ARMY, ABIGAIL G. M.A. “May the odds be ever in your favor”: The Hunger Games as Texts for Critical Engagement. (2022)
Directed by Dr. RJ Boutelle. 20 pp.

In Young Adult Dystopian Fiction stories like the *Hunger Games* series, the invisibility of whiteness creates a discordant view of the world and its potential future. Recognizing this invisibility and having the ability to evaluate and analyze its use in literature is a necessary skill for critical engagement. YADF is an approachable avenue for readers to engage with and understand the real-world implications of the genre’s themes and messages. This engagement also can aid readers in creating a more expansive feeling of empathy. The analysis of *The Hunger Games* aided the creation of a lesson plan for a collegiate classroom. This lesson plan has been prepared and is intended for actual use. The lesson focuses on connecting academic concepts to real-world application, drawing in students, and helping them develop their collective passions.

ARMY, ABIGAIL G. M.A. “I am both worse and better than you thought”: Implications and Significance of Trauma Representation in Fantasy Literature. (2022)
Directed by Dr. Amy Vines. 22 pp.

With an annual profit of nearly $600 million, Fantasy is a widely popular genre in contemporary literature and is highly valued in the Young Adult (YA) canon. Fantasy literature’s pervasive popularity ensures this topic is not only currently relevant but will continue to be so. As the genre continues to enter cultural memory, it becomes increasingly imperative to understand the effect Fantasy has on its audiences. Specifically, quite often Fantasy literature features characters experiencing traumatic incidents, therefore understanding the potential for help or harm that a book could provide to audiences became a question. In this project: *Legendborn* by Tracy Deonn, *Six of Crows* and *Crooked Kingdom* by Leigh Bardugo, and the *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling presents different types of trauma representations. The texts and authors were selected because the traumatic incidents were clearly represented. The chosen authors displayed their relationship and knowledge of, or lack thereof, to trauma, which aided in developing a grid to evaluate the texts. The research discovered that an author’s cultural authenticity impacted whether the audience believed an author’s representations. Further, delineating the authenticity into three levels created refinements allowing it to apply to other genres and books as a research model.

“MAY THE ODDS BE EVER IN YOUR FAVOR”: THE HUNGER GAMES AS TEXTS FOR CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

AND

“I AM BOTH WORSE AND BETTER THAN YOU THOUGHT”: IMPLICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF TRAUMA REPRESENTATION IN FANTASY LITERATURE

by

Abigail G. Army

A Thesis
Submitted to
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Approved by

Dr. RJ Boutelle
Committee Co-Chair

Dr. Amy Vines
Committee Co-Chair

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my mother – Alyce Gray, sister – Margaux Gray, and fiancé – Misha Chemey. Without them, I would not have been able to complete this work. Thank you for the endless phone calls, the midnight snacks, and the willingness to talk about the same subjects for hours on end.

This work is also dedicated to my Inner Circle and to Becca Cash. The support of my Inner Circle ensured that I never lost my motivation, even at my lowest. Becca provided me with the tools to take care of my mental health through the "new normal" of COVID-19.

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis written by Abigail Army has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

I chose these topics because of my combined interest in pedagogy, speculative texts, literary criticism, and theory. These interests, while typically separate, can always be combined, whether that is through the texts I read, classes I take, or the synthesis between works.

Trauma studies are an avenue I find passion in, as it is a way for me to work through my own history of trauma. The field is gaining traction, as it is no longer extremely taboo to discuss trauma. I chose fantasy literature as my primary genre to study because it has so many possibilities. This genre is also just very fun to engage with as it is rife with magic systems and creatures that do not exist in this world. This makes the genre prime for escapist reading, which can be examined as it related to trauma.

Critical engagement with texts, especially as it relates to race, is important in today's world. Dystopian texts, which are often located in the future, rarely feature diverse casts. This puzzled me, as the US Census points to Caucasian people not making up the majority of the United States' racial breakdown by 2060. I wanted to explore Dystopian fiction in a more critical manner because I remember the boom in the genre in the early 2010s following *The Hunger Games*' publication.

All in all, both projects came about because I found clear pathways into their conception. These pathways offered me engaging ideas and creative outputs. Both papers are only initial studies. I want to pursue the ideas developed further to see how they can be shaped and changed when applied to wider swaths of literature.

CHAPTER II: "MAY THE ODDS BE EVER IN YOUR FAVOR": THE HUNGER GAMES AS TEXTS FOR CRITICAL ENGAGEMENT

Significance

Young Adult (YA) literature has always been a category I enjoyed. The broad swaths of subjects covered always manage to be relatable, and more than once, I have found myself moved by the poignancy of the material. YA literature is an excellent vehicle for lessons in the English classroom. The genre is approachable, with characters and themes that students feel comfortable engaging. Furthermore, "...YA literature is widely invested in teaching children about social forces and how institutions— church, government, school—reinforce more abstract social constructions like race, gender, and sexuality" (Fitzsimmons, 3-4). The ability to not only connect with the experiences YA protagonists have but also apply the knowledge of these abstract social constructs are learning objectives on which educators can build their lesson plans. The classic canon (George Orwell 's *1984*, Margaret Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*, and Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*) offers entry into the Dystopian genre. We see these novels in high school English classes, or college courses focused explicitly on Dystopias and Utopias. That approach makes sense, especially in education based on the canon's creation. However, bringing the literature and educational materials to the present day (or within ten to fifteen years) allows us to reach a more common area of understanding with our students. Works including Lois Lowry's *The Giver*, the *Shatter Me* series by Tahereh Mafi, Scott Westerfield's *Uglies* series, and Suzanne Collins's *The Hunger Games* series could begin this new canon. "Popular culture provides an accessible and familiar site for students to analyze how hegemonic narratives about

race circulate" (Kinney, 42). All but one of the previously mentioned works are part of a series, allowing the potential for more in-depth examinations.

Introduction

I began my undergraduate career taking English 102. That semester, the course centered on Dystopian Literature. Throughout the 15-week course, I noticed a common theme in the literature – whiteness. This theme did not appear prominently, like other dystopian themes such as justice or societal change. It was a hidden theme, one with much more insidious undertones. Outside of Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, every book I read for the course either presented a "colorblind" society or contained racially ambiguous language. Both elements discount and overshadow how race has been wielded as the weapon of white supremacy for much of Western cultural memory. In stories like the *Hunger Games* series, the invisibility of whiteness creates a discordant view of the world and its potential future. Recognizing this invisibility and having the ability to evaluate and analyze its use in literature is a necessary skill for critical engagement. Young Adult Dystopian Fiction (YADF) is an approachable avenue for readers to engage with and understand the real-world implications of the genre's themes and messages. This engagement also can aid readers in creating a more expansive feeling of empathy.[1]

Position Statement

As a student and future educator, my experience in English 102 was highly informative. Taking notes in class, I recognized both the topics we covered and the topics we did not. It has been several years since that course, but as I continued to work towards my degree in English, I was able to take classes that did contain the discussions I missed in English 102. Later in college, the courses I took became the models from which I wanted to base a new pedagogical

framework. This project is significant because it can result in a real-world application. One such application relevant for first-year college students is the idea of identity formation. Beginning college can be incredibly confusing and having formatted discussions about identity can help smooth the transition into college-level learning. Florian Coulmas writes of identity; "In socially relevant domains, identities are borders, borders that separate independent countries, distinct ethnic groups and races, languages and their speakers, genders, and sexualities, exclusive clubs, self-governing companies, and autonomous individuals" (128-9).

Reflecting upon the idea of hegemonic narratives brings up a critical thought, specifically one of my positions within the education system. As a future educator, I understand I need to commit to anti-racist pedagogical practices. This commitment begins in my educational pursuits, and the result will be creating an equitable and inclusive learning environment, not just in name but in actual practice. I continue to read both fiction and nonfiction works that further expand my worldview. I am committed to lifelong learning, but I am also very aware that my identity as a white person affords me the space to learn by reading and witnessing rather than living. I work through my positionality through a critical examination of works, specifically searching for any framework that signals a colorblind narrative or ideology. When I say colorblind narratives and ideologies, I explicitly refer to media that overtly communicate their "wokeness" and legitimacy because they "do not see race." It could be a seemingly innocuous phrase like, "I don't care if you're Black, White, or Purple, as long as you're a nice person." This colorblind mindset does more harm than good, especially when considering narrative works meant to create empathy. Consider this quote from Ebony Elizabeth Thomas when thinking about the realities of "colorblindness"

> The trouble with colorblind ideologies in text and culture is that by not noticing race, writers and other creatives do the work of encoding it taboo.

