multimodal composition is seen not as an outside of the box way of engaging students but instead as a necessary and important way of preparing students to do even more thorough multimodal composition at the college level.

Looking Ahead

In her call for "An Antiracist Black Language Education and Pedagogy" ²⁵ Dr. April Baker-Bell states "linguistic and racial justice for black students are not rooted in anti-Black Language pedagogies that cater to whiteness, but in term of the complete and total overthrow of racist, colonial practices that antiracist language pedagogies might begin to be imagined, developed and implemented."²⁶ Dr. Baker-Bell describes these new pedagogies as something that may come in the near future but will bring forward some of the best and most radical ideas from the past. It is scholars like Dr. Baker-Bell and my own teacher for this seminar, Dr. Ferguson, who inspired pedagogies like the ones I tried to outline in this unit that do not yet exist, but still must be.

The various literacies young people, and all people for that matter, need fluency in to make sense of the world and make themselves heard in the world seem to be changing at a pace that makes it almost impossible for any classroom teacher to adapt to before the next disruptive change comes along. We are not living in a world

where text, meaning the printed word, is the primary means through which important information is communicated. One of the deep understandings I have coming out of working on this unit is that important information has never been based solely in that kind of text, but that has not always been widely recognized or accepted. I am excited for the way this unit encourages teachers and students to explore the various ways we can read all the different kinds of information in the world through a process of dialogue where each perspective and understanding is validated and used to gain a deeper sense of understanding about the world and our places in it.

And while this unit speaks to much of what I believe liberatory pedagogy can look like in a high school English classroom, I feel equally strongly about this unit being centered around a performance-based assessment task. Across the country, more and more schools are putting into practice the idea that standardized tests can tell us very little when compared to well-designed performance-based assessment tasks that ask students to tackle authentic issues within a given content area, but in a way that centers the students' particular gifts and talents. I am excited for the walls of my classroom to be covered in collages created by my students' individual expressions of visual literacy.

Finally, the centering of student voice and student perspective in this unit is an essential component of the kind of restorative and healing work we are all seeking to do as we continue to struggle with the COVID-19 pandemic. Teaching through this pandemic has changed me as an individual and as a teacher. As our community continues to hope for the days when we will be past this pandemic, we also must acknowledge the scars that will stay with us forever. A unit such as this one where students' voices are not just welcomed, but brought to the center of the classroom, is the kind of work that I think can make the classroom a starting point for the kind of healing that we may need to do for a long time, and maybe should have been doing all along. Who better to be the voices of the 'things to come' than the wonderful young people with whom I am so fortunate to share my classroom.

Resources for Students and Teachers

- Overview of Afrofuturism through the eyes of three artists

https://video.vice.com/en_us/video/what-an-afrofuturist-world-looks-like/5a7a02cff1cdb35b0e054771

- An overview of Clotilde Jimenez's body of work

<http://www.clotildejimenez.art/>

- Video overview of Clotilde Jimenez's *The Contest*

<https://website-marianeibrahimgallery.artlogic.net/viewing-room/15/>

[_preview_uid=491f16bfea3f4ef9ac6281224ff518a4&version=bb5dbd](https://website-marianeibrahimgallery.artlogic.net/viewing-room/15/_preview_uid=491f16bfea3f4ef9ac6281224ff518a4&version=bb5dbd)

- *Peekaboo (Puerto Rico)* by Clotilde Jimenez

<http://www.clotildejimenez.art/thecontest/jvj4w69p5lqim3kyqof20fb7ynmlco>

- *Always on Guard* by Clotilde Jimenez

<http://www.clotildejimenez.art/thecontest/rrwgaerye4cezmi5gi3rh1mtus3bu8>

- *Toy Puncher* by Clotilde Jimenez

<http://www.clotildejimenez.art/thecontest/3ht0n5989ejm60npmi86a18uf4apgr>

Appendix on Implementing District Standards

This unit addresses the following 21st Century Standards as defined by New Haven Public Schools:

1. Problem Solving and Critical Thinking
 - Reason effectively
 - Make insightful judgements
 - Solve problems
2. Communication & Collaboration
 - Articulate ideas clearly and effectively to a variety of audiences using multiple modes
3. Creativity & Innovation
 - Demonstrate originality and inventiveness in work²⁷

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⁵ Nelson, Alondra. "Introduction: Future Texts." 9

⁶ Kendi, Ibram X. "Why the Academic Achievement Gap Is a Racist Idea."

⁷ Serafini, Frank. *Reading the Visual: An Introduction to Teaching Multimodal Literacy*, 23.

⁸ Serafini, Frank. *Reading the Visual: An Introduction to Teaching Multimodal Literacy*, 43.

⁹ Serafini, Frank. *Reading the Visual: An Introduction to Teaching Multimodal Literacy*, 43.

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¹¹ Williams, Gilda. *How to Write About Contemporary Art*, 49.

¹² Williams, Gilda. *How to Write About Contemporary Art*, 51.

¹³ Williams, Gilda. *How to Write About Contemporary Art*, 49.

¹⁴ Hale, Constance. *Sin and Syntax: How to Craft Wicked Good Prose*, ix.

¹⁵ McCann, Thomas M. *Transforming Talk into Text: Argument Writing, Inquiry, and Discussion, Grades 6-12*, 16.

¹⁶ McCann, Thomas M. *Transforming Talk into Text: Argument Writing, Inquiry, and Discussion, Grades 6-12*, 21.

¹⁷ Graff, Gerald, Cathy Birkenstein, and Russel K. Durst. "*They Say/I Say*": *The Moves That Matter in Academic Writing, with Readings*, xxiv.

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²⁰ Chavez, Felicia Rose. *The Anti-Racist Writing Workshop: How to Decolonize the Creative Classroom*, 36.

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²⁶ Baker-Bell, April. *Linguistic Justice: Black Language, Literacy, Identity, and Pedagogy*, 33.

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