Their America: A Multi-Genre Take On the State of the Union's Teens

A Three-Week Conceptual Unit By Kevin Mink ELAN 7408

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Karl Marx

Rationale

Within a semester that takes the question of what it means to be an American as its "overarching concept" (Smagorinsky, 2008, 46), I will be teaching a three-week conceptual unit that investigates what, specifically, it means to be an American teen: What "history," in Marx's words, are my students making, or hoping to make, for themselves? And, with what larger forces – Marx's "circumstances" – are they contending? The investigation will begin with the reading of texts representative of a variety of genres – all by, or about, American adolescents – and conclude with the production of individual multi-genre projects, through which students will make meaning of not only the texts they have read, but also the lives, historical and circumstantial, they've led.

Is this English?

This unit is *not* about worksheets, vocabulary workbooks, and selected response exams – or any of the other activities that too often turn English classes into what Bill Bigelow (2007) calls the "memory Olympics" (68). Rather, it is about literacy, which, as Bob Fecho (2004) writes, is less a process of reading and writing than it is one of "understanding the selves we are becoming and what that means in relationship to the rest of the world" (94).

For American teens, what a world it is. As seen from right and left, the picture is – and has been for some time – one of a population besieged, under attack from various parental, educational and governmental bodies. Remember the *Nation at Risk* report?

Twenty-five years ago, a commission appointed by Ronald Reagan concluded that, had a foreign power subjected American children to the stripe of education they were then receiving in our public schools, their actions might well have constituted a *casus belli*. In the 1990s, sociologist Mike Males (1996) detailed the "punishing dislike" for youth that had led to adult America's "relentless defunding and dismantling of public and private support for the young" (5). And more recently, radical academic Lawrence Grossberg (2005), after surveying our nation's teen-hostile legislation, policy, and temperament, noted that "we have not only abandoned the current generation of kids but ... we think of them as a threat that has to be contained [and] punished" (36). In the twenty-first century, Grossberg wrote, American adolescence is akin to a "life in a war zone" (37).

It certainly is for the adolescents served by the Clarke County School District, where I am currently student teaching. According to a recent editorial in the *Athens Banner Herald*, my students are bearing the brunt of the very abandonment of which Grossberg wrote. "[G]rinding poverty, lack of a stable home life and assorted other ills affect a significant number of the young people who walk into the district's schools each day," write the editors. Incorporating Marx's ideas of "history" and "circumstance," the goal of our unit, then, is this: To help students understand themselves, à la Fecho, in relation to this world of poverty and punishment, instability and illness.

What about texts?

We will be reading the following:

 LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman's *Our America*, an adaptation of the "audio diaries" two teens from Chicago's South Side recorded for National Public Radio between 1993 – 1996.

- Donna Gaines' *Teenage Wasteland*, a journalistic account of the "burnout" suicides in Bergenfield, NJ, in the 1980s. (We will only read excerpts from this.)
- Daniel Clowes's *Ghost World*, a graphic novel that, according the BBC, captures "the ennui and confusion of 21st-century American life, as seen through the eyes of two cynical teenagers."
- Edward Albee's *The American Dream*, a one-scene play revolving around an infanticidal couple, their mutilated "bumble [sic] of joy," and a "gorgeous young man" who admits that, by virtue of his upbringing, he "consists only of muscles and a healthy interior, but is dead inside, drained of genuine feeling and the capacity for experience" (Esslin, 1980, 312).
- Ancillary news reports, poems, and audio/video clips.

Aside from the Albee play, with its bracketing of pre- and post-adolescent characters, each text was chosen because it explicitly showcases a teen, or teens, whose hoped-for history is at odds with his or her extant circumstances. These characters are not, as Bruce Pirie (1997) writes, "romantic individuals, unfettered in the face of the universe" (10). Instead, they, like my students, are hemmed in – by race, class, neglect, and bad faith. All are "thickly entangled (or 'situated') in complex contexts" (Pirie, 1997, 10). The hope is that, in plumbing those contexts, my students – as they produce their culminating assessments, their multi-genre *My Americas* –will come to a richer understanding of their own cultural entanglements.

And ... the canon?

Are the texts canonical? Save for Albee's, perhaps: no. But there will be plenty of time in the semester for Twain, Miller, Steinbeck, Fitzgerald. In answer to the eminently

sound standard laid down by the College Board's Pacesetter Project, these texts serve a higher pedagogical purpose than mere coverage. Ranging from graphic text to memoir to play to reportage, from the 1960s to the present day, they, as scaffolding for the culminating project, will provide students with the opportunity "to situate and comprehend a range of texts in different genres and media, from different times and places, and to produce new texts of their own in response" to them (Scholes, 1998, 132).

How about standards?

Beyond those of the College Board, our unit addresses several of the NCTE/IRA standards. With our texts, and through our formative and summative assessments, students will:

- Read a wide range of print and non-print texts to build an understanding of texts, of themselves, and of the cultures of the United States.
- Read a wide range of literature from many periods in many genres to build an understanding of the many dimensions (e.g., philosophical, ethical, aesthetic) of human experience.
- Apply a wide range of strategies to comprehend, interpret, evaluate, and appreciate texts. They draw on their prior experience, their interactions with other readers and writers, their knowledge of word meaning and of other texts, their word identification strategies, and their understanding of textual features.
- Employ a wide range of strategies as they write and use different writing process elements appropriately to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes.

- Apply knowledge of language structure, language conventions (e.g., spelling and punctuation), media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and non-print texts.
- Participate as knowledgeable, reflective, creative, and critical members of a variety of literacy communities.

"School," H.L. Mencken once said, "is where children go to learn how to lie." Perhaps. Too often, at least, English class is where they go to learn how to *lie down*, to passively receive the "official meanings" of canonical texts – Marx's "transmissions" from the past – that cling like so many barnacles to the mainstream curriculum's bow. This unit is an attempt to do something different in the classroom. Imagining literacy, in John Willinsky's (1990) words, as "a way of working the world" (6), it encourages students to stand up, speak out, and be heard. Poverty and punishment? Illness and neglect? They exist, of course. But they need not, over the course of these three weeks, be taken lying down.

