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Writing for the Audience that Fires the Imagination: Implications for Teaching Writing

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From Shakespeare to Melville to Morrison, writers have embodied the audiences that fired their imaginations through the language of their texts. Authors leave cues for their readers in texts about what kind of audience they imagine they come to be. In Aeschylus, Marc Antony, speaking at Caesar’s funeral, laments the following: “Friends, Romans, countrymen, lend me your ears; I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him. The evil that men do lives after them; the good is oft interred with their bones; so let it be with Caesar.” Through the words of his character, Shakespeare, embodies his audience, communicating to them the role he expects them to take—of friend and countryman in order to understand Marc Antony’s modes of persuasion with his audience and to reflect on the consequences of political upheaval across a succession crisis, which was a public concern in England at the time of the play’s writing.

When English teachers teach students to read authors such as Shakespeare, they encourage them to read closely and actively, to recognize, interpret, and respond to those cues in texts to understand the writer’s intent and purpose. However, too often when those same writing teachers read their own students’ writing, the onus for understanding and responding to a reader’s expectations rests squarely on the student writer, who must create a text that considers the possible ways any reader might respond to that text in order to engage and please a reader. This spending of the active role of a reader is the result of writing pedagogy and writing process theory that positions the relationship between author and audience as integral to the development of student writers but places the success or failure of a text on a reader’s reception of that text. The challenge for writers then is to develop a text based on that audience’s expectations not only for what a text says but also for how it will say it.

In positioning student writers to meet these demands, writing teachers often instruct students to imagine an audience or construct assignments that will offer them real-world audiences. In asking students to attend to what is described as an authentic audience, teachers frequently set the terms for how writing can be done and constrain writers in the kinds of texts and ideas they can produce. However, no matter who the articulated audience of a text might be, we argue that student writers believe that when they are writing in a classroom the audience that truly matters, the real audience they are writing for, is the teacher. If students are expected to fictionalize an audience that is the same as their teacher, if they are to take into consideration the constraints placed on the writer, in certain situations, by the audience. In other words, he fails “to take into consideration the consequences of political upheaval across a succession crisis, which was a public concern in England at the time of the play’s writing” (Ede & Lunsford, 1984/2003, 89). These roles are correspondingly fictionalized. As readers, we do not expect Shakespeare to consider our expectations; rather we position ourselves as active readers of his works by looking for clues in the text for how to read and engage with his text. These clues—ranging from semantics and word choice to cultural touchstones—are used by readers to stretch their own understandings of a text and become the audience, Shakespeare, or any writer, has imagined them to be.

Student writers employ these same rhetorical moves that they have learned as readers, as they take up the conventions and language that best suits their text and authorial purpose. As readers themselves, student writers assume their audience will take up the roles they have imagined for them, including recognition of the linguistic and cultural cues needed to understand and engage with their text, so that their audience will take on the role imagined for them. To often, though, student writers are not presented with opportunities in classrooms to write for the kinds of audiences that they have experience being themselves and when they make those opportunities on their own they are not always able to find receptive audiences in their writing teachers.

Background

According to Aristotle, the father of modern rhetoric, when a speaker or writer composes a text he or she must take into account three elements: the subject or message, the audience, and the speaker/writer. These three elements make up what is known today as the rhetorical triangle. In considering the subject, the speaker/writer evaluates what he or she knows already and needs to know, investigates perspectives, and determines useful evidence for supporting claims. Considering the audience means speculating about the reader’s expectations, knowledge, and dispositions with regard to the subject the writer explores. The speaker/writer then considers the potential role the writer represents in the triangle—intermediate or non-intermediate. While the speaker/writer represents the author’s voice or persona, writers use who they are, what they know and feel, and what they’ve seen and done to find their topic and a subject their and understanding of a reader. Decisions about formal and informal language, the use of narrative or quotations, the tone of familiarity or objectivity, come as a result of writers considering their speaking voices on the page. Aristotle saw the three rhetorical elements coming from lived experience; speakers knew how to communicate because they spoke and listened to the world. Though not discussed explicitly by Aristotle, two other important elements make up the rhetorical situation—the context in which writing or speaking occurs and the writer/speaker’s voice.