> While silence and evasion around race in dystopian science fiction is "understood to be a graceful, even generous, liberal gesture," implying the inevitability of a post-racial future, this silence also has the effect of confusing readers. Even worse… is that authors and society have, in [Toni] Morrison's words, "transferred internal conflicts to a 'blank darkness' consisting of conveniently bound and violently silenced Black bodies," creating a "playground for the Imagination" (59).

Methods

As I worked through my analysis of *The Hunger Games* novels, I noticed a desire to utilize the analysis beyond the scope of a paper. Practical application, especially when discussing educational plans, presents a powerful way to intervene in the scholarly conversation, no matter the topic. The lesson should also provide students with a safe experience to practice such intervention. "We should strive to provide a venue in which students can use their language skills to promote change and contend with social responsibility and justice (Greene, 1993a; hooks, 1994)" (Simmons, 31). By creating this conceptual lesson plan, I hope to share this with other educators and ultimately begin to work through pedagogical frameworks that promote more profound thought and more equitable results.

bell hooks once said, "The classroom remains the most radical space of possibility in the academy." I will not be as presumptuous as to put words in bell hooks' mouth. However, this quote is the clearest and most definite way I could hope to indicate the effect I hope to have as an educator. In many ways, academia is an exclusionary and elite field. In creating the type of lesson plan, utilizing popular culture and collaborative technology, I aim to exist in that radical space of possibility that hooks presented. I share this existence with Elizabeth Savage[2] and her pedagogical framework.

Savage's article, "What We Talk Around When We Talk about the *Dick*" gave me the first spark of inspiration in my goal of the application. In her article, I saw how a scholar could

examine works through lenses that seemingly have no relation. The article discusses how Savage teaching *Moby-Dick* through a feminist lens, even if nothing in the text denotes the possibility of that reading, is beneficial in many ways. First, the approach helps her to confront and work through her understandings of the literary canon; "Changing the way I read and teach *Moby-Dick* has also changed my thinking about American literature and has made visible assumptions about American identity I hadn't even realized I carried into my reading practices" (Savage, 103). She also presents the idea that an unexpected critical lens can aid students in understanding the literary canon more fully.

> For students to understand the power and purpose of all experimental works, as well as poetry and prose that counters the racism and sexism conveyed by now-infamous dead white male writers in formally conventional ways, they must read (and not just hear referenced on CNN) the works the canon comprises (106).

Reflecting once again on bell hooks' view of the classroom, Savage echoes my goal in her way, stating very plainly, "Teaching *Moby-Dick* helps me reveal the faultiness of the 'us versus them' mindset still governing academia and beyond" (92). Educators dismantling the divisive nature of academia (and society) lays the groundwork for more compassionate and thoughtful interactions outside the classroom.

Savage's reasons for teaching Moby-Dick are like why I want to teach YADF – namely, *The Hunger Games*. She lays it out in her article;

> ... I teach *Moby-Dick* because it's about everything: because it disturbs categories of gender and sexuality upon which patriarchy and the canon are built; because its considerations of reading, truth, language, and friendship serve the feminist principles I hold (92).

With Savage's article in mind and in my resource folder, I have the framework ideas I need to develop an actual lesson plan. Utilizing a template from the University of Toronto -

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, (see Figure 1) and adjusting it to my use, I created a tangible example of a class period.

When I was in college, my favorite courses were the ones that utilized materials (regardless of medium) related to culture, specifically popular culture. Applying academic concepts to the media that I already consumed was a natural way for me to feel connected to the learning outcomes my professors created. As I work towards a graduate degree, I try to connect my learning to outside media. Having tangible reminders of what I learn in the classroom and seeing how these concepts manifest in multiple ways illuminates the real-world implications that I'm always searching for, "Lisa Lowe notes that culture is a site of shaping, constructing, and reconstructing what citizenship means regardless of what the law dictates. In the same way, popular culture illuminates the meaning of race and of structural and cultural racism" (Kinney, 42). Prior to explaining how a lesson plan would flow, it is important to have a baseline understanding of the literature I would use and why it would be useful in an academic environment.

Figure 1 - Sample Lesson Plan from OISE

Lesson Plan Template

Source : http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/supo/Forms_Resources/Lesson_Plan_Templates/index.html

LESSON PLAN

Date: _____

Title of the Lesson: _____ Unit of Study: _____

Background Information:

Grouping:

Learning Expectations:

Assessment:

Lesson:

- o Mental Set
- ☐ Sharing the Purpose/ Objectives
- ☐ Input
- ☐ Modelling
- ☐ Check for Understanding
- ☐ Guided Practice
- ☐ Independent Practice
- ☐ Closure

Materials/Resources:

Bloom's Taxonomy:

- ☐ Knowledge
- ☐ Understanding
- ☐ Application
- ☐ Analysis
- ☐ Synthesis
- ☐ Evaluation

Multiple Intelligences:

- ☐ Linguistic
- ☐ Logical/Mathematical
- ☐ Spatial
- ☐ Musical
- ☐ Bodily/Kinesthetic
- ☐ Interpersonal
- ☐ Intrapersonal
- ☐ Naturalistic

Modifications:

Personal Notes/Reminders/Homework/Other Considerations:

The Hunger Games Series

Set in the post-apocalyptic United States, now known as Panem, the first book (and titular novel) in the original *Hunger Games* trilogy sets up the world for audience consumption. Audiences quickly learn that the US has been split into 14 sections (12 functional Districts, the Capitol, and one abandoned, presumed to be annihilated District). The Districts are separated from each other and very rarely communicate with citizens outside of their own District. Annually, to remember the Districts' "rebellion" against the Capitol, two "tributes" (one male and one female) aged 12-18 from each District are "reaped" and sent to an arena to participate in a deadly battle royale known as The Hunger Games. Only one competitor can win, and as far as audiences know, no "Victor" has left the Arena without killing someone. These Games are televised to all 12 Districts and the Capitol, as Katniss presents it; "To make it humiliating as well as torturous, the Capitol requires us to treat the Hunger Games as a festivity, a sporting event pitting every district against the others" (19).

In the media circus prior to the Games, Katniss learns that Peeta has loved her from afar since they were children. Their mentor, and the only surviving Victor from District 12, Haymitch Abernathy, encourages Katniss to lean into the romance, informing her that Peeta has made her desirable to the public.[3] This desirability makes Capitol citizens invested in her survival, and once the Games begin, Katniss discovers how valuable that investment can be, especially when the Gamemakers (the Capitol citizens in charge of designing and producing the Hunger Games) announce that in this year's Hunger Games, there can be two Victors, but only if they are from the same district.

When Peeta and Katniss discover that they are the last two tributes still alive, the Gamemakers revoke the original amendment, announcing that there can only be one Victor. This

announcement spurs Katniss and Peeta to find deadly berries, both choosing to die rather than face survival without one another.[4] Ultimately, the Gamemakers end the Games the moment Katniss and Peeta put the berries in their mouths, announcing the newest Victors (345). At the end of the novel, we learn that the Capitol, specifically President Snow, viewed their act with the berries as the most dangerous thing – rebellion.

Book 2, *Catching Fire*, begins with President Snow visiting Katniss and informing her that the defiant end to her Games has started a string of small rebellions in the other Districts. Snow then gives Katniss an ultimatum, while traveling through the districts on the "Victory Tour," she must convince everyone (including Snow) that her ploy with the deadly berries was born of her love for Peeta and nothing else or face the consequences – the execution of her family and Gale. After the Victory Tour ends, the Capitol announces the new Hunger Games. Since *Catching Fire* takes place 75 years after the "Dark Days," we learn that this year's Games are different, they're known as a "Quarter Quell."[5] This Quarter Quell's tributes are chosen from the past Victors of each district, meaning that Katniss must re-enter the arena. The competition is more grueling, and the book ends on a cliffhanger, with rebels rescuing Katniss from the arena and depositing her in District 13.

The final installment in the original trilogy, *Mockingjay*, completes Katniss's narrative arc. Opening with a discussion of what really happened to District 13, audiences see how the "small" rebellion that President Snow alluded to in *Catching Fire* has grown. Through the novel, audiences see Katniss adjust to life in District 13, convince the Districts to unite against the Capitol, and eventually cope with the effects of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder years after the rebellion ends. *Mockingjay* does not have a necessarily happy ending, offering the reader more of a taste of *realpolitik*. This installment focuses primarily on themes of hardship, loyalty,

and morality. From an educational perspective, this novel would be useful for a unit on narrator reliability or identity formation and reevaluation. In the aftershocks of the climactic battle scene, Katniss and Peeta must learn to trust each other again as each party works through their own trauma and grief.