Works Cited

Esslin, Martin. The Theater of the Absurd. New York: Penguin. 1980.

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Males, Mike. *The scapegoat generation: America's war on adolescents*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage, 1996.

Pirie, Bruce. Reshaping high school English. Urbana, IL: NCTE, 1997.

Scholes, Robert. *The rise and fall of English*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.

Willinsky, John. The new literacy. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Goals and Rubrics

Goal #1: Personal Response Journals¹

Throughout our unit, students will be reading a range of texts dealing with teenagers and the American experience. Their journals will allow them to log their thoughts and feelings in relation to these texts, and will eventually provide data for their final projects.

In a journal entry, a student might note:

- Great writing: a line, phrase, or paragraph that grabs them.
- Questions: "Is something confusing or unclear?"
- Memories: "Does this remind you of something?"
- Other reading: "Does this remind you of something you have read?"
- Literary techniques/conventions: "Are these examples of the devices we have studied in class?" Or: "What makes, say, a play different from a short story?"
- Social questions: "Who has power in the text, and who does not?" Think of our Marx quote: "Is someone's would be 'history' at odds with their circumstances?"

Entries must be a minimum of 100 words. Students must make a minimum of two entries for each text we read, view, or listen to.

Personal Response Journal Rubric²

| Category | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|--------------------|---|--|---|
| Length & Frequency | The response meets minimum word count and frequency requirements | The response meets either the length or frequency requirement, but not both. | The response meets neither length nor frequency requirements. |
| Engagement | Entries show insight, introspection, and contemplation about the reading. | Entries are adequately contemplative. | Entries are superficial and sketchy. |
| Relevance | Entries focus on the text, or reader's reaction to it. | Entries are only somewhat related to the text, or reader's reaction to it. | · |

¹ Adapted from Christensen, Linda. <u>Reading, Writing, and Rising Up</u>. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools. 2000.

²Adapted from: http://www.coe.uga.edu/~smago/VirtualLibrary/Frilot_Tubiak.pdf

Goal #2: Narrative/Graphic Novel

Students will now have read excerpts from Donna Gaines' *Teenage Wasteland*, a nonfiction account of the "burnout" suicides in Bergenfield, NJ, in the 1980s, and from Daniel Loews's *Ghost World*, a graphic novel about, among other things, an aimless summer after high school graduation. And, as a class, we will have discussed what made those narratives distinct and compelling.

For the final formative assessment, students are to either recast an incident from *Ghost World* à la Gaines, to make a prose narrative out of a graphic text, or to recast an episode from *Teenage Wasteland* à la Clowes, to make a graphic narrative out of prose. A successful graphic text will:

- Chronicle all of the important events in the episode chosen.
- Clearly identify Gaines' characters.
- Directly relate the graphic landscape/background to Gaines' text.
- Match the graphic characters' actions and dialogue to Gaines' prose.

A successful prose narrative will:

- Chronicle all of the important events in the episode chosen.
- Clearly identify Clowes's characters.
- Use vivid words and phrases that bring Clowes's text to mind.
- Match the narrative's characters' actions and dialogue to Clowes's text.

Graphic Text Rubric

| Category | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| Scene | Relates all of | Relates most of | Relates most of | Relates few of |
| | the most | the most | the most | the most |
| | important | important | important | important |
| | events of | events of | events of | events of |
| | chosen scene. | chosen scene. | chosen scene, | chosen scene. |
| | | | but includes | |
| | | | many | |
| | | | irrelevancies as | |
| | | | well. | |
| Characters | Main characters | Main characters | Main characters | It is hard to tell |
| | are clearly | are clearly | are identified, | who the |
| | identified, and | identified, and | but their actions | characters are, |
| | their actions | their actions | and dialogue | or their |
| | and dialogue | and dialogue | are too general | dialogue and |
| | match Gaines' | are related to | to show their | actions bear no |
| | text. | Gaines' text. | relationship to | relationship to |
| | | | Gaines' text. | Gaines' text. |

| Landscape/ | Landscape/ | Landscape/ | Landscape/ | Landscape/ |
|--------------|------------------|---------------|---------------|------------------|
| Background | Background are | Background | Background | Background |
| illustration | directly related | bear some | bear little | bear no relation |
| | to Gaines' text. | relation to | relation to | to Gaines' text. |
| | | Gaines' text. | Gaines' text. | |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

Adapted from:

http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson195/comic-strip-rubric.pdf

Narrative Prose Rubric

| Category | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|-------------|---|--|--|--|
| Scene | Relates all of the most important events of chosen scene. | Relates most of the most important events of chosen scene. | Relates most of the most important events of chosen scene, but includes many irrelevancies as well. | Relates few of the most important events of chosen scene. |
| Characters | Main characters are clearly identified, and their actions and dialogue match Clowes's text. | Main characters are clearly identified, and their actions and dialogue are related to Clowes's text. | Main characters are identified, but their actions and dialogue are too general to show their relationship to Clowes's text. | It is hard to tell who the characters are, or their dialogue and actions bear no relationship to Clowes's text. |
| Word Choice | Writer consistently uses vivid words and phrases that bring Clowes's text to mind. | Writer sometimes uses vivid words and phrases that bring Clowes's text to mind. | Writer rarely uses vivid words and phrases that bring Clowes's text to mind. | Writer's prose does not bring Clowes's text to mind. |

Adapted from:

http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson195/comic-strip-rubric.pdf

Goal #3: Research Project/Presentation

In order to prepare students to read, and perform, Edward Albee's admittedly bizarre *American Dream*, students will work in groups to research the historical context

of the play. Written in 1961, the play is very much a product of its, again, admittedly bizarre time – a time that, though rarely discussed in schools, has much to do with the world in which we live today. These are the sixties that we *don't* talk about, typically, when we talk about the decade. Let's change that.

Each group of 3-4 will research a different event that occurred between 1960 and 1962:

- The Greensboro, N.C., civil rights "sitdowns"
- Eisenhower's "military-industrial complex" speech
- Bay of Pigs invasion
- Construction of the Berlin Wall
- American "advisers" openly operating in Vietnam
- Publication of James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*
- "Port Huron" statement

Drawing on a minimum of one on-line and one in-print source, the groups will then make a presentation to the class. In these presentations, students should:

- Explain the Who, What, Where, Why, and How of the event
- Exhibit one "prop" (photograph, timeline, map, Power Point slide, etc.)
- Discuss how the event might possibly relate to our theme of what it means to be an American.