Clearly, considering the audience has long been considered an important element of the composing process. Most scholars of composition theory have worked to understand and explain the relationship between writers and their audiences and the strategies writers use to accommodate actual and/or imagined readers’ expectations, knowledge, and dispositions toward their writing. While some theorists have contended that assigning such importance to an audience is to hierarchicalize and oversimplify the “observational physical or occupational characteristics” (Long, 1980/2003, 223) in which fact most writers, whether writing for an actual audience or not, must construct their audiences in their imaginations. In his well-known essay about audience, Ong (1975/2003) argued that whether or not an author was writing for an addressed audience, “the writer’s audience is always a fiction”.

What do we mean by saying the audience is a fiction? Two things at least. First, that the writer must construct in imagination, clearly or vaguely, an audience cast in some sort of role. Second, we mean that the audience must be correspondingly fictionalized itself (12).

Ong called these constructed, or fictionalized, audience “the audience that fires the writer’s imagination” and explained that fictionalizing an audience is how writers “give body to the audience for whom [they] write” (58). What’s more, Ong suggested that, rather than analyzing or imagining actual audiences, writers fictionalize in their imaginations audiences they have learned to know from earlier writers who were fictionalizing in their imaginations audiences they had learned to know in still earlier writers.

By way of example, Ong describes how a student, assigned to write an essay on how he spent his summer vacation, finds an audience by “making like Samuel Clemens” That is, the student who has read The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, and “knows” that Tom would have felt like this, and how the narrator expressed his audiences, as readers, expected a narrator “who related himself to him and to the text” (59) picks up that voice, and with it, its audience. Ong and Long argued that the central task for writers was not to analyze an audience and adapt to its needs, but instead to “use semantic and syntactic resources of language to provide cues for the reader—cues which help to define the role the writer wishes the reader to adopt in responding to the text” (Ede & Lunsford, 1984/2003, 83).

The audience embodied, or invoked, by the text shares a set of evoked attitudes, interests, reactions, and conditions of knowledge. “It is only through the text, through language, that writers embody or give life to their conception of the reader… that is, they invoke it… by using all the resources of language available to them [they] establish a broad, and ideally coherent, range of cues for the reader” (90). For instance, Ong describes how Hemingway’s use of definite articles in A Farewell to Arms subtly cues readers that their role is to be that of a “companion in arms—a confidant” (62). Other roles identified by Ong include entertainment seekers, reflective sharers of experience, inhabitants of lost and remembered worlds of childhood, and the like. Ong labeled this process of fictionalizing an audience in the imagination and embodying and cueing that audience to their roles through the language of their texts a “game of literacy,” adding that “readers over the ages have had to learn this game of literacy, how to conform themselves to the projections of the writers they read, or at least how to operate in terms of those projections” (90-91). “A reader has to play the role in which the author has cast him, which seldom corresponds with his role in the rest of actual life” (90). That is, as was stated above, just as the writer fictionalizes his or her audience, the audience must correspondingly fictionalize itself. Ong does admit, however, that, for a variety of reasons, a reader may or may not be willing or able to fictionalize such an audience or take up expected roles.

For this reason Ede and Lunsford, advocate a conception of audience that captures the integrated, interdependent nature of reading and writing highlighting the important role the writer plays as reader of his or her own text as well as emphasizing that the writing process is not complete until someone other than the writer reads the text also. It is through this process they claim that “writers create readers and readers create writers” (93). Ede and Lunsford (1984/2003), explain the role of audience in terms of a complex series of obligations, resources, needs and constraints embodied in the writer’s concept of audience (p.88) and submit that any complete conception of the audience must take into account the fluid, dynamic nature of rhetorical situations. “It is the writer who, as writer and reader of his or her own text, one guided by a sense of purpose and by the particulars of a specific rhetorical situation, establishes the range of potential roles the audience may play” (99). These roles might be, for example, colleague, critic, and future audience member. The writer, who fails to take into consideration the constraints placed on the writer, in certain situations, by the audience. In other words, he fails “to acknowledge [that] readers’ own experiences, expectations do play a central role in their reading of a text, and that the writer who does not consider the needs and interests of his audience risks losing that audience” (88). Ede and Lunsford suggest that the best way to understand the writers’ audience is through analysis of particular rhetorical situations.
Here in, we feature the writing of two girls—Kristina, an African American sixth grader and Charlotte, a European American eighth grader. The texts described and analyzed in this article were generated during two different studies both conducted in middle school English language arts classrooms separately by the authors. Study One, conducted by Author One, Denise, aimed to document the literacy practices of African American students in an urban middle school English language arts (ELA) classroom. Study Two, conducted by Author Two, Cara, in her own suburban English language arts classroom, sought to examine the narrating practices of middle school writers. Both studies employed ethnographic methods including participant observation and field note, writing, interview, and artifact collection. Below we describe the contexts and participants of each study.