Published 12 years after the original installment, *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes* is considered both a spin-off and a prequel to *The Hunger Games* trilogy. This book follows a teenage President Snow (when he was still known only as Coriolanus Snow) as he makes his rise to fame as a Mentor in the 10th Hunger Games. This novel is an interesting oppositional force to the original trilogy, despite taking place nearly 65 years prior to Katniss's journey. Audiences can see how the residents of the Capitol view those who live in the Districts, even when their situations are not necessarily "better."[6]

Snow's participation as a Mentor brings him up close and personal with the true horrors of the Games. After sneaking around and trying to save his tribute, the Capitol's government exiles him to District 12 to become a Peacekeeper. His experiences in District 12 almost push him to rebel, but at the last moment, his ambitious attitude sets in, and he returns to the Capitol, ready to prove his family's motto, "Snow lands on top," true.

Dystopian Literature, Revisited

Since March 2020, society has heard the phrase "unprecedented times" more often than we thought possible. When Coronavirus first hit the United States (US), and we went into lockdown, I remember people describing their trips to the grocery store as "eerie" and "dystopic."[8] In August 2021, Twitter user @Hugo_Book_Club wrote "Dystopian fiction is when you take things that happen in real life to marginalized populations and apply them to people with privilege" (see Figure 2). Staying within the scope of the US, the laws presented, and in

some cases enacted, against people with uteruses are compared to Atwood's *The Handmaid's Tale*.[9] In my experience, the collegiate classroom is often one of the most diverse spaces to find oneself. In many of the classes, I would find myself learning things about my peers that I never imagined, from backgrounds, to passions and life goals, to the guilty pleasures they wouldn't talk about with other people. This diversity within the classroom can echo the diversity within YADF. More broadly, the Young Adult and Dystopian genres also echo the diversity in the classroom, each in unique ways; "Dystopian literature fits well with adolescent literature in a generic sense: both are literatures of the disempowered, the oppressed and repressed, those subject to and yet resisting the hegemony of their worlds—they are inherently literatures of resistance" (Jones, 225). With the oldest members of Generation-Z (Gen-Z)[10] turning 23 this year, college-level educators should be aware of the generational attitudes and beliefs. This generation is not only motivated to create positive change, but they are also committed to understanding their Return on Investment (ROI) on the choices they make. This is especially clear in extracurricular decisions, and it can also be applied to Gen-Z's attitude toward education. YADF has consistently proven itself to be a genre of resistance and change. These themes offer Gen-Z education and hope as the main sources of YADF's ROI. In practice, S.R. Toliver[11] presents the genre's effect as such.

> YADF gives readers the opportunity to question the current world and themselves. The problems faced by YADF characters resonate with young readers because the novels replicate aspects of modern society with surprising accuracy, as the authors write to 'extrapolate on current social, political, or economic trends,' prompting adolescents to critically analyze facets of the society in which they live to promote a more positive future existence (Serafini and Blasingame 147) (Toliver, 196).

Figure 2 - Tweet from @Hugo_Book_Club, August 2021

Application

From my own analysis of the series, the two books worth utilizing for discussions of invisible whiteness would be *The Hunger Games* and *The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*. Since Katniss and President Snow are literary foils for the entirety of the original trilogy, it opens yet another avenue of education.

> *The Hunger Games* series, demonstrating a complex presentation of anxieties that may be interpreted in terms of our own world, exceeds most representatives of Young Adult dystopian fiction, therefore, it appears to be one of the best tools that the Young Adult literary market offers at the moment for such a purpose (Limpár, 395).

I think that a reading list containing all four of Collins's *Hunger Games* novels, excerpts, and short stories within the YADF genre, and works of critical scholarship would provide a well-rounded understanding of any of the themes and topics I have presented thus far.

The Hunger Games is an excellent choice for examining and critiquing whiteness's invisibility. Readers should examine Katniss and her fellow tribute Rue from District 11. When audiences meet Rue, we are aware of her parallels to Katniss's sister, Prim. Both are twelve years old, participating in their first Reaping, small-bodied, and the pictures of innocence. When14-year-old Amandla Stenberg accepted the role of Rue, the public reaction was full of racist remarks and vitriolic hate. While these attitudes were not surprising given the amount of racism built into society, it was surprising that people were shocked to find out that Rue was Black. In *The Hunger Games*, Rue is one of the few characters that Collins explicitly racializes. In a novel where most of the characters are racially ambiguous, audiences can assume that Collins choosing to describe a character's race is significant.

> Suzanne Collins's deliberate construction of Rue as the symbol of innocence meant that some readers automatically imagined her as White. After all, in what universe, fictional or real, is a Black child or teen innocent? Certainly this is not the case in our schools, with their attention-grabbing discipline gaps that anticipate the school-to-prison pipeline. Certainly this is not the case in our parks and playgrounds, where young Tamir Rice of Cleveland was stolen from the world long before his time. And it is certainly not the case in contemporary children's and young adult literature, where Black kids and teens are underrepresented, and when they do appear, are often viewed as 'unlikeable' or "unrelatable" (Thomas, 58).

From her district to the way she dies, Rue reflects representation. More than that, Rue plays into a specific role that many characters of color and Black characters play,

> Within American folk and literary traditions, the primary narrative function of magical Negro characters is to assist White protagonists on their heroic journeys. Although Rue's death is far too tragic for the magical Negro trope, she is part of a long tradition of Black female characters serving as "the

> help," since her first encounter with Katniss in the arena is to offer aid, pointing to a wasp's nest as both danger and opportunity (Thomas, 50).

Rue's help is the reason Katniss survives, and after her death, Katniss uses Rue as one of her reasons to make it to the end and survive the Games. However, Rue is so much more than a representation of innocence, Katniss's savior, or a reminder of Prim. Her death especially, is a blatant reminder of the barbarity of the Games. Readers are reminded that the Capitol is willing to let these children die if they have control over the districts, not unlike the present-day attitudes towards violence against children, especially Black children.

Outside of physical characteristics, readers can also find blatant descriptions of the social inequities many districts face within the novel.[7] Each district has a specific industry, and it seems that some districts are more well-off than others. For example, the tributes from District 1 and District 2 are considered "Career Tributes" because children train from the time they start school to participate in The Hunger Games. District 1 produces most of the luxury items and District 2 produces weaponry, making these two districts the wealthiest as well. District 11 is known as the agricultural district. Despite producing the food for Panem, District 11 citizens are not allowed to eat much of the product they harvest. In fact, they are actively punished if they do so,

> Much as in US slavery and debt peonage, the people of District 11 are not allowed to consume the crops they grow. The punishment for eating the crops in District 11 is whipping, which Katniss says is rare in District 12. Even worse, a three-year-old in Rue's district was killed for playing with the night-vision goggles used by the orchard workers' supervisors. When Katniss learns of this violence, she thinks to herself, "Hearing this makes me feel like District 12 is some sort of safe haven. Of course, people keel over from starvation, but I can't imagine the Peacekeepers murdering a simpleminded child" (Thomas, 50).

From an educational standpoint, *Catching Fire* is perfect for discussions of morality and the influences of media on society. Analysis of this book would build well upon the lessons from The Hunger Games, specifically concerning how race is presented, messaged, or glossed

over. The themes of rebellion presented in *The Hunger Games* are also reinforced here, and classes can perform a textual analysis of the characters and their actions to develop a more concrete understanding.

Mockingjay, in a more explicit manner than its predecessors, highlights a connection between Panem and Ancient Rome. This connection can be a pathway into discussions of the gladiator fights of the Roman Empire. The gladiators were often slaves and participated in these fights unwillingly.[12] This connection to the Roman Empire can also turn into a connection with America's own history of slavery practices. It requires more background information than other works in the series, but it is information worth delving into.