Research Project/Presentation Rubric

| Category | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|----------|--|--|---|--|
| Research | Information presented demonstrates a clear understanding of the topic. Group located at least 2 reliable, interesting sources. One in print. One online. | Information presented demonstrates some understanding of the topic. Group located at least 2 reliable sources. | Information presented demonstrates little understanding of the topic. Group located at least 1 reliable source. | Information presented demonstrates no understanding of the topic. Group did not locate any reliable sources. |
| Visual | Visual is neat and organized, and aids the audience in understanding the topic. | Visual is neat and organized, but does not further insight into the topic. | Visual is sloppily created and does not further insight into the topic. | Group did not create an acceptable visual. |

| Citation | Group | Group creates | Group lists | Group does not |
|----------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|
| | accurately | an MLA | sources, but | cite sources. |
| | creates an MLA | "Works Cited" | they are not in | |
| | "Works Cited" | page, but | an MLA | |
| | page. | sources are not | "Works Cited" | |
| | | accurately | page. | |
| | | cited. | | |

Adapted from: http://www.coe.uga.edu/~smago/VirtualLibrary/White.pdf

Goal #4: Multigenre Project

Students will have begun our unit by reading, and listening to, *Our America*, LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman's "diary of their lives." Now each student's task is to produce a diary of their own life – a *My Am*erica, if you will. Working individually, they will need to address their past, present and future. They should, that is, explain their "history" and their "circumstances":

- Who they are (present)
- Where they come from (past)
- Where they someday hope to be (future)
- What they see as either helping or hindering your arrival at that destination

A successful project will:

- Include a minimum of five texts, each from a different genre (e.g., dramatic work, research findings, narrative essay, graphic text, CD notes, movie poster, screenshot of Facebook/My Space page, etc.)
- Include at least 3 direct quotes from our unit's texts.
- Maintain a consistent focus on your America: your past, present, and future.
- Develop ideas fully, within the conventions of the chosen genres
- Be well organized, within the conventions of the chosen genres.
- Show careful attention to editing, within the conventions of the chosen genre.

Rubric for Multigenre Project:

| Category | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
|--------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-------------------|
| Completeness | | Project | Project | Project |
| | comprises five | comprises four | comprises three | comprises fewer |
| | texts. | texts. | texts. | than three texts. |
| | | | | |
| | | | | |

| Focus | Project focuses clearly on author's "history" and "circumstances." | Project focuses on author's "history" and "circumstances." | Project occasionally focuses on author's "history" and "circumstances." | Project is not at all focused on author's "history" and "circumstances." |
|--------------|--|--|--|--|
| Development | All major ideas are developed using elaboration techniques appropriate to the genre. | Most major ideas are developed using elaboration techniques appropriate to the genre. | Some major ideas are developed using elaboration techniques appropriate to the genre. | Most major ideas are undeveloped, or developed using elaboration techniques inappropriate to the genre. |
| Organization | Project stands as a coherent whole; elements are well ordered within genre- appropriate conventions. | Project stands as a coherent whole; some elements are not well ordered within genre- appropriate conventions. | Elements may not cohere as a whole; some elements are not well ordered within genre- appropriate conventions. | Elements do not cohere as a whole; some elements are not well ordered within genreappropriate conventions. |
| Conventions | Within the demands of the genre, the project demonstrates careful attention to editing. | Within the demands of the genre, the project demonstrates some attention to editing. | Within the demands of the genre, the project demonstrates little attention to editing. | Within the demands of the genre, the project demonstrates no attention to editing. |

Adapted from: http://www.readwritethink.org/lesson_images/lesson1103/Multi-genre%20rubric.pdf

Daily Lesson Plans

Note: Schedule accords with 90-minute "block" classes.

Day One

5m: Attendance/housekeeping

Introductory Activity: Opinionaire

10m: Hand out opinionaire (Appendix A), for students to answer individually.

15m: Students discuss responses in groups of 3 or 4, comparing answers and reasons – personal experience, other things read, "conventional wisdom" – for them.

20m: Reconvene as a large group and discuss. Prompts will include: Was there a consensus among small-group members? Among the large groups'? Did our personal experiences lead us to answer in similar or different ways? And, for the more controversial items: Who do you think said these things, and why?

First text: LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman's *Our America* (book and related NPR documentaries)

5m: Introduce text: Describe whom we're about to meet. What is each kid's age, race, and socioeconomic status? Where do they live? What do their parents do for a living? What kind of schools do they attend?

15m: Pre-reading activity: As a whole class, fill-in a Venn diagram. "Knowing what we know about LeAlan and Lloyd, how do we think their lives might be different from ours? How might they be similar?"

15m: Listen to portion of original NPR documentary covering text's pp. 1-49.
- http://soundportraits.org/on-air/ghetto life 101/

5m: "Ticket Out the Door" informal writing: "Are there any similarities or differences you would now add to our diagram?"

Homework: Read pp. 50-83 in *Our America*.

Day Two

5m: Attendance/housekeeping

Goal #1: Personal response journals

10m: Introduce journals (Appendix B): what they are, what an entry might comprise, when they will be collected.

10m: On Smart Board, show students the journal entry that I made during last night's reading. Talk through what I noted and why I noted it.

15m: In pairs, students brainstorm two additional things they would have added to their own journals, had they been keeping them last night. Refer back to yesterday's Venn diagram. "Relative to you, where are these kids 'coming from'?"

15m: Share results with whole class.

20m: Introduce Character Map activity

- Let students know that they, in pairs, will be sketching out the relationships among characters in *Our America*, but that we, as a class, will work first with a more accessible text, *The Simpsons*.
- Starting with a transparency that features a class-generated list of the show's main characters, we will connect them, with black pen, according to family ties (Appendix C). Then, with different colored pens, we connect the characters according to different types of relationships: school, work, leisure, and most important affection (likes or dislikes) and authority (who has power over whom).
- Discuss, as we go, the significance of these connections, e.g. "Are the patrons of Moe's Tavern bound by anything other than thirst, and a love/hate relationship with the bar's proprietor? What does it *mean* for Smithers to work for Burns? For Homer?"