Study One. The site of Study One was Ms. Wagner’s ELA classroom at Hoyt Middle School (HMS), HMS is one of four middle schools in a school district located in a midwestern Midwestern city. The student body at Hoyt Middle is composed of entirely of African American students from poor and working-class homes. At the time the study was conducted, Hoyt was in its fifth consecutive year of failure to meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) as defined by the federal No Child Left Behind Act. Not surprisingly, concern about preparing students to take and pass the state assessments, called LEAP tests, was an ever-present and highly visible pressure in the lives of Hoyt administrators and teachers including Ms. Wagner, the focal teacher in this study. Ms. Wagner is a middle-class, European American woman, who at the time of the study had taught at Hoyt her entire 12-year teaching career. Ms. Wagner described herself as an avid reader and reported that she “tried to always use best practices” in her teaching and worked hard to stay abreast of and align her instruction with current federal, state, and district curricular expectations for sixth grade language arts. Kristina’s text, a play titled “Ghetto Family,” was written by Kristina on her own outside of the classroom. It was not a school assignment, but was brought to the classroom by Kristina who asked her English teacher, Ms. Wagner, if she would type it up for her. Denise was introduced to Kristina’s play by Ms. Wagner. Ms. Wagner said she thought to show Kristina’s piece to her because it was written in African American Language (AAL), which her English teacher, Ms. Wagner, said she knows but what can she do, she loves him. Before Tamika and MJ have a chance to address the situation, the narrator reminds him that she cooks, cleans, and takes care of the children during the day and then goes to work at night. The following day Cookie and Tamika discuss what happened, and Cookie says he doesn’t have the right to tell his hands on her. Tamika says she knows but what can she do, she loves him. Before Tamika and MJ have a chance to address the situation, the narrator declares an Unhappy Ending, but teases readers with the promise of an upcoming “Ghetto Family, Part II.”

Study Two. The site of Study Two was Cara’s own ELA classroom at Garden Grove Middle School, one of two middle schools in a small suburban town located in the Northeastern United States. This school, with a student population of 434, is comprised largely of young people who are European American and come from middle, upper-middle class and wealthy homes. The school provides not only the core content classes during the school day but also offers classes through an extensive music program and has one or more athletic leagues outside of school. The school pride is an extended family, not only to the student’s status as a Level 2 school, teachers at Garden Grove were given wide latitude in determining curriculum and assessments. While the state-mandated test, MCAS, informed the work of the classroom, like Cara made final curricular and instructional decisions about what to teach and how to teach. Cara is a middle class European American woman who was new to the school during the time of Study Two. Although Cara had been teaching for nearly twenty years at the time, the study was Kristina’s text embodies one is that she has knowledge of or curiosity about black language, characters, and themes and can appreciate a humorous glimpse into the life of a “ghetto rich” family. Charlotte writes for an audience who enjoys a traditional fairy tale complete with an evil king, star-crossed lovers, and a happy ending with a contemporary flare—a postmodern, boundary-crossing princess of power.

Empowering an audience through the language of the text

Both Kristina and Charlotte embodied their audiences, those they fictionalized in their imaginations, through the language of the texts. The language employed by each girl reveals how the two writers created their readers, that is, communicating their knowledge, interests, attitudes, and values to their audience. Through their language, they established their audience as the final arbiter for an author in making a story successful. This assignment also preceded their final term project, an analytic essay constructing arguments about character motivation and choice. Cara, Charlotte’s ELA teacher, viewed the short story assignment as a way for students to position themselves as consumers of stories as well as producers of them. She wanted students to develop an insider’s perspective on how stories are constructed. Class discussions, free writers, and partner writing activities were utilized for students to practice with the idea of how one can transform writing for the self into a piece that can resonate with another person.