The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes is also one of my top choices to critique whiteness's invisibility because of the different point-of-view. Asking students to examine this book after they've examined *The Hunger Games* can provide some discussion of the differences in perception and how perceptions held by the dominant culture (in this case, the Capitol) can affect society. In *The Hunger Games* series, students have several different ways to look at how present-day constructs are used and manipulated by Collins's characters; "In her article 'Critical Conversations on Whiteness in Young Adult Literature,' Melissa Schieble argues that critical literacy benefits from acknowledging whiteness as a construct and examining how that construct is reinforced or challenged in YA literature" (Coste, 57). Utilizing the lesson plan template from OISE, the example I created is meant to work through a conversation that fits into this critical literacy Schieble mentions (see Figure 3). Within this lesson plan, I reference an alternative gauge for class participation (see Figure 4 for application).

Figure 3 - OISE Lesson Plan Adapted for My Use

Lesson Plan

Class Information: N/A for this example
Class Length: 50 minutes

Learning Expectations:
- By the end of this lesson students should:
  - Build on their close reading skills to discern meaning
  - Differentiate between overt and implicit themes of race and racism
  - Begin their understanding of "strategic whiteness" as it is related to *The Hunger Games*

Assessment:
- Class Participation
  - Conversation contribution
  - Google Form (distributed at the start of every meant to give students space to participate in alternative ways) (see Figure 4)

Background Information:
- Students are entering this lesson having read the following:
  - "Racist *Hunger Games* Fans are Very Disappointed" by Dodai Stewart from *Jezebel*
  - Part II: "The Games" of *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins

Grouping: N/A for this example

Lesson:
- Open class with scheduled student presenter (covering what we discussed last class period and a question based on readings for the day to begin discussion) [5 minutes]
- Class discussion based on student question [10 minutes] and transition into discussion of readings for the day
- Discussion for THG Part II: "The Games" [30 minutes]
  - Begin with "strategic whiteness"[1] quote from Thomas
  - Through this section of the novel, how are we witnessing media and its manipulation?
  - Where did you see internalized racism displayed throughout the novel?
  - Why do you think Collins included these themes and details?
  - After reading Part I and Part II, do you see the districts divided based on ethnic or racial backgrounds? Why or Why not?
  - How does *The Hunger Games* disrupt the idea of strategic whiteness?

Mental Set
- ☐ Sharing the Purpose/Objectives
- ☐ Input
- ☐ Modelling
- ☐ Check for Understanding
- ☐ Guided Practice
- ☐ Independent Practice
- ☐ Closure

Materials/Resources:
- "Racist *Hunger Games* Fans are Very Disappointed" by Dodai Stewart from *Jezebel*
- *The Hunger Games* book

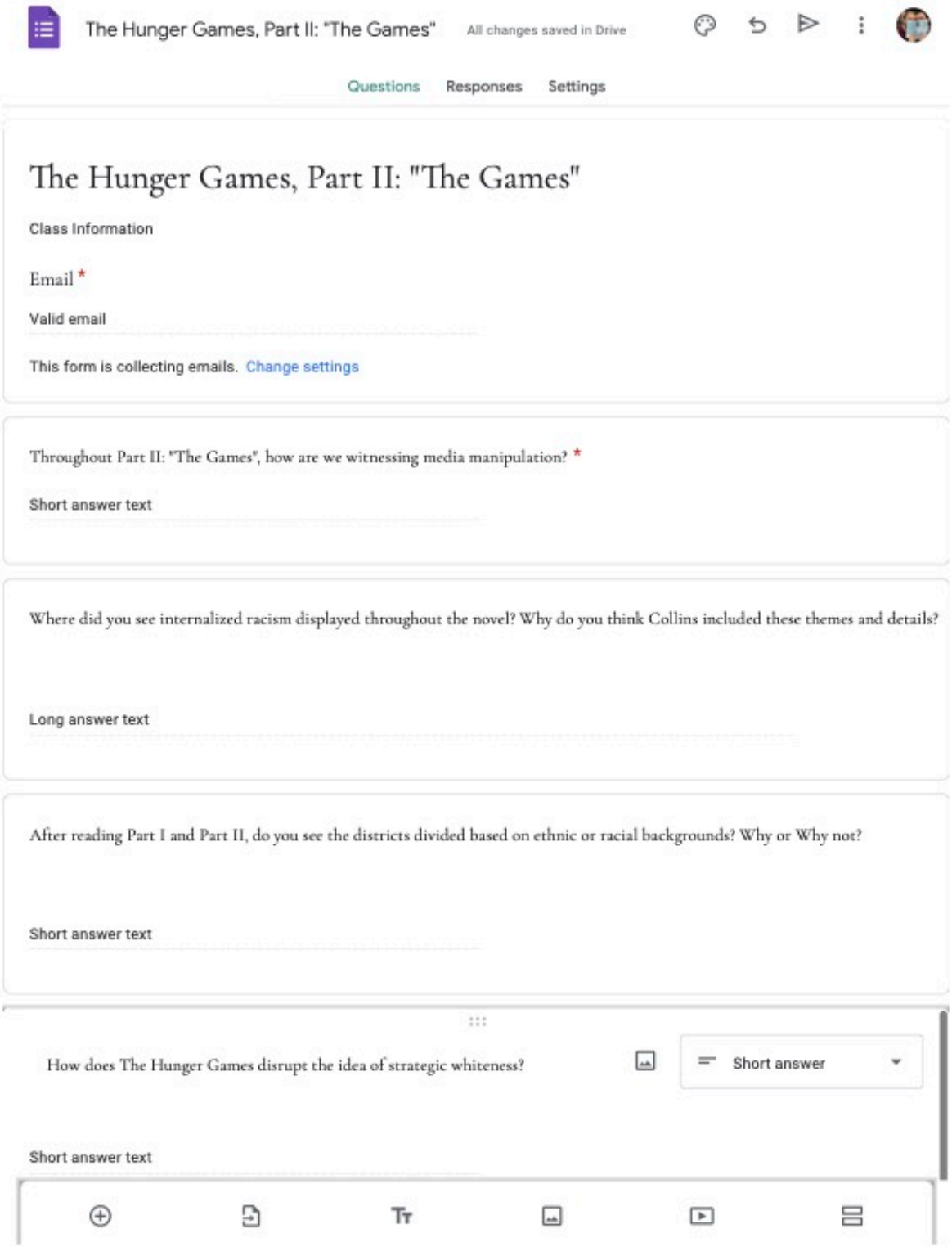
Bloom's Taxonomy:
- ☐ Knowledge
- ☐ Understanding
- ☐ Application
- ☐ Analysis
- ☐ Synthesis
- ☐ Evaluation

Multiple Intelligences:
- ☐ Linguistic
- ☐ Logical/Mathematics
- ☐ Spatial
- ☐ Musical
- ☐ Bodily/Kinesthetic
- ☐ Interpersonal
- ☐ Intrapersonal
- ☐ Naturalistic

Modifications:
- N/A for this example, but helpful to keep in mind in actual practice

Personal Notes/Reminders/Homework/Other Considerations:
- Homework
  - Before the next class, students should;
    - Read Part III of *The Hunger Games*
    - Read "The Imminent Whitewashing Of The Hunger Games' Heroine" by Sarah Seltzer from *Jezebel*

Figure 4 - Class Participation Assessment



Conclusion

As I think back to Fall 2016, I wonder what would have been different if we had engaged in clearer discussions of identity, the dangers of hegemonic narratives, or explored the nuance of coded language. By making the choice to create space in a lesson plan (or several) that encourages students to critically examine texts for examples of strategic whiteness (Projansky and Ono), educators are presenting students with the tools to become more socially conscious and responsible citizens. YADF is one of the best genres through which students can perform this work because it inspires students towards the desire for change rather than scaring them away from the power of their authentic voice; "Rather than predicting a bleak future for the young persons of today, this dystopian trend may very well be pointing toward a more positive future, at least in teams of political engagement" (Ames, 18). In the interest of continuing this research, the best next step would be to see the lesson plan in action. Once it has gone through the trial of classroom use, then I can reevaluate and reshape the plan to best fit my actual teaching style and my students' learning styles. Ultimately, the best way to engage students is through educational pursuits that utilize relatable sources in which they can find themselves. Once students find that spark, it is exactly as Collins puts it; "'Fire is catching!'... 'And if we burn, you burn with us!'" (*Mockingjay*, 132). As educators, our passion for the work we do ignites when the spark lights in our students. Our collective fire catches and turns into an unending cycle of growth.

NOTES

1. See Megan Schmidt's article "How Reading Fiction Increases Empathy and Encourages Understanding" on *DiscoverMagazine.com*.