20m: In pairs, students repeat this process with *Our America*, starting with a blank Character Map (Appendix D).

- Prompt students to consider tensions in the text, e.g. "Is there any real affection among these parents and their children? Does one of our narrators seem more powerful than the other?"

Homework: Read pp. 87 - 125 in *Our America*.

Day Three

5m: Attendance/housekeeping

10m: Finish work on yesterday's Character Maps

25m: Present Maps.

50m: Listen to original NPR documentary covering pp. 127 – 155 in text.

5m: "Ticket Out the Door" informal writing: "Did you notice any differences between today's radio documentary and Mondays? Think 'mood' and 'tone'."

Homework: Read pp. 159 – end in *Our America*.

Day Four

5m: Attendance/housekeeping

10m: As a whole class, discuss answers from yesterday's "Ticket Out the Door." Were students' responses uniform or varied? *Were there* significant differences? If it goes unmentioned, point out a significant difference: the first was scored with Hip Hop, the second jazz. Did that contribute to our "reading" of the broadcasts?

5m: Introduce today's activity: In groups of 3-4, students are to score the portion of the text they read last night. Prompt: "You're producing the last part of the text as a radio broadcast. Pick 2 moments in the text that would benefit from musical accompaniment. At the end of class, you'll present your songs – audio clips from the web; original, group-performed, lyrics and beats; etc. – and the reasoning behind your choices to the entire class.

5m: Walk class to computer lab.

30m: Work on activity

35m: Present soundtracks.

Day Five

5m: Attendance/housekeeping/collection of journals

5m: Introduce "Where I'm From" poem activity. Show transparencies of, and read aloud from, examples produced by Linda Christenson's high-school students (Appendices E & F).

10m: Drawing on Character Maps and soundtrack ideas, teacher composes, on Smart Board, his own "Where I'm From" poem – but in the voice of Chilly, a minor character in *Our America*. "Where is this character from?"

I am from rehab and boxed wine, From cheap labor and Free Jazz, And a worrisome world That ain't helping — It's killing me ...

30m: In groups of 3-4 students create their own "Where They – the characters in the text – Are From" poems. They may pick any character other than Chilly. Poems must be 20 lines long.

25m: Share poems.

Goal #4: Multi-Genre Project

15m: Introduce unit's summative assessment, a multi-genre "My America" project (Appendix G).

- Distribute list of genres (Appendix H)
- Stress that a personal "Where I'm From" poem, a soundtrack to your own life, an audio diary, or transcription thereof, are all acceptable – encouraged! – choices.

HW: Students are to brainstorm 5 genres they might like to include in their projects.

Day Six

5m: Attendance/housekeeping

10m: Share results of Day Five's HW, adding new genres to our list.

Second text: Daniel Clowes's Ghost World

15m: Begin introductory "Tea Party" activity.³

-Each student is given an index card with a quote from *Ghost World* (Appendix I). -Students are asked to get up & circulate throughout the room. The goals are these: 1) Share your card with as many students as possible; 2) Listen to as many other students reading *their* cards as possible; 3) Discuss how the cards might be related; 4) Speculate on what the cards, collectively, might be about.

15m: In groups of 4-5, students discuss what they've heard and what the cards in front of them say. Each group writes an informal "We think" statement of four or five sentences: "We think the upcoming text is about"

20m: Reconvene as large group to share "We think" statements. Probe students on how they arrived at their predictions.

5m: View trailer for film adaptation of *Ghost World*.

- http://www.voutube.com/watch?v=rg6AOc0ATnU

5m: Discussion. "Was that, at all, what you expected? Why, or why not?"

15m: Begin silent reading of *Ghost World*.

- While students read, pull them out in groups of 2-3 to discuss progress on, and any questions about, the multi-genre project.

HW: Read through p. 46 in *Ghost World*.

Day Seven

5m: Attendance/housekeeping

³ Adapted from: Beers, Kylene. When Kids Can't Read. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2003.

15m: Discussion, prompted by: "Did you like this text? Hate it? Compared with *Our America*, was this more, or less, true to your personal experience"

- Show Youtube clip of *Mr. Show*'s "No Adults Allowed," in which aging Gen-Xers adopt teenage personae, to (intentionally) embarrassing effect.
- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BY8YIn5okX8
- Point out that Daniel Clowes, author of our text, is not only a male writing about two female protagonists, he's also an Xer writing about teens. Does that matter? How so?

20m: "Kibitz with Coleslaw" activity

- Distribute handout (Appendix J)
- Prompt: "God," says Enid Coleslaw, early in *Ghost World*, "you never listen to me." But you *have* been listening. Reading, too. And given our discussion, you just might understand Enid and her best friend, Rebecca Doppelmeyer, better than their creator, Daniel Clowes, does. Here's your chance to prove it.
- In pairs, students write original dialogue for one page of Clowes's text.
- Stress that they can go beyond existing "speech balloons," add narration, etc.

20m: With blank (i.e., dialogue-free) copy of page projected on Smart Board for reference, pairs present their re-writes to the class.

25m: Individual work on multi-genre projects.

- Remind students that Enid, Rebecca & co. are about the same age as they are. Perhaps *Ghost World*'s form and/or content might provide some ideas for addressing the "Present" portion of their multi-genre projects.
- Meet with any students you didn't have a chance to talk with yesterday about progress/problems.

5m: "Ticket Out the Door" informal writing: On p. 24, John Crowley sneers at Enid, "It must be nice to have everything paid for by mommy and daddy." Is that true? What role do parents play in both girls' lives? Are they a help, a hindrance, a hassle?

HW: Finish Ghost World (pp. 47 - 80). Write down two questions you would like to ask *Ghost World*'s author. They can be about form – about, that is, the way the story is told – or about content, i.e. the story itself.

Day Eight

5m: Attendance/housekeeping

15m: As a whole class, return to Day One's Venn Diagram, now with another circle added. Are the characters in *Our America* living lives at all comparable to those in *Ghost World*? To those of the "characters" in our class? Is that because of race? Gender? Geography? Socioeconomic status? Enid and Rebecca's lack of a 3rd dimension?