In what follows we summarize the two focal texts and analyze the cues, or rhetorical strategies, employed by both writers to invite and evoke imagined audiences. We illustrate how, through particular authorial choices, both girls signaled their audience roles. We also demonstrate how both writers drew on their own experiences of being certain kinds of audiences as they “made like” others they had read in order to construct their audiences. Finally, we present and discuss the opportunities each student had to write for, and share that writing with audiences that fired their imaginations.

Findings

Kristina’s Play. Kristina’s play consisted of several sheets of three-hole punched, lined notebook paper filled from edge to edge on both sides with the balloon-like print characteristic of many middle school girls. At the top margin of the first page was a cast of characters including the narrator, Tamika, MJ, Grandma Cookie, Ta’Nesha, Ra’Tonya, Shonda, Tonya, La’Tonya, Re’Lonya, and Doctor. The play began with the narrator speaking to the audience. “Yo, yo, yo. What’s the [deals]? Well this play is about a ghetto rich family. They are ghetto about everything. Then MJ gets shot.” In essence the play is about a family, a ghetto family to be precise—that is made up of parents, Tamika and MJ, Tina’s mother, Grandma Cookie, 5 teenage girls, and a two old. In the play the characters chided, squabbled, teased, and tried to get each other into trouble. They also did homework, attended school (where Ta’Nesha got into a fight over a boyfriend), and held down jobs.

Throughout the first part of the play, the reader comes to understand that something is bothering MJ, but when Tamika tries to find out what’s wrong by asking him if he got somebody pregnant, he hits her and accusers her of not helping out. She reminds him that she cooks, cleans, and takes care of the children during the day and then goes to work at night. The following day Cookie and Tamika discuss what happened, and Cookie says he doesn’t have the right to tell his hands on her. Tamika says she knows but what can she do, she loves him. Before Tamika and MJ have a chance to address the situation, the narrator declares an Unhappy Ending, but teases readers with the promise of an upcoming “Ghetto Family, Part II.”

Charlotte’s Short Story. As per the assignment requirements, Charlotte handed in her completed short story typed using Times New Roman font. The length of her story surpassed both the assignment expectations and the length of nearly every other story assigned by her peers. Charlotte’s story includes a two-voiced narrative, which allows her to tell the main story of a kingdom ruled by a cruel tyrant through the voice of his daughter, Evelyn, and the commoner she is secretly in love with, Rowan. These characters describe their resistance to the king, their plot to prevent Evelyn’s arranged marriage to a man like her father, and to admit her own bargaining love for one another. Minor characters include the king; Frederick; the evil sorcerer, Galen; a palace worker Evelyn sees as a surrogate father but who will betray her; Maritza, the “castle seamstress,” who is a surrogate mother; and the members of Rowan’s family, who suffer in poverty due to the king’s reign. Other characters include various guards at the castle and villagers in the kingdom.

Charlotte’s story begins with Evelyn’s wedding, but rather than continue the scene, Charlotte halts that scene as she uses several pages to explain Evelyn’s family situation, life as a princess, and the social and political conditions of the kingdom. Rowan, who has been her best friend since childhood despite the forbidden nature of their relationship, is introduced. When Evelyn and Rowan sneak out of the castle in order to bring food to the starving inhabitants of the village (including his family) they are caught by guards. Evelyn is taken by the guards to be married to the king. Meanwhile, Rowan’s father has arranged for his son’s marriage, but only if Evelyn’s father presents her with the choice of have Rowan killed or allow him live but as a slave. While she makes the choice, he also has a plan to rescue him. He is released from prison, and roves for revolution sympathetic villagers and later guards who begin to see their ruler’s treachery. While Evelyn prepares for her wedding day, Rowan and his allies prepare for revolt and to gather their strength. After a month, Rowan’s father agrees to let Evelyn’s father bring his daughter home. Evelyn is rescued as her father, Frederick, and even Galen die in the midst of the battle that breaks out in the castle hall. Evelyn and Rowan are as free of the kingdom. For the two main characters, they are also freed to love one another.-------

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Ghetto rich. Kristina chose to write about her subject, the daily life of a ghetto family, in the format of a play. Her play included some experimental approaches which would include itself as a cast of characters as a way of promoting a poetic dialogue of a personal nature. The narrator opens the play by announcing, “This play is about a ghetto rich family. They are about ghetto everything.” Kristina’s choice to describe the family as “ghetto rich” implies at least two things about the audience for whom she writes: 1) that her audience is willing and able to understand ghetto as a positive attribute and 2) that her audience will recognize and appreciate her clever way of play.