2. Elizabeth Savage is a self-described "poet, feminist critic, and professor based in West Virginia." She is a professor of English at Fairmont State University and "she teaches courses in 19th, 20th, and 21st century American literature, literary criticism, experimental poetry, women, and gender studies"

3. "Haymitch grabs my shoulders and pins me against the wall. 'Who cares? It's all a big show. It's all how you're perceived. The most I could say about you after your interview was that you were nice enough, although that in itself was a small miracle. Now I can say you're a heartbreaker. Oh, oh, oh, how the boys back home fall longingly at your feet. Which do you think will get you more sponsors?'" (*The Hunger Games*, 135)

4. "*We both know they have to have a victor.* Yes, they have to have a victor. Without a victor, the whole thing would blow up in the Gamemakers' faces. They'd have failed the Capitol. Might possibly even be executed, slowly and painfully while the cameras broadcast it to every screen in the country. (*The Hunger Games*, 344).

5. "President Snow goes on to tell us what happened in the previous Quarter Quells. 'On the twenty-fifth anniversary, as a reminder to the rebels that their children were dying because of their choice to initiate violence, every district was made to hold an election and vote on the tributes who would represent it.' … 'On the fiftieth anniversary,' the president continues, 'as a reminder that two rebels died for each Capitol citizen, every district was required to send twice as many tributes.' … 'And now we honor our third Quarter Quell,' … Without hesitation, he reads, 'On the seventy-fifth anniversary, as a reminder to the rebels that even the strongest among them cannot overcome the power of the Capitol, the male and female tributes will be reaped from their existing pool of victors.'" (*Catching Fire*, 171-172)

6. "How was he to live? Borrow? Being in debt in the Capitol was historically a ticket to being a Peacekeeper, and that came with a twenty-year commitment to who knew where. They'd ship him off to some horrid backwater district where the people were hardly better than animals… Everyone knew what happened if you went to the districts. You were written off. Forgotten. In the eyes of the Capitol, you were basically dead." (*The Ballad of Songbirds and Snakes*, 36)

7. "The reaping system is unfair, with the poor getting the worst of it. You become eligible for the reaping the day you turn twelve. That year, your name is entered once. At thirteen, twice. And so on and so on until you reach the age of eighteen, the final year of eligibility, when your name goes into the pool seven times. That's true for every citizen in all twelve districts in the entire country of Panem. But here's the catch. Say you are poor and starving as we were. You can opt to add your name more times in exchange for

tesserae. Each tesserae is worth a meager year's supply of grain and oil for one person. You may do this for each of your family members as well. So, at the age of twelve, I had my name entered four times. Once, because I had to, and three times for tesserae for grain and oil for myself, Prim, and my mother." (*The Hunger Games*, 13)

8. See Carolina Bologna's article "45 Tweets About Grocery Shopping in the Age of COVID-19" on *HuffPost.com*.

9. See Jackie Calmes's op-ed "Column: With Texas abortion law, a far-fetched dystopia has come to pass" on *LATimes.com*.

10. See Alec Tyson, Brian Kennedy, and Cary Funk's article "Gen Z, Millennials, Stand Out for Climate Change Activism, Social Media Engagement With Issue" on *PewResearch.Org*

11. See S.R. Toliver's chapter "Eliminating Extermination, Fostering Existence: Diverse Dystopian Fiction and Female Adolescent Identity" in *Beyond the Blockbusters: Themes and Trends in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction*.

12. See "The Roman Gladiator" webpage from *UChicago.edu*

13. "In the movie version of The Hunger Games, Jennifer Lawrence, a blue-eyed blonde actress, was cast as Katniss, and her hair was dyed brunette for the role. Media scholars Sarah Projansky and Kent A. Ono characterize this phenomenon as strategic whiteness. It involves re-centering White people within our popular media without explicitly calling attention to that fact. In a narrative of a dystopian future that is purportedly post-racial, the racial hierarchies of our own world are reinscribed" (Ebony Elizabeth Thomas, *The Dark Fantastic*, 40).

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CHAPTER III: "I AM BOTH WORSE AND BETTER THAN YOU THOUGHT": IMPLICATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF TRAUMA REPRESENTATION IN FANTASY LITERATURE

Introduction

In my freshman year of college, I took an Introduction to Psychology course. My professor was a little odd, often brash, and had the tendency to teach based on her opinions more than facts, but my classmates and I pushed through (because it was a General Education course, and we needed a C or above to pass). Right before midterm exams, we began our unit on abnormal psychology, and my professor made it a point to tell our class that all people with Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) were "war-hungry monsters." At this point, I was understanding my new normal after several traumatic events, including a bout with cancer, and had lived with the PTSD/Complex PTSD (C-PTSD) diagnosis for over a year. Sitting in class hearing my professor say this sent me reeling. Was this how people viewed me? This extremely stigmatized view of my diagnosis by an authority figure I was supposed to trust made me want to utilize my favorite (and only) coping skill at that point, reading. In the books I chose, I often found comfort in the way characters would advocate for themselves and the struggles they faced.

Fast forward four years, and I revisit the fantasy genre for the first time since I was a child. While reading Sarah J. Maas's *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series, I repeatedly found myself identifying with the protagonist, Feyre, as she attempts to cope with being taken prisoner, losing access to her family, sexual assault, and facing death multiple times. The most relatable part for me to identify with was Feyre's radical acceptance of her trauma. The messaging is clear; Feyre has been through some of the worst things someone could experience, but what

matters is her life and continued progress forward. There are also several scenes featuring Feyre painting ornate works depicting her time in captivity, reminding audiences of art therapy, a very common method of treatment for patients with PTSD.[1]

Fantasy. The word itself conjures up images of magic users, prophecies, and battles between Good and Evil.

> Fantasy, from the Greek *φαντασία* meaning 'making visible,' is a genre of fiction that concentrates on imaginary elements (the fantastic). This can mean magic, the supernatural, alternate worlds, superheroes, monsters, fairies, magical creatures, mythological heroes—essentially, anything that an author can imagine outside of reality. With fantasy, the magical or supernatural elements serve as the foundation of the plot, setting, characterization, or storyline in general. Nowadays, fantasy is popular across a huge range of media—film, television, comic books, games, art, and literature—but its predominant and most influential place has always been in literature.[2]

Speculative fiction can be an ideal place to begin this conversation. As seen from the definition above, fantasy literature (along with most subgenres of speculative fiction) is equated with the "fantastic" or unrealistic. The speculative (and its Fantasy subgenre) tend to focus on facets of the human experience and offer commentary through completely fictionalized worlds. This field of speculative literature is an excellent location to break down societal anxieties, like sexual assault or parental abuse. Fantasy literature follows this pattern and takes it a step further by adding a magic system. The magic allows audiences to disconnect from "reality," priming the genre as a method of escapism. Some of the main draws to the genre include the lengthy book series, character-driven plot, and the distinct lack of stereotypes for the younger age groups.[3] The events and/or signifiers mentioned in definitions of Fantasy are often traumatic in nature, even if there is no specific mention of trauma.

Furthermore, with regular features of the genre, including wars, deceased loved ones, or physical altercations, it is surprising that trauma is not addressed in a more in-depth manner. The

placement of these features is important as they tend to exist as either the catalyst (in the onset) or the climax (in the end) of the story. Beginning at the onset of or just after a traumatic event, the narrative could follow along as the character works through the very thing that could be their downfall. Having a traumatic event as the climax often closes the door on depictions of responses and eventual resolution.

Since the mid-19th century, fantasy literature has been gaining and maintaining popularity. Depictions of trauma within this genre have the potential to aid readers in actualizing and understanding their own trauma while also helping them find the words to discuss their experiences. In August 2020, Fantasy Fiction was proven to be one of the most popular genres. With approximately 350 million books (or 13%) of about 2,594,000,000 books falling into the Fantasy genre, it's hard to deny its potential impact. Furthermore, the Science Fiction/Fantasy genre is in the top 5 most profitable genres earning about $590.2 million.[4] It is my belief that the fantasy genre's popularity and major features make it one of the prime genres to aid readers in understanding, educating, or accepting trauma victims and responses.

Significance

If fantasy literature is as pervasive as the trends show, it becomes increasingly imperative to consider the effects of its contents on readers. The draw to fantasy centers on its clear divide between good and evil, "The real world is morally murky and troublingly complex, so the black-and-white worlds of traditional fantasy can be a calming antidote to that."[5] Even if the truth is much more complex than this, this basic feeling is still true. Fantasy's prevalence as a genre shows us that it has the audience to make a difference, all it needs is the push into the spotlight as a valid method to aid healing.