- Incorporate perspectives on parents from Day Seven's "Ticket."

20m: Canvas the room. Students share the questions they posed for HW.

- Keep track on board.

- Ask: What makes a good question? E.g. Do they ask for yes/no answers? Are they loaded/biased, a la, Have you stopped beating your husband yet?
- Refer back to *Our America* to see what types of question garnered interesting, open responses.

15m: Watch BBC *Secret of Drawing* documentary, featuring an interview in which Daniel Clowes discusses storytelling through graphic texts.

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3jpyz_daniel-clowes-part-bbc-documentary_shortfilms

20m: Interview activity (Appendix K)

- Prompt: "Over the past week, you've had the opportunity to see how several exceptional journalists conduct their interviews. Unfortunately, the author we've just read, Daniel Clowes, wasn't willing to sit down with LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman, authors of *Our America*. And the BBC's Andrew Graham-Dixon apparently forgot to ask Clowes many of the questions we have listed on the board. Here's your chance to make that right..."
- Distribute handout. Stress that spelling and grammar **do not** count. Creativity and engagement do.

10m: Silent reading of *New York Times* article (Appendix L) on Bergenfield suicides, the subject of our upcoming text.

5m: "Ticket Out the Door" informal writing: Our next text deals with a serious subject, teenage suicide. Do you have any suggestions for how we should our classroom discussions over the next few days?

Third Text: Donna Gaines's Teenage Wasteland

HW: Read "The Kids in the Basement" chapter (pp. 17 - 39)

Day Nine

5m: Attendance/housekeeping

10m: Introduce Polar Appraisal activity.4

- Distribute handout (Appendix M)
- Stress that, while one character pick can come from any of the texts we've read, one must come from *Teenage Wasteland*: The Police Chief, the School Superintendent, Thomas Rizzo, Tommy Olton, etc.

20m: Students answer questions on handout individually

15m: Begin Discussion Web

- Students share their answers in pairs

⁴ From Milner, Joseph & Lucy Milner. *Bridging English*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall. 1999.

15m: Each pair joins with another to discuss answers

25m: Groups of four share answers with entire class.

HW: Read *Teenage Wasteland*, "Us and Them" chapter, pp. 91 – 113. Answer, informally: how would this narrative come across as a graphic text? What about *Ghost World* as prose?

Day Ten

5m: Attendance/housekeeping/collection of journals

15m: Discuss answers from HW.

- How might an author of a prose narrative make up for her inability to paint a literal picture for the reader?
- Is the dearth of text in a graphic novel a help or a hindrance?

Goal #2: Narrative/Graphic Novel

15m: Explain assessment (Appendix N). Let students know that their work will be due on Day 11, ideally a Monday.

55m: Individual work on assessment.

Day Eleven

10m: Attendance/housekeeping/collection of assessments from Day Ten

Goal #3: Research Project/Presentation

10m: Introduce Project/Presentation; hand out instructions (Appendix O) and Bibliographic Record (Appendix P); explain that presentations will start at the mid-point of class tomorrow.

5m: Walk students to media center for research.

60m: Orbit media center, answering questions and monitoring off-task groups. Let them know that their research should be largely complete by the end of this block.

5m: "Ticket Out the Door" informal writing: Does our topic have anything whatsoever to do with the texts we've read? Anything to do with the world in which we, in 2008, live?

Day Twelve

5m: Attendance/housekeeping

5m: Walk class to media center

10m: Mini-lesson on MLA citation style. Talk through the logic of citations found at: http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/557/06/

-Make sure students can properly format the information on their Bibliographic Records

25m: Continued work on research/presentations

5m: Walk class back to classroom.

40m: Presentations

Day Thirteen

5m: Attendance/housekeeping

Fourth text: *The American Dream*

5m: Cast for performance of play

- Start with volunteers; draft conscripts if necessary.

60m: Perform play, to p. 57 ("Beseech! Oh, that's the nicest word in the English language.)

10m: Informal writing: How is a play different than a graphic novel, a prose piece? Would Albee's piece work in another genre?

10m: Share results. Point out that, here, we have characters that are both younger and (slightly) older than they are. Perhaps there's something going on in this play that could be a catalyst for either the Past or Future parts of the multigenre project.

HW: Read The American Dream pp. 57 - 80

Day Fourteen

5m: Attendance/housekeeping

15m: Finish performing play

30m: Dependent Author activity (Appendix Q).

- In groups of 4, students write a five-minute continuation of the play.

35m: Perform continuations

5m: "Ticket Out the Door" informal writing activity: Return to Opinionaire from Day One. Have any of your opinions changed over the course of this unit?

Day Fifteen

5m: Attendance/housekeeping/collection of journals.

80m: Individual work time for multigenre projects.

5m: Collect multigenre projects.

Opinionaire

Drawn from mainstream sources, each of the following quotes either expresses an opinion or states a supposed "fact." Based on personal experience, other things you've read, or so-called "conventional wisdom" ("Everyone knows that's true!"), do you agree or disagree with what the speakers are saying?

| strongly disagree | disagree | agree | strongly agree |
|--|---|---|--|
| 2. "Today, kids trust their gatart out poor and become i | | their parents, and | d believe it is possible |
| strongly disagree | disagree | agree | strongly agree |
| . "Among today's kids, th | ere is idealism rath | er than cynicism; | a sense of community |
| strongly disagree | disagree | agree | strongly agree |
| . "As far as the media are | · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · | re only two types | of kids: Teen Science |
| Whiz and Teen Rap Suspec | | | |
| Whiz and Teen Rap Suspections strongly disagree | disagree | agree | strongly agree |
| strongly disagree . "Baby Boomers' efforts oday's kids seem to be have | disagree to create a more priving the desired effo | rotected and familect." | ly-oriented atmosphere |
| strongly disagree "Baby Boomers' efforts oday's kids seem to be have strongly disagree | disagree to create a more proving the desired effort | rotected and familect." | ly-oriented atmosphere |
| strongly disagree . "Baby Boomers' efforts oday's kids seem to be have strongly disagree . "Kids in this country are | disagree to create a more proving the desired effort | rotected and familect." | ly-oriented atmosphere |
| strongly disagree . "Baby Boomers' efforts oday's kids seem to be have strongly disagree . "Kids in this country are | disagree to create a more proving the desired effort | rotected and familect." | ly-oriented atmosphere |
| strongly disagree . "Baby Boomers' efforts oday's kids seem to be have strongly disagree . "Kids in this country are erpetrators." | disagree to create a more pring the desired effecting the desired effective disagree e much more likely disagree | agree to be the victims | strongly agree of violence than its |
| strongly disagree . "Baby Boomers' efforts oday's kids seem to be have strongly disagree . "Kids in this country are erpetrators." | disagree to create a more pring the desired effecting the desired effective disagree e much more likely disagree | agree to be the victims | strongly agree of violence than its |
| strongly disagree "Kids in this country are perpetrators." strongly disagree | disagree to create a more pring the desired effecting the desired effecting disagree e much more likely disagree different world that | agree to be the victims agree agree agree agree agree | strongly agree of violence than its strongly agree |