The word ghetto as a noun frequently signifies a poor, culturally or racially homogeneous urban area and for many carries a negative connotation. “For many African Americans, though, ghetto means home: a place representing authentic blackness” and perhaps also as reminding them of the language of “home.” Kristina’s use of the term “ghetto rich” is one that is representational of the feeling, passion, or emotion derived from rising above the reputation and suffering of being black in America. (Smith, 2000). Here Kristina uses ghetto as an adjective. While “ghetto” as an adjective can be used derogatorily, the African American community, particularly the hip hop scene, has taken the word for themselves and begun using it in a more positive sense that transcends its derogatory origins. The audience Kristina invokes with the use of the phrase “ghetto rich” is one that understands and embraces the hip hop culture. In addition, Kristina points out that in the play of their own, the audience who recognizes and appreciates the artful way in which she pairs ghetto (typically signifying poor) with the rich word (meaning wealthy but also abundant) to establish that being ghetto, in this case, is both a source of pride, and hence a positive attribute, as well as something the family is to a large degree.

Though Kristina’s narrator does not explicitly explain to the audience what ghetto rich means Kristina, through the dialogue of her characters, lets her audience hear what ghetto rich sounds like. In the first few lines of the play in an interchange between Tamika, RaTonya, the oldest daughter, and RaLonya, the youngest child, we hear how a ghetto rich family talks: 

Tamika: Naw ask ya gma.

RaTonya: He at work don’t remember.

Tamika: Who is you gettin’ smart wit’? Cause I will beat you like you stole somethin’.

RaLonya: na, na, na, na, na, na you gon get in trouble.

Tonya: Shhhhhhh…You gon get cha self in trouble.

ReLonya: na, na, na, na, na, na, na, you gon get in trouble.

Though Kristina’s narrator does not explicitly explain to the audience what ghetto rich means Kristina, through the dialogue of her characters, the audience understands that all three of the children who speak the above lines are female and that they are female of color. This is a character that reads as one that is not a part of the mainstream. The dialogue of her characters, lets her audience hear what ghetto rich sounds like.

In the first few lines of her play Kristina has created a family whose relationships are conflict-ridden. There is conflict between the members of the family—between the mother and grandmother and the daughters, between the siblings, and between the parents, Tamika and MJ. There is also conflict between family members and the outside world. Tamisha gets in a fight at school, MJ is shot and killed by his work partner, and Tamika smacks the doctor treating MJ after he asks her out on a date as her husband lay dying. In every case conflicts involve either the threat of violence or actual violence. In the following scene we see the conflict between the parents as Tamika attempts to find out what is bothering MJ after he returns from work for the second evening in a row in a bad mood and heads immediately to bed. Tamisha follows MJ to the bedroom. MJ greets her, “Hey baby” and Tamika says, “Why is always you goin’ to bed? You got somebody pregnant?” MJ responds to Tamika’s question by telling her he is tired of her being nosy and leaving her alone.

Though the play centers around the multiple conflicts in this family’s life and the content—domestic violence, infidelity, drugs, and the like—the play also utilizes the narrator to communicate to readers that, despite the serious content of the text, the tone the author adopts is a playful, humorous one. The clearest example of this occurs at the end of the play when the narrator informs the audience that MJ has been shot and doesn’t have long to live. The narrator punctuates the announcement with, “I feel sorry. Sike (sic): Kristina even inserts a stage direction (laughs) for the narrator to laugh. Again at the conclusion of the play the narrator caustically announces, “The husband died, of course,” and adds, “so you can say this is a unhappy ending.” Despite the grave circumstances and the narrator’s declaration of an “unhappy ending,” she or he doesn’t really feel sorry about MJ’s violent and untimely demise. One could infer that the narrator believes that MJ has suffered his fate for hitting Toni, or perhaps Kristina believes that MJ’s suffering of being linked to two petitions to the audience with humor, strength, and optimism—an audience that understands life is hard and that those living it must carry on without the benefit of in-depth skills. For instance, Kristina invites her audience to take up the roles of connoisseur of “authentic” black language and culture, intellectual or interested boundary crisscrosser, and consumer of dark comedy. Charlotte asks her readers to root for a postmodern princess of power, whom when star-crossed lovers fall into one another’s arms, and cheer when an evil king gets what is coming to him.