Trauma changes the brain and its function. Trauma is "a psychic injury, [especially]. one caused by emotional shock the memory of which is repressed and remains unhealed; an internal injury, [especially] to the brain, which may result in a behavioural disorder of organic origin. Also, the state or condition so caused."[6] As the definition states, trauma can cause the brain to remain unhealed, typically due to repression, or the brain trying to protect itself in the short term. Since the definition of trauma is so broad, one would think that it would be an approachable topic that people feel comfortable discussing and investigating without fear. Unfortunately, this is not the case, as seen from my beginning anecdote. Trauma is a subject that has a stigma. There is no avenue around this fact. However, by writing literature that displays a variety of representations of experience, authors can help decrease the stigmas. Trauma theory is an academic path to discussions of trauma. Originally developed by Sigmund Freud, trauma theory was not widely discussed or accepted until after World War I when soldiers returned home and ended up with a PTSD diagnosis.[7] At this point, the public fascination with trauma skyrocketed. Despite this awareness and interest, trauma theory was not considered an emerging field until the 1990s (Wood, 6). Furthering our understanding of trauma theory is understanding how societal views of trauma have shifted and so has the way women are treated for trauma.[8] This intervention in trauma theory provides some important context for readers, allowing them to see what practitioners may be thinking or utilizing when practicing actual treatment. As a reminder, "trauma" as a term is not one "unitary concept," the varied presentations make it a "contested term" (Tseris, 160).

Framework and Methods

The nature of this work requires two separate approaches: one from a literary standpoint, and one from a psychological standpoint. I will be focusing more on the literary side because I

consider myself a literature scholar first. With that in mind, I will be working through the literature from the Psychology field and synthesizing that information with the literary discussions I found. As revealed previously, Fantasy as a genre is popular. With that in mind, I have determined that Fantasy is a useful tool for not only theorizing about but also thinking of issues like trauma. A major factor in this determination comes from my belief that Contemporary Fantasy (and honestly Young Adult (YA) literature, in general) has become more explicit in the author's choice to include depictions of "the hard stuff" or topics that wouldn't be considered appropriate for small talk.

To be frank, much of the work that went into creating this section felt unfamiliar. I struggled to understand the need to depict the process I used to make my way through my research question as I felt like the pathing was clear. However, as I began the actual trek through the research, I found that mapping my pathway through this process helped me track the work I completed and any potential avenues for further exploration. As I started this project, I wanted to be sure to acknowledge the significant number of books that include trauma representation in some way, shape, or form. It is not a subject simply located in the Fantasy genre, and because of that, I had quite an extensive selection from which I could have chosen. Ultimately, Fantasy won out for a variety of reasons. The clearest reason that sealed this decision was that the variety of traumas and methods of depictions were numerous enough that I knew I had enough of a selection to feel like the choices I made were my own. In other genres, there is not as much variety, so the work I would be doing would feel very homogeneous. Furthermore, I chose works with contemporary young adult Fantasy parameters because I find the works located within compulsively readable. Despite how formulaic some of the stories may be, there is always enough of a difference (whether that be in writing style, world build, magic system, etc.) that the

stories feel unique and approachable. Like any research project, prior to being able to perform analysis, I had to decide which literary works could be discussed in a reasonable manner. This decision-making mostly consisted of me reading several popular works in Fantasy, published within the past ten to twenty years. While I performed my initial read-through of each work, I made sure to note what, if any, representations of trauma existed within. I also worked to parse through the existing scholarship on this relationship to find literature that supported and negated my positioning.

When I created my research plans, there were two facets of Fantasy that I had not originally considered; modern fairy tale retellings and how much detail authors provide when writing about traumatic incidents. This consideration has a direct impact on how useful any given fantasy work can be in terms of understanding trauma. Depictions of torture, often, will have the very real risk of triggering readers. In trauma, a "trigger" can often cause unpleasant mental side effects like panic attacks or paranoia or physical side effects like nausea or sweating. I also had to consider how fairy tale characters are written. These characters are often described as "depthless" since most of their characterization has been "sanitized" for the genre's main audience -- children.[9] This sanitization is notably absent in modern retellings, and this could be that often the retellings are geared toward an older audience. This new level of representation could be conflated with real-world concerns surrounding sexual violence (Jorgenson, 4). The final point that I think is worth exploring has to do with comparing works considered "dark" fairy tale retellings (essentially those works that feature traumas like torture) to the horror genre. This conflation makes complete sense to me, seeing as both genres are considered subsections of speculative fiction and they both address cultural anxieties in similar ways. Reflecting on Sarah J. Maas's *A Court of Thorns and Roses* series; by witnessing the main character's trauma,

“readers may experience the same voyeuristic and even visceral response as viewers of a horror film” (Jorgenson, 9). This response displays the fine line that trauma representations live on. If a depiction is seen as too graphic, it does begin to represent horror in its more stereotypical presentation. If the depiction is too vague, then the author runs the risk of readers missing the message completely. Ultimately, “these works [fairy-tale retellings or “dark” fairytales] can offer a perspective on trauma that includes reckoning with its aftermath and eventually healing from it, lessons that real-world readers can to some degree replicate if they realize how much those lessons harmonize with our understandings of trauma today” (Jorgenson, 13).

A critical idea for my research is cultural authenticity.[10] Cultural authenticity (CA) is one of the main methods of author accountability. It is how authors communicate their experience with a subject, often located within the disability community. “The cultural authenticity of a text reaches a broader conceptualization than just conversations of race or of insider versus outsider, as all forms of culture, including disability (Hall, 31) should be included” (Brown, 143). This communication often occurs in the peritext. Peritext is “the parts of the book that come with the publication of the text and are mainly the responsibility of the publisher to design, elicit, and produce…” (Brown, 142). The biggest drawback to this communication is that there is no way to really "prove" cultural authenticity just by looking at an author, the most accepted way is for the authors to verbalize their CA in some way. This is especially noticeable with diagnoses like trauma (PTSD, Grief, etc.) or other mental illnesses and disabilities because of its invisibility. For Brown, “‘Accuracy’ means that the aspect of culture is described within the realm of what would be realistically experienced” (Brown, 143). From my understanding of this topic, CA is something that lends itself to fields like Disability and Trauma studies because it is a way that authors can prove the work they are performing. “Without sharing the experiential details within

the peritext, the reader is unaware of the ways their [the author] experience or the experience of others might be presented in the narrative" (Brown, 144). They can communicate their expertise and provide why they should be taken seriously. This is not to say that I believe authors should have to self-disclose to have their work well-received. In a lot of ways, I think that by normalizing CA markers (like writing about their CA in the author's notes or within an afterword) the call for self-disclosure could be mitigated. Another difficulty that authors face is that sometimes readers will not include the peritextual elements in their reading experience (Brown, 142).

Once I felt confident that I had a solid foundation to build upon, I began moving into an evaluation phase. To perform the analysis I had in mind, I decided that two different lenses would be most useful. The first was an evaluation of Cultural Authenticity, and the second was a literary analysis of the primary texts. In stories of disability, an author's cultural authenticity is what can signal whether readers receive the book well, and if readers with the featured disability feel represented. I ended up creating three different levels of representation, using cultural authenticity and delivery as the measures. This was an important part of how I approached this project because it helped me to clarify what I wanted to investigate. The three levels are as follows: Level One (1) - Authentic and Internal, Level Two (2) - Authentic and External, and Level Three (3) - Semi-Authentic and Non-Existent. Thus, works I deem "Semi-Authentic" consist of characters who may experience trauma, but it is not a dimensional experience. It may be mentioned in relation to a character, but it either relies on stereotypes ("war-hungry monster") or it seems to have no actual impact on the character's approach to life. Essentially, "They are using the influx of these ideas [of disability] to support the story but not the actual reality of their readers" (Brown, 141, brackets by me). The "External" versus "Internal" refers to CA's

dissemination. “External” dissemination is considered anything located in the epitext of the work,[11] and “Internal” is any CA that audiences can locate within the work and its peritext. Utilizing this methodology, I believe that it is possible to conduct further research within the Fantasy genre or work to apply it to other genres (specifically within YA literature at first) to develop a broader view of how representation occurs. I found an opportunity to think about my questions and theories of representation by utilizing fantasy because the literature is so full of entry points. No matter what direction you approach the literature from, you have a way into exploration. Fantasy is often seen as a method of escapism, and thus, can be wielded in a variety of ways, both academically and personally. I also believe that Fantasy has the potential to help with decision-making, as it provides readers with a way to remove themself from a situation and then return when they feel comfortable.