strongly disagree disagree agree strongly agree

10. "I would there were no age between ten and three- and twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting...."

strongly disagree disagree agree strongly agree

Appendix B

Personal Response Journals

Throughout our unit, you will be reading a range of texts dealing with teenagers and the American experience. These journals will allow you to log your thoughts and feelings in relation to those texts, and will eventually provide data for your final projects.

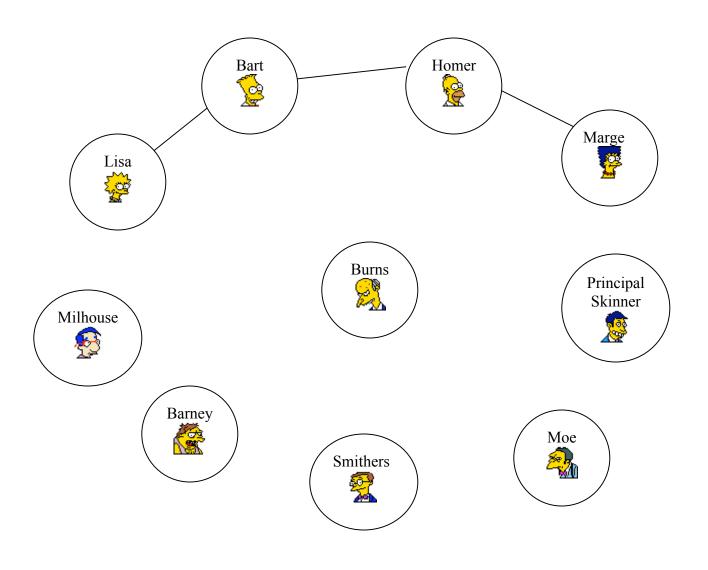
In a journal entry, you might note:

- Great writing: a line, phrase, or paragraph that grabs them.
- Questions: "Is something confusing or unclear?"
- Memories: "Does this remind you of something?"
- Other reading: "Does this remind you of something you have read?"
- Literary techniques/conventions: "Are these examples of the devices we have studied in class?" Or: "What makes, say, a play different from a short story?"
- Social questions: "Who has power in the text, and who does not?" Think of our Marx quote: "Is someone's would be 'history' at odds with their circumstances?"

Entries must be a minimum of 100 words. You must make a minimum of two entries for each text we read, view, or listen to. Journals will be collected on Fridays.

Appendix C

Simpsons Character Map



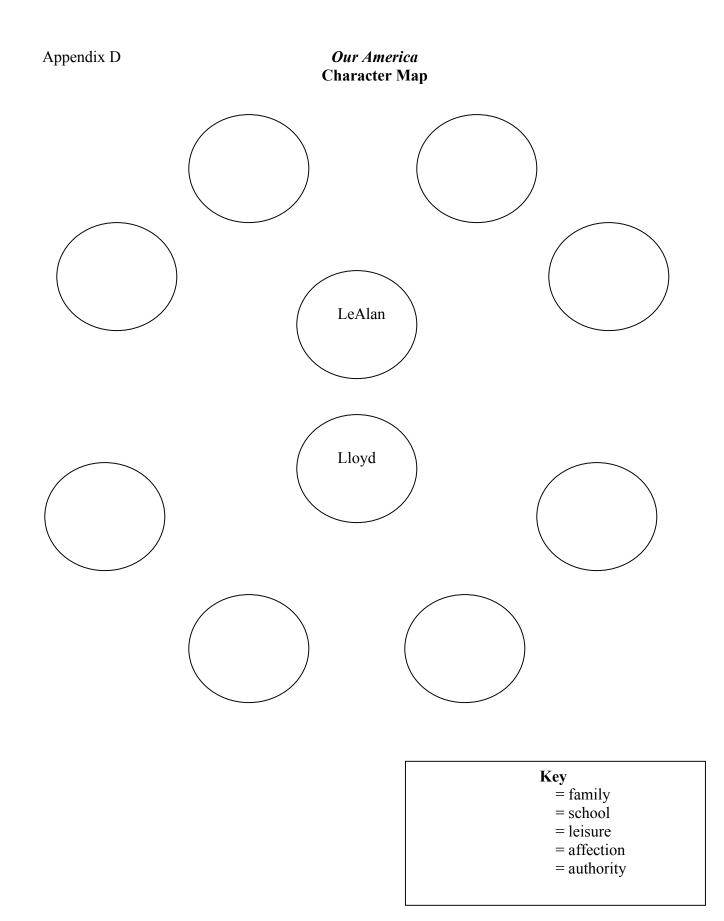
Key black = family

= school

= leisure

= affection

= authority



"Where I'm From" Poem #1

I Am From Soul Food and Harriet Tubman By Lealonni Blake (From Linda Christensen's *Reading, Writing and Rising Up*)

I am from get-togethers And Bar-B-Ques K-Mart specials with matching shoes. Baseball bats and BB guns, a violent family is where I'm from.

I am from "get it girl" and "shake it to the ground." From a strict dad names Lumb sayin' "sit you' fass self down."

I am from the smell of soul food Cooking is Lelinna's kitchen. From my Pampa's war stories To my granny's cotton pickin'.