Charlotte embeds the phrase “I mean” to add emphasis and make clear the stakes for Evelyn, while assuming her audience will understand this rhetorical move.

Unlike princesses in traditional fairy tales, Charlotte’s princess, Evelyn, is a young woman of power, granted her by both a princess and the power she takes for herself throughout the story. Evelyn steps outside of the boundaries of the social expectations for a princess in many ways. She maintains a friendship with Rowan, which crosses the boundaries of station and age, and creates a parallel parent relationships for Evelyn. Here Evelyn understands that these forbidden relationships have provided her with love, guidance, and a moral code by which to live her life. These relationships and the models they provide her to live as a good person coupled with Evelyn’s rejection of the power granted by her birth offers audiences a main character who will resonate with anyone who has negotiated the individual stage of adolescence development. Charlotte assumes her audience will understand how rich an emotional life exists outside of one’s own family and will appreciate Evelyn’s rejection of her own father.

In similar ways, Charlotte further positions readers in relation to the genre in her use of violence, but here violence used to further legitimate ends: the overthrow of injustice both personal and social. This idea that the story is ultimately about power and resistance is further supported with a character of a contemporary hip hop artist. She is as motivated because she is playing on ideas of social justice and fighting for what is right. Evelyn’s resistance for justice continues with her rescue of Rowan from the cell in which he has been imprisoned, putting herself and him in further danger. Rescue occurs not only when she takes him from the cell, but also when she declares her love for him before he is able to articulate his own feelings for her. Evelyn perhaps assumes her privilege as princess will protect her if the guards come upon them; however, in her situation, the roles and the model that they provide her to live as a good person coupled with Evelyn’s rejection of the power granted by her birth offers audiences a main character who will resonate with anyone who has negotiated the individual stage of adolescence development. Charlotte’s narrative understands that rich an emotional life exists outside of one’s own family and will appreciate Evelyn’s rejection of her own father.

Firstly, Charlotte writes for an audience that enjoys an action-packed story laced with suspense and dramatic tension. Charlotte begins her story in medias res: the narrative begins in the middle of a dramatic scene, which readers will later find out is in fact the last scene of the story. The drama has already come to its high point and a reader cannot help but wonder how Evelyn has gotten herself into this predicament and how it might be resolved. But first, Evelyn and her author understand that before the drama can move forward, before we can find resolution, we must fully understand how Evelyn arrived at this moment. The final line of the first scene invites readers deeper into the story through the use of a flashback: “Then, I think back to the day when my life began to unravel.” With this pause on a moment of dramatic tension, Charlotte understands that an audience will read a story when there is something at stake, so her flashback is constructed to cue readers both that the story will move back in time but also that dramatic events, “my life began to unravel,” will continue. In the final scene of the story Charlotte revisits positions out of the flashback and back into the story’s beginning: “Here we are. Back to where it ended.” In those few short moments Charlotte recapitulates everything that went down. I have brought you in a full circle. “In bringing readers full circle, she ends not with the overthrow of the evil king, but with the moment of reunion for the lovers, played both for laughs with the knowledge that the true intention of her story is to be in other, rows. Evelyn and Rowan have pledged his love to her. Readers are asked to leave Evelyn behind in the midst of political or social upheaval to which she has been concerned in much of her story but back in the arms of love.

Curing audiences to play a role

Through the language of their texts the girls not only embody audiences they have fictionalized in their imaginations, they also cue, or signal to, those audiences to the role or roles they are expected to play. That is, through their texts, both authors communicate the expectations of their audience. In Charlotte’s story, for instance, when Toni and her friends are obeying the social expectations for a princess in many ways. She maintains a friendship with Rowan, which crosses the boundaries of station and age, and creates a parallel parent relationships for Evelyn. Here Evelyn understands that these forbidden relationships have provided her with love, guidance, and a moral code by which to live her life. These relationships and the models they provide her to live as a good person coupled with Evelyn’s rejection of the power granted by her birth offers audiences a main character who will resonate with anyone who has negotiated the individual stage of adolescence development. Charlotte assumes her audience will understand how rich an emotional life exists outside of one’s own family and will appreciate Evelyn’s rejection of her own father.