Analysis

After learning about the ideas of trauma research, treatment, and author authenticity, I wanted to look at authors who may or may not display it. From my research, I agree with several other scholars who have performed studies involving trauma theory; Trauma's inclusion in this genre begins the task of what, to some, may seem impossible: the destigmatization of trauma. For example, by providing peritexts, authors and publishers signal authenticity to readers. This authenticity, regardless of whether it’s an experience of the self or research, will help perform a rhetorical action to readers which convinces them that this book is worth reading. In my experience, authenticity is what helps make the difference and what seals my decision about reading a book. Ultimately, I did not decide on this topic to determine whether these books are objectively authentic, as that is not a determination any one person is qualified to make. However, I will determine if the work is authentic to me and specify what makes it that way. The

representation's authenticity and how the authors address it helped me to measure all my pieces in the same manner so that one book wouldn't outweigh the other.

Tracy Deonn's debut novel, *Legendborn*, falls into the Level 1 category for me. This work is an Arthurian retelling set on the campus of UNC-Chapel Hill. The protagonist, 16-year-old Bree Matthews, loses her mother in an unexpected car accident just a few months before she starts the Early College program at UNC-CH. Throughout the book, Bree refers to herself as Before Bree and After Bree, specifically referencing her behavior before losing her mother and after. After Bree displays signs of trauma response, with specific dissociations from reality and forcing herself to isolate herself emotionally from those around her. In conversation with her best friend, Bree thinks, "Because I can't just sit in our room right now. Because ever since my mother died, there's a version of me inside that wants to break things and scream."[12] Losing a relative is a form of trauma that has been so normalized that it does not read as something to be counted as representation. However, Bree is clearly undergoing an untreated trauma response, which Deonn addresses through later plot points in the book.[13] Bree finds her connection to Rootcraft, Deonn's take on a magic system called Rootwork which was developed by enslaved Africans and their descendants through America's history of chattel slavery. This experience with Rootcraft also provides Bree with a connection with her mother that she had not originally held. Deonn includes a section in her Author's Note specifically referencing Grief & Trauma. This section details how Bree's trauma is modeled after her own trauma and grief. Deonn also says, "Part of why I wrote Legendborn is because I hope to raise awareness of these sometimes-comorbid conditions, particularly when they occur due to the loss of a parent and/or when they occur in young people" (496).[14] This statement takes the time to highlight that this grief and trauma are lesser-known and lesser validated experiences for young people. *Legendborn* exists as

a Level One work to me because the depiction of trauma feels realistic (almost visceral in some respects), and Deonn takes the time in the peritext to detail her authenticity.

Leigh Bardugo's *Six of Crows* and its sequel *Crooked Kingdom* feature a variety of trauma representations presented through multiple points of view. The story focuses on a group of heist-minded teens as they try to complete jobs that will offer them all the financial ability to start fresh away from the island of Ketterdam. As I read this duo, I noticed that several of the narrating characters represented varied types of traumas. Inej Ghafa, also known as "The Wraith," was torn away from her family and sold into service at one of Ketterdam's pleasure houses. The memories of her capture still haunt her, even years later, "Inej had gotten good at anticipating when a memory might seize her, bracing for it, but this time she wasn't prepared" (274). This not only leaves her with individual trauma from separation but also sexual trauma as she is constantly faced with clients not respecting her boundaries.[15] Matthias Helvar and Nina Zenik both face military trauma, approached from serving on opposite sides of a war. Matthias also faces betrayal trauma once Nina turns him into the government when they reach Ketterdam,

> "Tell them, Nina," he demanded. "They should know how you treat your friends."
> Nina swallowed, then forced herself to meet their gazes. "I told the Kerch that he was a slaver and that he'd taken me prisoner. I threw myself on their mercy and begged them to help me. I had a seal I'd taken from a slaving ship we'd raided near the Wandering Isle. I used it as proof."[16]

In *Crooked Kingdom*, when Matthias dies, Nina's grief is heart wrenching, showing her trauma in an extremely vibrant way, "Nina screamed, a howl that tore from the black space where her heart had beat only moments before" (495). Finally, Kaz Brekker (the central protagonist for all intents and purposes) has some of the most intense traumas of the duo. As a child, Kaz faced the death of his parents, food, and housing insecurity, and lost his brother (Jordie) to a pandemic that swept through Ketterdam ruthlessly. He was infected with the illness

but managed to survive. There is a scene in the novel depicting how Kaz was lumped in with the rest of the dead and ferried over to the Reaper's Barge where those who died of infection would remain. Just when audiences think that they have reached the peak level of trauma a young man could face, Kaz uses his brother's dead body to float back to Ketterdam. This action causes almost unbearable trauma to Kaz, and audiences witness his refusal of any skin-on-skin contact, even in his late teens.[17] Additionally, Kaz has faced physical trauma and utilizes a cane for stability most of the time. In the first two chapters – about 35 pages – of *Six of Crows*, there are 8 references to Kaz and his limp or cane. As a reader, Kaz's cane appears as a symbol of his power despite trauma. This duo of works exists between Level One and Level Two for me. Bardugo includes a discussion, specifically about Kaz, in her Author's Note in *Six of Crows*. She reveals that he is loosely based on her own life and experiences with a degenerative bone disease called osteonecrosis,

> … This basically translates to "bone death," which sounds kind of gothy and romantic, but actually means that every step I take is painful and that I sometimes need to walk with a cane. It's no coincidence I chose to create a protagonist struggling with similar symptoms, and I often felt that Kaz and I were limping along this road together.[18]

I also consider this duo an example of Level Two representation, as Bardugo has participated in several interviews about the choices she made while writing. These interviews acted like Tracy Deonn's Author's Note in *Legendborn*.

J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is one of the more notable examples of Level Three representation. While the literary community has several valid reasons to call Rowling's writing into question, I am simply focusing on her methods of representation. For much of Harry Potter's life, he is faced with certain dangers. Harry's opponent, Voldemort, works to isolate and kill him, starting when Harry was just a baby. From killing Harry's parents to engaging Harry in a

nonconsensual duel or allowing his followers to torture one of Harry's best friends Hermione simply because of her heritage (she is a witch born to non-magical parents), there seems to be no boundary Voldemort won't cross to reach his goal. The biggest fault I have found in Rowling's representation is how it differs between adults and children. For most of the series, Harry Potter and his friends are actual children, all under the age of eighteen. It makes sense for their perspective of trauma to not reach full conceptualization, the children react how you would expect children to react to trauma, "He felt dirty, contaminated, as though he were carrying some deadly germ, unworthy to sit on the Underground train back from the hospital with innocent, clean people whose minds and bodies were free of the taint of Voldemort."[19] However, as they reach adulthood, Rowling simply moves the audience to full resolution without the intense work that goes into healing the level of trauma that Harry and his friends face. Rowling also does not just settle for leaving Harry's trauma unresolved, she also never provides true background into how Voldemort's childhood traumas manifested so darkly. In Book 6 (*Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*) of the series, Rowling finally provides key insight into Voldemort's upbringing, but besides his unnatural proclivity for stealing, bullying, and talking to snakes, readers are left to synthesize what he actually faced to make him so evil.[20] The only theory that truly makes sense is that since Voldemort was conceived under the effects of a love potion, he could never truly understand love, and thus, was easily swayed towards the path of evil. This one-dimensional characterization of trauma is common in Rowling's adult characters, many of whom, the audiences learn have lived through a Wizarding World War already. The series ends with an Epilogue, taking place 19 years after the "final battle." Audiences see Harry Potter and his friends all grown up, and seemingly healed from the war, "As Harry looked at her, he lowered his hand absentmindedly and touched the lightning scar on his forehead… The scar had

not pained Harry for nineteen years. All was well."[21] This epilogue completely ignores the trauma these characters faced and how they must have had to work to ensure they all recovered mentally and physically. To me, it made the trauma a single-dimensioned factor not addressed in either the peritext or epitext of the work. These factors are really what make me consider this series as a Level Three representation.