I am from Kunta Kinte's strength, Harriet Tubmans's escapes. Phyllis Wheatley's poems, and Sojourner Truth's faith.

If you did family research, and dug deep into my genes. You'll find Sylvester and Ora, Geneva and Doc, My African Kinds and Queens, That's where I'm from.

"Where I'm From" Poem #2

I Am From Pink Tights and Speak Your Mind By Djamilia Moore (From Linda Christensen's *Reading, Writing and Rising Up*)

I am from sweaty pink tights encrusted with resin

bobby pins Winnie-the-Pooh and crystals.

I am from awapuhi ginger sweet fields of sugar cane green bananas.

I am from warm rain cascading over taro leaf umbrellas. Crouching beneath the shield of kalo.

I am from poke, brie cheese, mango, and raspberries, from Marguritte and Aunty Nani.

I am from speak your mind, It's o.k. to cry and would like it if someone did that to you?

I am from swimming with the full moon. Saturday at the laundromat, and Easter crepes. I am from Moore and Cackley from sardines and haupia. From Mirana's lip Djavan split, to the shrunken belly my grandmother could not cure.

Seven diaries stashed among Anne of Greene Gables.

Dreams of promises Ending in tears. Solidifying to salted pages.

I am from those moments of magic

when life remains a fairy tale.

Multigenre Project

We began our unit by reading, and listening to, *Our America*, LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman's "diary of their lives." Now your task is to produce a diary of their own life – a *My Am*erica, if you will. Working individually, you will need to address your past, present, and future. You should, that is, explain your "history" and their "circumstances":

- Who you are (present)
- Where you come from (past)
- Where you someday hope to be (future)
- What you see as either helping or hindering your arrival at that destination

A successful project will:

- Include a minimum of five texts, each from a different genre (e.g., dramatic work, research findings, narrative essay, graphic text, CD notes, movie poster, screenshot of Facebook/My Space page, etc.)
- Include at least 3 direct quotes from our unit's texts.
- Maintain a consistent focus on your America: your past, present, and future.
- Develop ideas fully, within the conventions of the chosen genres
- Be well organized, within the conventions of the chosen genres.
- Show careful attention to editing, within the conventions of the chosen genre.

Appendix H

List of Genres

| | . | 11. |
|--------------------|------------------|---------------------------|
| s for Dummies | Diaries | Headlines |
| Acrostics | Editorials | History |
| Ads | Emails | How-Tos |
| Advice Columns | Epitaphs | Information Guides |
| Autobiographies | Essays | Insults |
| Biographies | Explanations | Interviews |
| Book Jacket | Fables | Invitations |
| Book Reviews | Facebook Pages | IPod Playlist |
| Bumper Stickers | Fairy Tales | Jingles |
| Cartoons | Fantasies | Journals |
| CD Cover Art | Feature Articles | Labels |
| Character Sketches | Folk Tales | Letters |
| Collages | Fortune Cookie | Lists |
| Comics | Games | Love Notes |
| Couplets | Ghost Stories | Lyrics |
| Craig's Listings | Gossip | MadLibs |
| Dear Abby | Greeting Cards | Magazine Articles |
| Dialogues | Haiku | Maps |

MemoirsProloguesSonnetsMenusProverbsSpeechesMemosSpoofs

MonologuesPunsSpoonerismsMovie PosterRebuttalsSports ArticlesMovie ReviewsRecipesSuperstitionsMySpace PagesReportsStoryboardsMysteriesRequiemStories

Myths Resumes TV Commercials

News Articles Reviews Tall Tales **Obituaries** Rhymes Telegrams Odes Riddles Text Messages Satires Theater Programs **Opinions Pamphlets** Travel Brochures Sequels Parables Serials Travel Logs Parallel Poetry Sermons Tributes **Parodies** Vignettes Signs Personal Ads Slogan Want Ads

Plays Soap Opera Wedding Invitations

Poems Songs Wills

Adapted from Melanie Hundley, Multigenre Writing Packet.

Appendix I

Quotes for Ghost World Tea Party

[&]quot;Oh man, I forgot to tell you what happened yesterday."

[&]quot;I feel as though I stepped directly into 1954."

[&]quot;If he's such a 'weirdo,' how come he's wearing Nikes?"

[&]quot;Like you couldn't have any guy in the world if you weren't so picky...."

[&]quot;God, you never listen to me."

[&]quot;... until one day I find like this ten page letter in my locker saying how much he loves me and everything...."

[&]quot;This is my first time voting, and I'm going to make it count."

[&]quot;Those guys make like 200 dollars a day."

[&]quot;Don't you just love it when you see two really ugly people in love like that?"

"Eww! Look at that creepy guy He's obviously a serial killer!"

"It's not like these are people who actually care about humanity"

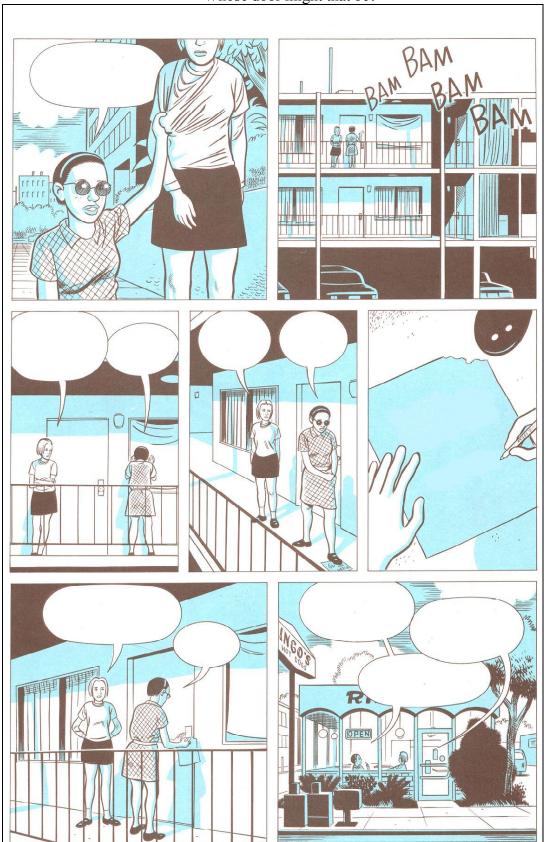
"Admit it, you really do hate all men."