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Firstly, Charlotte writes for an audience that enjoys an action-packed story laced with suspense and dramatic tension. Charlotte begins her story in medias res: the narrative begins in the middle of a dramatic scene, which readers will later find out is in fact the last scene of the story. The drama has already come to its high point and a reader cannot help but wonder how Evelyn has gotten herself into this predicament and how it might be resolved. But first, Evelyn and her author understand that before the drama can move forward, before we can find resolution, we must fully understand how Evelyn arrived at this moment. The final line of the first scene invites readers deeper into the story through the use of a flashback: “Then, I think back to the day when my life began to unravel.” With this pause on a moment of dramatic tension, Charlotte understands that an audience will read a story when there is something at stake, so her flashback is constructed to cue readers both that the story will move back in time but also that dramatic events, “my life began to unravel,” will continue. In the final scene of the story Charlotte revisits positions out of the flashback and back into the story’s beginning: “Here we are. Back to where it ended.” In those few short moments Charlotte recapitulates everything that went down. I have brought you in a full circle. “In bringing readers full circle, she ends not with the overthrow of the evil king, but with the moment of reunion for the lovers, played both for laughs with the knowledge that the true intention of her story is to be in other, rows. Evelyn and Rowan have pledged his love to her. Readers are asked to leave Evelyn behind in the midst of political or social upheaval to which she has been concerned in much of her story but back in the arms of love.
Charlotte sets up Evelyn’s as yet undisclosed love for Rowan while she also introduces the real lives of the girls she imagines as her audience. In this same scene, Charlotte’s tension clearly shows in her narrator’s dialogue. Once again, the words are contemporary in tone but echo one of the most important conventions of a fairy tale, the type of plot that sets up and resolves the love relationship. Readers know that the question isn’t if the lovers will declare their love but how. The narrator’s interactional style creates an intimate, playful, provocative relationship with the audience cueing them to respond to the play, the narrator does with interest and black humor.

Charlotte’s play, unlike other plays she has read, is at once dramatic, artistic, and entertaining. The narrative guides the audience in terms of what events are important and cue readers to how they should experience those events and feel about characters. The narrator’s interactional style creates an intimate, playful, provocative relationship with the audience cueing them to respond to the play, the narrator does with interest and black humor. The narrator launches the play by saying to the audience, “Yo, yo, yo. What’s the dealio?” In other words, “Hey, everybody. Let’s get started!” Charlotte sets up Evelyn’s unspoken love for Rowan while she also introduces the real lives of the girls she imagines as her audience. In this same scene, Charlotte’s tension clearly shows in her narrator’s dialogue. Once again, the words are contemporary in tone but echo one of the most important conventions of a fairy tale, the type of plot that sets up and resolves the love relationship. Readers know that the question isn’t if the lovers will declare their love but how. The narrator’s interactional style creates an intimate, playful, provocative relationship with the audience cueing them to respond to the play, the narrator does with interest and black humor. The narrator launches the play by saying to the audience, “Yo, yo, yo. What’s the dealio?” In other words, “Hey, everybody. Let’s get started!”

Charlotte is the first to introduce this type of plot for her audience. Charlotte’s play, like the books by Carl Weber and the movie featuring Major Payne, is the narrative voice of a working-class, adolescent, and female identity. Charlotte, like Bella of the Twilight series, Hermoine in the Harry Potter saga, and Katniss in The Hunger Games, is unapologetic about who she is, unafraid of the conflicts like abuse, infidelity, and unplanned pregnancy. Charlotte’s play shares many features with both the books by Carl Weber and the movie featuring Major Payne. Indeed, we might say she is making like Carl Weber as she writes her Ghetto Family. It features a family of black characters who negotiate life’s conflicts with a certain style. They bicker,boss, get into trouble, and are unapologetic about who they are. Kristina’s play, like these two exemplars, adopts a playful, almost slapstick attitude in the face of serious conflicts. For the Duncans, it is the death of a parent and negotiating love relationships. For Kristina’s characters, it’s wearing a Nobody suit and gun violence, and the question isn’t if they will declare their love but how. Charlotte has written what she can, in the machinations of Evelyn, live outside of her boundaries, rescue others, and declare her feelings of love to the audience that fires the imagination.