When authors like Rowling leave gaps in their story's resolution, also defined as plot holes, audiences have begun to take it upon themselves to fill the gaps. I would be remiss if I did not mention fan works in my analysis. These pieces exist as ways for the readers to enter the discussion. For example, Harry Potter has 328,945 works listed on the popular Fanfiction website *Archive of Our Own*. As I read through some of the descriptions, I noticed how many of them centered on unresolved traumas featured in the series.[22] Fanfiction works act as a meeting point between authors and audiences, and thus, seem to be a fascinating next space to explore this idea of trauma representation.

One method of pedagogy that could be beneficial as a way of introducing students to these topics is trauma-informed writing. Trauma-informed writing (TIW) is mostly grounded in a clinical approach that allows the instructor to act as a role model for a psychologically safe classroom.[23] Students understanding the importance of TIW and practicing it themselves is the first step in developing a critical eye ready to evaluate other authors and their potential use of TIW.

Thinking about TIW, I began to wonder about its relation to principles of harm reduction. Harm reduction is "a set of practical strategies and ideas aimed at reducing negative consequences associated with drug use. Harm Reduction is also a movement for social justice built on a belief in, and respect for, the rights of people who use drugs."[24] This belief has three

different types of interventions; "(H)arm (R)eduction," "(h)arm (r)eduction," and "risk reduction." Of these three, TIW practices line up strongest with the first and third interventions. "(H)arm (R)eduction intervention [is] a philosophical and political movement focused on shifting power and resources to people most vulnerable to structural violence." While "risk reduction [is] tools and services to reduce potential harm."[25] In *Six of Crows* and *Crooked Kingdom*, Bardugo writes about one of her characters, Nina, through drug addiction, "Nina woke well before dawn. As usual, her first conscious thought was of parem, and as usual, she had no appetite. The ache for the drug had nearly driven her mad last night."[26] This aspect creates a definite entrance using Harm Reduction lessons.[27] Despite the fact that TIW mostly focuses on trauma and Harm Reduction mostly focuses on drug use, I believe that the two can be linked when thinking about representation. Having access to texts that represent trauma can be harm reduction as their existence actively adds to the destigmatization of an experience like trauma.

Conclusion

When I think back to my freshman year psychology class, I come away with the knowledge that literature helped me cope with the stigmas I faced more than I realized. It is clear to me that these trauma representations, especially when accompanied by cultural authenticity markers, act as methods of harm reduction for readers. YA literature is a genre that houses a variety of experiences. YA readers need works to include stigmatized topics, and by providing representation, readers may be able to access an understanding that helps them to reach out and ask for help or search for a diagnosis. At the very least, the reader can feel a sense of community which does act as harm reduction in many cases. The Fantasy genre is one born out of society's need to escape the realities of the world. Luckily, with Tracy Deonn and Leigh Bardugo as popular authors in the genre at this moment, there is hope for the future of trauma representation.

The authors have a responsibility to consider the effect any traumatic event descriptions may have on readers. A stigmatized representation of trauma is not beneficial and has the potential to create a gap in understanding.

To fully conceptualize this topic, more research is required. The exploration should start with other texts in the fantasy genre, speculative fiction, and even fan-made works such as fan art and fan fiction. Fan works have the potential to show researchers how audiences address and come to terms with the traumas incurred in various "canon" Fantasy works. Ultimately, educating and understanding the language of trauma is the first step in creating a widespread culture of authenticity which will aid in the normalization and acceptance of traditionally ignored and misrepresented topics.

NOTES

1. See ArtTherapy.org for more examples of Art Therapy and its usage

2. See LiteraryTerms.net's definition of "Fantasy" for more.

3. See "Why is Fantasy Such a Popular Genre?" on NilesLibrary.org for further explanation.

4. See "Which Book Genre Is the Most Popular in 2021?" on ProActiveWriter.com for the full entry.

5. See Maggie Barrett's article, "Wild About Harry and Hobbits: Behind Fantasy's Appeal" for more. The article quotes American University professor Charles Cox

6. See the "Trauma" entry in the *Oxford English Dictionary* for more.

7. See Chapter 1 in *Readings of Trauma, Madness, and the Body* by Sarah Wood Anderson for more.

8. See Emma Jane Tseris's article, "Trauma Theory Without Feminism? Evaluating Contemporary Understandings of Traumatized Women" for more.

9. See Jeana Jorgensen's article, "The Thorns of Trauma: Torture, Aftermath, and Healing in Contemporary Fairy-Tale Literature" for more.

10. See Megan Brown's chapter, "'Tell Me Who I Am': Cultural Authenticity in Disability Texts" in *Beyond the Blockbusters: Themes and Trends in Contemporary Young Adult Fiction* for more.

11. See Brown's chapter, she defines "epitext" as "the information about the book that is external to the text itself, such as author interviews or reviews" (Brown, 142).

12. (*Legendborn*, 11).

13. See this description of Bree's wall, "My wall works two ways: it hides the things I need to hide and helps me show the things I need to show. Particularly useful with the Sorry for Your Loss crowd. In my mind's eye, the wall's reinforced now. Stronger than wood, iron, steel. It has to be, because I know what comes next: Charlotte and Evan will unleash the predictable stream of words everyone says when they realize they're talking to the Girl Whose Mom Died. It's like Comforting Grieving People Bingo, except when all the squares get covered, everyone loses" (*Legendborn*, 12)

14. See Tracy Deonn's "Author's Note: Grief and Trauma," (*Legendborn*, 495-6).

15. "... when the man who smelled of vanilla had begun to kiss her neck and peel away her silks, she hadn't been able to leave her body behind. Somehow his memory of her had

tied her past and present together, pinned her there beneath him. She'd cried, but he hadn't seemed to mind" (*Crooked Kingdom*, pages 275-276).

16. (*Six of Crows*, 243).

17. (Kaz Brekker's full backstory in *Six of Crows*, pp.205-212 and pp.273-276).

18. (*Six of Crows*, 463).

19. (*Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, 435).

20. *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, "Chapter 10: The House of Gaunt" (163); "Chapter 13: The Secret Riddle" (215); "Chapter 20: Lord Voldemort's Request" (352); and "Chapter 23: Horcruxes" (409).

21. (*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, 759).

22. See *Manacled* by SenLinYu, *The Auction* by LovesBitca8, and *A Season for Setting Fires* by MightBeWriting on ArchiveofOurOwn.com. Each fanwork features tags like "Alternate Universe - Voldemort Wins," "Angst," and "Drama" or "Grief/Mourning."

23. See Melissa Tayles's article "Trauma-Informed Writing Pedagogy: Ways to Support Student Writers Affected by Trauma and Traumatic Stress" for further information.

24. See "Principles of Harm Reduction." on HarmReduction.org for more information.

25. See "Respect to Connect: Undoing Stigma: Harm Reduction Interventions" on HarmReduction.org for more.

26. (*Crooked Kingdom*, 186). See also, *Six of Crows*, 422 for further context, "The first dose was the strongest, wasn't that what they'd said? The high and the power could never be replicated. She'd be chasing it for the rest of her life. Or maybe she'd be stronger than the drug."

27. See the following quote on page 84 in *Crooked Kingdom*: "*You survived the worst of it*, she had told herself. *The* parem *is out of reach, and now you can stop thinking about it*. And she'd managed for a while."

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

A graduate of Albright College, Abigail Army (Bee) is a high achiever who is committed to pursuing a career in English Education. They're currently enrolled at the University of North Carolina Greensboro, where they are pursuing a master's degree in English.

Bee knew from an early age that they wanted to work in higher education as a professor. They loved school from the moment they set foot in the classroom. They were also surrounded by professors from birth, with their grandfather, Benjamin Gray, and uncle, Benjamin Gray II both working as professors. They have loved every minute of their time in school, from exploring new topics to building strong academic skills and working in collaboration with other students. They can't wait to inspire a love of learning in their own students.

Bee currently works in UNCG's Office of Strategy and Innovation where they communicate with undergraduate students in the Transfer2Transfer and Spartan StartUp Programs. During college, Bee worked as an Albright Admissions Ambassador, Media Services Assistant, and Layout Editor for Albright's newspaper, *The Albrightian.* They also were a part of the Peer Orientation Person program, Sigma Kappa Sorority, Sigma Tau Delta, and Order of Omega Honor Societies, and Artists Striving to End Poverty.

In their spare time, Bee enjoys reading speculative fiction, writing both creative nonfiction and fiction, and making playlists. They also spend time volunteering as Sigma Kappa Sorority's District 6 Risk Management Coordinator, planning their wedding, and spending time with their three cats: Salem, Freya, and Osiris.