"Are you sure you want to hear this? Once I get started there's no stopping me."

"I just hate anybody who likes cartoons."

"Kibitz with Coleslaw"

Enid Coleslaw and Rebecca Doppelmeyer are walking, talking, and – apparently – banging on someone's door. But where are they, exactly? What are they talking about? Whose door might that be?



Interview Activity

Over the past week, you've had the opportunity to see how several exceptional journalists conduct their interviews. Unfortunately, the author we've just read, Daniel Clowes, wasn't willing to sit down with LeAlan Jones and Lloyd Newman, authors of *Our America*. And the BBC's Andrew Graham-Dixon apparently forgot to ask Clowes many of the questions we have listed on the board. Here's your chance to make that right. With a partner, you are to 1) pose two new questions to Clowes – questions, that is, raised by the class but left unanswered in the documentary, and 2) answer them in the character of the author, himself. Total length should be 1/2 - 3/4 page.

BERGENFIELD ADULTS VIEW YOUTHS WHO LACK HOPE

By JANE GROSS

SPECIAL TO THE NEW YORK TIMES 3/18/1987

From his barbershop in the Foster Village shopping mall here, Alfred D'Ambrosia has a bird's-eye view of the teen-agers who have lately given this suburban town a grim kind of celebrity.

Mr. D'Ambrosia cuts their hair, listens to their grumbling and cleans up the beer cans they leave behind after nightly gatherings in the parking lots and alleyways of the mall and an adjacent apartment complex.

Last week, four of these teen-agers asphyxiated themselves in an automobile inside a garage at the apartment complex, and this morning two more, trying to do the same, were pulled from a car filled with deadly fumes.

"They were bound to do it; it was just a matter of time," Mr. D'Ambrosia said of the young people - some of them unemployed high-school dropouts, some alcohol or drug abusers, some from broken homes or families already torn by suicide or addiction, all members of the same social group.

"If you looked into those kids' eyes today, it would explain the whole thing," Mr. D'Ambrosia continued while tidying up his shop and dispensing lollipops to visiting youngsters. "Then you wouldn't have to ask any questions. Their eyes are somewhere else, empty. They weren't going anywhere. Their idea of the future was next week."

Mr. D'Ambrosia said these young people were a tiny minority in this largely working-class suburb about 10 miles west of the George Washington Bridge, not unlike small groups of troubled teen-agers in high schools throughout the region.

"It's really just a couple of them who have given up on life," he said.

Polar Appraisal

Choose two opposing characters from the texts we've read. (One must come from *Teenage Wasteland*, but the other can come from any text, including *TW*.) One, you should admire. The other should trouble you. In the next 20 minutes, you should:

- Recall three incidents, or lines of dialogue, that most clearly show why you chose each character.
- Name two qualities or characteristics reflected in your choices above.
- Consider these questions: "Do the qualities and characteristics of the admirable character reflect my own ideals or values?"; "Which ones do I identify with and which ones do I not?"

Be prepared to share your answers with classmates.

Appendix N

Narrative/Graphic Text

You have now read excerpts from Donna Gaines's *Teenage Wasteland*, a work of nonfiction, and the entirety of Daniel Clowes's *Ghost World*, a graphic novel. And, as a class, we have discussed what made those narratives distinct and compelling.

For this assessment you are to either recast an incident from *Ghost World* à la Gaines, to make a prose narrative out of a graphic text, or to recast an episode from *Teenage Wasteland* à la Clowes's, to make a graphic narrative out of prose.

A successful graphic text will:

- Chronicle all of the important events in the episode chosen.
- Clearly identify Gaines' characters.
- Directly relate the graphic landscape/background to Gaines' text.
- Match the graphic characters' actions and dialogue to Gaines' prose.

A successful prose narrative will:

- Chronicle all of the important events in the episode chosen.
- Clearly identify Clowes's characters.
- Use vivid words and phrases that bring Loews's text to mind.
- Match the narrative's characters' actions and dialogue to Clowes's text.

Research Project/Presentation

In order to prepare yourselves to read, and perform, Edward Albee's admittedly bizarre *American Dream*, you will work in groups to research the historical context of the play. Written in 1961, the play is very much a product of its, again, admittedly bizarre time – a time that, though rarely discussed in schools, has much to do with the world in which we live today. These are the sixties that we *don't* talk about, typically, when we talk about the decade. Let's change that.

Each group of 3-4 will research a different event that occurred between 1960 and 1962:

- The Greensboro, N.C., civil rights "sitdowns"
- Eisenhower's "military-industrial complex" speech
- Bay of Pigs invasion
- Construction of the Berlin Wall
- American "advisers" openly operating in Vietnam
- Publication of James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*
- "Port Huron" statement

Drawing on a minimum of one on-line and one in-print source, your groups will then make a presentation to the class. In these presentations, students should:

- Explain the Who, What, Where, Why, and How of the event
- Exhibit one "prop" (photograph, timeline, map, Power Point slide, etc.)
- Discuss how the event might possibly relate to our theme of what it means to be an American.

Bibliographic Record⁵

| Book: | |
|-------------------------------|------------|
| Title | |
| Author | |
| Publisher | |
| PublisherCity of Publication | Pages Used |
| Book: | |
| Title | |
| Author | |
| Publisher City of Publication | |
| City of Publication | Pages Used |
| Website: | |
| Author of Article | |
| Title of Article | |
| Website Data Published | |
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| Date Accessed | |
| URL | |
| Magazine/Newspaper | |
| Title of Article | |
| Author | |
| Journal Name | |
| Date of Publication | |
| Pages Used | |

⁵ From http://www.coe.uga.edu/~smago/VirtualLibrary/White.pdf

Dependent Author Activity

"So let's leave things as they are right now ... while everybody's happy," says Grandma at the end of Edward Albee's *The American Dream*. "Good night, dears." But was that *really* the end? Today you get to write a continuation of the play: a five-minute scene that takes place the morning after Grandma goes to bed. Be as serious, as silly, as Albee-weird as you like – but be prepared to perform for your classmates.