Charlotte also had a lot of experience being the audience of other writers. The texts Charlotte reads feature youthful characters and strong female characters who are engaged in violent struggles of good versus evil. They also feature romantic relationships between star-crossed lovers and fractured families that allow for emancipated characters. Main characters are black, white, though class boundaries are often crossed. The endings are generally happy and the tone serious. She shared in personal discussions with Author Two her love of reading and even showed Author Two a photograph of herself reading one of the Harry Potter series books at age two. She described herself as a voracious reader who enjoyed complex texts and read them with ease. Her teachers observed that she was as the popular series books of Harry Potter, Twilight, and The Hunger Games. She preferred to read stories that had fantastical elements, though not necessarily the fantasy genre, and strong female characters who were active participants in the fictional situations in which they were involved but who also were negotiating love and heterosexual gender relationships.

In all sorts of ways, Charlotte creates a fictional world, not unlike the fictional world she has inhabited as a reader, that allows a girl not only options for agency, but the drive to act and in acting the ability to create the kind of world she imagines. Her main character is the sort of hero popular fiction offers to young adult readers today, and Charlotte is an avid reader of such books about characters who struggle to resolve the evolution of the love relationship, so the lapses into more contemporary speech jibes with Charlotte’s retelling of the traditional fairy tale love story.

When Charlotte brings her readers to the ending of her story, this fairy tale readers can anticipate a happy ending. But first she returns to the story’s first scene. This time, violence breaks out at the wedding, leading to the deaths of her father and the man he intended her to marry. Quickly, the scene moves from “chaos” to that happy ending for the two lovers, but it is an ending that combines sexual innuendo with romantic love: “I hastily move to get off. ‘You don’t have to go,’ says cockily. I sat at his head and laugh. ‘You could have gotten hurt,’ I chide. I am dizzy with relief. His lips seal those words. ‘You could have gotten hurt,’ I know that everything will be ok.” Once again, the words are contemporary in tone but echo one of the most important conventions of a fairy tale: the assurance of a happily ever after.
paradigm of writers “fictionalizing audiences in their imagination audiences learned from other writers,” raises a number of question about teachers of writing might consider. In what ways are their students writing, either inside or outside of the classroom, for audiences that fire their imaginations? Are there opportunities in the writing classroom for students to self-select not only topics but also genres, formats, purposes, and imagined audiences? Is there room for students’ texts to be the texts that are read and studied in order to learn how authors embody audiences and cue readers? What roles are writing teachers playing in relation to their students’ texts? Do they play multiple roles, such as friend or learner, taking their cues from the students’ texts, or do writing teachers too frequently simply slip unconsciously into the role of critic or more knowledgeable other? In what ways are writing teachers capitalizing on opportunities, especially unexpected opportunities, to recognize, value, and build upon what their students know about writing because they are speakers, listeners, readers, and writers in the world? Finally, are writing teachers, as the most common audience for student writers, able to interpret the cues student writers embed in their texts and willing to take up the roles students are inviting them to play in relation to those texts even when the imagined audience their students are writing for does not at all correspond to the roles the teacher plays in everyday life? While it’s true that all writers make demands of their readers, in the sense that they invite them into other life worlds, and cue them through their texts to take up certain kinds of roles, such as “companions at arms,” it’s also true that “readers may accept or reject the roles.” Readers might reject writers’ invitations to become the audiences they have fictionalized in their imaginations for a number of reasons. For instance, as English teachers know, students may not be willing or able to take up Shakespeare’s invitation to be “friends, Romans, countrymen” because they cannot recognize his words and can’t let the text for them instructing them how to do so. In other instances they are not willing to search for those cues, or take up those roles, because they seem too far removed from their own life experiences and perceptions of themselves. Teachers, as actual readers of, or possible audiences for, students’ texts also have the option of accepting or declining student writers’ invitations to be the kinds of audiences that “fire their imaginations.” As writing teachers, it is essential to consider how our classrooms shape students’ opportunities to write for and be read by the audiences that fire their imaginations.

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